Your job as a Ph.D. student in political science is to write a good dissertation. What is a good Ph.D. dissertation, and how do we know one when we see it? First, it must accomplish what Theda Skocpol describes to her own graduate students as “product differentiation.” That is, your dissertation project must establish you as an innovative scholar who has given the world a new piece of knowledge. Second, it must convince us that your flashy new product in fact provides what it promises; it does so by making clear the means by which your data were collected, analyzed, and interpreted and to some degree by sticking to accepted strategies of social scientific inquiry. More on what I mean by that later.

In short, you need an interesting and researchable question to answer, and you need the tools to answer the question feasibly and convincingly. In this course you will learn something about developing doable research questions and figuring out how best to answer them. I want to put my own methodological biases on the table by stating that to my mind research problems or questions come first. The appropriate methods to answer those questions come second. And all research methods contain their own specific logics, strengths, and weaknesses; whether scholars employ one method or multiple ones, they need to understand all three aspects and choose thoughtfully rather than to follow fads or trends. Following this course, you will begin to fill your toolbox with research skills in specialized methods classes.

You will also learn something about numerous research methods, from experimental social science to aggregate statistical data analysis to case studies and structured comparisons to reflexive critical inquiry and textual interpretation. My primary goal (and job) here is not to stuff your heads with knowledge, but to teach you a) how to recognize various strategies that scholars use to “create” or organize knowledge, b) to critique different research approaches thoughtfully and on their own terms, and c) to lay the groundwork for becoming a knowledge producer in your own right. This last one is our collective job as faculty; to help you acquire the tools to craft your own scholarly work, find meaningful employment, and go away with your Ph.D in hand.

We will spend a good portion of the semester addressing “big” questions from the three major empirical subfields of political science: American politics, comparative politics, and international relations. We will look, for a start, at how Americanists study political representation, how comparativists investigate the causes of ethnic violence, and how IR scholars explore the democratic peace thesis (i.e. that democracies don’t fight one another).

Finally, you’ll learn something about some of the nuts and bolts involved in doing social science research, such as evaluating the external vs. internal validity of research, appropriate levels of analysis for inquiry, inference vs. explanation in social inquiry, and so on. The bulk of your grade in this course (50%) will be based on your research design, which you will develop in consultation with me according to your own research interests. Statistically speaking, most of you will not write what becomes your dissertation prospectus; that is fine. What I expect from the exercise is that you will find a viable research question that
hopefully hasn’t been definitively answered already (although there will probably be multiple competing answers), think long and hard about what kind of logic of inquiry your question is likely to demand, and construct a plan of action for building theory, collecting data and analyzing it. This assignment will take shape in parts. On **February 2**, you’ll submit a statement of intent, outlining the topic and question based on prior consultation with me. On **March 23**, you will submit a draft of your literature review. On **April 6**, you will submit a draft of the research design itself for feedback from me and your fellow students. The “final” version is due on **April 25** at noon.

The remaining 50% of the grade will come from participation in seminar discussions (20%) and from three short response/thought papers of about 1000 words (30%, 10% each). The response papers are based on readings for a particular week and are due at the start of class the day we discuss those readings (in other words you cannot submit a response paper on a given week’s readings after that class meeting. **I want to be very clear that participation grades are not a giveaway. Completion of all readings before we meet to discuss them, evidence of having read and thought about them, a willingness to engage the materials and the ideas of your colleagues, are all mandatory.** Please, take this seriously. You could write a brilliant prospectus, turn in splendid response papers, and fail the course (i.e. earn a B-, a failing graduate grade) by not actively participating in discussion. Plagiarism on any assignment will result in a failing grade for the course. If you are unclear what constitutes plagiarism, consult the UF Honor Code and this website: http://plagiarism.org/. All assignments other than weekly questions will be submitted in hard copy to me and electronically via turnitin.com. Late assignments accrue a 20% penalty the first day and 10% each additional day except in documented emergencies.

Students requesting classroom accommodation must first register with the Dean of Students Office, which will provide documentation to the student who must then provide this documentation to the professor when requesting accommodation. For more information regarding University policies on this issue, please visit the [Disability Resource Center’s website](http://plagiarism.org/). While I have endeavored to keep the readings within the bounds of an acceptably heavy graduate workload, this course is going to demand much of you, so be prepared. You should come to each class meeting with all readings and assignments completed beforehand, with your own written or typed summary of the readings, **three questions to bring to the discussion (to be emailed to me by 8am each Monday morning)**, and a general willingness to engage the materials. Students who come unprepared are likely to be asked to leave; this is a seminar, therefore a team effort, and there is no free riding.

The following books are required and are available at local bookstores and online:

- Gary King, Robert Keohane, Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry* (DSI)
- Steven Van Evera, *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science*

As you will discover in reading these books, DSI, RSI and SSM present quite different ways of thinking about social science research. This kind of spirited disagreement is simply what characterizes political science today, even within the broad approach to explanation that we call positivism.

Note: Van Evera’s book, in my opinion, is at its most valuable as a guide to writing a proposal. That in mind, I’ve only asked you to read 2 chapters from it for discussion, but I hope that in developing your research designs you’ll find it a useful reference.

There are also many additional readings, drawn from academic journals and edited volumes. Since this is your first graduate seminar (at UF, at least) in research design, one important skill to learn is tracking down the materials that define the parameters of different research programs. To that end, you will need to access
many of the readings through the UF libraries online system. In addition to saving you money, you’ll acquire a good sense of what is available through our libraries and how to get it.

**Schedule of Readings.**

Readings noted as “online” can be found on the UF libraries’ online access system.

**January 12. What Does it Mean to Study Politics Scientifically?**

Why do we become scientists, or social scientists, and what does being a social scientist entail? How much does it seem like what we thought we were getting ourselves into when applying to grad school? An introduction to the course, the PhD program, and all of the rest of us.

- KKV, Chapter 1.
- Brady and Collier, Chapter 2.
- Alan Sokal, “A Physicist Experiments With Cultural Studies.”

**January 19. No class—MLK day**

**January 26. A Primer on How to Do It, with Examples.**

Today we look at some arguments about what social science actually is and take a brief look at a big question in international and comparative political economy: do oil-rich countries suffer political instability that other countries do not? What led us to think they do/do not?

- Van Evera, Chapter 1.
- Terry Karl, pre-publication communication with me (to be sent by email)

**February 2**

**NOTE: Your statements of research design topic and question are due today.**

Today we’ll discuss conceptions of what it means to do social scientific research, beginning with what has become, rightly or wrongly, the dominant statement on the subject: King, Keohane, and Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry*. We’ll also take a look at a provocative statement from the field of international relations, and some efforts to subject it to serious testing.

- Gerring, chapters 3-4.

**February 9. Concepts and Measures: the Building Blocks of Research.**

• Gerring, Chapters 5-7.
• KKV, Section 5.1
• Brady and Collier, Chapter 3.

**February 16: Building Theories: Inferring vs. Explaining and Other Problems.**

• Gerring, Chapters 8-10.
• Brady and Collier, Chapter 5.
• KKV, Chapter 3.

**February 23. Some of the “Greatest Hits” of Research Pitfalls: Selection Bias, Validity Issues, and Choosing Levels of Analysis.**

• Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions*, Chapter 1.
• Andrew Bennett and Colin Elman, “Qualitative Research: Recent Developments in Case Study Methods,” *Annual Reviews of Political Science*
• KKV, Section 1.2.3


Meet in Computer Lab for the 2nd half of class.

• You have already taken Data Analysis, so you know the basics of why we use statistics and analysis of statistical data. Today we’ll mostly explore publicly available data for some of the central concepts in American politics, comparative politics and international relations.


• Van Evera, Chapter 2.
• KKV, Chapter 6.
• Brady and Collier, Chapters 10 and 11.

**March 23. Research Designs, Part III. Experimental Methods.**
Please submit the draft literature review at the start of class.

- Macartan Humphreys, “Some Reflections on the Ethics of Field Experiments,” manuscript to be distributed by email.

March 30. Big Questions in American Politics: What is Representation, and How Does it Happen?


April 6. Big Questions in Comparative Politics: Why do some locales suffer endemic ethnic violence while others are peaceful?

Complete draft of research design due.

- Rizal Panggabean and Benjamin Smith, “Explaining anti-Chinese Violence in Late-20th Century Indonesia,” available on my research page.

April 13. Big Questions in International Relations: Is There a Democratic Peace?


April 20. Course conclusion.

April 25: Final draft of Research Design due by noon, both to turnitin.com and by hard copy to me at Anderson 234.