

**The University of Western Ontario
Department of Political Science
Political Science 2350A
Research Design in Political Science
Fall 2026**

Instructor: Cameron D. Anderson

Office: SSC 7312

Office Hours: Friday 9am-10am

Telephone: 519-661-2111 x81163

Email: cander54@uwo.ca

Antirequisite(s) at Main Campus: Political Science 3324F/G, Health Sciences 2801A/B, Psychology 2800E, Psychology 2820E, Psychology 2830A/B, Psychology 2840F/G, Psychology 2855F/G, Psychology 2856F/G, and Sociology 2206A/B

Prerequisite(s): Political Science 1020E or permission of the instructor

Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

Course Description:

This course introduces students to basic concepts and methods of research in the social sciences and, in particular, 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 proposing 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.

Learning Objectives:

- Explain the goals, subjects and orientations of social science research; introduce the steps in the scientific method
- Present the ethical concerns surrounding the use of human subjects; detail the ethical issues regarding publication, such as transparency and credit stealing
- Introduce criteria for identifying a good research topic; identify ways research can make theoretical and empirical contributions
- Describe the purpose and content of a literature review; discuss how to summarize and synthesize research for a literature review
- Define concepts and importance to research, describe steps involved in building effective concepts
- Differentiate between deductive and inductive reasoning; define necessary, sufficient as well as (neither) necessary and (nor) sufficient conditions; identify different direction through which explanatory factors influence outcomes
- Describe the attributes of qualitative and quantitative research; define hypothesis building, hypothesis testing, causal inference, generalizability and replicability
- Develop an objective-based typology of mixed methods research designs; compare and contrast 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 presents for research
- Differentiate among types of interviews and interview modes; discuss useful techniques for organizing and analyzing interview data
- Discuss utility of focus groups for hypothesis building and hypothesis testing
- Identify different types of measures according to their response categories; describe criteria most commonly used to evaluate measurement quality; define random and systematic measurement error and the problems each presents for research
- Compare and contrast observational and non-observational data; provide criteria with which to evaluate data quality and present techniques for identifying high quality data
- Identify the different types of surveys used in social science research; discuss strengths and weaknesses of surveys vis-à-vis other research method; identify types of survey modes and their appropriateness for certain respondents
- Identify the different types of experiments used in social science research and compare and contrast their advantages and disadvantages; discuss the strengths and weaknesses of experiments vis-à-vis other quantitative research methods
- Define the key features of observational studies; present the advantages and disadvantages of observational studies vis-à-vis other research methods

Course Readings:

Brancati, D. 2018. Social Scientific Research. Sage.
Available in the University Bookstore and online as an e-book.

Course Requirements:

Attendance 5%
Ethics Assignment 5%
Midterm Exam 40%
Final Exam 50%

DISCUSSION OF COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

1.) Attendance (5%): Class attendance is mandatory. Attendance will be taken in the first few minutes of class. If you arrive late, you will be automatically marked as absent—it is then your responsibility to notify the TA or instructor at the end of the lecture. Each student is allowed one unexcused absence, beyond which each additional unexcused absence will be penalized by 1%, up to a total of 5%. Please scan the QR code posted on the screen at the beginning of each class and fill in the short form to record your attendance.

2.) Ethics Assignment (5%): Students are required to complete the Tri-Council's TCPS2 Core Tutorial (<https://tcps2core.ca/welcome>) as part of the readings in preparation for the class. It takes about 4 hours to complete. You will need to register yourself prior to starting the tutorials. Once completed, please upload your unique completion certificate to the "Ethics Assignment" tab on the Brightspace course page. This must be uploaded by **11:59pm on Friday, September 25th**.

3.) Mid-term Exam (40%): The midterm exam will be composed of multiple-choice questions and short answers. You will complete all multiple-choice questions and will have a choice of short answers to complete. **This will be a closed-book exam conducted during class time on October 26.** The makeup date for this midterm will be **November 6 1-3pm in SSC 7210**. Please refer to the Faculty of Social Science makeup policy at included within this course outline for greater clarity.

4.) Final Exam (50%): The final exam will be composed of multiple-choice questions and short answers. You will complete all multiple-choice questions and will have a choice of short answers to complete. The final exam will be cumulative but weighted to material from the second half of the course. **This will be a closed-book exam scheduled during the Final Exam period in December.**

COURSE TOPICS AND READINGS:

Week 1 (September 14) Introduction, Overview and Social Science Research

- Review course outline
- Chapter 1 What is Social Science Research?

Week 2 (September 21) Research Ethics

- Guest Lecture by Kelly Patterson (Human Research Ethics Specialist at Western)
- Chapter 2 Research Ethics

Week 3 (September 28) Research Questions and Literature Reviews

- Chapter 3 Identifying a Research Question
- Chapter 4 Conducting a Literature Review

Week 4 (October 5) Argumentation

- Chapter 5 Building Effective Concepts
- Chapter 6 Making Strong Arguments

Week 5 (October 12) Thanksgiving and Fall Reading Week – no class

Week 6 (October 19) Method Selection and Mixed Methods Research

- Chapter 7 Method Selection
- Chapter 8 Mixed Methods Research

Week 7 (October 26) Midterm – in class

Midterm makeup date November 6 1-3pm in SSC 7210

Week 8 (November 2) Case Selection

- Chapter 9 Case Selection

Week 9 (November 9) Interviews and Focus Groups

- Chapter 10 Interviews
- Chapter 11 Focus Groups

Week 10 (November 16) Quantitative Measures and Data

- Chapter 15 Quantitative Measures
- Chapter 16 Quantitative Data

Week 11 (November 23) Surveys

- Chapter 18 Surveys

Week 12 (November 30) Experiments

- Chapter 19 Experiments

Week 13 (December 7) Observational Studies

- Chapter 20 Observational Studies

IMPORTANT COURSE POLICIES:

1.Procedure on makeup assessments for Social Science students and for courses offered by the Faculty of Social Science

Effective September 1, 2026

Students who miss a regularly scheduled test/quiz, mid-term, or final exam may request academic consideration through the Student Absence Portal.

If academic consideration is granted, students should consult the course outline for information regarding how the missed assessment will be addressed and follow any instructions provided by the instructor. At the instructor's discretion, the weight of a missed test/quiz or mid-term may be transferred to another assessment in the course, including the final exam, rather than requiring a makeup assessment. Reweighting is not available for missed final exams.

Students are entitled to **one makeup assessment opportunity** for a missed test/quiz, mid-term, or final exam supported by approved academic consideration. **No additional makeup opportunities will be provided.** Makeup assessments represent the final opportunity to complete a missed course assessment.

What happens if I miss a makeup assessment as a Social Science student or in a course offered by the Faculty of Social Science?

Students who miss a makeup assessment are not eligible for an additional makeup opportunity. Depending on their circumstances, they may:

1. Remain enrolled in the course and accept a grade of zero on the missed makeup assessment. Students should consult the course outline and calculate whether they can still achieve a passing grade in the course.
2. Withdraw from the course through Student Center before the published drop deadline. A course dropped before the deadline will result in a withdrawal (WDN) without academic penalty. Part-time students should consult the Registrar's Office refund schedule to determine whether a tuition refund is available. Students enrolled full-time in 4.0-5.0 courses are generally not eligible for tuition refunds when a course is dropped.
3. If the published drop deadline has passed and the missed makeup assessment is supported by appropriate documentation, students may submit their documentation through the Student Absence Portal to request a **WDN (withdrawal without academic penalty)**. Approval is not automatic and remains subject to Faculty review. Requests for a second makeup assessment will not be considered.

Students are encouraged to carefully consider their ability to complete a makeup assessment as scheduled, as no further opportunities to complete the missed work will be available.

2. Technology

All wearable technology and smart glasses are banned from use for in-class exams and assignments. Students who need glasses must ensure that they have their regular prescription eyewear available for exam use.

Should in-class use of technology (phones, computers, tablets etc.) become problematic or disruptive, the instructor reserves the right to ban the use of devices during class time.

3. Non-medical and medical accommodation

Please refer to the following for University policy on Academic Consideration:

www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/academic_consideration_Sep24.pdf

4. Statement on Academic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken very seriously, and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following website:

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_offences_26SEP.pdf

5. Plagiarism

Plagiarism involves reliance on the work of another author without attribution. Students must compose their own essays and assignments, in their own words. Whenever students incorporate an idea, or a passage, or data from another author, they must fully acknowledge this by using quotation marks where appropriate and by properly citing the borrowed material. Plagiarism can be direct, involving straightforward copying of an author's work without providing both attribution and quotation marks. It can be less direct, involving lightly paraphrasing an author's work, rearranging their sentences while maintaining the same general structure and meaning, or stitching together material from two or more sources — these would count as plagiarism even with the source or sources identified, as they rely too heavily upon the way the author or authors chose to present their ideas. Take note that students may satisfactorily write up an author's ideas in their own words, but then neglect to cite the source or sources of the ideas, which also counts as plagiarism. And students may plagiarize themselves by submitting work they have previously submitted in other courses.

Plagiarism is a major academic offence, one which is taken seriously at Western. See Scholastic Offence Policy (above) and Procedures in the Western Academic Calendar for more detail:

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/undergrad_scholastic_offence_procedure.pdf

Plagiarism Checking: "All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>).

Multiple-choice tests/exams: Computer-marked multiple-choice tests and/or exams may be subject to submission for similarity review by software that will check for unusual coincidences in answer patterns that may indicate cheating.

6.Statement on the Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI)

When using AI, reliance on false citations (i.e., AI hallucinations) will also be considered as an academic offense. Although this doesn't involve plagiarizing from a specific author, it does involve inclusion of AI-generated material without proper attribution, and which simply may not exist to properly attribute.

7.Essay course requirements

With the exception of 2100-level courses, most courses in the Department of Political Science are essay Courses, as designated by E, F, or G. Total written assignments (excluding examinations) will be at least 3,000 words in Politics 1025F/G or 1026F/G, at least 5,000 words in a full course numbered 2200 or above and designated with an E, and at least 2,500 words in a half course numbered 2200 or above and designated with an F or G.

8.Security and Confidentiality of Student Work:

"Submitting or Returning Student Assignments, Tests and Exams - All student assignments, tests and exams will be handled in a secure and confidential manner. Particularly in this respect, leaving student work unattended in public areas for pickup is not permitted."

9.Duplication of work

Undergraduate students who submit similar assignments on closely related topics in two different courses must obtain the consent of both instructors prior to the submission of the assignment. If prior approval is not obtained, each instructor reserves the right not to accept the assignment.

10.Grading and grade adjustments

The Department of Political Science has a policy that undergraduate final course grades will only be rounded to the next whole grade if they end at 0.5 or higher; otherwise, they will be rounded down.

In order to ensure that comparable standards are applied in political science courses, the Department may require instructors to adjust final marks to conform to Departmental guidelines.

Students registered in Social Science should refer to <https://www.advising.ssc.uwo.ca/index.html> for information on Medical Policy, Term Tests, Final Examinations, Late Assignments, Short Absences, Extended Absences, Documentation and other Academic Concerns. Non-Social Science students should refer to their home faculty's academic counselling office.

11.Accessibility at Western: Please contact accessibility@uwo.ca if you require any information in plain text format, or if any other accommodation can make the course material and/or physical space accessible to you. <https://accessibility.uwo.ca/index.html>

12.Support Services

The website for the Office of the Registrar, and the same for affiliated university colleges when appropriate, and any appropriate Student Support Services (including the services provided by the USC) and Academic Support Page 3 and Engagement, should be provided for easy access.

<https://www.uwo.ca/health/case-management/index.html>

Western is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence (GBSV) and providing compassionate support to anyone who is going through or has gone through these traumatic events. If you are experiencing or have experienced GBSV (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts on the Wellness and Wellbeing website <https://www.uwo.ca/health/gbsv/index.html>. To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact support@uwo.ca.

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

<https://www.uwo.ca/health/mental-health/index.html>