

POS 6736 | Conduct of Inquiry

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA
FALL 2025

Instructor: David Macdonald, Ph.D.

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Time & Location:

- Tuesdays 11:45 AM - 1:40 PM (WEIM 1098)
- Thursdays 12:50 PM - 1:40 PM (WEIM 1098)

Office Hours:

- Anderson Hall 207
- Mondays 9:30 AM - 12:30 PM & 2:30 PM - 4:30 PM
- Also by email appointment if necessary

Course Description

Conduct of Inquiry (POS 6736) is a graduate-level course that introduces students to the logic and methods of research design in the social science. It is geared toward students pursuing a Master's Degree in political science. This course is fundamentally about the logic of scientific inference. That is, how we go about exploring and testing whether "X causes Y," with a focus on political phenomena. In doing so, we will draw upon the logic of the scientific method and focus on research design, rather than crunching numbers (although there will be a bit of that). My hope is that by the end of this course, you will move from being primarily a passive receiver of research toward being both a critical consumer of existing research *and* a producer of new knowledge.

Course Objectives

Students should exit this course being familiar with:

- Different types of research designs, e.g., observational vs. experimental
- The strengths and weaknesses of qualitative vs. quantitative studies
- The "ingredients" that go into high-quality published papers, e.g., novel research questions, thorough literature reviews, and appropriate designs
- How to properly derive and test scientific hypotheses

Required Texts & Readings

There are two required texts for this class. They are listed below. You can purchase these books individually or as a bundle. I hope that these books will be a resource throughout your academic career. I will also incorporate other academic readings beyond the required texts. I will make these electronically available as a PDF on the course website. All readings are listed in the “Course Schedule” section of this syllabus.

- Johnson, Janet Buttolph, H. T. Reynolds, and Jason D. Mycoff. 2019. *Political Science Research Methods*. 9th Edition.
- Mycoff, Jason. D. 2020. *Working With Political Science Research Methods: Problems and Exercises*. 5th Edition.

LaTeX (optional)

LaTeX (pronounced “lay-tech”) is a word processing software program. It is specifically geared toward scientific research and is excellent at writing mathematical notation, outputting statistical results, and making documents with high-quality tables and figures. You can read more about this program at the following link <https://www.latex-project.org/>. LaTeX is becoming increasingly popular in political science. I used it to create this syllabus and also use it to write papers. LaTeX has a steep learning curve, but programs such as TeXstudio (<https://www.texstudio.org/>) make it relatively easy to download and use on your personal computers. You are not required nor under any obligation to use LaTeX in this course, but I would recommend eventually becoming familiar with LaTeX as it will serve you well in your academic and professional careers.

Course Policies

Canvas

The course website will be on Canvas (<https://elearning.ufl.edu/>). It is here (click on the “Files” tab) that you will be able to access all of the assignment instructions and readings.

Grades

Your overall course grade will be comprised of the following weighted components. Further detailed instructions about these assignments will be given in class and posted on the course website.

- **Homework Problem Sets (30%)**
 - Detailed instructions posted on Canvas
 - Total of 6 assignments drawn from the Mycoff (2020) workbook
 - Due (as a typed hard copy) on various class meetings (see the Course Schedule)
- **Exam (20%)**
 - Closed-book exam given in class on Tuesday 11/12
- **Class Participation (10%)**
 - Based on the frequency and the quality of your ORAL contributions (speak up!)

- **Research Design Paper** (40%)
 - Detailed instructions posted on Canvas
 - Part I: Discuss initial research ideas in class on Tuesday 10/14
 - Part II: Present proposed research design in class on Tuesday 11/04
 - Part III: Email final paper (as a PDF) to instructor by 11:59 PM on Monday 12/01
 - Part IV: Present final design (email me your slides) in class on Tuesday 12/02

Letter grades will be assigned as follows.

| | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------|--------|-----------|-------|-----------|-------|-----------|-------|----------|-----|
| A | 93-100 | B+ | 87-89 | C+ | 77-79 | D+ | 67-69 | F | <60 |
| A– | 90-92 | B | 83-86 | C | 73-76 | D | 63-66 | | |
| | | B– | 80-82 | C– | 70-72 | D– | 60-62 | | |

Extra Credit

I DO NOT give out extra credit, but I am willing to round up borderline grades in certain cases. Student participation, preparation, and effort may be taken into consideration in deciding whether to round up borderline grades.

Lecture Notes & Study Guides

I DO NOT make my lecture slides available on Canvas. You need to come to class in order to truly learn and absorb the material. I will, however, give out a study guide before each exam.

Late Work

Late work will not be accepted except as a result of unusual/extenuating circumstances that have been discussed with the instructor.

Email

All email correspondence in this course must be through your UF student email. Please keep it professional when writing and responding to emails.

Electronics

I expect you to keep your phones away and to only use laptops for the purpose of note-taking. If I notice that you are frequently using such devices for other purposes and thus not paying attention nor participating in class, then I will NOT round up your borderline grades.

Decorum

Students in this course are expected to follow the “Golden Rule” of treating others as you wish to be treated. Everyone in this class has the right to speak and to be heard, but this right is not unlimited. Ultimately, we are all responsible for the things we say and do. There will also be ZERO tolerance regarding any threats of violence toward the instructor(s) and/or students, be they verbal or written. Such threats will be reported to University Police.

Reasonable Accommodations

As evidenced by the Covid-19 pandemic, sometimes difficult and unfortunate things happen in our lives that can make attending class and thus being academically successful very difficult. As such, I am willing, if possible, to help you overcome such difficulties. If you are experiencing challenging life circumstances and need help to succeed in the course, please speak to me ASAP. Do not wait until the end of the semester to as it will often be too late for me to do anything. Please see the following link (<https://umatter.ufl.edu/helping-students/your-well-being/>) and/or reach out to a medical professional for any physical or mental health problems.

Changes to the Syllabus

I reserve the right to make minor changes to the syllabus and course schedule during the semester as necessary. That being said, if there are any changes, every effort will be made to alert you in writing as far in advance as possible.

University Policies

Academic Honor Code

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states: “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The Conduct Code specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. See the following link for more information. <https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/process/student-conduct-code/>.

Disability Services

Students with disabilities who are requesting special accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/ or **352-392-8565**) by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter which must be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodation.

Recordings

Students are allowed to record video or audio of class lectures. However, the purposes for which these recordings may be used are strictly controlled. The only allowable purposes are (1) for personal education use, (2) in connection with a complaint to the university, or (3) as evidence in, or in preparation for, a criminal or civil proceeding. All other purposes are prohibited. Specifically, students may not publish recorded lectures without the written consent of the instructor. A “class lecture” is an educational presentation intended to inform or teach enrolled students about a particular subject, including any instructor-led discussions that form part of the presentation, and deliver by an instructor hired or appointed by the University, or by a guest instructor, as part of a University of Florida course. A class lecture does not include lab sessions, student presentations, clinical presentation such as patient history, academic exercises involving solely student participation, assessments (quizzes, tests, exams), field trips, private conversations between students in

the class or between a student and the faculty or guest lecturer during a class session. Publication without permission of the instructor is prohibited. To “publish” means to share, transmit, circulate, distribute, or provide access to a recording, regardless, of format or medium, to another person (or persons), including but not limited to another student within the same class section. Additionally, a recording, or transcript of a recording, is considered published if it is posted on or uploaded to, in whole or in part, any media platform, including but not limited to social media, book, magazine, newspaper, leaflet, or third-party note/tutoring services. A student who publishes a recording without written consent may be subject to a civil cause of action instituted by a person injured by the publication and/or discipline under UF Regulation 4.040 Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code.

Online Course Evaluations

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online. Students can complete evaluations in three ways: (1) The email they receive from GatorEvals, (2) Their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or, (3) The central portal at <https://my-ufl.bluer.com>. Guidance on how to provide constructive feedback is available at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/>. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>.

Course Schedule

You are expected to complete ALL of the assigned readings before our first weekly class meeting, which will consist, in part, of a seminar-style discussion. My hope is that these readings will introduce you to the broader political science literature, give you ideas for your own research design (due later in the semester), and model what high-quality research papers are supposed to look like. You should also bring your laptop and the assigned textbooks to each class meeting.

Week 1 - Course Introduction (No Assigned Readings)

- Class Meetings
 - Thursday 08/21 only

Week 2 - The Scientific Method & Research Ethics

- Class Meetings
 - Tuesday 08/26 & Thursday 08/28
- Readings (these are all pretty short and digestible)
 - JRM Textbook (2019, Chapters 1-2) *Skim Ch.1; *Closely read Ch.2
 - Bartlett (2025) *The Atlantic*
 - Franco, Malhotra, and Simonovits (2014) *Science*
 - Resnick (2018) *Vox*
 - Richardson et al. (2025) *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*
 - Sarewitz (2006) *American Scientist*

Week 3 - Research Questions & Literature Reviews

- Class Meetings
 - Tuesday 09/02 & Thursday 09/04
- Readings
 - JRM Textbook (2019, Chapter 3)
 - Carsey (2020, Chapter 3) *Tom's Comments*
 - Knopf (2006) *PS: Political Science & Politics*
 - Wilson and Knutsen (2022) *Perspectives on Politics*
- Homework 1 due in class on Thursday 09/04

Week 4 - Concepts & Measurements

- Class Meetings
 - Tuesday 09/09 & Thursday 09/11
- Readings
 - JRM Textbook (2019, Chapter 4)
 - DeSante and Smith (2020) *PS: Political Science & Politics*
 - Grumbach (2023) *American Political Science Review*
 - McDonald and Popkin (2001) *American Political Science Review*
- Homework 2 due in class on Thursday 09/11

Week 5 - Theory Building & Illustrating Prominent Work Across Fields

- Class Meetings
 - Tuesday 09/16 & Thursday 09/18
- Readings
 - JRM Textbook (2019, Chapter 6)
 - Fearon and Laitin (2003) *American Political Science Review*
 - Paglayan (2021) *American Political Science Review*
 - Stimson, MacKuen, and Erikson (1995) *American Political Science Review*
- Homework 3 due in class on Thursday 09/18

Week 6 - Qualitative Research Designs (Small N)

- Class Meetings
 - Tuesday 09/23 & Thursday 09/25
- Readings
 - JRM Textbook (2019, Chapters 7-8)
 - Fenno (1977) *American Political Science Review*
 - Ternullo (2022) *American Political Science Review*
 - Triesman (2020) *American Political Science Review*
 - Von Soest (2023) *Perspectives on Politics*
- Homework 4 due in class on Thursday 09/25

Week 7 - Quantitative Research Designs (Large N)

- Class Meetings
 - Tuesday 09/30 & Thursday 10/02
- Readings
 - JRM Textbook (2019, Chapter 9, pp. 182-192 & Chapter 10, all)
 - Goren and Chapp (2017) *American Political Science Review*
 - Ross (2001) *World Politics*
 - Solt (2008) *American Journal of Political Science*

Week 8 - Randomization & Experimental Research Designs

- Class Meetings
 - Tuesday 10/07 & Thursday 10/09
- Readings
 - Cheema et al. (2023) *American Political Science Review*
 - Costa (2021) *American Journal of Political Science*
 - Kuklinski, Cobb, and Gilens (1997) *Journal of Politics*
 - White (2019) *American Political Science Review*
- Homework 5 due in class on Thursday 10/10

Week 9 - Research Topic Brainstorm

- Class Meetings
 - Tuesday 10/14 & Thursday 10/16
- Readings
 - Initial discussion of research ideas *Tuesday
 - Carsey (2020, Chapter 8) *Tom's Comments* *Thursday

Week 10 - Making Sense of Data

- Class Meetings
 - Tuesday 10/21 & Thursday 10/23
- Readings
 - JRM Textbook (2019, Chapter 11)
 - Gamm and Kousser (2021) *American Political Science Review*
 - Holman, Merolla, and Zechmeister (2022) *American Political Science Review*
 - Ward (2020) *American Journal of Political Science*
- Homework 6 due in class on Thursday 10/23

Week 11 - Analyzing Data

- Class Meetings
 - Tuesday 10/29 only
- Readings
 - JRM Textbook (2019, Chapters 12-14)
 - Class will also include some instructor lecture
- No Class Thursday 10/31
 - Use this time to work on your research design papers!

Week 12 - Research Design Proposals

- Class Meetings
 - Tuesday 11/04 only
- Presentation of final research design proposals
- No Class Thursday 11/06
 - Use this time to work on your research design papers!

Week 13 - Putting It All Together

- Class Meetings
 - Thursday 11/13 only (Veteran's Day on 11/11)
- Readings
 - Carsey (2020, Chapter 9) *Tom's Comments*
 - Gerring (2011) *Political Research Quarterly*

Week 14 - EXAM

- Exam Tuesday 11/18 (in class @ regular time)
- Bring yourself and a pencil
- No class Thursday 11/20
 - Use this time to work on your research design papers!

THANKSGIVING BREAK

- Monday 11/24 - Friday 11/28

Week 15 - Final Research Design Papers

- Research Design Paper Due
 - Email a PDF copy to instructor
 - Due by 11:59 PM on Monday 12/01 (no late work accepted)
- Presentation of research design papers in class on Tuesday 12/02
 - Send me a copy of your slides when you submit the paper