PSC 8109: Dissertation Development Workshop  
Department of Political Science  
Fall 2016  
Tuesdays, 11:10-1:00pm  
George Washington University  
Monroe 450

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Office hours: Open-door policy for graduate students or email to schedule appointment.

Description
This course is about formulating, designing, and executing a great political science research project. In your case, this is about your dissertation, though what we’ll do in this course is applicable to any sort of political science project (article, book, dissertation). The course is designed to facilitate the completion of a dissertation prospectus, which is a blueprint for your entire dissertation research project. By the end of the fall semester, you will write a draft of your dissertation prospectus. This may not be the final draft of your prospectus. But it will provide a foundation for your actual prospectus that you will be circulating to and getting feedback on from your adviser and dissertation committee members.

Learning Outcomes
1. Produce a draft of a dissertation prospectus.

Recommended Books (to read on your own)

Assignments
The whole course, including the readings and class discussions, is structured around 6 core assignments, which are designed to facilitate the building of a dissertation prospectus. The course culminates in the completion of and presentation of a dissertation prospectus draft. I will be building in a public submission and peer-review component to the course, which will institutionalize the practice of sending your ideas and work to others for feedback. I will occasionally seek out faculty feedback, either in writing or in class.

1. Three Ideas: Write a brief (one paragraph for each idea) description of three different research ideas you believe could be feasible dissertations topics. Due Friday, Sept. 9

2. Concept Paper: Pick a concept that is a centerpiece of your dissertation idea. Define it, discuss it, describe how it has been characterized and defined in the literature. 3-4 pp. For many of you, the concept you choose will be related to your dependent variable. For others, it will be related to an independent variable. Either way, it should be a key concept that is central to your analysis. Due Friday, Sept. 23

3. Five Most Important Works: Briefly describe the five most important scholarly works (journal articles and books) to your core research idea and interest. Discuss why they are important and
relevant to your work and how your research seeks to fill in gaps left by these works. Due **Friday, Oct. 7**.

4. **Characterizing the Literature:** I refrain from calling this a “literature review” because I don’t want it to be merely a regurgitation of past work (e.g., Author A argues this. Author B contends that this occurs. Author C claims that X1 causes Y). There’s an art to writing about past work, with the key being using past work to tell a story about where the literature is regarding your research question, where the holes are, where the controversies are. There’s commentary on this as well. 10-15 pp. Due **Friday, Oct. 14**

5. **Research Question, Puzzle, Theory:** Here, you begin crafting and framing your research idea. Approx. 12-15 pp. Due **Friday, Oct. 28**

   Elements that should be included:
   a. Introduction, including research question and puzzle, “so what?” [2-3pp]
   b. A brief theory section, including your “story,” theoretical mechanisms, hypotheses/empirical implications, and alternative explanations. [5-7pp]
   c. Plausibility demonstration or motivating case that demonstrates some support for your story. [3-4pp]
   d. Begin building bridge from theory to empirics: How will you know if you’re right or wrong? [2-3pp]

6. **Research Design and Data Plan:** How will you execute the research? What types of designs and data will you be analyzing? What types of analyses are you doing and what unique leverage do they give you? You want to provide a sufficient level of detail such that your dissertation committee can envision what this dissertation would look like. Approx. 10 pp. Due **Friday, Nov. 11**

7. **Preliminary Draft of Dissertation Prospectus (in preparation for presentations):** Due **Thurs., Nov. 31**

8. **FINAL Draft of Dissertation Prospectus:** Due end of Finals Week (TBA)
COURSE SCHEDULE

1. Tuesday, Aug. 30: Introduction

2. Tuesday, Sept. 6: Great Idea!

   * Three Ideas Due Friday, Sept. 9 *

3. Tuesday, Sept. 13: Three Ideas Presentations

4. Tuesday, Sept. 20: Concepts, Measurement, Descriptive Inference

   * Concept Paper Due Friday, Sept. 23 *

5. Tuesday, Sept. 27: Concept Paper Presentations

6. Tuesday, Oct. 4: Characterizing the Literature, aka, “Lit Review”
   • Skocpol, Theda et al. American Political Science Review.

   * Five Most Important Works Due Friday, Oct. 7 *

7. Tuesday, Oct. 11: Five Most Important Works Presentations

   * Preliminary Literature Characterization (“Review”) Due Friday, Oct. 14 *

8. Tuesday, Oct. 18: Puzzling, Formulating Research Questions, and Theorizing

   Articles with “A Theory of” or “A Model of”
Articles without “A Theory of” or “A Model of”


** No Class Oct. 25, Fall Break **

* Research Question, Puzzle, Theory Paper Due Friday, Oct. 28 *

9. Tuesday, Nov. 1: Research Question, Puzzle, Theory Paper Presentations

10. Tuesday, Nov. 8: Research Design and Data Analysis; Research Ethics

• GWU CITI Training. http://humanresearch.gwu.edu/collaborative-irb-training-initiativeciti

• Milgram, Stanley. “Some Conditions of Obedience and Disobedience to Authority.” Human Relations 18: 57-76.

• Humphreys, Macartan, Raul Sanchez de la Sierra and Peter van der Windt. “Fishing.” Political Analysis.


* Research Design and Data Plan Paper Due Friday, Nov. 11 *

11. Tuesday, Nov. 15: Research Design and Data Plan Presentations

** Tuesday, Nov. 22: No Class, Work on Drafts of Dissertation Prospectus

** Tuesday, Nov. 29: No Class, Work on Drafts of Dissertation Prospectus

* Preliminary Drafts of Dissertation Prospectus Due Thursday, Nov. 31 *

12. Tuesday, Dec. 6: Dissertation Prospectus Presentations, Part I

13. TBA: Dissertation Prospectus Presentations, Part II