

POSC-4305: AMERICAN POLITICS RESEARCH

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Faber Hall 667

Office Hours: Monday, 1:30 – 2:30 PM, Thursday, 1:00-2:00 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 political science research and meet the author in class to discuss their research project(s).

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.

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). With regards to health issues, I am of the strong belief that if you're sick, you're sick: so, if you are – get better, let me know, and report your absence to Fordham by filling out the [Excused Absence Form](#).

Do note that I keep attendance and while excused absences do not affect your participation grade, unexcused absences will result in a lowering of that grade. Fordham's official attendance policy is that for courses that meet once a week it is not allowed to have more than two unexcused 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.

Office Hours

If you have any questions or want to chat about the course, you can come to my office hours on **Monday between 1:30 and 2:30 PM** and **Thursday between 1:00 and 2:00 PM** (unless otherwise noted) or email me to set up a Zoom meeting. My office is in 667 Faber Hall. You can also e-mail me with any questions or concerns – I try to respond to every e-mail within 24 hours. Office hours do not require an appointment so if you want to chat feel free to drop by. Also, you should not feel like you can only stop by if you have really specific questions: it's fine to stop by if you want to talk about the course more broadly.

Grade

Components: Your grade is based on participation in class (25%), one research discussion paper (10%), and a research paper (65%, divided across multiple assignments).

The research discussion paper requires you to write a four double-spaced page paper assessing the readings we will be doing for class on either **March 4 OR March 11**. The paper should summarize the core takeaway points of all of the included readings and include a

response from you. It also needs to include 4 questions to ask the author about the research or the process that led to it. You must submit this paper **before** the related class day: either on **March 2** or on **March 9** on Blackboard. Note that reading and thinking about research carefully takes time – you should schedule in some time to make sure you have the time to consider each of the readings seriously.

The final research paper is due on **May 5**. 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 24. We will use our class on February 26 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 20: 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 16. We will use our class on March 18 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 20.

April 17: 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 13. We will use our class on April 15 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 17.

April 29: Paper presentations, worth 10% of your paper grade. You will present your research project to the full class in a concise 5 minute presentation. The

presentation must include a discussion of your topic, research question, methodological approach, and your (preliminary) findings.

May 5: 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 $3.3 * 0.10 = 0.333$ 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
0.99 and below

D
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 general expectations of all participants, as well as your fellow classmates' work in this particular 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. You must do so within a full week of receiving the grade. 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 carefully.

First, the goal of a grade reassessment is to produce a grade that fairly represents 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. Both of those feelings can be very frustrating. But they are not arguments for why the 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 the answer keys or my comments, make sure you do not just look at the things you did right. You have to incorporate those things you missed or got wrong. It is quite common for students who received, for example, an A- to list all the things they got right when complaining about a grade. But those things are what earned you the A-. The question is whether there were mistakes or elements missing 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, it is on you to identify what it is you think I did wrong and provide an argument for why the grade would need to be corrected. If you cannot articulate why you think a 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* the exams and paper deadline, and not on trying to haggle about a grade afterwards.

AI Use, Plagiarism and Other Violations of Code of Conduct: All assignments in this course fall under Fordham University's code of conduct. Generative AI tools are not permitted in this course. Students must rely on their own originality, creativity and critical thinking skills to complete assignments and engage with course material. Any violation (including, but not limited to, cheating on exams, relying on AI, and plagiarism) will result in the student being held accountable to the full extent of university guidelines. This includes self-plagiarism – meaning, cases where students re-use material they wrote themselves for other courses. 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.

If you have a learning disability for which you require accommodations, make sure to check in with the Office of Disability Services (<https://www.fordham.edu/student-life/disability-services/>). They will subsequently provide me with the appropriate documentation and instructions. If you have any questions or concerns about these accommodations, feel free to contact me!

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. Note that CPS also provides other services, including support groups for students that meet regularly throughout the semester. You can find more information about these services on the CPS website (<https://www.fordham.edu/student-life/safety-health-and-wellness/counseling-and-psychological-services/>). 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/>).

If you, or a student you know, is experiencing a mental health crisis or emergency that requires immediate attention, please contact Fordham’s office of Public Safety at Rose Hill at 718-817-2222 (available 24/7).

Course Materials

All readings for this course will be made available online as PDFs through Blackboard.

Course Syllabus

January 22

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 29

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 5

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 12

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 20

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 Bense, "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 24

Assignment: Share one-pager with other students

February 26

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 2

Assignment: Submit your research response paper if you plan to respond to the readings on March 4.

March 4

Topic: Author Meets Students I: National Party Organizations and Party Brands

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, *National Party Organizations and Party Brands in American Politics: The Democratic and Republican National Committees, 1912-2016* (Oxford University Press, 2023) Chapters 1, 2, 5, 6, 8, 9.

March 9

Assignment: Submit your research response paper if you plan to respond to the readings on March 11.

Note: if you did *not* submit a research response paper on March 2, writing and submitting a response paper to the material for March 11 is your last opportunity to do so.

March 11

Topic: Author Meets Students II: Julia Azari

Readings:

Julia Azari, "It's the Institutions, Stupid: The Real Roots of America's Political Crisis," *Foreign Affairs* (July/August 2019) 52-60.

Julia Azari, "Party Foul: How Obama Made Partisan, Not Party, Politics in a Polarized Environment," in Brent A. Rockman and Andrew Rudalevige (Eds.), *The Obama Legacy* (University Press of Kansas, 2019) 44-70.

Julia Azari, *The Racial Backlash Presidency* (book project under contract at Princeton University Press) Chapter 1 and 5. [Note; Chapter 1 is not yet available on Blackboard, I will upload it when I have it available!]

March 16

Assignment: Share updated proposal with other students

March 18

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 20

Assignment: Submit updated proposal on Blackboard

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

March 25

No class due to Spring break.

April 1

No class due to Easter break.

April 8

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 13

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

April 15

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 17

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

April 22

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.

April 29

Topic: Paper Presentations

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

Readings:

No readings.

May 5

Assignment: Submit final paper on Blackboard.