

**PSC-400: Field Research Methods
Fall 2020**

T/Th 2:00-3:20 PM
Maxwell 110

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Office: 400B Eggers Hall
Virtual Office Hours: by appointment, via Zoom

Course Description:

How should a local government agency figure out the needs of its constituents? Why do Republicans and Democrats watch different sources of news? Are positive or negative campaign ads more effective? Whether your research question is relevant for the non-profit world, government functioning, or academic inquiry, answering these questions requires an understanding of field research methods: tools for gathering original data from people or primary sources in “the field”—in other words, IRL. This course will take you through practical instruction on best practices in interviews, surveys, ethnography, experiments, and more, culminating in a final research design. While the course draws explicitly on political science literature and methods, it is applicable across the social sciences.

Learning Objectives:

In this course, you will learn:

1. How to select and conceptualize a good social science research project involving original data collection.
2. How to conduct five different methods of data collection (ethnography, interviews, surveys, experiments, and archives), including the strengths and weaknesses of each approach.
3. Practical issues of implementing research, including ethical considerations, IRB applications, logistics, and budgeting.
4. How to put together a comprehensive research design and pitch it to possible funders.
5. **Specific to Fall 2020:** How to adjust research strategies to respect social distancing guidelines.

Course Requirements and Grading:

Assignments 1-10	50%
Participation (Attendance and Informal Writing)	15%
Final Presentation	10%
Final Research Design	25%

Assignments 1-10, due weekly, guide you through the practical application of the skills we discuss in class each week. Participation includes both class attendance and completion of informal writing exercises prior to class time. Assignments 1-10 are explained in full on the Assignment List document; informal writing exercises are listed on the syllabus schedule below. All assignments and informal writing exercises are also posted as assignments on Blackboard.

The final research design requires you to produce....wait for it....a final research design based on the work earlier in the semester. The final presentation is a 10-minute pitch of this research design to a hypothetical funder.

A: 93-100	B-: 80-82.9	D+: 68-69.9
A-: 90-92.9	C+: 78-79.9	D: 63-67.9
B+: 88-89.9	C: 73-77.9	D-: 60-62.9
B: 83-87.9	C-: 70-72.9	F: <60

Course Format

This semester, we will follow the general format of an in-person lecture and discussion on Tuesdays, followed by virtual workshops on Thursdays. During the virtual workshop, you will attend class via Zoom and break out into smaller groups to work on practical elements of that week's topic. I will circulate between the groups to assist. These sessions will be virtual to mitigate the risk of working in close proximity.

If any student becomes ill or is required to quarantine, the in-person sessions will be broadcast via Zoom. If you are unable to attend class due to Covid-19 or other illness, please let me know in advance so I can ensure your ability to livestream.

In the event that half the class participants are unable to attend in person, we will convert the Tuesday session to Zoom. In order to minimize unnecessary risk of exposure, please let me know as soon as possible if you plan to miss class for any reason so that I can send timely notifications if class will be virtual.

COURSE POLICIES

Zoom Etiquette

Remote learning is most effective when all participants can see each other, and therefore I require that you use a webcam for our remote sessions. If you do not have a camera or have reservations about this policy, please let me know. Please treat Zoom class as you would an in-person class: come fully clothed and be sure nothing is in view of your camera that you do not want to share. Feel free to use a virtual background to maintain privacy. Zoom sessions may need to be recorded. I will always warn you in advance of recording.

Electronics in Class

Typically I do not allow laptops or other devices in my class, as a [mounting body of evidence](#) shows that students learn better without screen and taking notes by hand. Obviously, these are not typical times, and I understand that laptops may be necessary as we toggle back and forth between in-person and virtual sessions. **I strongly suggest that you take notes by hand**, whether we are in person or virtual, but will leave the decision up to you. I reserve the right to change this policy if laptops become too distracting in class.

Attendance and Late Work

Attendance—either in-person or virtual—is required and comprises part of your final grade. If you are mildly ill, I suggest virtual attendance. Absence will be excused in the case of more severe illness or other emergency that requires you miss class, but you must notify me in advance (unless impossible).

Because the assignments in this course are sequential and time-sensitive, I do not accept late work. It is much better for you to submit an incomplete assignment than nothing at all. I will accept extension requests for the final research design, but I do not guarantee that they will be granted.

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Academic Integrity

Syracuse University's Academic Integrity Policy holds students accountable for the integrity of the work they submit. Students should be familiar with the policy and know that it is their responsibility to learn about course-specific expectations, as well as about university policy. The university policy governs appropriate citation and use of sources, the integrity of work submitted in exams and assignments, and the veracity of signatures on attendance sheets and other verification of participation in class activities. The policy also prohibits students from submitting the same written work in more than one class without receiving written authorization in advance from both instructors. The presumptive penalty for a first offense by an undergraduate student is course failure, accompanied by a transcript notation indicating that the failure resulted from a violation of Academic Integrity Policy. The standard sanction for a first offense by a graduate student is suspension or expulsion. For more information and the complete policy, see <http://academicintegrity.syr.edu>.

Disability Related Accommodations

If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS), <http://disabilityservices.syr.edu>, located in Room 309 of 804 University Avenue, or call (315) 443-4498, TDD: (315) 443-1371 for an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations. ODS is responsible for coordinating disability-related accommodations and will issue students with documented Disabilities Accommodation Authorization Letters, as appropriate. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact ODS as soon as possible.

Religious Observances

SU religious observances notification and policy, found at <http://hendricks.syr.edu/spiritual-life/index.html>, recognizes the diversity of faiths represented among the campus community and protects the rights of students, faculty, and staff to observe religious holidays according to their tradition. Under the policy, students are provided an opportunity to make up any examination, study, or work requirements that may be missed due to a religious observance provided they **notify their instructors before the end of the second week of classes for regular session classes** and by the submission deadline for flexibly formatted classes. An online notification process is available for students in **My Slice / StudentServices / Enrollment / MyReligiousObservances / Add a Notification**.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1

8/25 T: Course Introduction

8/27 Th: Finding a Good Question

Read: Chodorow, Stanley. *Writing A Successful Research Paper: A Simple Approach*. Chapters 3

Write: Begin to brainstorm topic ideas. Start with a general topics and move to narrow, open-ended questions.

Week 2

9/1 T: One-on-One Meetings (via Zoom) – Be ready with 2-3 possible topics ready to discuss

9/3 Th: Question Workshop (via Zoom)

Assignment 1 due 9/6, midnight

Week 3

9/8 T: Explanations and Outcomes

Read: Habyarimana, James, Macartan Humphreys, Daniel Posner, and Jeremy Weinstein. 2007. “Why Does Ethnicity Undermine Public Goods Provision?” *American Political Science Review* 101(4). Read 709-711.

Write: Briefly describe the different explanations that the authors put forth about the relationship between ethnicity and public goods provision. Note: they call these explanations “families of mechanisms.”

9/10 Th: Explanations and Outcomes Workshop (via Zoom)

Write: possible outcomes or explanations relevant to your research question. Whether you focus on outcomes (Ys) or explanations (Xs) depends on the format of your question.

Assignment 2 due 9/13, midnight

Week 4

9/15 T: Conceptualizing Variables

Read: Habyarimana et al, pages 712-721

Write: How do the authors measure the following variables: ethnicity, co-ethnicity, egoist, non-egoist, “commonality of taste,” “other-regardingness,” “efficacy”, “findability”, and “social sanctioning”?

9/17 Th: Variables Workshop (via Zoom)

Write: Identify as many variables as possible in your research question and explanations/outcomes.

Assignment 3 due 9/20, midnight

Week 5

9/22 T: Ethnography and Participant Observation (1)

Read: Boswell et al. 2018. “State of the Field: What can Political Ethnography Tell us About Anti-Politics and Democratic Disaffection?” *European Journal of Political Research* 58: 56-71.

9/24 Th: Ethnography and Participant Observation (2) (via Zoom)

Read: Scott, James. 1985. *Weapons of the Weak*. New Haven: Yale University Press. Chapter 1.

Write: In documenting everyday life in “Sedeka,” what themes does Scott highlight? What do you think he is trying to convey through his descriptions?

Assignment 4 due 9/27, midnight

Week 6

9/29 T: Interviews and Focus Groups (1)

Read: Mosely, Layna. 2013. *Interview Research in Political Science*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. Chapter 5. *Note: this e-book is available through the library and would be very useful in its entirety if you plan to carry out interviews.*

10/1 Th: Interviews and Focus Groups (2) (via Zoom)

Read: Verwey, Cornel and Michael Quayle. 2012. “Whiteness, Racism, and Afrikaner Identity in Post-Apartheid South Africa,” *African Affairs* 111/445: 551-575.

Write: What was the author’s sampling strategy? What impact did the authors’ personal identities have on the research process? What kind of interviews did they conduct? What was their process for analyzing the interview data?

Assignment 5 due 10/4, midnight

Week 7

10/6 T: Surveys (1)

Read: Converse and Presser, pgs 9-47

10/8 Th: Surveys (2) (via Zoom)

Read: Converse and Presser, pgs. 48-75

Write: Draft your survey questions.

Assignment 6 due 10/11, midnight

Week 8

10/13 T: Experiments (1)

Read: Gerber, Alan and Donald Green. 2012. *Field Experiments: Design, Analysis, and Interpretation*. W.W. Norton. Introduction.

Write: Responses to the exercises at the end of the chapter.

10/15 Th: Experiments (2) (via Zoom)

Read: Habyarimana et al (revisit first parts, read through the end).

Write: Identify any part of your research project that might be possible to explore through an experiment.

Assignment 7 due 10/18, midnight

Week 9

10/20 T: Archives and Primary Sources (1)

Read: Schmidt, Laura. 2016. "Using Archives: A Guide to Effective Research," Society of American Archivists.

10/22 Th: Archives and Primary Sources (2) (via Zoom)

BONUS Day, 10/25 Su: Archives debrief – (via Zoom)

Write: Compile a list of primary documents that could be useful for your project, using one of the digitized collections we discussed on Tuesday.

Assignment 8 due 10/25, midnight

Week 10

10/27 T: Choosing a strategy

Read: Jensen, Eric and Charles Laurie. 2020. *Doing Real Research: A Practical Guide to Social Research*. Sage publishing. Chapter 1.

10/29 Th: One-on-One meetings (via Zoom)

Write: Your preliminary thoughts about the method (or combination of methods) you want to use in your research design.

Week 11

11/3 T: Ethical Considerations

Read: Mosely, Layna. 2013. *Interview Research in Political Science*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. Chapters 2 (Sarah Brooks) and 3 (Lauren MacLean). *Note: this e-book is available through the library and would be very useful in its entirety if you plan to carry out interviews.*

11/5 Th: Working with the IRB (via Zoom)

Complete: [CITI training through SU](#). Submit completion certification via Blackboard.

Assignment 9 due 11/8, midnight

Week 12

11/10 T: Logistics and Budgeting

11/12 Th: Contingency planning (via Zoom)

Write: Complete a data collection plan for the "ideal" version of your research. Note any data collection exercises that may need alteration due to Covid-19.

Assignment 10 due 11/15

Week 13

11/17 T: Research Design and Pitches

11/19 Th: Research Design Workshop (via Zoom)

Week 14

11/24 T: Final Presentations

Final Research Designs Due DATE