

Note from instructor: The Quantitative Analysis section, described starting on Pg. 4, is particularly relevant to QCR ILO 2.



## Semester Research Project (55% of Course Grade)

As a major component of this course, you will write a mixed methods research paper that seeks to answer a social science research question and draws on at least two of the methods (one qualitative, one quantitative) covered in class. The goal of this assignment is twofold: first, it will provide you an opportunity to engage in basic research on a political science question of interest to you; and second, it will allow you to compare and contrast the types of claims and conclusions that can be drawn when using different types of research methods.

The research project is broken into five separate submissions, with deadlines spread across the semester. This means that your project is *iterative* in nature; you are free (and expected) to alter, update, and revise earlier assignments in light of my feedback and your own judgement as you confront new challenges and opportunities in the research process and build toward your final submission.

### How To Submit

You will use a **single Google Doc** throughout the semester for this assignment, and will submit this document using the appropriate links on our Moodle page for the course. You may title it any way you like, and are free to format the paper in whatever way makes the most sense to you. Note that once you submit your document on Moodle, ownership of the file is given to me until I return it back to you. That means you will not be able to make edits after submitting the file, and I will have full access to the

document's version history. While you are free to use online resources to help you with this assignment, I expect your writing to be your own and will be checking the version history for any unusual activity.

Below I've provided more detailed information about the requirements and expectations for each of the five required submissions.

### **Research Paper Topic Proposal (5% of Course Grade)**

This component consists of a 1-to-2 paragraph description of your research topic, clear definitions of relevant concepts, your research question(s), any hypotheses you plan to test, and initial thoughts about potential indicators at this early stage of the project. This component is due by **11:59 pm on Monday, September 29th**. While you are not required to meet with me before submitting your topic proposal, I am always happy to meet and I would love to chat about your research interests!

### **Literature Review (10% of Course Grade)**

Next, you will write a literature review that summarizes and synthesizes existing scholarship on your topic. This component will help you identify key debates, theoretical approaches, and gaps in the research. Your goal is to demonstrate an understanding of how scholars have approached your topic and to begin situating your own research question within that conversation. Remember, a good literature review provides a *synthesis* of previous research and *critically evaluates* the strengths and weaknesses of existing research. The specific requirements for this component are as follows:

- Includes a minimum of 10 academic sources;
- Is between 800-1200 words long;
- Includes a properly formatted bibliography (using APA or Chicago citation styles);
- And is submitted by 11:59 pm on Monday, October 13th

After learning more about what existing research has found with regards to your research topic, you may also wish to revise your research question and any hypotheses from your first submission. Spending some time on this now will save you a great deal of time later in the semester once you begin your actual analyses.

### **Qualitative Analysis (15% of Course Grade)**

**NOTE: ALL STUDENTS ARE REQUIRED TO HAVE AT LEAST ONE MEETING WITH ME TO DISCUSS YOUR QUALITATIVE RESEARCH DESIGN BEFORE BEGINNING DATA COLLECTION.**

You will conduct a small-scale **qualitative** analysis using one or more of the methods we cover, such as comparative case studies, process tracing, interviews, ethnography, or archival research. You'll analyze your chosen materials systematically and connect your findings to your research question. The aim is to

gain experience with the qualitative methods of political science research and to uncover insights that numbers alone cannot provide. The specific requirements for this component are as follows:

- Is approximately 1500-2500 words long;
- Draws on primary sources or original (i.e. you gathered it yourself) qualitative data;
- States the hypotheses you plan to test with this data;
- Includes a detailed methodology section;
  - What this section looks like is contingent on the nature of your project, but there are a few good principles to keep in mind:
    - Be as transparent as possible: What method are you using? What sort of data are you using? Where did you get the data in the first place?
    - Make an argument for the validity and reliability of your approach
    - Justify your case selection or units of analysis
    - Justify the evidence to which you are attending (e.g. Why do you focus on certain statements from interviewees and not others?)
    - Explain to the reader why they should believe in your conclusions, given your qualitative design – a methods section is really an argument that your approach is rock solid
- Includes a section describing your results and analysis;
  - For example, this might be where:
    - you present interview data and interpret results;
    - you walk through a careful process tracing result of a government in transition
    - you provide a “thick description” of a community’s political struggles
  - As with any paper, this needs to be organized, and you need to clearly show how your fresh and original look at the evidence is supporting your thesis (i.e. your emerging answer to your research question)
- And is submitted by 11:59 pm on Monday, November 10th

This component is the heart and soul of a traditional qualitative research paper. Even though we are removing some of the other elements (e.g. an introduction; a conclusion), you should think of this as a more traditional academic essay. A few other recommendations to keep in mind:

Be sure that your qualitative analysis **flows naturally from your literature review**. Many other smart, hardworking people have investigated similar questions before, and you want your own research to clearly speak to those same issues. This ensures that a reader will understand why your question is important, and what new information your research brings to bear on that question.

Be sure to **make an actual argument**. Part of my assessment will be whether the evidence supports your argument. If I can’t tell what the argument is in the first place, no amount of evidence (however good) will help improve your paper. Your argument is likely to be causal or explanatory, though in some cases you might argue that a particular typology (or the like) is most appropriate to understand a particular issue. In either event, you should be able to show this

paper to someone who knows very little about the topic, and they should be able to discern your argument, and what evidence is used to support it.

Be sure to **acknowledge your method's limitations**. This might be particularly appropriate to include in the methodology section. For example, perhaps there are some validity issues with your dependent variable. While there may be reasons your design isn't perfect, you can (and should) argue that this is the best possible approach given resources, etc.

Be sure to keep everything we've talked about in class in mind. I am assessing your knowledge of the research process by seeing how well you **apply class concepts** to this project. Anticipate possible objections, and justify your approach and your conclusions.

Finally, **do not be afraid to use headings and subheadings!** These only serve to help guide your reader and organize your thoughts. For example, if your methodology selection has two main components, say, "case selection" and "results," you should feel empowered to organize your paper with subheadings for these topics.

## **Quantitative Analysis (15% of Course Grade)**

**NOTE: ALL STUDENTS ARE REQUIRED TO HAVE AT LEAST ONE MEETING WITH ME TO DISCUSS YOUR QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH DESIGN BEFORE BEGINNING DATA COLLECTION.**

In addition to the analysis above, you will conduct a small-scale **quantitative** analysis using one or more of the methods we cover, drawing on content analysis, surveys, experiments, or other observational data (including any statistical analyses). As before, you'll analyze your chosen materials systematically and connect your findings to your research question. The aim is to gain experience with the quantitative methods of political science research and to uncover insights enabled by the precision of mathematics. The specific requirements for this component are as follows:

- Is approximately 1500-2500 words long;
- Draws on primary sources or original (i.e. you gathered it yourself) quantitative data;
- States the hypotheses you plan to test with this data;
- Includes a detailed methodology section;
  - What this section looks like is contingent on the nature of your project, but there are a few good principles to keep in mind:
    - Be as transparent as possible: What method are you using? What sort of data are you using? Where did you get the data in the first place?
    - Make an argument for the validity and reliability of your approach (i.e. why did you use a survey, experiment, observational data, etc.)
    - Explain and justify your measurement approach: How did you operationalize the constructs at hand? Any weakness we should know about? Any important control variables we are accounting for?

- Explain your analytical approach (i.e. what are the statistical tests you used, and why did you use them?)
  - Explain to the reader why they should believe in your conclusions, given your quantitative design – remember, a methods section is really an argument that your approach is rock solid
- Includes a section describing your results and analysis;
  - For example, this might be where:
    - you begin with some **descriptive statistics** to give the reader a feel for the data, before moving into a test of your hypothesis;
    - you present group means and test for statistically significant differences;
    - you walk through a careful process tracing result of a government in transition
    - you interpret the results of a multiple regression analysis
  - As with any paper, this needs to be organized, and you need to clearly show how your fresh and original look at the evidence is supporting your thesis (i.e. your emerging answer to your research question)
- And is submitted by 11:59 pm on Friday, December 5th

Like before, this component is the heart and soul of a traditional quantitative research paper. Even though we are removing some of the other elements (e.g. an introduction; a conclusion), you should think of this as a more traditional academic essay. A few other recommendations to keep in mind:

Be sure that your quantitative analysis **flows naturally from your literature review**. Many other smart, hardworking people have investigated similar questions before, and you want your own research to clearly speak to those same issues. This ensures that a reader will understand why your question is important, and what new information your research brings to bear on that question.

Be sure to **make an actual argument**. Part of my assessment will be whether the evidence supports your argument. Moreover, keep in mind that **your results do not speak for themselves**. For example, if you ran a regression, don't just say something like "according to my regression results, my theory is correct." Interpret the coefficient of interest and the associated p-value. Interpret any control variables. What does the overall model fit look like?

Be sure to **acknowledge your method's limitations**. This might be particularly appropriate to include in the methodology section. For example, perhaps there are some validity issues with your dependent variable. While there may be reasons your design isn't perfect, you can (and should) argue that this is the best possible approach given resources, etc.

Be sure to keep everything we've talked about in class in mind. I am assessing your knowledge of the research process by seeing how well you **apply class concepts** to this project. Anticipate possible objections, and justify your approach and your conclusions.

Finally, **do not be afraid to use headings and subheadings!** These only serve to help guide your reader and organize your thoughts. For example, if your methodology selection has two main

components, say, “case selection” and “results,” you should feel empowered to organize your paper with subheadings for these topics.

## **Final Submission (10% of Course Grade)**

Your final submission is a polished, mixed-methods research paper that brings together the work you’ve done throughout the semester. Building on your literature review, quantitative analysis, and qualitative analysis, your paper should clearly state a research question, explain your methods, and present your findings in a coherent and compelling argument. Since you will have already submitted and received feedback on each component, this final paper is your opportunity to refine your work, integrate the parts into a unified whole, and demonstrate your growth as a political science researcher. **Most importantly, your final submission should include a new section (replacing a traditional conclusion) that discusses your experiences with both of the methods (qualitative & quantitative) you chose and the relative strengths and weaknesses of those approaches to answering your research question.** The specific requirements for this component are as follows:

- You final submission should contain all the following elements:
  - A brief (1-2 paragraph) introduction;
  - Your literature review;
  - Your qualitative analysis;
  - Your quantitative analysis;
  - A reflection on the strengths and weaknesses of the two methods you used
    - This section should be somewhere between 500-1000 words;
    - Should discuss your experiences with the methods (e.g. challenges, obstacles, joys, or anything else about how it felt to actually do the research);
    - Should discuss the strengths and weaknesses of **both** methods;
    - Should conclude with some thoughts about the kinds of knowledge or conclusions you were able to reach using each method, including whether you think your qualitative, quantitative, or both methods in tandem were best suited to your research question;
  - A properly formatted bibliography;
  - An appendix containing the specific scripts or questions used to collect your data, **if relevant** (e.g. interviews, surveys, experimental treatments, etc.);
- And is submitted by Monday, December 15th at 11:59pm