GOVT 500 001: The Scientific Method and Research Design (3 Credits)

Fall 2015
Mondays, 7:20-10:00pm
Seminar Meeting Room: Innovation Hall 203

Professor: Eric McGlinchey
Office Robinson Hall A225
Email: emcgline@gmu.edu
Phone: 703.993.2960

Office Hours: Mondays, 4-6 pm, and Wednesdays, 2-4 pm

Course Description

This course grounds students in the principles of the scientific method as the framework for investigating all research questions in political science, whether qualitative or quantitative in character (or both). Focus is on sound and rigorous research design. Students will explore approaches and potential pitfalls to conceptualization, measurement, and causality. Along the way, students will investigate competing and complementary approaches to causal analysis. Students will examine case study, survey, experimental, game theory, and ethnographic research designs and assess the strengths and limitations of these approaches in our effort to build theories in social science.

Course Learning Outcomes

By the close of this course, students will be able to:

1. Identify and execute multiple social science research designs.
2. Identify the strengths and limitations of different research designs and methods.
3. Write a research proposal that can serve as a foundation for the Masters or PhD research proposal.
4. Orally present research concisely and in a way that engages academic as well as policy audiences.

Course Texts

Many of the course readings are available in electronic format and can be accessed through Mason’s E-Journals: http://library.gmu.edu.

Students are encouraged to purchase the following texts:


Instructor-Student Communication

I will respond to your emails within 48 hours. If I will be away from email for more than one day, I will post an announcement in the Blackboard course folder.
Before sending an email, please check the following (available on your Blackboard course menu) unless the email is of a personal nature:

1. Syllabus
2. Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)
3. Help forum (Feel free to respond to other students in the Help forum if you know the answer.)
4. Blackboard videos on how to use Blackboard features
5. Blackboard Q&A, and
6. Technology Requirements

**Mason EMAIL**

- Mason requires that Mason email be used for all courses. I will be sending messages to your Mason email and you are responsible for making sure you have access to these messages.
- You may forward your Mason email to other accounts but always use your Mason email when communicating with me to allow verification of your identity.
- You are required to check your Mason email account regularly and to keep your mailbox maintained so that messages are not rejected for being over quota.
- When you email me, be sure to include GOVT800 at the beginning of the subject heading to alert me that I have received a message from one of my online students.

**Course Logistics**

This course will meet in seminar as well as use Blackboard to facilitate discussions outside of our weekly meetings. In a typical week:

- you will read about 100 and 200 pages and discuss the material with your classmates
- accomplish on-line activities
- work on assignments to be submitted in the Blackboard assignment drop box according to the assignment schedule.

**To Access Blackboard**

2. Login using your NETID and password.
3. Click on the ‘Courses” tab.
4. Double-click on GOVT-500-001 (Fall 2015) under the course listings.

**Technical Help**

- If you have difficulty with accessing Blackboard, please contact the ITU Support Center at 703.993.8870 or support@gmu.edu.
- If you have trouble with using the features in Blackboard, email courses@gmu.edu.

**Course Requirements**
The following requirements are designed to promote an optimal learning environment for motivated students. This syllabus is a contract; your continued enrollment in this class constitutes your acceptance of these requirements.

1. Students are expected to have read the assigned reading before completing assigned coursework.
2. Students will complete nine short papers, each 500 words in length. Paper topics are detailed in the course schedule below. **Papers are to be submitted through Blackboard by 11:59 pm, on the day before the seminar meets.**
3. Students will complete online discussion posts. **In weeks that have online discussions, initial posts are due by 11:59pm, Friday. Follow-up posts are due by 11:59pm, Sunday.**
4. Students will submit a draft research proposal, 1,250 words in length. **The draft research proposal is to be submitted through the Blackboard by 11:59 pm, Sunday, November 15th.**
5. Students will submit a final research proposal, 2,500 words in length. **The final research proposal is to be submitted through the Blackboard by 11:59 pm, Monday, December 14.**

**Late Assignments Policy**

One-third of a grade will be deducted for every day a paper is late. Incompletes—both for papers and for the seminar—will be extended only in cases of documented emergencies.

**Student Responsibilities**

**Academic Integrity** Students must be responsible for their own work, and students and faculty must take on the responsibility of dealing explicitly with violations. The tenet must be a foundation of our university culture.

**Honor Code** Students must adhere to the guidelines of the George Mason University Honor Code. The George Mason University Honor Code states: “Cheating and attempted cheating, plagiarism, lying, and stealing of academic work and related materials constitute Honor Code violations.

To maintain an academic community according to these standards, students and faculty members must report all alleged violations to the Honor Committee.” Students are encouraged to read the full Honor Code: [http://oai.gmu.edu/the-mason-honor-code-2/](http://oai.gmu.edu/the-mason-honor-code-2/) and to remain vigilant against any violation of the Code in their own work. Any cases of academic dishonesty in this course will be pursued according to the guidelines detailed in the University Catalog.

**Time Conflict** George Mason University is committed to creating a welcoming, respectful and inclusive educational environment that values diversity. Students should review the syllabus at the beginning of the term to determine if there are any conflicts between class time and religious observance. It is the student's responsibility to inform the instructor of these conflicts within the first week of the semester. [http://ulife.gmu.edu/calendar/religious-holiday-calendar/](http://ulife.gmu.edu/calendar/religious-holiday-calendar/)

**MasonLive/Email (GMU Email)** Students are responsible for the content of university communications sent to their George Mason University email account and are required to activate their account and check it regularly. All communication from the university, college, school, and program will be sent to students solely through their Mason email account. [See https://masonlivelogin.gmu.edu].

**Patriot Pass** Once you sign up for your Patriot Pass, your passwords will be synchronized, and you will use your Patriot Pass username and password to log in to the following systems: Blackboard, University
Libraries, MasonLive, myMason, Patriot Web, Virtual Computing Lab, and WEMS. [See https://password.gmu.edu/index.jsp].

**University Policies** Students must follow the university policies. [See http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu].

**Responsible Use of Computing** Students must follow the university policy for Responsible Use of Computing. [See http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/policies/responsible-use-of-computing/].

**University Calendar**
Details regarding the current Academic Calendar. [See http://registrar.gmu.edu/calendars/index.html].

**University Catalog**
The current university catalog. [See http://catalog.gmu.edu].

**Students with Disabilities**
Students with disabilities who seek accommodations in a course must be registered with the George Mason University Office of Disability Services (ODS) and inform their instructor, in writing, at the beginning of the semester [See http://ods.gmu.edu].

**Netiquette For Online Discussions [1]**

Our discussion should be collaborative, not combative; you are creating a learning environment, sharing information and learning from one another. Respectful communication is important to your success in this course and as a professional. Please re-read your responses carefully before you post them so others will not to take them out of context or as personal attacks. Be positive to others and diplomatic with your words and I will try my best to do the same. Be careful when using sarcasm and humor. Without face-to-face communications your joke may be viewed as criticism. Experience shows that even an innocent remark in the online environment can be easily misconstrued.

[1] Netiquette prepared by Charlene Douglas, Associate Professor, College of Health & Human Services, GMU.

**Student Services**

**Writing Center**
The George Mason University Writing Center staff provides a variety of resources and services (e.g., tutoring, workshops, writing guides, handbooks) intended to support students as they work to construct and share knowledge through writing. [See http://writingcenter.gmu.edu]. You can now sign up for an Online Writing Lab (OWL) session just like you sign up for a face-to-face session in the Writing Center, which means YOU set the date and time of the appointment! Learn more about the [Online Writing Lab (OWL)].

**Counseling and Psychological Services**
The George Mason University Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) staff consists of professional counseling and clinical psychologists, social workers, and counselors who offer a wide range of services (e.g., individual and group counseling, workshops and outreach programs) to enhance students' personal experience and academic performance [See http://caps.gmu.edu].
**Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)**
The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA), also known as the "Buckley Amendment," is a federal law that gives protection to student educational records and provides students with certain rights. [See http://registrar.gmu.edu/privacy].

**Special Needs:**
Please address any special needs or special accommodations with me at the beginning of the semester or as soon as you become aware of your needs. Those seeking accommodations based on disabilities should contact the Disability Resource Center (703) 993-2474, or the Equity Office (703) 993-8730.

**Enrollment:**
Students are responsible for verifying their enrollment in this class. Schedule adjustments should be made by the deadlines published in the Registrar calendar: [http://summer.gmu.edu/](http://summer.gmu.edu/)

**To Access Blackboard**
1. Go to [http://mymason.gmu.edu](http://mymason.gmu.edu)
2. Login using your NETID and password
3. Click on the ‘Courses” tab.
4. Double-click on GOVT-500-001 (Fall 2015) under the “Course List” heading

**Grading:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nine Short Papers, 20 points each</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Proposal First Draft</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Proposal Final Draft</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Presentation</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Participation</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Participation</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two Peer Reviews</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CGG Chapter 2 Problem Set</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>500 points</td>
</tr>
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</table>

**Grading Scale:**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Minimum Score</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A+</td>
<td>490-500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>460-489</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>450-459</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>440-449</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>410-439</td>
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<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>400-409</td>
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<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>390-399</td>
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<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>360-389</td>
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<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>350-359</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>340-349</td>
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<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>310-339</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D-</td>
<td>300-309</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>299 and below</td>
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</table>


## Course Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Readings and Videos</th>
<th>Discussions and Assignments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
3. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, Ch. 1, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," pp. 3-32. | **Assignment:** Problem Set—Complete the CGG Ch. 2 problem set and upload through the Blackboard assignment link.<br>**Assignment Deadline:** Sunday, 9/13 by 11:59pm. |
| 3 | 9/21 | **Concepts and**<br>1. KKV, Ch. 2, “Descriptive Inference,” pp. 34-74. | **Discussion Assignment:** (1) Initial Post—Identify two concepts, one for which you believe it is easy to
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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</table>
Mid Semester Survey – Please Complete by 10/5  
**Discussion Assignment:** (1) Initial Post—Consult the Tuesday Science section of the New York Times or the BBC Science section. Identify an article that forwards a scientific statement. Next identify how this statement could be falsified. (2) Two follow-up posts—Look at the Scientific Statements identified by two of your colleagues. Transform these scientific statements into a non-scientific statement, that is, a statement that CANNOT be falsified.  
**Discussion Deadlines:** Initial posts are due by 11:59pm, Friday. Follow-up posts are due by 11:59pm, Sunday.  
**Paper 2:** Choose a causal mechanism. Identify two different outcomes you anticipate might be shaped by this causal mechanism. Convey the findings of two political science articles (one for each outcome) regarding the nature of the relationship between the causal mechanism and the dependent variable.  
**Paper Deadline:** Papers are due through Blackboard by 11:59 pm, Sunday. |
| 10/5 | Case Study Analysis (CSA) | 1. George and Bennett, Chapters 3-6, pp. 67-123 and Chapters 8-10, pp. 151-231.  
**Discussion Assignment:** (1) Initial Post—Identify a pressing topic in the news and illustrate how a case study may help us better understand this topic. (2) Two follow-up posts—Identify potential insights as well as limitations of two of your colleagues’ case studies. |
Discussion Deadlines: Initial posts are due by 11:59pm, Friday. Follow-up posts are due by 11:59pm, Sunday.

Paper 3: Conduct in brief a case study to address a compelling puzzle in the social sciences. Follow George and Bennett’s instructions (Part II of the text) in conducting your case study.

Paper Deadline: Papers are due through Blackboard by 11:59 pm, Sunday.

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Challenges to CSA: Case Selection

6
10/13

1. KKV, Ch. 4, Determining What to Observe," pp. 113-149.

Discussion Assignment: (1) Initial Post—Identify a compelling research question and cases that will help you address this question. Justify your selection of cases (2) Two follow-up posts—Address potential limits of two of your colleagues’ research designs. In Geddes’ words, address how the cases your colleagues have chosen might affect the answers they get.

Discussion Deadlines: Initial posts are due by 11:59pm, Friday. Follow-up posts are due by 11:59pm, Sunday.

Paper 4: Identify a compelling research question and cases that will help you address this question. Justify your selection of cases. Address the limits of your research design and, in Geddes’ words, address how the cases you choose may affect the answers you get.

Paper Deadline: Papers are due through Blackboard by 11:59 pm, Sunday.

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Complements to CSA: Survey Research

7
10/19


Discussion Assignment: (1) Initial Post—Use Google Forms to create a three-question survey. Share your survey with your group members and answer the survey questions that your group colleagues share with you. (2) Follow-up post—analyze the data you collected and present your findings to the group.

Discussion Deadlines: Initial posts are due by 11:59pm, Friday. Follow-up posts are due by 11:59pm, Sunday.

Paper 5: Identify a research question you find compelling and two surveys that address this research question. Use the survey data sets to probe competing causal hypotheses identified in the literature. Report your findings.

Paper Deadline: Papers are due through Blackboard
<table>
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<tr>
<th>8 10/26</th>
<th>Complements to CSA: Game Theory</th>
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**Discussion Assignment:** *(1) Initial Post*—Identify a “game” with at least two players that you encounter in your daily life. Draw a game tree that illustrates the choices players make. Identify the preferences of each player. *(2) Two follow-up posts*—Solve, through backward induction, two of your group colleagues’ games.

**Discussion Deadlines:** Initial posts are due by 11:59pm, Friday. Follow-up posts are due by 11:59pm, Sunday.

**Paper 6:** Identify a research question that lends itself to game-theoretic analysis. Convey the findings of two political science articles that address this question—one article that applies game theory and one that uses an alternate method. Discuss the contributions and potential limitations of both articles’ approaches to answering the research question.

**Paper Deadline:** Papers are due through Blackboard by 11:59 pm, Sunday.

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<tr>
<th>9 11/2</th>
<th>Complements to CSA: Experiments</th>
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**Paper 7:** Identify a research question that lends itself to experimental analysis. Convey the findings of two political science articles that address this question—one article that applies an experimental approach and one that uses an alternate method. Discuss the contributions and potential limitations of both articles’ approaches to answering the research question.

**Paper Deadline:** Papers are due through Blackboard by 11:59 pm, Sunday.
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>References</th>
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**Paper 8:** Identify a social science study that “went wrong.” Relate how the study and the researcher(s) transgressed, the academic community’s response to this transgression, and potential lessons learned from this example.

**Paper Deadline:** Papers are due through Blackboard by 11:59 pm, Sunday.

**Paper: Draft Research Proposal**—Using the insights of this week’s readings, write a 1,250 word draft research proposal. Successful proposals will offer clearly specified research questions, devote attention to conceptualization and measurement of outcomes and causes, justify case selection and research methodology, and engage the current literature related to the topic under investigation.

**Draft Research Proposal Deadline:** The draft research proposal is to be submitted through the Blackboard by 11:59 pm, Sunday, November 15th.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Research Proposal Workshop</td>
<td>Reading: Two Research Proposals (Instructor will assign)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/23</td>
<td>Round Robin of Peer Reviews</td>
<td><strong>Round Robin of Peer Reviews:</strong> Write one page reviews for two of your colleagues’ research proposals. Reviews are to be completed and uploaded to Blackboard prior to class. Please bring a hard copy of your reviews to class to facilitate discussion. <strong>Review Deadline:</strong> Reviews are due through Blackboard by 11:59pm, Sunday.</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Round Robin Presentation</td>
<td><strong>Presenters:</strong> 10-minute presentations. Review presentation insights from week 1 readings. Presentations will be recorded.</td>
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<tr>
<td>11/30</td>
<td>End of Semester Debrief</td>
<td><strong>Paper 9:</strong> Identify at least one key insight from each week’s readings for weeks 1-10. For each insight, explain (1) its importance for social science research, (2) how you might use this insight to instruct your own research and writing and (3) the pitfalls that might emerge if we ignore this insight. Post your list to Blackboard and bring a printed copy for discussion to seminar. <strong>Paper Deadline:</strong> Papers are due through Blackboard by 11:59 pm, Sunday.</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Final Research Proposal</td>
<td><strong>Final Research Proposal Deadline:</strong> The final research proposal is to be submitted through the Blackboard by 11:59 pm, Monday, December 14.</td>
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