This course is designed to introduce a variety of empirical research methods used by political scientists. The primary aims of the course are to make you a more sophisticated consumer of diverse empirical research and to allow you to conduct advanced independent work in your junior and senior years. This class is not a course in data analysis. Rather, it is a course on how to approach political science research and presumes that social science research can be evaluated according to common criteria that transcend methodological approaches. It discusses how to generate research questions, how to think of measurement and causality in political science, existing research designs in the discipline (qualitative and quantitative), whether and when to mix research methods, and how to think about the ethics of research in political science.

The course will consist of three parts. One part of the course will involve readings and homework exercises (due Sept 29 and Nov 3). Our readings will be roughly evenly divided between methodological works and notable applications of various research methods from different subfields of political science. A second part of the course involves visits from guest professors. Students will be responsible for preparing questions about the professor’s research design and approach. The third part of the course entails the presentation of research projects that students will be designing throughout the semester.

The research project is a critical element of the course and should be taken very seriously. First, students will submit one or two ideas for a research project (one or two paragraphs, due Sept 15). Next, students will submit a two-page statement describing their research question and explaining why it was selected (due Oct 6). Next, students will submit a list of at least 10 articles or three books on the topic and a brief abstract for each that presents the basic argument, findings, and relevance for the student’s question (due Oct 20). Next, students will submit a critical literature review (15 pages, due Nov 17). This will serve as the basis for a 10-minute in-class presentation, which will be followed by a 10-minute group discussion of research strategies. Building on this discussion, students will submit a 20-25 page research proposal that includes a revised version of the literature review and a new section that proposes an original research design (due Dec 08). Students are required to virtually meet with the TA by Oct 27 to discuss their projects, and are encouraged to do so multiple times during the semester. Assignments should use The Chicago Manual of Style author-date system for citations and references.

This course has been designated Communication Intensive (CIM). A CIM course is designed to help you develop your writing and speaking skills in the major. As a result, a lecturer from the Writing, Rhetoric, and Professional Communication (WRAP) program has been assigned to help with this course. Students are required to meet with the WRAP faculty once during the semester, and the WRAP faculty can provide you with guidance and comments on written work. In addition, you can set up an individual consultation with the communications experts at the Writing and Communication Center (WCC) via their online form. The WCC staff may be particularly helpful in revising your writing or practicing your oral presentation.

Please note that course participation is a critical part of your grade for this course. I expect that you will come to class prepared to discuss the week’s readings. Discussion involves both asking and answering questions – from the teaching staff but also from other students.

Goals:
- Understand the variety of ways to answer significant questions about politics and political science.
- Learn about the benefits and drawbacks of various research methods; be able to critique research claims in popular media or academic settings.
- Gain confidence in presenting technical details clearly and concisely, both in written work and in oral presentation.
Required work and grading:
Grades will be calculated based on performance on the following required assignments:

- 02 Exercises, due on Sept 29 and Oct 27: 10% (5% each)
- A short preliminary research ideas (1-2 paragraphs), due on September 15, followed by a complete research questions statement (2 pages), due on Oct 10: 5%
- A literature review (15 pages), due on Nov 17: 15%
- An in-class presentation, to be delivered on Dec 1 or Dec 8: 10%
- A final research proposal (20-25 pages, including revised literature review), due on December 8: 30%

Grades for each individual assignment will be based on the demonstrated progress in accomplishing the course’s goals relative to the course schedule, on appropriate adherence to each assignment’s guidelines. Extra credit will be given to works that go above and beyond the assignment’s expectation.

In addition, attendance in class and active participation in class discussions are also required and will factor in grades calculation:

- Complete attendance in all 13 lectures: 15%
- Class participation: 15%

For Fall 2020, this course will follow MIT’s updated grading policy to account for the effects of the significant disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Managing Virtual Classes:

- Lectures: For the 2020-2021 Academic Year, this course will be taught virtually via Zoom. Classes will be held live from 9:00am to 11:00am EST every Tuesday (except for Oct 13 and Nov 24). Your attendance is required at all lectures. Due to the interactive nature of the class, recordings of class sessions will not be available. Lecture slides and class notes, however, will be posted online.
- Recitations: Recitations will also be held online via Zoom from 12:00 to 1:00 EST on Fridays (except for Oct 16 and Nov 27). Recordings of recitations will not be available, but if attending recitations is impossible because of a time zone issue accommodations can be made. Recitation slides, if presented, will be posted online.
- WRAP Sessions: Three recitations on November 6, 13 and 20 will be led by the WRAP Lecturer, and will focus respectively on writing the literature review, preparing the presentation, and writing the research proposal. Students are especially encouraged to attend all three sessions.
- Office Hours: To accommodate differences in time zones, Professor Christia will hold virtual office hours by appointment via Zoom. Minh will also hold virtual office hours by appointment via Zoom. Given the disadvantage of virtual teaching, students are especially encouraged to set up office hours, even if only for purely informal interactions.

- Norms for online participation in lectures/recitations/office hours:
  When joining a Zoom session, students are asked to join unmuted and with video on. If it is not possible to connect from a space without ambient noise and with minimal audible interruption, students may keep themselves muted until they speak. Video should be kept on the whole time. Sessions will be conducted using available Zoom features e.g. the chat function and virtual hand-raising. Due to possible latency, during discussions students should use the virtual hand-raising function, and avoid speaking until they are called on, or if the previous speaker has completely finished their sentence.
To respect each other’s privacy and to abide by MIT’s norms and codes of conduct, which strictly forbid the dissemination of recordings of class sessions beyond those with permission to access the course, students should not make their own recordings of class sessions. Students should also avoid sharing access to Zoom sessions to others who are not in the class.

Submitting Assignments:

All assignments must be submitted on Canvas prior to the beginning of class (9:00am EST) on their due date. They will be considered late if the submission has a time stamp later than 9:00am EST. Assignments will be penalized 1/3 of a grade for every 24 hours that they are late. All assignment should be sent as Word or PDF documents with the student’s last name as the first part of the file name (e.g., Smith_LiteratureReview.docx).

Please review MIT’s Academic Integrity Policy. Violations of the policy will result in official Institute sanction.

As per MIT’s Fall 2020 grading policy, some flexibility is allowed for the late completion of certain assignments. Students are encouraged to discuss with Minh whether they plan to take advantage of this flexibility.

Course Outline:

All of the readings are available from the Canvas course website and should be completed prior to class on the day that they are listed.

1. Introductory Session (September 1)

   I: The Scientific Method

2. Models and Theories in Political Science (September 8)

3. Generating Research Questions and Hypotheses (September 15)

   Note: Preliminary Research Ideas due, 1-2 paragraphs (September 15)

4. Ethics and Political Research (September 22)
   (Read also this recent argument that the experiment was fraudulent. Optional reading: Zimbardo’s response to the criticism.)
II: Methods of Political Science Research

5. Experiments, Statistical Analysis, and Case Studies (October 6)


Note: Exercise 1 due (October 6)

III: Gathering Data

6. Selecting and Sampling Cases (October 13)


Note: Research Question Statement due, 2 pages (October 13)

7. *** OCTOBER 13: MONDAY SCHEDULE – NO CLASS

8. Measurement (October 20)

Gerring, Social Science Methodology, 155-94 (Chapter 7: “Measurements”).


Note: Annotated citations due (October 20). You should set up a meeting with the TA in the next week if you haven’t met already.

9. Combining Methods (October 27)


Note: Exercise 2 due (October 27); Deadline to meet with TA (by October 27)

10. Causal Methods and Causal Analysis (November 3)

Gerring, Social Science Methodology, 197-217 (Chapter 8: “Causal Arguments”) and 218-55 (Chapter 9: “Causal Analyses”).


WRAP session on writing the literature review will be held at recitation (November 6)

IV: Guest Lectures

11. Guest lecture: Prof. Ariel White, MIT (November 10)

Reading TBA

WRAP session on delivering the presentation will be held at recitation (November 13)

12. Guest lecture: Prof. In Song Kim, MIT (November 17)

Reading TBA

WRAP session on writing the research proposal will be held at recitation (November 10)

Note: Literature Review due, 15 pages (November 17)

V: Student Presentations & Conclusion

13. *** NOVEMBER 24: THANKSGIVING BREAK – NO CLASS

14. Presentations – Group 1 (December 1)

15. Wrap-up & Presentations – Group 2 (December 8)

Note: Final Paper due, 20-25 pages (December 8)