

# PS3324F: Introduction to Research Methods in Political Science

Department of Political Science – Western University, Summer 2021  
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## Course description

This course introduces students to basic concepts and methods of research in the social sciences and, in particular, in political science. Students will learn about how the scientific method of research can be applied to the study of human behaviour, adopting both qualitative or quantitative methods of analysis. In the first part of the course, students will learn about how to identify research questions and conduct literature reviews. In this same section, we will discuss questions related to research ethics and how such concerns can affect the kinds of questions one can ask and how other questions can be answered empirically. Next, we will discuss questions related to argumentation. These include defining clear concepts of interest and building strong arguments for building theories that will subsequently be evaluated with data. The following section covers how researchers go about choosing among methods of analysis and how cases are selected to adequately evaluate their research questions. Finally, the course will cover a series of commonly used qualitative and quantitative methods of analysis, including interviews, focus groups, surveys, and experiments.

## Course text

The required text for this course is:

Brancati, D. 2018. *Social Scientific Research*. Sage. (hereafter Brancati)

## Course objectives

- Explain the goals, subjects, and orientation of social science research; identify the steps in the scientific method;
- Present the ethical concerns surrounding the use of human subjects; detail the ethical issues regarding publication like transparency, credit stealing and others;
- Introduce criteria for identifying a good research topic; identify ways research can make theoretical and empirical contributions; suggest ways to find inspiration for research;
- Describe the purpose and content of a literature review; discuss how to summarize and synthesize research for a literature review;
- Define concepts and their importance to research; describe the steps involved in building effective concepts;
- Differentiate between deductive and inductive reasoning; define necessary, sufficient, and (neither) necessary and (nor) sufficient conditions; examine different directions through which explanatory factors influence outcomes; identify common mistakes in causal arguments;
- Describe the attributes of qualitative and quantitative research; define hypothesis building, hypothesis testing, causal inference, generalizability, and replicability;
- Develop an objectives-based typology of mixed methods research designs; compare and contrast each of the objectives presented in this typology, namely design, concatenation, gap-filling, triangulation, and interpretation;

- Discuss why and how the number of cases included in a study matters; define and describe random and non-random sampling methods; explain selection bias and the problems that it represents for research;
- Differentiate among types of interview and interview modes; describe the strengths and weaknesses of interviews for theory building and theory testing;
- Discuss the utility of focus groups for hypothesis building and hypothesis testing;
- Identify different types of measures according to their response categories; describe the criteria used to evaluate measurement quality; define random and systematic measurement error and the problems each represent for research;
- Identify the different types of surveys used in social science research; provide guidance on designing survey questionnaires; identify types of survey modes and their appropriateness for certain respondents;
- Identify the different types of experiments used in social science research; discuss the strengths and weaknesses of experiments vis-à-vis other research methods; present the criteria commonly used to evaluate the quality of experiments.

## Course format

This course is delivered in an online format. Weekly lectures will be delivered electronically on OWL. Communications with the professor and among students should be primarily done by email and/or the OWL forums.

## Student assessment

Students will be assessed through 4 assignments (each worth 7.5% of the final grade), a midterm (35%) conducted online on **May 21 from 7-8pm** (don't miss it!), and a final exam (35%) also conducted online on **June 11 from 7-8pm**. Assignments will be posted on OWL. No late assignments will be accepted.

## Due dates for assignments

#1: May 9, 11:55pm;

#2: May 16, 11:55pm;

#3: May 30, 11:55pm;

#4: June 6, 11:55pm;

## Topics and readings

### Week #1 (May 3-7): Research in social science, research ethics and research questions

◇ Brancati Chapter 1 *What is Social Science Research?*

◇ Brancati Chapter 2 *Research Ethics* ◇ Brancati Chapter 3 *Identifying a Research Question*

### Week #2 (May 10-14): Literature review and argumentation

◇ Brancati Chapter 4 *Conducting a Literature Review* ◇ Brancati Chapter 5 *Building Effective Concepts*

◇ Brancati Chapter 6 *Making Strong Arguments*

### **Week #3 (May 17-21): Method selection, mixed methods research and case selection**

- ◇ Brancati Chapter 7 *Method Selection*
- ◇ Brancati Chapter 8 *Mixed Methods Research* ◇ Brancati Chapter 9 *Case Selection*

### **†May 21: Midterm exam**

Online multiple choice exam on OWL. The exam will open at 7pm and close at 8pm, leaving students with exactly 60 minutes to answer 35 multiple choice questions.

### **Week #4 (May 24-28): Interviews and focus groups**

- ◇ Brancati Chapter 10 *Interviews* ◇ Brancati Chapter 11 *Focus Groups*

### **Week #5 (May 31 - June 4): Quantitative measures and data and surveys**

- ◇ Brancati Chapter 15 *Quantitative Measures*
- ◇ Brancati Chapter 16 *Quantitative Data* ◇ Brancati Chapter 18 *Surveys*

### **Week #6 (June 7-11): Experiments and observational studies**

- ◇ Brancati Chapter 19 *Experiments* ◇ Brancati Chapter 20 *Observational Studies*

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### **†June 11: Final Exam**

Online multiple choice exam on OWL. The exam will open at 7pm and close at 8pm, leaving students with exactly 60 minutes to answer 35 multiple choice questions.