

**Senior Seminar – Political Attitude Formation & Expression**  
**Political Science #415**

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Class meetings: Wednesday, 6:15-8:55  
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*Course description and requirements:*

This seminar is designed to be the culmination of your undergraduate work in political science. By the end of the semester each student will produce an original research paper of high quality focusing on a question (or questions) relating to the development and/or expression of political attitudes. This is a broad area, ranging from voting behavior, to public opinion formation, expression and measurement, to protest and social movement involvement, and more. You need not limit yourself to research on the United States. Each student is expected to make weekly progress on their project. Graded homework will reinforce this. Students will present various pieces of their projects at several points during the semester, and they will present their complete projects in both a written and oral version near the end of the semester.

Through readings and workshop time, we will examine the steps to good quality political research: developing a literature review and a research design, hypothesis formulation, data collection, analysis, and writing a paper that reports your findings and their implications. The final product will be a paper you proudly will be able to show to a prospective employer or to a graduate or law school admissions committee. I fully expect several of these papers will be of high enough quality to be accepted by our departmental journal, *Res Publica*. This project should display your best work.

We will spend most of our weekly sessions discussing models of political research along with works in progress from each student. Everything we do together this semester will build toward the completion of your seminar papers. As your project develops, you will share your work with the class. You must be prepared to discuss and defend each step of your project at several points, from your literature review through to a highly polished presentation of your final product.

You are expected to develop a meaningful question on a topic related to political attitude formation and/or expression and to present a cogent and reasonably complete analysis of empirical evidence on that question. Several few parameters apply. The paper must be grounded theoretically. That a question and its answer help us think more systematically about politics is precisely and exclusively what makes that question worth asking for political scientists. Your paper must test one or more clear propositions or hypotheses. Second, your research design must have a substantial empirical component. Merely posing an interesting question is insufficient. Substantially answering your research question(s) is expected. Regarding evidence, whether you tend toward quantitative or qualitative work, your methods should be driven by the nature of your question, not the other way around. You must develop the implications of your findings (or consequential non-findings). Telling your reader exactly why your findings matter is crucial. You must answer the “so-what?” question in some detail. Last, you must take great care with the presentation of your work. Documenting sources, explaining your rationale, measurements and analysis, and writing the paper clearly are all vital to your success in this seminar. Successful papers are typically 15 to 25 pages long, plus bibliography and appendices. Refer to the University of Chicago Press style

manual as needed regarding citation and bibliographic form. Please take those matters seriously, as to not do so can lead to plagiarism. See the detailed grading rubric in our LMS for my expectations.

You will present your final paper in class near the end of the semester. Use slides. Be careful not to allow the style of your presentation to overshadow the substance of your presentation. Presentations will occur according to a schedule I will distribute by about mid-semester. Provide me one paper copy of the final version of your paper. Double-space the text, include a title page with an abstract, and a staple (no paper clips) in the upper left corner. No other covers or bindings are encouraged. Late final papers will suffer a 5 percentage point penalty for each day they are late, beginning with the first day, weekends included. Emailing me your late work stops the penalty clock.

Throughout the semester you will have homework. These assignments will be due at the beginning of the following class meeting. Homework delivered later than this will be considered late. Each late assignments will suffer a 5 percentage point reduction for each day it is late. All the written work you hand in must be typed. If you fall behind on your project and are unable satisfactorily to meet homework deadlines, your homework grades will suffer until you catch up to where you should be. Please do not ask for passes on homework assignments. Give me the best you can on time (or very close to on time). Pay close attention to the mechanics of writing on all assignments. Refer to a handbook of standard American English usage if necessary. Visits to the IWU writing center can be very helpful. Both the substantive and stylistic/mechanical aspects of your written work contribute to your grades. See our LMS page for a detailed grading rubric.

Regular attendance is expected, as is regular and thoughtful participation in seminar discussions. Unexcused absences beyond the first carries a penalty of two percentage points off of your overall grade. Every student will present material in class several times. Missing your presentations will seriously impact your participation grade. During those evenings on which you are not scheduled to present material formally, you are expected to offer constructive criticism to those who do present. You will likely learn quite a lot from each other in addition to learning from me and the readings. You should view other students' experiences (both ups and downs) as learning opportunities. You should also see your peers as resources. After all, every student in the seminar will be working on a project related to political attitude formation and/or expression, so you will develop a lot of shared interests and resources with your peers.

*A note on human subjects research:* If you plan to gather data by interviewing or otherwise observing human subjects in an intrusive way, you must first secure the approval of IWU's Institutional Review Board. You can learn about this group at [www.iwu.edu/irb](http://www.iwu.edu/irb). This is not simply my preference; rather, it's required by federal law. If you plan to go this route, you must submit consult with me during the first couple of weeks of the semester, and you must submit your application to the IRB no later than the 3<sup>rd</sup> week of September, as committee's turn-around time is generally 2 to 3 weeks.

With the exception of the text book chapters, the readings assigned below are archived in our LMS. Only one text is required for this course:

*Empirical Research and Writing: A Political Science Student's Practical Guide*, Leanne Powner, Sage/CQ Press, 2015.

You can access this book via Ames Library here: [https://i-share-iwu.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01CARLI\\_IWU/ke7gmu/alma998114997705847](https://i-share-iwu.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01CARLI_IWU/ke7gmu/alma998114997705847)

You need to have read each week's assigned materials before coming to class that week. Be prepared to discuss the readings in class. The schedule of classes below lists the work we will do in class that evening as well as each week's homework assignment on the evening it's assigned (it's due the following week). Read the entries below carefully. Ask if you are unsure of assignments.

*A note on sources:*

The large majority of your sources need to be peer-reviewed, scholarly literature. Materials from legitimate research organizations also have their place, and you may find these useful sources for data. While there are occasions when newspaper or news magazine stories can make useful sources, these cannot be the primary sources. A well-developed bibliography will be a key part of your project. We will discuss this in detail as the semester progresses.

*Grades:*

Final course grades will be assigned as follows: 90-100% = A/A-; 80-89% = B+/B/B-; 70-79% = C+/C/C-; 60-69% = D; below 60% = F. In order to graduate with a political science major you must earn at least a C-minus in this course. I very strongly discourage taking a grade of incomplete in this course. Under no circumstances will a student be granted a grade of incomplete without discussing the matter with me by the end of week 10 (see dates below). Overall course grades are based on four factors:

Homework assignments: 25%

Participation in class discussions: 10%

Oral presentation of your project: 15%

Written version of research paper: 50%

*Academic integrity:*

I am aware that academic dishonesty has become common at some institutions. While I am sure that very few, if any, Illinois Wesleyan students would cheat on class assignments, the university's policy and my policy on academic dishonesty bear repeating. Academic dishonesty fundamentally undermines the mission of the university and cheapens our collective enterprise. Students caught cheating on an exam or engaging in plagiarism on written assignments will receive a failing grade for the course. This includes working on quizzes or exams with others, which is not something you are permitted to do. In cases of academic dishonesty I will also file a formal complaint with the administration. Per the university's academic dishonesty policy, the administration will move to expel from the university any student who is the object of two such substantiated complaints. See the university catalog for further explanation.

Regarding artificial intelligence tools, I have come to think of them a bit like Wikipedia: they can be useful to generate ideas and to point you in potentially useful directions as to what you might want to read and what issues or questions you should think about. For instance, I sometimes find it useful to read the bibliographies of Wikipedia entries, even if I don't particularly trust the accuracy of the entries themselves. If you find AI tools useful as preliminary pointers, you may use them in this way. However, you may not submit written work generated by AI. The assignments in this course are designed to walk you through the research process, step by step. Hence, by design, you will not find AI useful in crafting thoughtfully written sections of your research paper. Given that current AI tools neither fact-check nor know how to holistically integrate the various parts of the text these tools generate, frankly, they make pretty lousy writing partners. I consider any submission of AI generated work – either text or numerical analysis – to be plagiarism.

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*Schedule of class meetings, readings:*

- Week 1                      Overview, getting started on research  
                                 Powner, chapter 1  
                                 Hibbing, Smith, and Alford, chapter 1 from *Predisposed: Liberals, Conservatives, and the Biology of Political Differences*
- Class work:** Review syllabus, expectations, discuss tentative research topics  
**Homework assignment (due next week):** Locate and read 3 articles on your topic from scholarly journals. Read the most relevant articles you can find, not necessarily the easiest to locate. Based on what you learn from these authors, write down 2 or 3 well formulated questions that could form the basis of your own research. By next week's class meeting we will need to agree on a broad research topic. See me before then if we have not already agreed on a topic.
- Week 2                      Literature reviews                      \*Powner, chapter 3  
**Class work:** Library instructional session on bibliographic databases with Chris Sweet (**Ames instructional lab**). Review of research questions, discussion of literature reviews.  
**Homework assignment (due next week):** Find at least 3 additional books or articles on your topic. Write a 3- to 4-page review of what the authors say (you should now have at least 6 of them). Compare and contrast them. Include full citations of works cited (this will be the beginning of your literature review).
- By the end of week 2 you need to visit my office to discuss your project*
- If you plan to use human subjects in your research, you must submit your IRB application by the 3<sup>rd</sup> week of September. Consult with me about this soon.
- Week 3                      Generating testable hypotheses    \* Powner, chapter 2  
**Class work:** Hypothesis building exercise, discussion of literature  
**Homework assignment (due next week):** Within 2-3 pages, re-write your research question and hypotheses. Also respond to the following: describe the theoretical framework of your research. Are there other theoretical approaches that could be used to examine your topic? Why are you not going to use those alternative approaches? Explicitly relate your hypotheses to your approach. What kind of data will you use? What is your unit of analysis? Prepare to present your research question to the class next week. By the end of week 3 you need to consult with at least one other faculty member about your project. Write up a one-page summary of what you learned from that conversation.
- Week 4                      Research design                      \* Powner, chapter 4  
**Class work:** Library instructional session on bibliographic databases with Chris Sweet (**Ames instructional lab**). Students will present their research questions (about 5 minutes each).  
**Homework assignment (due next week):** Write your response to the following:
- 1) Restate your research question as clearly as you can.
  - 2) What is your dependent variable? How do you operationalize it?
  - 3) What are your independent variables? How do you operationalize them?
  - 4) What is your unit of analysis? Justify your choice in terms of your readings.

Write a brief status report of the information or data that you'll need for your analysis. Note: if you plan to use human subjects for your project, you must be ready to turn in your IRB application by this week. See me. Do not delay.

Week 5

Qualitative analysis

\* Powner, chapter 6

**Class work:** Discuss data collection strategies; formal student presentations (5 minutes each) on research design and progress to date.

**Homework assignment (due next week):** Further develop your works cited page. By this point you should have at least 8 to 10 relevant pieces of peer-reviewed literature on your topic (remember that quality matters as much or more than quantity). For each entry in your bibliography, write me a single sentence summarizing how this particular reading will be useful to you. Turn in this annotated bibliography.

Week 6

Approaching quantitative data \* Powner, chapter 7

**Class work:** Practice locating numeric data in some common sources – **Meet at The Ames Library instructional lab:** data scavenger hunt, analysis, and presentations by small teams. The details of week 6, 7, and 8 will depend somewhat on the nature of your projects.

**Homework assignment (due next week):** Locate as many sources of data for your project as you can. Write up a 1-2 page description of what you found. Separately, re-write your literature review based on what you have read so far. This should summarize what others have written and also offer some of your own critique of that work. Turn in both of these documents next week.

Week 7

Working with machine-readable data bases

**Class work:** Working with quantitative data. **Meet at the CLA lab.** Discuss the data you have found for your own project. What are its limitations? Tips on writing a good paper. You will receive a schedule of student paper presentations by this week.

**Homework assignment:** Write the section of your paper that will report the methods and measures you plan to use. This will likely fill about 2 or 3 pages.

Week 8

Quantitative analysis

**Class work:** Refresher on means, medians, x-tab tables, comparisons of means, bivariate and multivariate regression. **Meet at the CLA lab.**

**Homework assignment:** Rewrite the methods and measures section that you began last week. Explain exactly why you are using the measures you plan to use. Polish this to a high level.

Week 9

Writing research designs and analyses

\* Fowler, "The Colbert Bump in Campaign Donations: More Truthful than Truthy," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 41 (#3) (2008)

\* Lieberman & Shaw, "Looking Inward, Looking Outward: ..." *Political Research Quarterly* 53: 215-240 (2000)

\* Powner, chapter 9

**Class work:** Exploring model research designs and data analysis. This is also a good time to check in on writing strategies and how to say exactly what you mean.

**Homework assignment (due next week):** Write the data / evidence analysis section of your paper to the fullest extent you are able, given your progress to date. Answer the questions of what you have found and what you think these findings mean.

Week 10

No class meeting; trouble-shooting instead – I'll be in my office during class meeting time. Please come see me for advice. Be sure to turn in your homework (the research design and analysis sections) by 6:15pm.

**Homework assignment (due next week):** Complete a draft of your entire paper. Hand in entire draft (double-sided printing if possible; stapled; title page with abstract.

Week 11

**Class work:** 5 to 8-minute student presentations of your research design: briefly pose the central question (to remind us), clarify the logic of your design, explain how you will conduct your analysis of evidence.

**Homework:** Write a 1-page summary of what you think is lacking and what you are going to do about it in very specific terms. Turn in this brief summary.

Week 12

**Class work:** Discussion of common problems with data analysis and reporting of findings. Sample of paper presentation by Greg, followed by student Q&A.

**Homework assignment (due next week):** Revise your entire paper. Write a 1-page summary of what you think is lacking. The more detail, the better. Turn in only your 1-page summary along with the introductory section of your paper to my office by noon on Monday the 20<sup>th</sup>.

Week 13

No class – Thanksgiving break

Week 14

**Student presentations**

Week 15

**Student presentations**

Your final version of the paper is due to my office by noon on \_\_\_\_.

Consult the check-list document located in our LMS.