

POSC-4305: AMERICAN POLITICS RESEARCH

Instructor: Boris Heersink

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Faber Hall 667

Office Hours: Monday 12:30 PM – 2:30 PM, and by appointment on other times

Class Location and Time:

Faber Hall 668

Monday, 2:30-5:15 PM

Course Description

Aim of the Course: Political scientists engage in a variety of approaches to try and answer important questions about American politics. These questions can concern anything from the historical development of political institutions like the presidency, the effect of campaign activities in elections, the many ways that race, gender, or sexuality matter in American politics, how different institutions (such as electoral rules) can affect political outcomes, and countless others. Designing and executing studies that try and answer such questions is not easy, but it is necessary to learn more about American politics. The core goal of this course is for you to come up with an original research question, design a study that answers this question, execute that study, and present its results both in writing and through an oral presentation. You are free to pick a topic (in consultation with the instructor) that is of interest to you, as long as it relates to American politics. To help you figure out how to find a research topic, design a research question, identify a proper methodological approach to answering the question, and execute the entire project, we will spend the first half of the semester looking at different methodological approaches political scientists rely on from a practical perspective. We will subsequently use much of our class time to help you workshop your ideas and get feedback from other students and the instructor on your research project as it develops. Finally, we will be engaging in an 'Author-Meets-Student' class – for which you will read a recent political science book and meet the author in class to discuss their research project.

This course is designed to meet the **Eloquentia Perfecta 3** requirements. This means the class is centered on helping you develop your skills in both writing and oral expression. The core writing assignment is a 20-25 page final paper which you will develop throughout the semester. At multiple moments, you will be submitting assignments that will be part of this paper and you will receive (and provide) feedback from fellow students and the instructor on those assignments. This will allow you to revise and improve the paper at each step. At the end of the semester, you will present your final paper to the class in an oral presentation before submitting the final version of the completed research paper.

Covid Policies

Note: As the Covid pandemic continues and new strains emerge, the university and/or the instructor may update any of the policies outlined below. Make sure you stay up to date on any changes in Covid policies and, if you are at all unsure, please feel free to ask!

As of the writing of this syllabus, the university maintains the same policy on masking as it has since spring 2022. That is, while the university encourages mask use in public spaces, it does not require it. However, individual faculty members *can* mandate mask use in their classes. While for most of us, COVID-19 exposure is increasingly relatively low risk – given the protection provided by vaccination – that risk is not consistent to everybody, for example people with preexisting conditions that put them at risk for serious illness (regardless of vaccination status) or those who have loved ones who fall in that category.

To assess where students fall on this issue, I will be mandating mask use during the first class of the semester. After the end of add-drop I will send out a survey to all students asking their position on continued masking. If there are no objections to lifting the mask mandate, students will be free to decide whether or not to wear a mask. If there are objections, the mask mandate will remain in effect. I strongly recommend [using \(K\)N95 masks](#) as [there is plenty of evidence](#) that these masks are much more effective than cloth or general surgical masks in slowing the spread of Covid.

If during the semester you find yourself experiencing symptoms of a possible Covid infection, or if you were in close contact with someone who has Covid, **you should not come to class**. You will not be penalized in any way for missing class for health reasons (Covid or otherwise!). If you find yourself symptomatic or exposed, you should contact Fordham student health services (health@fordham.edu or at 718-817-4160) and get tested. Just let me know you will be absent through email. I am happy to meet with you on Zoom to discuss any material you missed in class.

The pandemic has thus far affected all of us in some way, though the extent to which it has is likely to be different for each of us. However, at this point we are all, if nothing else, tired, frustrated, and facing all types of motivational issues. This is completely understandable. And, of course, some of us may be dealing with much more serious possible issues caused by Covid-19 – including its effect on our own (long and short term) physical and mental health, that of our family and other loved ones, as well as any economic struggles caused by the pandemic. If you are facing issues limiting your ability to participate and perform fully in this course, please do not hesitate to reach out so we can work on solving those problems.

Basic Rules

In-Class: You are expected to be present in class every session, and to participate in Q&A during class. You should make sure that you come to class having read all the readings for each day, and you should participate actively in our conversation about those readings.

To create an atmosphere in which all students feel comfortable participating and have the ability to achieve their full potential, civility during the discussions is vital. During our conversations we will inevitably come to talk about day-to-day politics, and it is very much

possible that you will find yourself disagreeing strongly with points put forward by your fellow students (and, they with you!). While you should absolutely feel free to challenge other students, it is crucial that you should do so in a respectful way (and, of course, you can expect the same of your fellow students towards you).

Absences: If for some reason you cannot be present for understandable reasons (illness, personal circumstances clearly beyond your control, etc.) you should contact me as soon as you can (if at all possible, before the start of class). In line with Fordham's attendance policy you should report any excused absences with documentation by filling out the [Excused Absence Form](#). I keep attendance and unexcused absences result in a lowering of your participation grade. Note that Fordham's official attendance policy is that for courses that meet once a week it is not allowed to have more than two absences in total across the course – while having more than two unexcused absences does not automatically result in failing this course, excessive absences make it very difficult to receive a passing grade.

Grade

Components: Your grade is based on participation in class (25%), one book discussion paper (15%), and a research paper (60%, divided across multiple assignments).

The book discussion paper requires you to write a four double-spaced page paper assessing a book we will be reading for class. The paper should summarize (parts of) the book and include a response from you. It also needs to include 4 questions you would like to ask the author about the book or the research process that led to it. You must submit the paper on **March 26**, the day before that week's class, on Blackboard. Note that reading a complete book takes time – you should not start reading the book the day before the discussion paper is due.

The final research paper is due on **May 8**. This paper must be 20-25 double spaced pages, present a novel and clear research question, and original research done to try and answer this question. You are free to pick the topic, question, and methodological approach in consultation with the instructor.

Putting together a new research project like this can be daunting. To help you through the process, your research paper project will consist of multiple assignments allowing you to work on the project throughout the semester. You will receive written and oral feedback from the instructor and fellow students for each assignment. Specifically, you will submit the following assignments throughout the semester:

February 28: Topic and research question proposal (one page), worth 5% of your paper grade. In this one-pager you will outline the topic you'd like to study, and a research question related to the topic you would like to answer. You will send a draft version of this one-pager to fellow students on February 26. We will use our class on February 27 for you to receive feedback on your one-pager (and provide other students with feedback on theirs). You will then revise your one-pager and submit it to me for feedback on February 28.

March 21: Updated topic and research question proposal (two to three pages), worth 5% of your paper grade. On the basis of feedback from the instructor and fellow students, update your topic and research question proposal and include an outline of your proposed methodological approach. You are free to change anything from the first version (including topic and research question) but it will be helpful to narrow down what you plan to do in the paper in this assignment. You will send a draft version of this updated proposal to fellow students on March 19. We will use our class on March 20 for you to receive feedback on your proposal (and provide other students with feedback on theirs). You will then revise your proposal and submit it to me for feedback on March 21.

April 20: Working paper (seven to ten pages), worth 10% of your paper grade. This working paper should include your final research question and hypotheses, a full literature review, and a detailed outline of the methodological approach you are taking in executing your study. You will send the draft paper to fellow students on April 16. We will use our class on April 17 for you to receive feedback on your draft paper (and provide other students with feedback on theirs). You will then revise your proposal and submit it to me for feedback on April 20.

May 1: Paper presentations, worth 10% of your paper grade. You will present your research project to the full class in a 5 minute presentation. The presentation must include a discussion of your topic, research question, methodological approach, and your (preliminary) findings.

May 8: Submit your final 20-25 page paper (worth 70% of your paper grade) on Blackboard.

Fordham's Writing Center (in Walsh Library at Rose Hill and in Quinn Library at Lincoln Center) provides individualized assistance to students for writing assignments. You can make an appointment – free of charge! – to meet with someone who will read your paper and discuss it in detail with you. I strongly recommend using this system – especially for your final paper draft, but also for other written assignments before then. You can sign up for an appointment at https://www.fordham.edu/info/20126/writing_center.

Grading Scale and Calculation of Final Course Grade: For your book response and research paper assignments and participation you will receive a single letter grade which follows the point value outlined below.

Letter Grade	Points Towards Final Grade
A	4.0
A-	3.7
B+	3.3
B	3.0
B-	2.7
C+	2.3

C	2.0
C-	1.7
D	1.0
F	0.0

Your final grade is based on a weighted average of each of the points earned towards your final grade based on the percentages outlined above. For example, if you received a B+ for your book response paper, that earns you $3.3 * 0.15 = 0.495$ points towards your final grade. If you earn an A- for participation this would earn you $3.7 * 0.25 = 0.925$ points towards your final grade. Your final grade is calculated by counting up all those earned points and translated into a letter grade based on the following scale:

Total Earned Final Grade Points	Final Letter Grade
4.0 – 3.84	A
3.83 – 3.50	A-
3.49 – 3.17	B+
3.16 – 2.84	B
2.83 – 2.50	B-
2.49 – 2.17	C+
2.16 – 1.84	C
1.83 – 1.34	C-
1.34 – 1.0	D
0.99 and below	F

Your final grade will be based on your performance on the elements identified above. Extra credit opportunities are unlikely to appear but if they do they will be announced to the entire class. Students will not be able to earn extra credit with individual assignments or activities.

Grade Complaints: I will grade your performance in this course in comparison to your fellow students as well as predetermined expectations. This means that the grade you earn should be a fair representation of how you have performed in comparison both to my general expectations of all participants, as well as your fellow classmates' work in this course.

It is possible that you may be unhappy with a grade, and I am always willing to discuss your progress during the course to help you improve. If you believe the grade you received is an **incorrect** assessment of the quality of the work you produced, you can challenge your grade. If you want to do so, please email me to set up an appointment and send me a copy of your work and a written description explaining in detail why you believe your grade does not accurately represent the quality of the work you submitted. We will subsequently discuss your work and I will assess whether I believe your grade should be changed.

Before you contact me about your grade(s), consider the following things. First, the goal of a grade reassessment is to produce a grade that is a fair representation of your performance: this means that any errors that lowered your grade will be corrected, but any potential errors that *increased* it will also be adjusted. A re-grading process can thus result in a higher grade,

the exact same grade, or a lower grade than what you received through the original grading process.

Second, a grade challenge means you must make a **specific argument** about why you think the grading does not reflect the quality of your work. It is not enough to state that you are confused by your grade, or that you feel that it does not reflect the amount of time and effort you put into the course. I understand that both of those feelings can be very frustrating. But they are not arguments for why a grade is not correct, and I will not entertain grading challenges based solely on these arguments.

Third, as you are assessing your work in comparison to my comments, do not just look at the things you did right. You also have to incorporate those things you missed or got wrong. It is quite common for students who received, for example, an A- to list the things they did well. But those things are what earned you the A-. The question is whether there were things that reasonably cost you enough points to keep you below an A.

Fourth, students sometimes try to ‘challenge’ their grade through a roundabout way – effectively having the instructor defend why they graded the work the way they did. Often, those students do not provide arguments for why they disagree with the grade. If you are unsure what you did wrong and you’d like me to clarify, I am of course always happy to do so. But I will not engage the ‘roundabout grade challenge’: if you think the grade is incorrect, you have to identify what it is you think I did wrong and engage with me on that basis. If you cannot articulate why you think the grade is wrong, then that might just mean it is in fact a correct assessment of your performance.

Finally, grades are not a negotiation. They should reflect the quality of the work you produced. If you believe I made a mistake, you should feel free to challenge the grade. But the correct use of this process is not to look at your different grades at the end of the semester and to try to up one, or multiple, grade(s) with the sole goal of collecting enough points to increase your final letter grade. If you want to ensure you get the highest grade possible I would advise you to spend your time reaching out to me with questions *before* assignments are due, and not on trying to haggle about a grade afterwards.

Plagiarism and Other Violations of Code of Conduct: All assignments in this course fall under Fordham University’s code of conduct. Any violation (including, but not limited to, cheating on exams, and plagiarism) will result in the student being held accountable to the full extent of university guidelines. Note that this includes self-plagiarism – that is, taking (parts of) assignments you did for other courses and resubmitting them for this course. While self-plagiarism might seem like an innocent act, it means you did not do original work as required for this course. It too can lead to negative consequences, including failing this course, suspension, or even expulsion from the university. If you aren’t sure whether what you are doing is right or not, check in with the writing center or with me!

Notes

Fordham provides me with a class list that includes your legal name. If you prefer to be addressed by an alternate name and/or gender pronoun, please do not hesitate to let me know! You can do so in class, by email, or during an office hour appointment – whichever you are comfortable with. Also, if during the semester I mispronounce your name or use an incorrect gender pronoun please do correct me – I want to get these things right.

Fordham's Writing Center (in Walsh Library at Rose Hill and in Quinn Library at Lincoln Center) provides individualized assistance to students for writing assignments. You can make an appointment – free of charge! – to meet with someone who will read your paper and discuss it in detail with you. I strongly recommend using this system. You can sign up for an appointment at https://www.fordham.edu/info/20126/writing_center.

As a faculty member, I am – by law – a mandatory reporter and I am required to contact and provide information to Public Safety, the Dean of Students, or Fordham's Title IX Coordinator if I am provided with any information indicating that a Fordham student has been sexually harassed (verbally or physically), sexually assaulted, stalked, had domestic violence or dating violence occur in a relationship, or been a victim / survivor of any behavior that is prohibited by Fordham's Sexual Misconduct Policy and Procedures. Once reported, Fordham will seek to support any student and make efforts to stop the negative behavior, prevent it from recurring, and remedy its effects. It is important for you to be aware that there are three confidential places on campus where you can seek support or guidance from Fordham staff members who are **not** mandatory reporters: clinical counselors in Counseling & Psychological Services, pastoral counselors in Campus Ministry, and medical service providers in University Health Services. You can read more about this in the Student CARE brochure or visit www.fordham.edu/care or www.fordham.edu/sexualmisconduct for more information.

If you or someone you know is struggling with emotional or mental health concerns, and/or gender, sexual, or domestic violence, Fordham's Counseling and Psychological Services (CPS) can provide (free) assistance. The Rose Hill office of CPS is open Monday through Friday and can be reached by phone at 718-817-3725. If you, or a student you know, is experiencing a mental health crisis or emergency that requires immediate attention contact Fordham's office of Public Safety at Rose Hill at 718-817-2222 (available 24/7). If you prefer to access mental health services outside of Fordham, New York City provides free mental health support through NYC Well (<https://nycwell.cityofnewyork.us/en/>).

Course Materials

Nearly all readings for this course will be made available online as PDFs through Blackboard. The exception is the book we will be reading, which is available on reserve through the Fordham library and for purchase at the university book store or through online retailers (like Bookshop.org or Amazon).

Monika L. McDermott, *Masculinity, Femininity, and American Political Behavior* (Oxford University Press, 2016).

Course Syllabus

January 23

Topic: Introduction to Political Science

Goal: This class will serve as a general introduction to the course. We will discuss the basic outline of the class and the research paper assignment. We will also focus on what political science is, how causal inference works (and why it is difficult!), and how social scientists try and answer their research questions.

Readings:

Amelia Hoover Green, "How to Read Political Science: A Guide in Four Steps."

Lisa Baglione, *Writing a Research Paper in Political Science* (CQ Press, 2019), Chapters 1 and 2.

January 30

Topic: Methodological Approaches – Experiments

Goal: In this class we will learn how political scientists can use experiments to answer specific types of research questions. We will discuss why experiments are helpful, what kind of questions in political science they can answer, what kinds of different experiments there are, how to design an experiment, and how to interpret its results. You will work in small groups to come up with a simple research question and design a basic experiment that could help answer it. You will present this design to the full class and we will discuss the pro's and con's to each design.

Readings:

Ted Brader, "Striking a Responsive Chord: How Political Ads Motivate and Persuade Voters by Appealing to Emotions," *American Journal of Political Science* vol. 49, no. 2 (2005) 388-405.

Camille D. Burge, Julian J. Wamble, and Chryl N. Laird, "Missing the Mark? An Exploration of Targeted Campaign Advertising Effect on Black Political Engagement," *Politics, Groups, and Identities* vol. 8, no. 2 (2020) 423-438.

Alan Gerber and Donald Green, "The Effects of Personal Canvassing, Telephone Calls, and Direct Mail on Voter Turnout: A Field Experiment," *American Political Science Review* vol. 94 (2000) 653-663.

February 6

Topic: Methodological Approaches: Quantitative Analysis of Observational Data

Goal: While experiments may be the 'gold standard' in causal inference, they are not a (realistic) option to answering many research questions. An alternative approach is to rely on observational data – that is, data not affected by researchers. In this class, we will learn how to collect observational data, how analyzing it is different from experimental data, and how scholars use statistical analysis to make causal claims.

Readings:

Christopher H. Achen and Larry M. Bartels, "Blind Retrospection: Why Shark Attacks Are Bad for Democracy," working paper (2013).

Anthony Fowler and Andrew B. Hall, "Do Shark Attacks Influence Presidential Elections? Reassessing a Prominent Finding on Voter Competence," *The Journal of Politics*, vol. 80, no. 4 (2018).

Christopher H. Achen and Larry M. Bartels, "Statistics as If Politics Mattered: A Reply to Fowler and Hall," *The Journal of Politics*, vol. 80, no. 4 (2018).

February 13

Topic: Methodological Approaches: Quantitative Analysis Workshop

Goal: using a set of basic instructions, you will work with group members to expand a quantitative data set and propose a test between an independent and dependent variable in that new data set. Each group will present the data they collected (what variables they chose, why, where they found the data, etc.) to the full class. We will then test whether or not there is a statistically significant correlation between those variables.

Readings:

No readings.

February 21

Note: this week's class is on Tuesday since the university is closed on Monday due to Presidents' Day.

Topic: Methodological Approaches - Qualitative Methods

Goal: While most political scientists answer their research questions through large N data analysis (whether collected through experiments or as observational data), many scholars rely on qualitative case studies. In this class we will learn what differentiates qualitative methods from experimental and quantitative analysis, and we will look at ways scholars rely on qualitative methods to both test theories and create new ones.

Readings:

Stephen van Evera, *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997) Chapter 2.

Richard Benschel, "The American Ballot Box: Law, Identity and the Polling Place in the Mid-Nineteenth Century," *Studies in American Political Development* vol. 17 (Spring 2003) 1-27.

Katherine J. Cramer, *The Politics of Resentment: Rural Consciousness in Wisconsin and the Rise of Scott Walker* (The University of Chicago Press, 2016), Chapters 1, 2 and 3.

February 26

Assignment: Share one-pager with other students

February 27

Topic: Paper Workshop I – Paper Proposal I

Goal: In this class we will use our class time to discuss each student's proposal, and work on improving / editing the assignment.

Readings:

No readings.

February 28

Assignment: Submit one-pager on Blackboard.

March 6

Topic: Author Meets Students I: Republican Party Politics and the American South

Goal: In class we discuss these articles in groups and come up with questions for the author (who happens to be me). In the second half of the class we will be talking with the author (still me!) about the work they did, the choices they made, the issues they ran into executing the work, etc.

Readings:

Boris Heersink and Jeffery A. Jenkins, "Southern Delegates and Republican National Convention Politics, 1880-1928," *Studies in American Political Development* vol. 29 (April 2015) 68-88.

Boris Heersink and Jeffery A. Jenkins, "Whiteness and the Emergence of the Republican Party in the Early Twentieth Century South," *Studies in American Political Development* vol. 34 (April 2020) 71-90.

Boris Heersink, Jeffery A. Jenkins, and Nicholas G. Napolio, "Southern Republicans in Congress during the pre-Reagan era: An exploration," *Party Politics* (2022) 1-14.

March 13

Topic: No class due to spring break.

Readings:

No readings.

March 19

Assignment: Share updated proposal with other students

March 20

Topic: Paper Workshop II – Updated Proposal

Goal: In this class we will use our class time to discuss each student's proposal, and work on improving / editing the assignment.

Readings:

No readings.

March 21

Assignment: Submit updated proposal on Blackboard

March 26

Assignment: Submit book discussion paper.

March 27

IMPORTANT: If your study requires IRB approval (that is: if it involves human subjects *and* you intent to use your results outside of this class) you **must** submit a full application no later than today.

Topic: Author Meets Students II: Masculinity, Femininity, and American Political Behavior

Goal: In class we discuss the book in groups and come up with questions for the author. In the second half of the class we will be talking with the author about the work they did, the choices they made, the issues they ran into executing the work, etc.

Readings:

Monika L. McDermott, *Masculinity, Femininity, and American Political Behavior* (Oxford University Press, 2016).

April 3

Topic: Paper Workshop III - Executing Your Paper

Goal: This class we will use in-class discussion to work on any issues you are facing in executing your project. We will focus on identifying what data you would need to collect and how you are collecting it, designing your ex

Readings:

No readings.

April 10

Topic: No class due to Easter break.

Readings:

No readings.

April 16

Assignment: Submit 7-10 page working paper to fellow students.

April 17

Topic: Paper Workshop IV – Working Paper

Goal: In this class we will use our class time to discuss each student's proposal, and work on improving / editing the assignment.

Readings:

No readings.

April 20

Assignment: Submit 7-10 page working paper on Blackboard.

April 24

Topic: Paper Workshop V

Goal: This week you will work on your paper individually in class. You will receive individual assistance with any issues or questions you are facing in the process.

Readings:

No readings.

May 1

Topic: Paper Presentations

Goal: You will present your (preliminary) results in 5 minute presentations for the entire class.

Readings:

No readings.

May 8

Assignment: Submit final paper on Blackboard.