

Team Research Project

Thirty-five percent of your course grade will be based on your work on a Team Research Project. You will work with a classmate to conduct original research. The goal of the assignment is to enable you to get firsthand experience designing and conducting research. Throughout the semester I will incorporate information relevant to conducting the various phases of research into our class sessions.

Choosing a Topic

You will have a lot of freedom in choosing the topic for your project, though I will provide suggestions, guidelines, and expectations to help you arrive at a workable idea. The only requirement is that your project be a research project on any topic related to media and politics.

First, you will need to select a broad topic in media and politics that interests you. Then you will need to narrow your topic down to a ***specific, testable*** research question. Designing your project will require you to:

- review relevant scholarly literature
- identify remaining controversies, problems, or unresolved issues
- design a study that would allow scholars to investigate a specific, testable question that derives from the remaining controversies and unresolved issues you've identified.

Some examples of appropriate topics students have written about in the past include:

- a focus group with peers to discuss what political advertisements they see as negative,
- a survey designed to capture how trust in the media influences framing effects
- in-depth interviews with peers about how views of media bias influence media consumption.

Once your project is designed, you will then spend the last several weeks of the semester conducting your study or locating data, writing a final paper based on your findings, and presenting your work to your classmates.

One-Page Description

A one-page description of your paper topic is due in class on **February 21**.

- This should give the general area of media and politics your research will be in and begin to define your research question.

Proposal

Five copies of a 5-page (minimum) proposal are due in class on **March 16**. The proposal should include:

- A description of your paper topic, your testable argument, and your research strategy
- A discussion of how you plan to collect your data
- A discussion of your understanding of protecting human subjects (e.g., principles in the Belmont report which we read and discussed in class)
- An outline of the paper
- A list of the sources you have consulted to date

One copy is for me and four are for two other research teams. At our next session, you will meet in groups to critique each other's ideas. Please take time to come up with thoughtful questions and/or critiques for them about their proposed research. The peer review groups will be determined the week before the session.

Conferences

Each research team is expected to meet with me during the week of 4/3-4/7 to discuss your progress on the research project. By this meeting you should have made progress on your paper's literature review and you should have a clear theory/hypothesis that you are testing. I will ask you specifically about your plans for data collection, etc. Each of your projects would benefit from meeting with me multiple times!

Data Collection

After you have received feedback on your proposal, you will be set to conduct your research! You will need to collect your own data using one of the methods discussed in class, including using: focus groups, interviews, q-sort methodology, survey research, experiments/survey experiments, or content analyses. There is not a specific number of "cases" you'll need to collect, however, please follow these general guidelines:

- Survey data – collect data from approximately 50 people.
- In-depth interviews – conduct at least 6 interviews.
- Focus groups – hold at least two focus groups with a total of 20 people or more.

Instead of collecting your own data you may use data from a published source. This type of data will need to be properly referenced.

Your data should be collected by Tuesday, April 27. Bring it with you to class. We will discuss how to analyze and draw conclusions from various types of data.

Drafts

I will be happy to go over a draft of your final paper if you wish, but only if you get it to me in class on Thursday, April 27.

Poster Session.

The final presentation of your paper will require your team to create a visual poster to report your research question, hypotheses, methods, and results. We will model an academic conference in which your classmates will walk through the exhibit asking questions and learning about your research. More details about the Poster Session will be given later, however, you should plan to have a solid draft of your final paper to present in class on Tuesday, May 2.

Final Paper

The final paper itself should be about 15-20 pages (double-spaced, 1-inch margins, 12 point Times New Roman font, preferably printed double-sided). The paper is due on Thursday, May 4 in class.

Your final paper should contain the following sections:

A. Introduction/Statement of the Problem – Motivate the research, give the puzzle and underscore its importance for political science.

B. Review of Relevant Literature – the literature review should focus on the question you introduced in part one, not only discuss relevant findings but also discuss how they are a springboard for your research, and point out weaknesses or holes in past research that your research proposes to address.

C. Hypotheses/Expectations – Given your review of the literature, what do you expect to find in your study? What are your hypotheses or expectations for your variable(s) of interest?

Your stated hypothesis should be as specific as possible. For example, do not state that you expect negative campaigning to have an effect on whether people vote. Specify what type of effect. For example, indicate whether all negative ads should have this effect or whether there are particular features of some negative ads that make them especially potent.

D. Study Design/Methods – What method of inquiry was best for your project? How did you conduct your data collection?

E. Results – What evidence did you find in your inquiry? Summarize your results and findings.

F. Conclusion/Discussion -- What do your findings mean? How do they support (or not) your hypotheses? How do they contradict or reflect past findings? What are the larger implications of the study and its findings?

This assignment will require you to find, read, and incorporate scholarly academic readings not included on our syllabus. Many of you are probably curious how many additional readings you will have to do. This will vary by topic, but I anticipate that you will have approximately ten or more additional citations for the proposal.

Important Assignment Dates:

Tuesday, February 21:	One-page description of paper topic due.
Thursday, March 16:	FIVE copies of the research proposal due.
Tuesday, March 21:	Come to class prepared to critique the 4 prospectuses you received.
Mon-Fri., April 3-April 7:	Team conferences with the professor.
Tuesday, April 25:	Data collection must be complete. Bring your data to class with you.
Thursday, April 27:	OPTIONAL: draft due to me in class.
Tuesday, May 2:	Poster session in class.
Thursday, May 4:	Final Paper due in class.

Policies: Remember that proper grammar, correct spelling, and appropriate citation of sources are minimum requirements for acceptable papers. I am assuming that you understand what is meant by the phrase “appropriate citation of sources.” See me if you have questions. **When in doubt, cite it.** Plagiarism need not be intentional. It is better to err on the side of too much citation rather than too little.

If you cite a website, be sure to explain in the text what the source is (ex: if it’s a particular interest group), and be sure to include the date you accessed the webpage in the citation. **DO NOT** put full web addresses for scholarly articles that have a full-text version online. In those cases, put the full journal citation instead.

Late work will be severely docked as outlined in the syllabus. Back up your work early and often (and in multiple places). A computer problem is not an acceptable excuse for not meeting deadlines.

Questions to help organize your approach and narrow your investigation:

What is the general topic I want to investigate?

- o Why am I interested in it?
- o Why should other people be interested in it?
- o What other aspects of politics does this topic relate to?

Who else has written important work on this topic?

- o Do I agree with them?
- o What insights does their work provide?
- o What are remaining questions that merit investigation?

What approach do I plan to use that might help me design a study to address some of those remaining questions?

What are the possible flaws with my approach?

- o What are some alternative hypotheses?

More specific questions to consider:

- What is the specific hypothesis that I want to investigate?
- What specific procedures will I use?
- How will I measure the variables of interest?
 - o Why did I choose these measurements instead of others?
- How can I evaluate the results of my study?
 - o How might these findings contribute to existing knowledge?
 - o What might the political implications of such findings be?

As you write:

Be wary of making grand claims that you do not support with evidence. With every argument you make, ask yourself: “Have I given the reader sufficient reason to believe me?”

And be sure to situate your project in the larger context of existing research on your chosen topic. Remember, view research as a **conversation**. In other words, make sure you include a review of relevant existing literature and make sure you explain how your work builds upon, or contributes to, or makes up for mistakes in, or fills gaps in, existing published research.

NEVER include a table, graph, or chart without discussing it explicitly in the text of your paper. Do not assume that readers will interpret these visual presentations of data in the way that you want them to. Make sure you explain why they are there, what they show, and what you want readers to take away from them. It is acceptable for you to place all tables and graphs at the end of the paper; you do not need to paste them exactly where they are supposed to go in the text.

USE SUBHEADINGS: divide your paper into logical sub-sections. This will help you develop, organize, and express your ideas in a coherent manner. But remember, transitions from one section to the next should not be abrupt or awkward.

In your final paper, be sure to include (preferably in a condensed appendix) the actual tools you use to collect your data. This means, for example, you should include relevant survey questions or mock newspaper articles that you might plan to show to participants.

Finding sources:

The nature of this assignment requires that you delve into political science research. The paper should have a literature review clearly in addition to an articulated hypothesis and research design. Tools that might help you locate relevant literature, such as books and journal articles, include:

- o JSTOR: The Scholarly Journal Archive: www.jstor.org
- o Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI)
- o Worldwide Political Science Abstracts
- o Lexis-Nexis/Academic Universe/Congressional Universe

Note: relying on newspaper and magazine articles is not sufficient. You should be including published academic research in your description of the current state of knowledge regarding your chosen topic.

For finding primary data (you might want to use, for example, to describe your research puzzle), good starting places include:

- o The U.S. Census: www.census.gov
- o Fedstats: www.fedstats.gov
- o The National Journal: www.nationaljournal.com
- o The Pew Center for People and the Press: www.people-press.org
- o The National Election Study
- o The General Social Survey
- o Thomas: searchable database of legislative activity in Congress: <http://thomas.loc.gov/>
- o Public Agenda: public opinion and policy summaries on a variety of issues: www.publicagenda.org
- o National Conference of State Legislatures: lots of good state-level information: www.ncsl.org

I am happy to help people navigate these tools for finding primary and secondary sources. Also consider making an appointment with reference staff at the library.

Tips for successful proofreading:

1. Print your paper and read it out loud. If it sounds awkward as you read it, it will sound awkward when I read it. You will also catch typos this way that you might not find otherwise.
2. Edit.
3. Repeat steps 1 and 2.
4. Make sure your schedule allows you to have a day or two where you DO NOT look at your draft. Then go back and repeat steps 1 and 2.
5. Ask a friend to proofread your paper for you.
6. Offer to proofread your friends' papers, even if they are taking classes you know little about. Evaluating other people's writing can be very valuable in helping you to improve your own writing. The best thing to happen to my writing was for me to start teaching and grading other people's work.
7. Repeat steps 1 and 2 as often as you can.

