

# PS2325F: Research Design in Political Science

Department of Political Science – Western University, Summer 2026

Instructor: Jan Eckardt (jeckardt@uwo.ca)

Office hours: Wednesday from 1-3pm or by appointment in SSC 7328, or via Zoom

## Course description

This course introduces students to the basic concepts and methods of research in the social sciences, with a particular focus on political science. The goal is for students to develop a strong understanding of the foundations of social science research and the research process, including commonly used methods and data in the field. By the end of the course, students should be able to design a research project that effectively addresses a question of their interest.

## Required course text

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

## Course Delivery

The class will be delivered asynchronously. Materials will be posted each week on Tuesdays at 1pm and will consist of a recorded lecture and a discussion prompt on the OWL Brightspace page. Instructions for three short assignments will be posted at least one week before their due date. Instructions for the final assignment will be posted during the third week of the course, so students have enough time to prepare their submission.

## Course objectives

The course's goal is to teach students the knowledge and skills necessary for independently conducting social science research. Specifically, the course aims to help students:

- Develop an understanding of the foundations of social science research and related skills, including:
  - the scientific method;
  - ethical considerations underlying social science research;
  - identifying novel research questions and developing testable hypotheses;
  - the development and use of effective and valid concepts;
  - case selection and sampling strategies;
  - measurement and issues of reliability and validity;
  - the choice between various qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods, including their respective strengths and limitations;
  - the choice between different types of data, including their advantages and disadvantages
- Apply course knowledge to develop their own research design that synthesizes relevant literature, builds on that literature to extend knowledge, and selects appropriate research methods to study a well-defined research question.

## Student assessment

Students will be assessed through three short assignments (each worth 15% of the final grade), a comprehensive research design of 8–10 pages (35%), and meaningful and regular participation in discussions posted to the course's forum (20%). Assignments will be posted on OWL Brightspace.

### Course Requirements and due dates

**Assignment #1 (15%):** May 12, 11:55pm

**Assignment #2 (15%):** May 19, 11:55pm

**Assignment #3 (15%):** June 2, 11:55pm

**Research Design (35%):** June 14, 11:55pm

**Forum Participation (20%):** Participate during three out of six weeks for full marks. Must be completed during the relevant week (i.e., before the next lecture and set of discussion questions are posted)

## Topics and readings

### Week #1 (May 5): The Foundations and Ethics of Social Science Research

- ◇ Review of syllabus and class organization
- ◇ Chapter 1: *What is Social Science Research?*
- ◇ Chapter 2: *Research Ethics*

### Week #2 (May 12): From Ideas to Theory

- ◇ Chapter 3 *Identifying a Research Question*
- ◇ Chapter 4 *Conducting a Literature Review*
- ◇ Chapter 5 *Building Effective Concepts*
- ◇ Chapter 6 *Making Strong Arguments*

### Week #3 (May 19): Tools for Social Science Research and Case Selection

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

### Week #4 (May 26): Qualitative Methods

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

### Week #5 (June 2): Quantitative Methods I

- ◇ Chapter 15 *Quantitative Measures*
- ◇ Chapter 16 *Quantitative Data*

### Week #6 (June 9): Quantitative Methods II

- ◇ Chapter 18 *Surveys*
- ◇ Chapter 19 *Experiments*
- ◇ Chapter 20 *Observational Studies*

# Lateness, Appeals and Generative AI Policy

## Lateness and Extensions

You will be permitted a single late submission across the three short assignments, granting an extension of up to **five** days beyond the due date. **No** justification is required to use this extension. This policy does **not** apply to the final assignment (i.e., the research design due June 14). For any additional late submissions, the penalty increases by 10% for each day the course assessment is late: Concretely, this means that you will lose 10% of the assignment's maximum points on the first day, 20% on the second day, 30% on the third day, and 40% on the fourth day after the due date. **No** points will be awarded for submissions that are five or more days late. These conditions may differ for students with approved academic considerations (see *Academic Considerations* section below).

## Make-Up Work and Grade Appeals

There are no opportunities to “make up” any assignments where a student received a grade that they felt was not satisfactory. If you are concerned that your assignment was not graded fairly or correctly, you must wait 48 hours before contacting the instructor to appeal your grade. To appeal your grade, you must email a **one-page written explanation** stating why you think your assignment was improperly graded. The instructor will respond to your appeal in writing. This policy is intended to promote thoughtful, well-justified grade appeals and an equitable review process, rather than allowing grades to be influenced by the frequency or persistence of such appeals.

## Generative AI Policy

Use of generative AI models (like ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude) for language editing is *permitted*. However, be mindful that generative AI often has different, or sometimes flawed, understandings of the concepts we will discuss in this course. Any **substantive use** of generative AI (i.e., beyond language refinement) in completing a course assessment constitutes unoriginal work and is therefore **plagiarism**. The *only* sources you need for the three short assignments are the course textbook and materials from this lecture. Using additional sources for these assignments is discouraged and will result in **heavy** penalties if not properly cited.

For the final assignment, you are permitted and encouraged to use external academic sources. You may also use generative AI to *assist* in identifying relevant literature. This applies **only** to literature search, however. Using generative AI to write your theory section or to interpret sources on your behalf is considered **plagiarism** (see below).

## Academic Considerations

### Exemptions from Lateness Policy

Students who require consideration beyond the single five-day extension for the three short assignments must submit a request via the *Student Absence Portal* under Western's Academic Consideration policy. Please note that the instructor is **not** responsible for granting or managing such accommodations or extensions.

### Religious Accommodation

When a course requirement conflicts with a religious holiday that requires an absence from the University or prohibits certain activities, students should request accommodation for their absence in writing at least two weeks prior to the holiday to the course instructor and/or the Academic Counselling office of their Faculty of Registration.

## Accessibility

Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact *Accessible Education*, which provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive testing.

## University Policy on Cheating and Academic Misconduct

### Plagiarism

"Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea or a passage from another author, they must acknowledge their debt by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offence." (see Scholastic Offence Policy in the Western Academic Calendar).

### 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>)."

## Support Services

Please visit the Social Science Academic Advising webpage for information on adding/dropping courses, academic considerations for absences, appeals, exam conflicts, and many other academic-related matters: Academic Counselling - Western University ([uwo.ca](http://uwo.ca))

Students in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western (<https://uwo.ca/health/>) for a complete list of options on how to obtain help.

Western is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence and providing compassionate support to anyone who has gone through these traumatic events. If you have experienced sexual or gender-based violence (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at *Gender-Based Violence and Survivor Support*.

To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact [support@uwo.ca](mailto:support@uwo.ca).

Please contact the instructor if you require lecture or printed material in an alternate format or if any other arrangements can make this course more accessible to you. You may also wish to contact Accessible Education at [http://academicsupport.uwo.ca/accessible\\_education/index.html](http://academicsupport.uwo.ca/accessible_education/index.html) if you have any questions regarding accommodations.

Additional student-run support services are offered by the USC, <https://westernusc.ca/services/>.