

PLSC 304 Research Methodology FALL 2021

Instructor: Dr. Syed Rashid Munir

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Office: Room 113-A, E-Block

Office Hours: Wednesday and Friday from 2pm to 3pm (or by appointment)

Class Details

Room E-343, 3 - 3.50pm on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. This course amounts to 3 credit hours and will be taught in blended format (in-person and online asynchronous). In-class students will be given a lecture, and a video of the same will be uploaded on Moodle within the same day for online students.

Course Description

This course presents an overview of research design and methodology for political science (and social sciences in general). The aim is to introduce students to key elements of research design and the need for methodological rigor. The focus of instruction in this course will be on two things: understanding the underlying concepts and the debates that surround them, and providing hands-on experience of the same concepts through assignments. The conceptual component will include fundamental questions about what we think we are doing when we do social science, and what kinds of knowledge we can obtain about the phenomena of interest to us (including what degree of generality or specificity we should strive for in the development and application of our theories, what makes for ‘good’ explanatory accounts of social or political phenomena, and how to manage bias and establish valid propositions). The practical hands-on part of the course is intended to get students working on elements of their own research design including formulating a sound research question, defining key concepts, making decisions about case selection, developing techniques for making descriptive and causal inferences, and anticipating and managing ethical concerns. Some assignments will be focused on statistical techniques, although no mathematical or statistical knowledge is expected for enrolled students. By the end of the course, students will have a better understanding of how to design their own social science research.

Learning Objectives

After taking this course, students will be able to:

- Recognize contending ideas about epistemology, strategies of inquiry and standards of evidence appropriate to the production of social scientific knowledge
- Understand the broad elements of research design, including how to pose good research questions, clarify concepts, select cases, and establish descriptive and causal propositions
- Demonstrate familiarity with a range of empirical research approaches (case- or variable-oriented, comparative, interviews/surveys, etc.)

- Understand key principles for assuring integrity and ethical practice in the conduct of research.

Required Readings

The readings for this course will be distributed by the instructor through Moodle. No other textbooks are required. Students are only responsible for reading the required texts; suggested texts are listed to provide additional resources.

Course Assessment

This course will assess the students through two different instruments. The breakdown for the course's assignments is given below.

Assignment Name	Marks Percentage	Mode of Submission
Attendance & Weekly Discussions	10%	In-person & online
Assignments (8)	80%	Online
Final Research Design & Presentation	10%	In-person & online

1. **Weekly Class Discussions & Participation:** Each week students will participate in class discussions when they are on-campus. These discussions will be held on Moodle through a discussion forum for students who have permission from the Vice Rector's Office (VRO) to take the entire course online. Excluding any special weeks listed in the Reading Schedule, all other weeks will have class discussions that will be graded. Reading the assigned texts before coming to class is required, and students are expected to take part in class discussions based on their understanding of the readings. Before each class, the instructor will ask students to provide questions they have for the week's readings individually, which will be subsequently addressed during the lecture. Students can also post questions in a separate 'Questions' thread on Moodle.

Students' Responsibilities:

Each student must have questions ready that pertain to the week's readings. The instructor may ask each student individually to provide her/his questions before the start of each class. Each student must participate in class and respond to discussion questions (in-person or online on Moodle if semester is being taken completely online). **Completely online students are responsible for participation through Moodle discussion forums only; blended mode students will get their attendance and discussion graded in-class only.** If course switches to fully online instruction for some reason, then discussions will be held through Moodle forums. The expectations for each mode of learning are listed below.

For blended-mode students: In-class participation will be graded.

For completely online students: Students following along online will have discussion questions posted online as a forum post on Moodle. These forum posts will be online during the entire corresponding week, but will be taken down after the Friday class of each week. Before this deadline, each online asynchronous student must respond at least once to the instructor's original question. Replying to other students' replies is encouraged but is not mandatory. Online students can also ask their own questions in the Questions thread.

2. **Assignments:** In total, students will attempt and submit eight (8) assignments that will focus on providing hands-on experience of applying the concepts they learn in class to their own areas of interest. The objectives of these assignments is to provide students the opportunity to learn through application; these assignments will be related to the readings for each respective week, and their submission deadlines are mentioned in the Reading Schedule section below. Each student is encouraged to select an area/topic of interest at the beginning of the semester, and attempt assignments with the main topic of interest in mind. Each assignment will have to be submitted through Moodle, and late submissions will carry a penalty (see Course Policies section below).

Students' Responsibilities: Complete and submit each assignment within the specified deadlines through Moodle.

3. **Final Research Design:** At the end of the semester, students will gather the work they have done towards a specific topic, and submit a research design that will include the following components:

- A precise research topic
- An exact research question(s)
- A directional hypothesis
- A discussion on the expected outcomes
- A specific methodology
- An exact time-period/area of research

This research design must at least be three (3) double-spaced, size 12 font pages in length; longer submissions are allowed. The exact deadline for submission will be communicated later on.

Students' Responsibilities: Complete and submit the final research design through Moodle in the finals week.

Grading Legend

Below is the grading legend of FCCU (published in all catalogs and available on the FCCU website) as approved by the Academic Council and applies for Fall as well.

Grade	Point Value	Numerical Value	Meaning
A	4	93-100	Superior
A-	3.7	90-92	
B+	3.3	87-89	Good
B	3	83-86	
B-	2.7	80-82	
C+	2.3	77-79	Satisfactory
C	2	73-76	
C-	1.7	70-72	
D+	1.3	67-69	Passing
D	1	60-66	
F	0	59 or below	Failing

Important Course Policies

- **Mode of Instruction:** This course will be taught **in-person and online asynchronously**, and will heavily make use of Moodle and Microsoft Teams; kindly ensure that you are familiar with using both. Students will require access to internet and access to a PC for successful completion of assignments. In-person students will attend the lecture, and a video of the same lecture will be uploaded on Moodle within the same day for online asynchronous students.
- **Discussion Blocks:** From time to time, the instructor will set aside time for students to ask questions about the week's readings and other related matters. These discussions will be held in class during class times, and students following online will be able to take part through online Microsoft Teams meetings simultaneously. In other words, the instructor will start a Microsoft Teams meeting in class and all students will be able to discuss the week's readings and ask questions related to the course. The links for the online meetings will be posted on Moodle before the class, and the details will be communicated through email beforehand.
- **Asynchronous Online Notification:** If you have permission from the Vice Rector's Office (VRO) to attend the course online asynchronously for the entire semester, please contact the course instructor immediately.
- **Contacting the Instructor:** The best way to reach the instructor is through email. During the scheduled office hours, the instructor will respond within 45 minutes of the query being sent; response time outside of office hours is 16 hours max. If a student is participating in the course online, individual meetings can be arranged online via email. The instructor will be readily available for such meetings during office hours (listed above) and all a student needs to do is send a request for an individual meeting through email. The meeting link will be provided shortly afterwards, via Microsoft Teams. Online meetings outside of office hours will depend on instructor availability.
- **Response Time for Emails:** The instructor will **only communicate with students on their official FCCU email addresses**, and respond to all emails during 9am to 5pm during Mondays to Fridays, with a maximum reply time of 16 hours. If you have urgent matters that need discussion, try to participate during scheduled office hours (in-person or online). The instructor is not responsible for responding to queries between Friday evening after 5pm and Monday morning before 9am.
- **Submission of Assignments and Plagiarism:** All written assignments must be submitted through Moodle, and will be checked for plagiarism via TurnItIn. This software ensures that the work submitted is the student's own, and plagiarism and cheating in any class discussion or assignment will be dealt with a failing grade, and further disciplinary action will be taken according to FCC policies. Please read the relevant sections in your Student Handbook for further details.
- **Late Submissions:** Late submission of the midterm exam and research paper will result in automatic penalties. Each day that passes after the deadline for submission will result in a 5% overall grade reduction. Submitting an assignment at 12.01am when it was due at 12.00am will be considered to be late by a full day. No late submission for class discussions (if class held asynchronously) or response papers is allowed in any case.
- **Extra-credit:** Absolutely no extra credit assignments will be given.
- **Re-take Policies:** Absolutely no re-takes for any assignment are allowed, and no extensions will be given for any assignment as well. Under extreme circumstances beyond the student's control - such as electric or internet outages during online quizzes - s/he should inform the instructor. Retakes may be allowed in such cases, but will be subject to reduced grades/penalties. For instance, if a student requests a retake for a quiz, the total grade for the quiz will be reduced by 30%, i.e., no student will be able to retake the quiz with the assignment counting as 100% towards the course grade.
- **Participation Etiquette:** Students are expected to come to class on time; failure to do so will result in reduced points for participation. Personal attacks on other participants - including the instructor - through class discussions or other means will garner strict punishments. A written warning will be issued after one transgression, and further transgressions will result in an automatic failing grade in the course.

- **Electronics Policy:** Usage of cell phones and other electronic or recording devices is strictly prohibited in class. If you need to use your laptop or tablet to take notes, please see the instructor to obtain permission beforehand.
- **Language of Instruction:** The language of instruction for the course is English, as required by the Higher Education Commission (HEC). As such, the instructor is not responsible for delivering the lecture or disseminating class-related reading materials in a language other than English; however, reasonable accommodations can be made on an individual basis. All assignments are to be completed and submitted in English as well. Students facing difficulty with the medium of instruction should contact the instructor and seek help during office hours (or by appointment).
- **Accommodation for Disabled Students:** If a student is facing difficulty in the course due to a disability or handicap, please contact the instructor immediately to arrange for an appropriate instruction method.
- **Health Emergencies:** If a student or a student's family member encounters a health emergency that can have significant impact on the student's performance in the course, s/he should immediately inform the instructor. Failure to do so will result in absolutely no accommodations being made towards the course assessments.
- **Modifications in Syllabus:** This syllabus was designed to convey course information and requirements as accurately as possible. It is important to note however that it may be subject to change during the course depending on the needs of the class and other situational factors. Such changes would be for the students' benefit and they will be notified of them as soon as possible.

Strategies for Success in the Course

- This course is reading-intensive. This means that students are expected to do the readings for each week beforehand, and engage in class discussions. In order to get a reasonable grade, students must do the readings regularly, and not fall behind. The readings for each week are listed in the Reading Schedule, and the instructor will upload each week's readings beforehand on Moodle. You are only responsible for doing the Required readings; the Suggested readings are there to provide useful insight in case a student wants to do a research paper on the respective topic.
- Participating in class discussions is a major chunk of the grade for this class. Therefore, students are expected to contribute to these discussions and demonstrate their understanding of the course material. Regular participation in class discussions is definitely a good way to go for this course. Be mindful of other participants' viewpoints during class discussions (see penalties related to class discussions in the above section).
- Ask questions and engage with the instructor over the course material. As no prior knowledge of the course material is required, students are bound to get confused from time to time. A good way to gain clarity is to ask questions from the instructor. The instructor's contact details and office hours are mentioned at the top of the syllabus. Students are advised to communicate with the instructor with respect in a formal manner.
- Try to work in a smart manner: focus on the key themes for readings and ask yourself if you understand what is being discussed. Your focus should be on understanding the concepts being discussed. Always ask yourself, "What is the puzzle/thesis being discussed?" when doing reading for each week.
- If you find yourself stressed out due to the course's workload, discuss the difficulties you are facing with the instructor.

Reading Schedule

Module 1: Introduction to Research in the Social Sciences

Week 1 - Doing Social Science Research

Required

- Benjamin A. Most. "Getting Started on Political Research". *PS: Political Science and Politics* 23, no. 4 (1990): 592–596
- Donatella della Porta and Michael Keating. "How many approaches in the social sciences? An epistemological introduction". In *Approaches and Methodologies in the Social Sciences: A Pluralist Perspective*, ed. by Donatella della Porta and Michael Keating. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2008

Suggested

- Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba. "The Science in Social Science". In *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994
- David Marsh and Heather Savigny. "Political Science as a Broad Church: The Search for a Pluralist Discipline". *Politics* 24, no. 3 (2004): 155–168

Week 2 - Finding Research Topics

Assignment 1 due by Friday 4pm

Required

- Philippe Schmitter. "The design of social and political research". In *Approaches and Methodologies in the Social Sciences: A Pluralist Perspective*, ed. by Donatella della Porta and Michael Keating. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2008

Suggested

- Wayne C. Booth et al. "From Topics to Questions". In *The Craft of Research: Fourth Edition*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2016

Week 3 - Hypotheses, Literature Reviews, and Citations

Assignment 2 due by Friday 4pm

Required

- John W. Creswell. "Research Questions and Hypotheses". In *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Method Approaches*. California: SAGE Publications, 2014
- John W. Creswell. "Review of the Literature". In *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Method Approaches*. California: SAGE Publications, 2014
- The Chicago Manual of Style Online. "Author-Date: Sample Citations". https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide/citation-guide-2.html