POLI SCI 210
Introduction to
Empirical Methods in Political Science
Winter 2025

Instructor: Gustavo Diaz (he/him)
Email: gustavo.diaz@northwestern.edu
Lecture: Tues/Thurs 11:00am – 12:20pm, University Hall 122
Canvas: TBD
Student Hours: TBD or by appointment

Teaching Assistants:

	Chloe Bernadaux	**Lucas Camara**
Email	chloebernadaux2028@u.northwestern.edu	lucascamara2028@u.northwestern.edu
Office	Scott Hall 215	Scott Hall 219
Hours	Tu 12:30–1:30pm	Mo 5:00–6:00pm
	We 3:30–4:40pm	Th 9:50–10:50am

Discussion Sections:

	Section 60	**Section 61**	**Section 63**	**Section 65**
Time	Th 1:00–1:50pm	Th 1:00–1:50pm	Fr 2:00–2:50pm	Fr 3:00–3:50pm
Room	University Hall 218	Parkes Hall 213	University Hall 418	University Hall 418
TA	Bernadaux	Camara	Camara	Bernadaux

Course Overview

This course introduces the empirical methods used by political scientists to answer research questions, including their appropriate application, advantages, and shortcomings. You will learn how researchers use data in social science contexts, with a particular emphasis on political science topics, across three broad areas: quantitative, experimental, and qualitative studies. This course prepares students to read and evaluate research in subsequent courses on substantive social science topics.

Learning Objectives

- Identify and explain descriptive and causal inference approaches, as well as their challenges in political science
- Evaluate inferential claims in academic social science research
- Identify types of research designs, explain their strengths and weaknesses, and discuss alternative approaches
- Communicate research processes and findings

Requirements

There are no requirements to take this course, which is required for Political Science majors. This course also counts toward the Empirical and Deductive Reasoning requirement (formerly known as Formal Studies Distribution Area) at Weinberg College.

Required Reading

Textbook

Clipperton, Jean, et al. 2020. *Empirical Methods in Political Science An Introduction*. Northwestern University Libraries

This is a FREE resource available through the link above. The rest of the syllabus will refer to the textbook as **EMPS** for short.

Any other required material or reading will be linked in the schedule below and available on Canvas.

Grading

This course uses a labor-based grading agreement, commonly known as contract grading. In this course, instead of being given a final grade based on how "good" your submitted assignments are, your final grade will be based on the amount of work you put into the course. The goal is to decouple grades from performance and emphasize learning and effort.

Each assignment is worth a number of points. You need 200 points out of a total of 350 to receive an A. The following table translates points to letter grades. These correspond in ratio to the Weinberg College grading system.

Grade	A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D	F
Points	≥ 200	185	165	150	135	115	100	85	50	< 50
GPA	4.0	3.7	3.3	3.0	2.7	2.3	2.0	1.7	1	0

There are five types of assignments:

1. **Quizzes** (10 points each)

2. **Research design critiques** (10 points each)
3. **AI memos** (10 points each)
4. **Section participation** (10 points each)
5. **Research proposal** (30 points)

With the exception of quizzes, which award points based on correct answers, all assignments are marked as satisfactory or unsatisfactory. You receive full points for every assignment marked as satisfactory.

The weekly assignments are due on Fridays at 11:59 PM of the week they are assigned. You can choose which assignments to complete, but you will be deducted 20 points if you have not obtained at least 100 points by Friday, February 14.

As a point of reference, with eight weeks of assignments in the quarter, you should average 25 points every week to secure an A. If you plan to complete 3 assignments every week, then you can afford to have two weeks without submitting any assignment.

Quizzes (10 points each x 8)

Weekly quizzes on the lecture and textbook material will be available on Canvas each week. These quizzes are brief, untimed, and consist only of multiple choice, matching, and true/false questions. Each quiz may be taken as many times as you want before the deadline to earn 10 points. Quizzes may be taken while referencing notes and course materials.

Research design critiques (10 points each x 8)

Every week has additional non-textbook readings assigned, these are usually published articles that illustrate the application of the methods we discuss that week. You can choose to write a short form document (around 700-1,000 words) that summarizes the question, relevance, and research design of the study in question, and then use course material to evaluate its design or implementation.

Ultimately, your research design critique must answer the question of "what should we change if we were to go back and conduct the study ourselves?"

AI memos (10 points each x 8)

On the first class meeting of every week, the instructor will present keywords or prompts. You can use at least one of these prompts to ask a generative AI chatbot to explain the corresponding concept or discussion. You should then ask at least five follow up or clarification questions on the topic. The keywords or prompts for every week are good starting points, but you are welcome to come up with your own questions, as long as they relate to course material for that week.

Based on your conversation with the AI, you will write a short memo (500-1000 words) summarizing the interaction and evaluating its quality. How does the AI explanation compare to what we discussed in class? Why is it different from the course material? Why is it more/less helpful than what is covered in the textbook or lectures? Do you feel the recommended sources are cred-

ible? At the end of the document, you should also attach a transcript of your conversation with the AI (you can directly ask in the chat to export a copy in Word format).

Northwestern University recommends students and faculty to use Microsoft Copilot to engage with generative AI. When using Copilot via Office 365 or Bing while logged into your Northwestern email account, your data will not be shared nor used for product improvement or to train other AI models. However, you are welcome to use your favorite generative AI chatbot as long as you are able to include a transcript in your memo.

Section participation (10 points each x 8)

During sections, we will engage in additional discussion of the week's material, with emphasis on the assigned non-textbook readings for each week. Your participation will be marked as satisfactory/unsatisfactory in each week. You must actively participate, not merely attend, in order to receive credit.

Research proposal (30 points)

This course is a good opportunity to start thinking about your own research interests. As an optional assignment, you can write a research grant proposal following the guidelines of the Office of Undergraduate Research for academic year or summer research grants.

You can only complete this assignment after if you receive prior approval to do so. To receive approval, you must schedule a meeting with a member of the instructional team to discuss your research interests and expectations prior to **Friday, February 21**.

Note that your research proposal needs to be about a political science topic OR connect with one of the methods covered in the course, but not both necessarily.

If approved to complete it, your research proposal is due on **Wednesday, March 19, 11:59 PM**.

Northwestern University Syllabus Standards

This course follows the Northwestern University Syllabus Standards. Students are responsible for familiarizing themselves with this information.

Schedule

Week 1 (January 7/9): Introduction and Overview

NO DISCUSSION SECTIONS

EMPS Chapter 1-2

Week 2 (January 14/16): Theory and Data

EMPS Chapters 3-4

Krcmaric, Daniel, Stephen C. Nelson, and Andrew Roberts. 2024. "Billionaire Politicians: A Global Perspective." *Perspectives on Politics* 22 (2): 357-371

Week 3 (January 21/23): Inference

EMPS Chapter 5

Baum, Matthew A., James N. Druckman, Matthew D. Simonson, Jennifer Lin, and Roy H. Perlis. 2024. "The Political Consequences of Depression: How Conspiracy Beliefs, Participatory Inclinations, and Depression Affect Support for Political Violence." *American Journal of Political Science* 68 (2):575-594

Week 4 (January 28/30): Surveys

EMPS Chapter 6

Merseth, Julie Lee. 2018. "Race-ing solidarity: Asian Americans and support for Black Lives Matter." *Politics, Groups, and Identities* 6 (3): 337-356

Week 5 (February 4/6): Experiments

EMPS Chapter 7

Naunov, Martin. 2024. "The Effect of Protesters' Gender on Public Reactions to Protests and Protest Repression." *American Political Science Review*

Week 6 (February 11/13): Large N

EMPS Chapter 8

McGrath, Mary C. 2017. "Economic Behavior and the Partisan Perceptual Screen." *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 11 (4): 363-383

Week 7 (February 18/20): Quasi-Experiments

Hungtinton-Klein, Nick. 2022. *The Effect: An Introduction to Research Design and Causality*. Chapman & Hall. Chapter 18

Cattaneo, Matias D., Nicolás Idrobo, and Rocío Titiunik. 2020. *A Practical Introduction to Regression Discontinuity Designs: Foundations*. Cambridge University Press. Chapters 1-4

García-Montoya, Laura, Ana Arjona, and Matthew Lacombe. 2022. "Violence and Voting in the United States: How School Shootings Affect Elections." *American Political Science Review* 116 (3): 807-826

Ademi, Ubeydullah and Firat Kimya. 2024. "Democratic transition and party polarization: A fuzzy regression discontinuity design approach." *Party Politics* 30 (4):736-749

Week 8 (February 25/27): Small N

EMPS Chapter 9

Gilbert, Danielle. 2022. "The Logic of Kidnapping in Civil War: Evidence from Colombia." *American Political Science Review* 116 (4): 1226-1241

Week 9 (March 4/6): Machine Learning

EMPS Chapter 12

Libgober, Brian and Connor T. Jerzak. 2024. "Linking datasets on organizations using half a billion open-collaborated records." *Political Science Research and Methods*

Week 10 (March 11/13) Weinberg College Reading Period

NO CLASS