

# APPLIED RESEARCH IN POLITICS (GOVT 4000)

Fall 2024, Millsaps College

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## Course Overview and Learning Objectives

“Theories on political behavior are best left to CNN, pollsters, pundits, historians, candidates, political parties, and the voters, rather than being funded out of taxpayers’ wallets, especially when our nation has much more urgent needs and priorities.” –Senator Tom Coburn (R-OK), October 2009<sup>1</sup>

As Senator Coburn’s quote makes clear, political scientists have struggled to justify their work to policymakers (who often have no problem funding research in other disciplines). As a professional political scientist, I am sometimes asked whether political science is *really* a science – or if my work is just a fancy way of advocating for my personal political attitudes. If you’re majoring in Government and Politics, you might have received similar questions from well-meaning family members or friends.

GOVT 4000 is a response to this critique. **The course turns on the difference between *open-ended “research”* and *research design*** – a distinction both poorly understood by the general public and poorly explained by many political scientists. In high school, you were probably asked to write a “research paper.” My guess is that the assignment required you to read lots of books or articles on a topic that interested you and report back on what you found. We make assumptions based on our experiences – so it makes sense that you would assume that college-level research looks similar.

But it’s actually pretty different. In this class, you will learn to conduct *empirical social science*. When political scientists conduct research, we propose explanations for political phenomena – such as voting behavior, the collapse of authoritarian regimes, or the success of anti-corruption campaigns. We aim for theories that build upon the work of other scholars, but help answer outstanding questions (or if you want to sound pretentious, “lacunae”) about our topic. And we make important decisions about how to *test* our theories – decisions that can help us figure out whether we are right or (more often than not) wrong.

If we skip steps in this process or choose the wrong data-gathering strategy, we risk an “indeterminate” research design – a project that cannot help us determine whether our theory is correct, because the data cannot differentiate between competing theories. Virtually every political scientist has made mistakes in the process of research design; one reason I *know* that political science is a “science” is that I understand the consequences of poorly planned research. Indeed, I *worry* about investing time and energy into a project that cannot produce new knowledge.

This semester, you’ll learn how to approach empirical social science research with a similar mindset. Upon successful completion of this course, you will be able to:

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<sup>1</sup>Quoted in Daniel W. Drezner (2009), “Tom Coburn Picks on Political Science,” *Foreign Policy*, 7 October. Available <https://foreignpolicy.com/2009/10/07/tom-coburn-picks-on-political-science/>

- **Identify an *empirical* research question** about a political phenomena that interests you – and communicate the significance of your research question to your colleagues
- **Develop a generalizable theory** that (if supported by empirical evidence) would help you account for the political phenomena you want to research
- **Review existing literature** that speaks to your research question, and explain how your theory either builds upon what scholars already know or challenges conventional wisdom
- **Derive one or more testable hypotheses** that follow from your theory; **identify the independent and dependent variables** in your hypotheses, along with the units-of-analysis to be sampled.
- **Evaluate different methodological techniques** that political scientists use and explain their strengths and weaknesses; **differentiate between qualitative and quantitative methods** for conducting applied research in politics
- **Propose and defend an original research design** that will enable you to test your theory and hypotheses in Senior Seminar – and just as importantly –
- **TEACH the course material to your classmates** – the best route to deep learning.

Indeed, everything we discuss will inform your final project – a written research proposal (to guide your work in Senior Seminar next semester), with an accompanying in-class presentation. Plan to meet with me (Dr. Schmidt) as early as possible to identify your research question, theory, and hypotheses.

Finally, a promise: **no matter your goals post-graduation, this course will teach you concrete, marketable skills for the twenty-first century economy.** By learning how to conduct high-impact research, you'll develop the core competencies that employers and admissions committees like to see: analytical reasoning, critical thinking, ethical decision-making, and effective communication (both written and oral). Moreover, by conducting an original research project next semester, you'll demonstrate the stamina, discipline, and process-oriented mindset that sets Millsaps graduates apart. It won't be easy – but I promise it will be worth your time.

## Course Connect

You should familiarize yourself with the [Course Connect page for GOVT 4000](#). You'll use Course Connect to submit written assignments. Assigned readings not in the required textbooks will be posted on Course Connect. And you can always use Course Connect to see your current grade. From time to time, I may also post optional additional readings on Course Connect.

## Emails

Throughout the semester, I will use email to communicate with the class. **Please check your Millsaps email at least once per day**, even if you usually use a different email account. Emails will often contain important announcements, updates, or clarifications about the course material.

## Textbooks

This course has two required textbooks. *Political Science Research Methods* is available as an eBook on the [Course Connect page for GOVT 4000](#). My understanding is that the Millsaps Bookstore will provide a paperback copy of *Focus Groups for the Social Science Researcher*. **Please talk to me as soon as possible if you have any difficulties accessing the textbooks for this class.**

- Janet Buttolph Johnson, H. T. Reynolds, and Jason D. Mycoff, *Political Science Research Methods*, **9th edition** (CQ Press, 2019)
  - Paperback ISBN: 978-1544331430
  - E-Book ISBN: 978-1544358031
- Jennifer Cyr, *Focus Groups for the Social Science Researcher* (Cambridge University Press, 2019)
  - Paperback ISBN: 978-1316638798

Alongside these texts, we will read several additional academic articles and book chapters. **These additional materials will be posted on Course Connect.**

## Attendance Policy

Irregular attendance under normal circumstances indicates that a student may be having difficulties adjusting to the course or to the College. Email your professors with any questions/concerns about engaging in courses when you miss classes due to illness.

**In-person attendance for all class/lab meetings is the expectation for all students.** Students should notify their instructor of the need to miss a class, laboratory, or studio session prior to the meeting time and provide a valid reason why they will be absent. Faculty will be regularly reporting attendance to the College, regardless of whether or not that attendance is a factor in a student's grade.

**Students will be excused from class in cases of documented illness, family emergency, religious observance, or participation in a co-curricular activity.** If you visit the Health Center and receive a note excusing you from class due to illness, there's no need to deliver it in person; just take a photograph and email it to me.

**If you accumulate three (3) unexcused absences *or* you are late to class six (6) or more times, I will ask that Dr. Lewton-Yates (Assistant Dean of Student Success) issue you a yellow card. After six (6) unexcused absences *or* eleven (11) late arrivals to class, I will request that the Office of Records drop you from the class roster with an F.** Please remember that attendance and active engagement in the course are critical for meeting the learning objectives outlined above.

## Deadlines

Students must complete the take-home midterm exam during the allotted time period; late exams will only be permitted in cases of illness, family emergency, religious observance, or participation

in a co-curricular activity. Please note that if you qualify for a make-up exam, you will receive an “alternate” version of the exam. Your version will not be more difficult, but it might have different questions. **If you miss the exam deadline without a valid excuse, you will receive zero (0) percent on the exam, and will not have the opportunity to complete a make-up exam.**

Other *non-exam* written assignments will lose points for late submissions. For these assignments, **you will lose ten (10) percentage points (one letter grade) for each day that the assignment was overdue.** Assignments will be considered “one day late” if they were submitted the day the assignment was due but after the 7:30pm deadline.

Students must give their in-class presentations as scheduled during the Finals Period. **If you miss your final presentation without a valid excuse, you will receive zero (0) percent on the presentation.**

## Emergency Remote Instruction Plan

**In the event campus shifted to remote instruction (either for a shorter period of time or for the remainder of the semester), we would hold class over Zoom.** I would continue to communicate with the class by email; the Zoom link to attend class would be available on Course Connect. Insofar as possible, I would still expect students to participate in class discussion with their cameras on; group exercises would take place in Zoom “breakout” rooms. Assessments that involve active engagement with your professor or classmates – the “Students as Teachers” workshops and the final presentations – would be conducted online, too. If students were unable to participate in class due to Internet connectivity issues, I would address those situations on a case-by-case basis. Otherwise, the attendance policy would still apply.

## Office Hours

Regardless of your performance in this class, I encourage you to stop by my Office Hours. During this time, I will certainly help students that might be struggling in GOVT 4000 – or who need clarification about the course material. However, I am also interested in your professional and intellectual development. Please see me as a resource and ally as you progress through your academic careers.

My Office Hours are **Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays (3:00-5:00pm)**, in the GOVT offices (first floor, Sullivan-Harrell). To make an appointment to see me, visit <https://calendly.com/ericrobertschmidt>. However, you can drop by my office even if you haven’t made an appointment. If I’m not in a meeting or otherwise occupied, I’ll be happy to speak with you.

## Course Requirements and Grading

### Course Structure

Each class session will meet for 60 minutes. Please keep the following format and guidelines in mind.

- **Class on Monday will introduce the substantive material for the week.** Students should come to class already having read the assigned readings. **Be sure to budget enough**

**time over the weekend for you to complete *all* the assigned reading for the upcoming week.** I will teach from PowerPoint slides, but there is no need to copy down everything on my slides; the slides are meant to guide your understanding, not to function as a substitute for completing the assigned readings. **Please note that I will not post my slides to Course Connect until the end of each week.**

- **On most Wednesdays, I will facilitate a “Learning by Doing” workshop.** Come prepared to work in small groups on a variety of active learning exercises – all designed to help you apply the week’s material to the process of research in politics. These classes will also give you ideas for how to teach the material during the “Students as Teachers” workshops on Friday.
- **On most Fridays, the entire class will be devoted to a “Students as Teachers” workshop** – where you’ll work together to brainstorm the most effective ways to *teach* this material to yourselves and your classmates. You will be graded on your preparation and performance, as well as your reflection on your efforts.
- **Note (updated 10-29-2024):** for the final four substantive weeks of class, we will **not** have “Students as Teachers” workshops. In place of your workshop grade, you will be assigned a participation score (between 0-10 for the entire week), based on your engagement with the interactive lectures and the R workshops on Friday. You are not required to submit a reflection memo for these weeks.

## **“Students as Teachers” Workshops (30% of Grade)**

Students do not learn course material simply by attending class and completing the assigned readings. Moreover, learning is *far* more complex than memorization of facts and concepts. Real mastery happens **when you have learned how to *teach* the material to someone else.** Therefore, this class will place a premium on just that.

On most Fridays during the semester, we will hold a “Students as Teachers” workshop, spanning the entire class:

1. For each week on the course schedule (below), you’ll find ***two sets of questions*** associated with the assigned readings for that week.
2. As you complete the assigned readings, take notes, and attend class, think about both the answers to these questions and ***how you would teach this material to your classmates*** if you were called upon to do so. This step is important, because by thinking about how you would explain something to someone else, you are *much* more likely to learn it yourself. You’ll also recognize more quickly the things you do not understand and need clarification about – making our class discussions and “Learning by Doing” workshops more productive.
3. At the beginning of the semester, **I will randomly assign students to two groups; group members will be assigned a number between 1-5. These will be your groups and numbers for the entire semester.** Feel free to prepare for the “Students as Teachers” days together – but remember that *each* student is responsible for learning the material well enough that you could explain it to someone unfamiliar with the concepts.
4. **On days when we have a “Students as Teachers” session, come to class prepared to teach your classmates about the material in BOTH question sets.** Will this require

substantial work on your part? Absolutely. But I *promise* that you will learn more than you would by passively completing the assigned readings and attending class.

5. **At the beginning of each “Students as Teachers” session, I will randomly assign two students from each group to be their group’s student-teachers** – one student for each set of questions. We’ll then break into groups for **two 25-minute sessions**, devoted to each question set in turn.
6. **Each session should *start* with the assigned student-teacher** making their best attempt to teach their fellow group members the material contained in that question set. This should generally be about 3-5 minutes.
  - **Note:** teaching involves *explaining*. Note-taking is fine, and it’s fine to compose pre-written answers to the questions to help *you* learn the material. But when you’re called upon to explain the material to your classmates, **please don’t *just* read off a note-card or prepared response**. (A few jotted-down notes are fine.) You should aim to know the material well-enough that you’re not dependent on something you wrote before class.
7. **Following the presentation by each group’s student-teacher, group members should *work together* to help the student-teacher polish their presentation and think about the most effective way to present this material.** Be as creative as possible. If you’re truly stumped about a concept, ask me for clarification. I will also (when needed!) intervene to nudge your conversations in a more productive direction. But if everyone comes to class prepared, you should all be able to compare notes about the most effective ways to do that.
8. **Ten minutes before the end of each 25-minute session, I will randomly select one group. The assigned student-teacher from that group should *re-teach* the material to the entire class** – ideally, incorporating everything from the group discussion.

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** while student-teachers will be randomly assigned, you probably won’t be an assigned student-teacher *exactly* the same number of times as each of your classmates. Some students will be put “on the spot” a few more times than others – but not by much. Try not to worry about this. **The “student-teacher” assignments are just a way to facilitate group-work; students assigned to be their group’s student-teacher will be graded no differently than others. As you work in groups, *everyone* should be stepping up to help themselves and their fellow group members learn the material.**

Grading for each “Students as Teachers” exercise will be based on two things:

1. **Dr. Schmidt’s graded assessment of your preparation for class and the quality of your participation (70% of workshop grade).** (No later than the second week of class, I will post a rubric to Course Connect outlining my expectations.)
  - My grade will ***not*** be based directly on your fellow group members’ evaluations of your preparation and participation. However, I will cross-check my grade against your classmates’ comments to make sure I have not missed something important about your contributions to the workshop. When evaluating each of your group members, consider the following things:

Table 1: Schedule, “Student-Teacher” Workshops

8:00	Dr. Schmidt gives group members their student-teacher assignments for the day.
<b>Question Set #1</b>	
8:00-8:05	<b>Student-Teacher #1</b> makes an initial attempt to teach their group members the material covered in the <b>first set of questions</b> .
8:05-8:15	Group members <b>work together</b> to help Student-Teacher #1 improve their presentation. This should involve constructive feedback about what was effective or ineffective about the student-teacher’s presentation, as well as clarifications about the material itself.
8:15-8:25	Dr. Schmidt randomly selects one group; the student-teacher for that group gives a <b>modified version</b> of their presentation to the class. Presentations should be about five minutes; afterwards, we will debrief.
<b>Question Set #2</b>	
8:25-8:30	<b>Student-Teacher #2</b> makes an initial attempt to teach their group members the material covered in the <b>second set of questions</b> .
8:30-8:40	Group members <b>work together</b> to help Student-Teacher #2 improve their presentation. This should involve constructive feedback about what was effective or ineffective about the student-teacher’s presentation, as well as clarifications about the material itself.
8:40-8:50	Dr. Schmidt randomly selects a different group; the student-teacher for that group gives a <b>modified version</b> of their presentation to the class. Presentations should be about five minutes; afterwards, we will debrief.
<b>Finishing Up</b>	
8:50-9:00	Students fill out brief self-evaluations and evaluations of their fellow group members’ performance and preparedness. You will assign points to your fellow group members and leave a few comments justifying your responses.

- Was your classmate prepared to engage with the course material? Had they reviewed the question sets for that day’s exercise and thought about how they might teach the material? Was it clear that they had read the assigned readings?
- If your classmate was one of your group’s assigned student-teachers, were they receptive to feedback? Did they take ownership of their student-teacher role and make an effort to improve their presentation over the course of the discussion?
- When your classmate was **not** an assigned student-teacher, did they provide constructive criticism? Did they play an active role in helping the assigned student-teacher improve their presentation? Did they provide encouragement and support, helping the student-teacher to *understand* the material? Or did they seek to dominate the conversation by telling the student-teacher exactly what to say rather than help them learn?

2. **Your own reflection on your preparation and participation.** At the beginning of each week (no later than Sunday evening at 7:30pm), **you must submit a brief ( $\approx$  2-3 paragraph) self-reflection on the previous week's workshop.** Talk about the following things:

- How prepared were you for the workshop? In what ways were you prepared? In what ways were you not as prepared as you would have liked?
- How would you evaluate your participation in the workshop itself? If you were one of the assigned "student-teachers," how effectively did you work with your group members to improve your presentation? When you were *not* one of the assigned student-teachers, in what ways did you help your group's student-teacher improve their presentation and learn the material?
- As you prepare for the next workshop, do **one** of the following. (No matter which question you answer, *share what you've learned about the **way** you learn*).
  - List **at least two (2) things that you plan to do differently to help you master the material in future workshops.** (For example, someone might write that they plan to budget more time to complete the assigned readings, visit Dr. Schmidt at his Office Hours, change something about their note-taking strategies, or focus on learning rather than just memorization.)<sup>2</sup>
  - List **two (2) things that you are *already* doing that have helped you master the material.** (For example, you could talk about ways that you've adapted your study strategies since the previous workshop.)

## Take-Home Midterm Exam (15% of Grade)

You are required to complete a midterm, take-home exam that covers all the material up to that point. **The exam will be posted on Course Connect on Monday, September 30 at 8:00am; you have until Friday, October 4 to submit your exam.** Exams should be uploaded to Course Connect as a .doc or .docx (Microsoft Word) file. The exam is open-book and open-note.

**The exam will contain three (3) essay questions; your response to each question should be about three to four (3-4) pages** (double-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman font). Exam questions will draw *heavily* on both our class workshops and the assigned readings – asking you to develop critical and creative perspectives on the research process.

## Research Proposal (Written Component) (45% of Grade)

In lieu of a final exam, you must complete a substantive research proposal for your Senior Seminar project (spring 2025). Proposals should contain (1) a **thorough review of the literature** related to your research question, (2) an **original theory** that could help explain the political phenomena you want to explore; (3) one or more **clearly stated hypotheses** that you intend to test, and (4) a **detailed research design** that explains how you will collect and analyze data to test your hypotheses. Your research design can be quantitative, qualitative, or "mixed-methods" (i.e., combining both approaches; we'll talk more about this as the semester progresses). Be sure to describe how your

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<sup>2</sup> **Note:** do *not* just write "I plan to budget more time to complete the assigned readings" because the instructions say that this is a possible response. Express *in your own words* the changes you plan to make, whatever they are, and why they are important for your learning.



research design will help you determine whether your data support your hypothesis (or hypotheses). In addition, you should convince me that your project *can* be completed by comprehensive examinations the following spring. **In your conclusion, include a preliminary schedule that factors in data collection, analysis, and (ideally) multiple drafts of your senior thesis.**

Proposals should be **approximately 15-18 pages** (double-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman font). Cite all sources, using APA format for in-text citations and your Works Cited page. **Complete proposals are due on Monday, December 2 at 7:30pm CST.** Upload your proposals to Course Connect in .doc or .docx (Microsoft Word) format.

**Initial research questions must be approved by Dr. Schmidt no later than Friday, September 13.** That week, I will set aside extra time to meet with each student. Plan to meet with me one-on-one for about 30-45 minutes. (**Note:** as the semester proceeds, don't worry if your research question and hypotheses evolve. As social scientists dive into the research process, our research questions often become more refined and interesting. But if you want to change your *topic* – from, say, Mississippi voting patterns to NATO's role on the world stage – that's a problem. All *topic* changes must be cleared with me.)

I am not asking you to do this all at once. **Over the course of the semester, you will submit initial drafts of the different components of your research proposal** – introducing your research question and reviewing the literature (due September 27), and outlining your theory and hypotheses (due October 27). **Initial drafts will receive full credit if they are finished, submitted on time, and free from significant spelling, grammatical, and citation errors.** “Finished” simply means that the draft *is* a complete draft; don't submit half of a literature review or half of a Theory and Hypotheses section.

I will give you timely feedback on each of these components; **your grade on the *final* draft (due December 2) will be based in part on how well you incorporated my feedback into your finished project.**

## **Research Proposal (In-Class Presentation) (10% of Grade)**

Alongside your final paper, you must prepare a short class presentation about your proposed research. Presentations will take place during the Finals Period. **Presentations should be 7-8 minutes, with an additional four (4) minutes for Q&A from the audience. You are required to use PowerPoint slides; please email these to me no later than 7:30pm the evening before your presentation.**

**This is a formal presentation;** avoid casual asides, in-jokes, or commentary on the project itself. Instead, describe your research question and proposed research design as cogently and systematically as possible.

## **Course Schedule**

**Week 1 (Monday, Aug. 19 - Friday, Aug. 22):** Course Introduction; The Empirical Approach to Political Science

- **Read (for Monday):** Course syllabus.

- **Read (for Wednesday):** *PRSM*, Chapters 1-2. As you read and take notes, think about how you might teach the following material to your classmates:
  - What makes political science a *science*? What does it mean for a discipline like political science to be *empirical*? What is the difference between *normative* and *non-normative* research questions – and which kinds of questions will GOVT 4000 be focused on?
  - What does it mean for something to be a *theory*? What do we mean when we refer to the *explanatory range* of a theory? What are some things that good theories have in common? Finally, what is the difference between *inductive reasoning* and *deductive reasoning* – and what is the role of theory in each of these processes?
- **Friday:** “Student as Teachers” workshop (graded exercise; see rubric for expectations)

**Week 2 (Monday, August 26 - Friday, August 30):** Identifying a Research Topic and Choosing a Research Question

- **Sunday: reflection memo (graded) due at 7:30pm** on previous week’s “Students as Teachers” exercise. Memos need not be longer than 2-3 paragraphs.
- **Read (for Monday):** *PRSM*, Chapter 3. (**Note:** please also bring your laptops to class; we’ll be conducting a mini-workshop on conducting online searches for literature on your topic.) As you read and take notes, think about how you might teach the following material to your classmates:
  - How do political scientists select questions to research? What are some examples of research questions that are probably too broad – and *why* are these questions too broad? What are some examples of research questions that are probably too narrow – and *why* are these questions too narrow? What are some examples of research questions that are impossible to answer using the scientific method, because they are generally a matter of opinion? What are some examples of research questions that are worthy of study, but probably cannot be studied due to lack of available data?
  - Your senior thesis must include a literature review. What should a literature review accomplish? What kinds of sources should and should not be included? What are some common mistakes that people make when writing literature reviews?
- **Wednesday:** Learning By Doing: “How do I use inductive reasoning to derive a generalizable theory?”

- **Friday:** “Student as Teachers” workshop (graded exercise; see rubric for expectations)

**NOTE: the week of September 2, all students *must* meet with Dr. Schmidt to discuss your research proposal and select a tentative research question.**

**Week 3 (Monday, September 2 – Friday, September 6):** Hypotheses and Variables

- **Sunday: reflection memo (graded) due at 7:30pm**, on previous week’s “Students as Teachers” exercise. Memos need not be longer than 2-3 paragraphs.
- **Read (for Monday):** *PSRM*, Chapter 4. As you read and take notes, think about how you might teach the following material to your classmates:

- What is a *variable*? What is the difference between an *independent variable* and a *dependent variable*? What are the different ways that an independent variable can influence a dependent variable? (Hint: for teaching this material to yourselves and others, it might be helpful to refer to the independent variable as *X* and the dependent variable as *Y*.)
- What is a *hypothesis*? What is meant by the term *units of analysis* and how does this relate to hypothesis testing? What is the difference between a *theory* and a *hypothesis*? What must every hypothesis include? What are some examples of testable hypotheses?
- **Wednesday:** Learning by Doing: “How do I identify hypotheses that follow from my theory? And how do I *write* these hypotheses up in a scientific way?”
- **Friday:** “Student as Teachers” workshop (graded exercise; see rubric for expectations)

#### Week 4 (Monday, September 9 – Friday, September 13): Concepts, Data, and Measurement

- **Sunday: reflection memo (graded) due at 7:30pm**, on previous week’s “Students as Teachers” exercise. Memos need not be longer than 2-3 paragraphs.
- **Read (for Monday):** *PSRM*, Chapter 4 (review) As you read and take notes, think about how you might teach the following material to your classmates:
  - For preparing to test a hypothesis, what is the difference between a *concept* and a *measurement*? Why is it important for researchers to clearly define their concepts? Why is it important for researchers to clearly describe the way their concepts are measured? In general terms, what does it mean for a measure to be *reliable*? In general terms, what does it mean for a measure to be *valid*? More specifically, what are some different types of measurement validity?
  - Explain the four different levels of measurement: (1) nominal, (2) ordinal, (3) interval, and (4) ratio. What are some examples of each level of measurement? (**Hint:** for explaining this material, it might be useful to talk about different ways to measure the same concept.)
- **Wednesday:** Learning by Doing: “OK, I have my hypotheses and I know the concepts associated with the independent and dependent variables. How do I *measure* my variables?”
- **Friday:** “Student as Teachers” workshop (graded exercise; see rubric for expectations)

#### Week 5 (Monday, September 16 - Friday, September 20): Sampling

- **Sunday: reflection memo (graded) due at 7:30pm**, on previous week’s “Students as Teachers” exercise. Memos need not be longer than 2-3 paragraphs.
- **Read (for Monday):** *PRSM*, Chapter 5. As you read and take notes, think about how you might teach the following material to your classmates:
  - What does it mean for a researcher to take a *sample* from a *population*? What is the purpose of *sampling*? In general terms, what do we mean when say that a sample statistic has a *margin of error*? What kinds of samples are associated with lower margins of error – and why? For there to be *no* margin of error, what would need to be true about your sample?

- What are the differences between a *simple random sample*, a *convenience sample*, and a *purposive sample*? What are some examples of research projects where the researcher might want a simple random sample? What are some examples of research projects where a convenience sample might be acceptable, even if it were unrepresentative of the population? Finally, what are some situations where a purposive sample might be preferred?
- **Wednesday:** Learning by Doing: “What does sampling look like when the units of analysis are not people?”
- **Friday:** “Student as Teachers” workshop (graded exercise; see rubric for expectations)

**The first draft of your LITERATURE REVIEW is due on Friday, September 27 (note deadline-change).** Your literature review should be approximately 4-5 pages. Remember that a successful literature review will not just summarize scholars’ conclusions – it will identify unanswered questions that another scholar (*you!*) can help answer. **Dr. Schmidt will have feedback on your draft no later than Friday, October 11.**

**Note:** it is extremely important that your research question be relevant to at least three sub-fields of political science (e.g., American politics; comparative politics; international relations; political philosophy). This is a departmental requirement for your senior thesis.

## **Week 6 (Monday, September 23 - Friday, September 27):** The Fundamental Problem of Causal Inference

- **Sunday: reflection memo (graded) due at 7:30pm**, on previous week’s “Students as Teachers” exercise. Memos need not be longer than 2-3 paragraphs.
- **Read (for Monday):** *PSRM*, Chapter 6. As you read and take notes, think about how you might teach the following material to your classmates:
  - Suppose that your theory predicts that when  $X$  (your independent variable) takes on higher values, this causes  $Y$  (your dependent variable) to take on higher values. Why is it so difficult to establish that  $X$  *causes*  $Y$ ? Why is it not enough to show that when  $X$  increases,  $Y$  increases? (Hint: the more examples you can think of, the easier it will be to teach this material to yourselves and others.)
  - Explain what it means to conduct a *classical randomized experiment*. (Again, an example or two will help tremendously.) On the one hand, why do classical randomized experiments make it possible to test whether an independent variable *causes* a dependent variable? But on the other hand, what are some examples of research questions where it would not be practical and/or ethical to conduct a randomized experiment?
- **Wednesday:** Learning by Doing: “In political science research, why are classical randomized experiments not a panacea? What does it mean for an experiment to lack external validity?”
- **Friday:** “Student as Teachers” workshop (graded exercise; see rubric for expectations)
  - **LITERATURE REVIEW (preliminary draft) due at 7:30pm.** See text-box above for more details.

**Week 7 (Monday, September 30 - Friday, October 4): Midterm Exam (Take-Home); no class**

- This week, we won't meet in-person. You should use our regularly scheduled class time to work on your take-home exam. **The exam is due on Friday, October 4 at 7:30pm CST.**

**Your TAKE-HOME MIDTERM EXAM will be posted on Course Connect on Monday, September 30 at 8:00am CST.** The exam will cover all the material up to this point in the class. You may reference your textbooks and notes to write the exam, but you may not discuss the exam with your classmates until students have returned from Fall Break.

**Exams are due on Friday, October 4 at 7:30pm CST.** You must submit your complete exam on Course Connect in .doc or .docx format.

**FALL BREAK runs from October 7-8. We will not meet on Monday, October 7.**

**Week 8 (Wednesday, October 9 - Friday, October 11): Qualitative Research Design: Comparative Case Analysis**

- **Read (for Wednesday):** *PSRM*, Chapters 7-8. As you read and take notes, think about how you might teach the following material to your classmates:
  - In general terms, describe what it means to conduct *qualitative research*. What makes a project *qualitative*? What are some things that qualitative research projects have in common? And what are some different ways that researchers conduct qualitative research?
  - Describe the two models of comparative case analysis described in Chapter 7: the *method of agreement* and the *method of difference*. In general terms, what are practitioners of both methods trying to understand? If you were using the method of difference, what kinds of cases would you want to analyze? If you were using the method of agreement, what kinds of cases would you want to analyze? In general terms, what are the strengths and weaknesses of comparative case analysis?
- **Friday:** "Student as Teachers" workshop (graded exercise; see rubric for expectations)

**Week 9 (Monday, October 14 - Friday, October 18): Qualitative Research Design: Focus Groups, Part I**

- **Sunday: reflection memo (graded) due at 7:30pm**, on previous "Students as Teachers" exercise. Memos need not be longer than 2-3 paragraphs.
- **Read (for Monday):** Cyr, *Focus Groups for the Social Science Researcher*, Chapters 1-3. As you read and take notes, think about how you might teach the following material to your classmates:
  - What *are* focus groups, and what makes them scientific? In general terms, what are practitioners of focus groups usually trying to understand? And what makes focus group research different from survey research? (**Hint:** the answer to the final question is more complex than it seems.)

- Describe how a focus group researcher might draft their *question protocol*. What do good question protocols have in common? What are some common mistakes that focus group researchers make when designing question protocols – and why do these make their data difficult to interpret?
- **Wednesday:** Tutorial: “Dr. Schmidt, how do I write a Theory and Hypotheses section?” (updated 10-14-2024)
- **Friday:** Learning by Doing: “How do I write an effective focus group question protocol?” (updated 10-14-2024; there will be no “Students as Teachers” workshop this week)

## Week 10 (Monday, October 21 - Wednesday, October 25): Focus Groups, Part II

- **Read (for Monday):** Cyr, *Focus Groups for the Social Science Researcher*, Chapters 4-6. As you read and take notes, think about how you might teach the following material to your classmates:
  - What are some ways that focus group researchers *process* and *analyze* their data (i.e. their interview notes or transcripts)? What kinds of patterns do focus group researchers care about?
  - What are some mistakes that focus group interviewers should watch out for to avoid biased interpretation of their data? What can focus group researchers do to minimize bias in their conclusions?
- **Wednesday:** Learning by Doing: “How do I systematically analyze focus group data?”
- **Friday:** “Student as Teachers” workshop (graded; see rubric for expectations).

**The first draft of your THEORY AND HYPOTHESES section is due on Sunday, October 27 (note deadline-change).** This should be approximately 3-4 pages. This part of your proposal will come right after your literature review. Now that you know what people *haven't* figured out about your research question, develop a theory that (if true) would help you explain what you're trying to explain. Then, present one or more formal hypotheses – specific, testable predictions that follow from your theory. Don't worry, for now, about *how* you will test these hypotheses (that comes next!) Just make sure that they meet the criteria for good hypotheses that we discussed in class.

**Dr. Schmidt will have feedback on your draft by Mon., November 4.**

**REMINDER: Your last day to drop GOVT 3000 is Wednesday, October 30.** If you believe you must withdraw from GOVT 4000 (or that you are in danger of failing the course), I **strongly** encourage you to consult myself and your academic advisor **in advance** of this deadline.

## Week 11 (Monday, October 28 - Friday, November 1): Quantitative Research Design: Introduction to Summary Statistics and Distributions

- **Sunday:** two assignments due...
  - **Reflection memo (graded) due at 7:30pm**, on previous week's "Students as Teachers" exercise. Memos need not be longer than 2-3 paragraphs.
  - **THEORY AND HYPOTHESES section (preliminary draft) due at 7:30pm.** See text-box above for more details.
- **Read (for Monday and Wednesday):** *PSRM*, Chapters 10-11.
- **Friday:** Workshop on using R (statistical software for data analysis). **Your participation score for the week will replace the grade for the "Students-as-Teachers" workshop originally scheduled.**

**Week 12 (Monday, November 4 - Friday, November 8):** Population Distributions, Sampling Distributions, and the Central Limit Theorem

- **Read (for Monday and Wednesday):** *PSRM*, Chapters 5 (re-read) and 12.
- **Friday:** Workshop on Data and Methods section of students' research proposals. **Your participation score for the week will replace the grade for the "Students-as-Teachers" workshop originally scheduled.**

**Week 13 (Monday, November 11 - Friday, November 15):** *z*-scores, *t*-tests, and Null Hypothesis Significance Testing

- **Read (for Monday and Wednesday):** *PSRM*, Chapter 13.
- **Friday:** Workshop on using R (statistical software for data analysis). **Your participation score for the week will replace the grade for the "Students-as-Teachers" workshop originally scheduled.**

**Week 14 (Monday, November 18 - Friday, November 22):** Quantitative Research Design: Null Hypothesis Significance Testing, Continued:  $\chi^2$  tests for independence.

- **Monday and Wednesday:** No new reading, but come to class prepared to work on some practice problems.
- **Friday:** Workshop on using R (statistical software for data analysis). **Your participation score for the week will replace the grade for the "Students-as-Teachers" workshop originally scheduled.**

**THANKSGIVING BREAK runs from November 25-29.** We will not meet the week of November 25; class will reconvene on Monday, December 2 (the last day of classes).

**Week 16 (Monday, December 2):** Last Day of Class

- **COMPLETE RESEARCH PROPOSAL due on Monday at 7:30pm;** submit on Course Connect in .doc and .docx format.

- Our last day of classes is **Monday, December 2**. We will spend this time debriefing from the semester and celebrating everything you've accomplished. I will also address any questions about the presentations during the Finals Period.

**Your COMPLETE RESEARCH PROPOSAL is due on Monday, December 2.** The proposal should include an (1) introduction, (2) literature review, (3) theory and hypotheses section, (4) data and methods section, and (5) conclusion, including timeline for completing your senior thesis by comprehensive examinations (March 17-28). I expect you to have addressed my feedback on your preliminary drafts of the literature review and Theory and Hypotheses section – by making substantive *revisions* based on my constructive criticism.

**Note:** your Data and Methods section should explain the data you will use to test your hypothesis/hypotheses and how you plan to collect these data; how you will measure your independent/causal and dependent/outcome variables and why these measures are valid; and how you will know whether your data provide support for your hypothesis/hypotheses.

### FINALS PERIOD:

**Your RESEARCH PRESENTATIONS will take place during the final exam period (Monday, December 9, 9:00-11:00am).** We'll meet in our usual classroom (Christian Center 114). Students' presentations should run no longer than 7-8 minutes, with an additional four (4) minutes for audience questions. Proposals that go substantially over time will be penalized.

## Course Policies

### Grading

Your final grade will be weighted as follows:

- “Student as Teachers” workshops, 30 percent total
  - **Update (10-29):** for the final four substantive weeks of class, we will **not** have “Students as Teachers” workshops. In place of your workshop grade, you will be assigned a participation score (between 0-10 for the entire week), based on your engagement with the interactive lectures and the R workshops on Friday. You are not required to submit a reflection memo for these weeks.
- **Take-Home Midterm**, 15 percent
- **Literature Review section of proposal (early draft)**, 7.5 percent
- **Theory and Hypotheses section of proposal (early draft)**, 15 percent
- **Research Proposal, Written Component (Final Draft)**, 22.5 percent
- **Research Proposal, Class Presentation**, 10 percent



**Note that no matter how well you do on the above assignments, you will be unable to pass GOVT 4000 if you accumulate more than five (5) unexcused absences *or* arrive late to class more than ten (10) times. After your sixth (6th) unexcused absence *or* eleventh (11th) time late to class, I will ask the Office of Records to drop you from the class roster with an F.** If either of these things happen before October 30th, I will advise you to drop the course to avoid a failing grade.

In addition, there will not be opportunities to earn extra credit in this course. Final grades will be assigned as follows, based on your final weighted percentage in the class:

Percentage	Grade	Percentage	Grade	Percentage	Grade
100-93	A	92-90	A-	89-87	B+
86-83	B	82-80	B-	79-77	C+
76-73	C	72-70	C-	69-67	D+
66-63	D	62-60	D-	59-0	F

**Note:** Before final grades are reported to the registrar, your weighted percentage will be rounded to the nearest whole number. For example, a student who finishes the class with 89.7% would earn an A- (90%); a student with an 89.1% would earn a B+ (89%). Grades on individual assignments will not be rounded.

## Campus Resources and Information

### Course Connect Support

Course Connect is Millsaps' learning management system. Your courses in Course Connect will provide access to syllabi and important course information. To access Course Connect, visit <https://courses.millsaps.edu> and login with your Millsaps username and password.

For questions about using Course Connect, visit the Course Connect LibGuide for Students: <https://libguides.millsaps.edu/courseconnectstudents>. If you experience issues with Course Connect, contact Rachel Long, Instructional Technology Librarian, at [rachel.long@millsaps.edu](mailto:rachel.long@millsaps.edu) or [librarian@millsaps.edu](mailto:librarian@millsaps.edu).

### Honor Code

Millsaps College is an academic community dedicated to the pursuit of scholarly inquiry and intellectual growth. The foundation of this community is a spirit of personal honesty and mutual trust. Through their Honor Code, **the students of Millsaps College affirm** their adherence to these basic ethical principles.

An Honor Code is not simply a set of rules and procedures governing students' academic conduct. It is an opportunity to put personal responsibility and integrity into action. When students agree to abide by an Honor Code, they liberate themselves to pursue their academic goals in an atmosphere of mutual confidence and respect.

The success of the Honor Code depends on the support of each member of the community. Students and faculty alike commit themselves in their work to the principles of academic honesty. When they become aware of infractions, both students and faculty are obligated to report them to the Honor Council, which is responsible for enforcement. Important information pertaining to the Honor Code can be found in Major Facts. The pledge affirmed by all students upon entering the College is as follows:

**As a Millsaps College student, I hereby affirm that I understand the Honor Code and am aware of its implications and of my responsibility to the Code. In the interest of expanding the atmosphere of respect and trust in the College, I promise to uphold the Honor Code and I will not tolerate dishonest behavior in myself or in others.**

Each examination, quiz, or other assignment that is to be graded will carry the affirmed pledge: **"I hereby certify that I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid on this assignment. (Signature)"** The abbreviation "Pledged" followed by the student's signature has the same meaning and may be acceptable on assignments other than final examinations.

The following is a representative, but not exhaustive list of academic offenses and violations covered by the Millsaps Academic Honor Code:

- At Millsaps College, **plagiarism** includes, but is not limited to, the following actions:
  - using *words* or *ideas* that are not your own without citing the source
  - copying from a text word for word without both using quotation marks *and* citing the source
  - paraphrasing or summarizing a source without citing the source
  - using language or sentence structures that are *too close* to the original text even while the paraphrase has *mostly* your own language
  - using online paraphrasing tools and artificial intelligence (AI) generators to generate all or part of your assignment, unless you have specific and direct permission from an instructor to do so
  - copying pictures, charts, graphs, or other illustrations without citing the source
  - using your own work from a past class without citation or approval from the instructor
- Dishonesty on examinations and tests
  - Using any outside materials deemed not usable by the professor of the course
  - Giving or receiving answers while taking a test
  - Revealing the content of an exam before others have taken it
- Dishonesty on assignments

- Receiving unauthorized help on an assignment
- Submitting the same paper for two classes unless approved by the professors of both classes
- Interfering with another student's course materials
- Lying about academic matters, including missed assignments or absences
- Unauthorized use of a computer file, program, username, or password
- Unauthorized use of, tampering with, or removing community materials from laboratories or the library

*It is the responsibility of students and faculty to report offenses to the Honor Council in the form of a written report.* This account must be signed, the accusation explained in as much detail as possible, and submitted to **AcademicAffairs@millsaps.edu**.

### Honor Council Members Fall 2024:

#### **Student Members**

Caroline Eschete, Chair, senior  
Elyse Warren, Vice-Chair, junior  
Jack Gaar, Sergeant-At-Arms, junior  
Shagun Gautam, sophomore

#### **Faculty Members:**

Dr. Krissy Rehm  
Dr. Priscilla Fermon  
Dr. Shalini Bhawal

## **Value of Diverse Perspectives, Backgrounds, and Identities**

As your instructor, I am committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion at Millsaps. Ultimately, **inclusion is a quality-of-life issue**. Students are unlikely to succeed in (let alone enjoy) an educational environment where their contributions are neither valued nor noticed. More than ever, liberal arts education must celebrate students with under-represented racial and ethnic backgrounds, sexual orientations or gender identities, religious beliefs, and socioeconomic statuses. Students with physical or learning disabilities must be fully included in campus life. And instructors must proactively *and quickly* address discrimination in all its forms.

Just as importantly, if you feel under-valued and unnoticed in class, this is probably not your fault. Rather, it is your instructor's responsibility to promote an inclusive learning environment. During the semester, I will do my utmost to promote diverse perspectives, backgrounds, and identities in the classroom. But if I ever fall short, please let me know. Like everyone at Millsaps, I am still learning; like everyone, there are "blind spots" in my cultural sensitivity and awareness. For this reason, I value *any* feedback that makes my classroom more inclusive – and would consider it a privilege to learn from you.

## Pronouns and Identity

Because all people have the right to be addressed in accordance with their personal identity, the instructor will gladly honor your request to address you by an alternate name or gender pronoun. Please let him know how you would prefer to be addressed as soon as possible.

## Millsaps-Wilson Library

Library resources can be found on the library's webpage: <https://www.millsaps.edu/library/>. Once on the webpage, you can find the library search engine Big Search, a list of scholarly databases, librarian-created research guides, the hours, and many other resources. Library hours are also available through this link: <https://www.millsaps.edu/library/hours-calendar/>.

Librarians are available to assist with research requests Monday-Friday. We encourage you to visit the library. You can email us at [librarian@millsaps.edu](mailto:librarian@millsaps.edu) to ask questions or to set up a meeting.

## Help Desk

ITS HelpDesk is the resource for technical support for students. Services provided include: email, wireless, Office 365 software installation, ID card access, smart classroom - audio visual, faculty staff office computer and network printing and also the College telecom system. The HelpDesk is located in AC100 and can be reached by phone 601-974-1144 or by email at [help@millsaps.edu](mailto:help@millsaps.edu).

## The Centers for Writing and Academic Success

All students are strongly encouraged to visit the Writing Center and CASE (the Center for Academic Success and Excellence). Both centers are staffed by peers trained as academic consultants who support learning and writing across all disciplines of study. Both centers offer appointments in-person as well as limited virtual availability. The Writing Center and CASE share a common appointment scheduler at <https://millsaps.mywconline.com>. To select a consultant in a specific subject area, select that subject area from the "limit to" dropdown menu to view hours and availability in that subject area. Not all consultants offer all types of appointments. **Both centers will open on August 26th for the Fall 2024 term.**

- **The Millsaps Writing Center**

- The Writing Center is located in John Stone Hall, with satellite locations in the library and in CASE. Writing Consultants work with all writers, in all disciplines, at all skill levels, and in all stages of the writing process. We recommend visits early in the writing process, such as when you first receive your assignment or are just beginning your research or first-drafting work. Visit <https://millsaps.mywconline.com> for more information about hours, locations, and upcoming events.

- **CASE (Center for Academic Support and Excellence)**

- CASE is located in Academic Complex suite 109 and offers one-to-one consultations and small group study sessions for all students in a range of disciplines, such as math, economics, chemistry, biology, and languages. (Writing Consultants also serve at the CASE

location.) Visit <https://millsaps.mywconline.com> for more information about hours, locations, and upcoming events.

## **Title IX**

As an instructor, one of my responsibilities is to help create a safe learning environment on campus. I also have a mandatory reporting responsibility as a member of the faculty. I will seek to keep information you share private to the greatest extent possible. However, if I am made aware of information regarding sexual misconduct or information about a crime that may have occurred on campus, I am required to share it with the College. If students wish to speak with someone confidentially, they should contact Student Life at 601-974-1200.

## **ADA Accommodations**

Under the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504, accommodations can be made for students with disabilities or learning differences. If you require accommodations or have questions about academic accommodations, please contact the Student Support Coordinator at [ada@millsaps.edu](mailto:ada@millsaps.edu).

Accommodations will not be granted until you meet with the Coordinator, your letters/documentation are processed, and you meet with your instructor.

## **CARE**

If you find yourself struggling with managing your coursework, physical or mental health, finances, relationships on or off campus, or any other aspect of being a student, Millsaps has resources available to help you. Our team of campus professionals can help you get connected to these free resources. Likewise, if you're concerned about the well-being of a friend or classmate, you can report using this online form [https://millsaps-advocate.symlicity.com/care\\_report](https://millsaps-advocate.symlicity.com/care_report) and we can get them connected to the help they need. All emergency concerns should be reported to Campus Safety 601-974-1234.

## **College COVID-19 Information**

If a student becomes ill or needs to be quarantined/isolated during the semester, they should use the [student reporting forms](#). It is the responsibility of the student to notify their faculty members that they will be absent from class due to illness. If a faculty member wishes to verify that a student is quarantining or isolating, they may request confirmation from [StudentLife@millsaps.edu](mailto:StudentLife@millsaps.edu).