

Research Design and Methods

Spring 2026

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Office Aulas 2, Room
Office Hours Weds. 12 - 2 pm

Course Description

This syllabus outlines the research design and methods section of your bloque integrator, *Diseño e implementación de innovaciones públicas*. The bloque allows you to apply your research, writing, and thinking skills to a real problem in political science or public policy. The ultimate goal is for you to produce a high-quality research paper or public policy proposal by the end of the semester. In the research methods section, you will develop a research question and craft a research design to investigate it. As you do so, we will review key aspects of research design, measurement, and hypothesis testing. We will then turn to gathering and analyzing your data and, lastly, to presenting it in a polished paper. I am eager to work with you to investigate some pressing social issues!

Required Texts

Our primary text is:

- Brancati, Dawn. *Social Scientific Research*. Sage, 2018.

You can purchase a Kindle or paperback version on Amazon. Additional articles and book chapters will be made available on Canvas under **Methods – Assigned Readings**.

Assignments

There are three main assignments (*evidencias*) shared across all sections of the course and evaluated collaboratively by your instructors.

In addition, there are two assignments unique to the research design and methods section:

Assignment	Due Date	Percentage
Defining your Research Question	March 27 (5 pm)	4%
Research Design Draft	April 14 (11:59 pm)	4%

Course Policies

Class Norms. We will engage in critical debate—sometimes about contentious topics—in this course. Students will engage in respectful dialogue and must not disparage their classmates. I encourage you to practice taking academic criticism as a way to develop your ideas rather than as an attack on your values.

Attendance. Regular attendance is critical for keeping up with the material. Please email me if you cannot attend a given class and I can help you get caught up.

Late Work. Late assignments will lose 10 percentage points per day. Assignments turned in more than 15 minutes past the deadline will be considered late; assignments not turned in after three days will receive a zero. Reading responses are considered late when submitted more than 15 minutes past the beginning of class.

Office Hours. I am happy to meet during office hours or via Zoom. If you are unavailable during my office hours, please email me at least 24 hours in advance and we will find another time.

Email Policy. Feel free to email me with any questions or comments. I will typically respond within one business day. Please do not expect a response on weekends or after 5 pm. My email is brettbessen@tec.mx.

Flexibility. I am happy to work with you to help you succeed in this course. Let me know if extenuating circumstances make it difficult to attend class or keep up with the material.

Artificial Intelligence. You may use AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT, Claude) to support your learning—for example, to brainstorm ideas, get feedback on clarity, or check grammar. However, all written work submitted for a grade must represent your own thinking and analysis. Submitting AI-generated text as your own work constitutes plagiarism and will be treated accordingly. When in doubt about whether a particular use is appropriate, ask me. Undisclosed AI use on written assignments will result in a failing grade for the assignment and will be reported to the office of academic integrity.

Inclusive Excellence. This course welcomes students of all backgrounds, identities, and perspectives. The study of politics and public policy requires engaging with diverse viewpoints, including ones we may personally disagree with. I expect all students to participate fully and to treat one another with respect. If you ever feel that the classroom environment is not conducive to your learning, please let me know.

Academic Honesty. Plagiarism or cheating will not be tolerated. All assignments must be original work done for this class. Plagiarism will result in a failing grade for the course and will be reported to the office of academic integrity.

Course Schedule

You need to keep up with the assigned readings to be successful in this class. I highly encourage you to print out the readings, annotate them by hand, and bring copies to class. Assigned readings are subject to change—follow Canvas announcements for any amendments. **Assignment due dates are in bold.**

Mon. March 23

4–7 pm

Intro and Asking Good Questions

- Gelman, 2021, “The social sciences are useless. So why do we study them?”
- Brancati, Ch. 3

Tues. March 24

3–7 pm

Concepts, Measures, and Description

- Brancati, Ch. 5 & 15
- Collier and Adcock, 1999, “Democracy and Dichotomies: A Pragmatic Approach to Choices about Concepts”
- Little and Meng, 2024, “Measuring Democratic Backsliding”
- Miller, 2024, “How Little and Meng’s Objective Approach Fails in Democracies”

Fri. March 27 — Assignment 1 due: Defining your Research Question (5 pm)

Mon. April 6

4–6 pm

Crafting Theory

- Brancati, Ch. 6
- Elster, 1989, *Nuts and Bolts for the Social Sciences*, Ch. 1
- Swedberg, 2016, “Before Theory Comes Theorizing”

Tues. April 7

4–6 pm

Method and Case Selection

- Brancati, Ch. 7–9
- King, Keohane, and Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry*, Ch. 1

Thurs. April 9

4–6 pm

Qualitative Methods Overview

- Brancati, Ch. 10, 13, & 14
- Gamboa, 2023, “How Oppositions Fight Back”
- Gonnet and Rodriguez, 2023, “Can I Borrow This?”

Tues. April 14

5–7 pm

Quantitative Methods Overview

- Brancati, Ch. 19–20
 - Keele et al., 2020, “The Causal Interpretation of Estimated Associations in Regression Models”
 - Achen, 2005, “Let’s Put Garbage-Can Regressions and Garbage-Can Probits Where They Belong”
- Assignment 2 due: Research Design Draft (11:59 pm)**

Thurs. April 16

4–6 pm

Writing Your Research Paper

- Outlines, UNC Writing Center
- Stimson, “Professional Writing in Political Science: A Highly Opinionated Essay”

- Strunk and White, *The Elements of Style*, Ch. 2

Fri. April 18 — Research designs due

Mon. April 20 — Proposal Workshop (Bloque event, 4 pm)

Thurs. April 24 — Research designs due

Fri. June 5 — Thesis drafts due

Week of June 8 — Oral Defenses (scheduled individually)

Fri. June 12 — Final thesis due