POLS 103 A
Research project

Updated on March 27, 2020

The primary purpose of the research project is to help you to develop your research skills and gain hands-on experience of conducting your own research.

The research project has two primary components: the research proposal and the research essay. In both assignments, you will answer one of the following questions:

1) Is democratic backsliding more likely in federal or in unitary political systems? Discuss with reference to at least two countries of your choice that are not the United States.
2) Why is it in the interest of some political parties, but not others, to employ populist electoral tactics? Discuss with reference to at least two political parties operating in the same country that is not the United States.
3) What electoral system is most appropriate in a country with a high level of economic inequality? Why is this the case? Discuss with reference to at least two countries of your choice that are not the United States.
4) *Is political mobilization of collective identities or of ideological commitments a more successful political strategy? Discuss with reference to at least two political leaders or movements from outside the United States. (Since the spring break has been extended in response to the coronavirus pandemic, we will not have time to discuss collective identities in the course. For this reason, I advise against answering this research project question, but I leave it on the list in case you have already begun work on your research proposal.)*

Library appointment

I recognize that for most of you this assignment will be the first time you have to look for scholarly sources outside the syllabus. Literature search can be an intimidating and difficult-to-navigate process for freshmen. The library staff will help you to identify high-quality, appropriate, and relevant sources for the research project. To book a Google Chat or Zoom appointment with a librarian, you can use one of the following two links:
http://library.sewanee.edu/pols103 or
http://sewanee.libcal.com/appointment/8124.
Meeting with a librarian is a required component of the research project. I will deduct 10% of the research proposal grade if you do not meet with a librarian prior to the research proposal submission deadline.

Research proposal

The purpose of the research proposal is to assist you in selecting your essay question, locating sources, and organizing your ideas as well as to provide you with feedback about your work that you can use as you prepare your research essay.

The proposal should be 1 page long. It should:
a) identify your selected question;
b) state your thesis;

c) outline the key arguments that you intend to advance in support of that thesis;

d) explain your research design; and

e) explain what scholarly and nonacademic sources you will draw on in your research essay.

Like all written assignments in the course, the proposal should be double-spaced with one-inch margins in Times New Roman 12-point font.

You should attach a one-page proposed bibliography to your proposal. You do not need to have read all the sources prior to proposal submission, but you will need to justify your choices. All citations should follow the Chicago author-date style. (This is the style used in the syllabus.)

The list of sources does not count towards the specified assignment length. If you choose to include a cover page, it also does not count towards the assignment length.

The proposal is due on April 8.

Because of the transition to online learning, the research proposal workshop originally scheduled in the course is not feasible. I will provide you with written feedback on the research proposal unless you prefer to receive in-person, spoken feedback, in which case we will schedule a Zoom meeting.

Research essay

In the research essay you will build on the work you did while preparing the research proposal and develop a cogent and articulate argument that demonstrates your knowledge and critical assessment of the existing scholarship—both covered in the course and located through your own literature search—on the topic and ability to use empirical evidence found in secondary sources to develop your own explanation. The research essay must be on the same topic as the research proposal.

The essay should be 4 pages long and follow the standard structure of a university essay: with an introduction—and, crucially, a thesis statement—main body, and conclusion. Make sure that you clearly state your argument in the introduction, determine its scope, define the key concepts, support your assertions with evidence (citing any contrary views or evidence as relevant), and conclude by summarizing your findings and outlining any questions or avenues that may require future research. The essay-writing tips handout I distributed earlier this semester offers suggestions on building your argument and structuring your essay that you should follow in this assignment.

Like all written assignments in the course, the essay should be double-spaced with one-inch margins in Times New Roman 12-point font. It should draw upon at least 6-7 *academic* sources; you may also use nonacademic sources. All citations should follow the Chicago author-date style. (This is the style used in the syllabus.)

The list of sources does not count towards the specified assignment length. If you choose to include a cover page, it also does not count towards the assignment length.

Assessment of the essay will be in two parts.

First, you will prepare and submit to me an initial draft of your research essay. The initial draft is due on April 20. I will read the draft, assign the first grade for the essay, and provide you with feedback.

Second, you will revise the essay based on received feedback. You will submit the final draft of the essay along with the initial draft that you will have received from me. The final draft is due on April 29. The second grade for the essay will assess the improvement that you have made to the assignment as well as the quality of your research and presentation and the cogency of your argument.

Please submit the graded copy of the proposal and, if applicable, of the initial draft of the research essay with your research essay draft.

I strongly advise you to keep rough and draft work *and* final copies of all of your assignments. You should keep all assignments until the marked assignments have been returned to you and the grades have been posted. You must also retain the initial drafts of your assignments until you can resubmit them along with the final drafts.

I will apply a late submission penalty of 1% of the assignment grade per weekday (Monday to Friday) to the final draft of the research essay if submitted after the submission deadline.

Research proposal rubric

	Failure	Below average	Average	Good	Excellent
Thesis statement and argument outline	Missing, does not address the question, or is not comprehensible. Shows limited or no understanding of the topic.	The proposal seems to respond to the question, but the thesis and argument outline are unclear.	The thesis answers the question and is focused, but could be stated better and in a more focused way. The outlined argument may not be compelling.	The thesis answers the question and is focused. An outline of a reasonably compelling argument is developed.	The thesis is focused, clear, and directly answers the question. An outline of a compelling argument is developed.
Sources	Missing, does not explain what data will be used in the paper.	Provides a list of sources, but does not explain their relevance or value.	Provides a list of sources and provides a poorly-developed explanation of their relevance or value.	Provides a list of sources and provides some explanation of their relevance or value.	Provides an extensive list of sources and provides comprehensive explanation of their relevance and value.
Research design	The research design is not explained.	At least one of the following research design components is identified: overall research design; case selection; independent and dependent variables.	Some of the following research design components are identified: overall research design; case selection; independent and dependent variables. Justification of the research design choices is not entirely convincing.	Most of the following research design components are identified: overall research design; case selection; independent and dependent variables. Justification of the research design choices is mostly convincing.	All of the following research design components are identified: overall research design; case selection; independent and dependent variables. Justification of the research design choices is convincing.
Organization, writing style, spelling, and grammar	Weak or no organization. Random expression of ideas. Thoughts are expressed in a disjointed or incomprehensible way. Writing style, spelling, and grammar need major improvement. The proposal is too short or too long.	The proposal needs better transition and flow between ideas. Some awkward and confusing passages detract from a thorough understanding of the argument. The proposal follows the length / page	Mostly logical progression of ideas, but the writer must do more to make connections. Some awkward and confusing passages detract from a thorough understanding of the argument. The proposal follows the length / page	Mostly logical progression of ideas, but the writer must do more to make connections. A few distracting errors or awkward phrasing. The proposal follows the length / page count instructions.	Good flow or progression of ideas and good presentation of how the points made fit into a broader argument. Eloquent expression of ideas with no distracting or obvious grammatical or mechanical errors. The proposal follows the length

		count instructions.	count instructions.		/ page count instructions.
Citations, quotations, and bibliography	Missing or inadequate citations, insufficient number of sources.	Referencing does not follow the required citation style. In some cases excessive use of quotations. Sufficient number of sources.	Referencing follows the required citation style, with some errors. Sufficient number of sources.	Mostly correct referencing, with a few minor errors. Sufficient number of sources.	Correct referencing. Number of sources which is at least sufficient and likely exceeds the requirements.
Library appointment	Student has not met with a librarian	Student has met with a librarian			

Research essay initial draft rubric

	Failure	Below average	Average	Good	Excellent
Thesis statement and argument outline	The essay does not address the question and provide a thesis statement, or the thesis statement is not comprehensible. The scope of the argument is unclear. Key concepts are not defined. The essay shows limited or no understanding of the topic.	The essay seems to respond to the question, but the thesis and argument outline are unclear. The scope of the argument is addressed, but may not be clear. Definitions of key concepts are provided, but may not be clear.	The thesis answers the question and is focused, but could be stated better and in a more focused way. The outlined argument may not be compelling. Definitions of key concepts are provided, but may not be clear.	The thesis answers the question and is focused. An outline of a reasonably compelling argument is developed. The essay defines the scope of the argument and key concepts.	The thesis is focused, clear, and directly answers the question. An outline of a compelling argument is developed. The essay defines the scope of the argument and key concepts. The essay shows a good understanding of the topic.
Research design	The research design is not explained.	At least one of the following research design components is identified: overall research design; case selection; independent and dependent variables.	Some of the following research design components are identified: overall research design; case selection; independent and dependent variables. Justification of the research design choices is not entirely convincing.	Most of the following research design components are identified: overall research design; case selection; independent and dependent variables. Justification of the research design choices is mostly convincing.	All of the following research design components are identified: overall research design; case selection; independent and dependent variables. Justification of the research design choices is convincing.
Literature outline and sources	The essay does not address the existing literature or identify the sources on which it is based.	The essay addresses the literature and sources, but shows limited understanding of them and does not explain their relevance and value.	The essay provides an outline of the literature and a list of sources. It demonstrates some understanding of the literature and data.	The essay provides an outline of the literature and a list of sources. It demonstrates good understanding of the literature and data.	The essay provides an outline of the literature and an extensive list of sources. It demonstrates an excellent understanding of the literature and provides a comprehensive explanation of the relevance and value of the data on which it is based.
Cogency of the argument	The argument is simplistic and/or poorly developed. Analysis indicates little understanding of the topic and no	The essay is somewhat developed, but may not have a clear focus and be logically	The essay is somewhat developed. Analysis displays some understanding of	The argument has a clear focus. It is logically constructed and internally coherent, but not	The argument has a clear focus. It is logically constructed and internally coherent. Analysis

	originality of thought.	constructed and internally coherent. Analysis displays some understanding of the topic, but little originality of thought.	the topic and, in some cases, some originality of thought.	fully developed or deficient in some other way. Analysis displays a solid grasp of the topic and some originality of thought.	displays a solid grasp of the topic and originality of thought.
Organization, writing style, spelling, and grammar	Weak or no organization. Random expression of ideas. Thoughts are expressed in a disjointed or incomprehensible way. Writing style, spelling, and grammar need major improvement. The essay is too short or too long.	The essay needs better transition and flow between ideas. Some awkward and confusing passages detract from a thorough understanding of the essay. The essay follows the length / page count instructions.	Mostly logical progression of ideas, but the writer must do more to make connections. Some awkward and confusing passages detract from a thorough understanding of the essay. The essay follows the length / page count instructions.	Mostly logical progression of ideas, but the writer must do more to make connections. A few distracting errors or awkward phrasing. The essay follows the length / page count instructions.	Good flow or progression of ideas and good presentation of how the points made fit into a broader argument. Eloquent expression of ideas with no distracting or obvious grammatical or mechanical errors. The essay follows the length / page count instructions.
Citations, quotations, and bibliography	Missing or inadequate citations, insufficient number of sources.	Referencing does not follow the required citation style. In some cases excessive use of quotations. Sufficient number of sources.	Referencing follows the required citation style, with some errors. Sufficient number of sources.	Mostly correct referencing, with a few minor errors. Sufficient number of sources.	Correct referencing. Number of sources which is at least sufficient and likely exceeds the requirements.
Proposal feedback	Proposal feedback is not addressed.	Some effort has been made to incorporate proposal feedback into the essay.	Proposal feedback has been incorporated into the essay, but issues identified in the proposal have not been fully addressed.	Proposal feedback has been incorporated into the essay and there is some evidence of critical reflection about the feedback.	Proposal feedback has been incorporated into the essay and the student has evidently reflected on the feedback.

Research essay final draft rubric

	Failure	Below average	Average	Good	Excellent
Thesis statement and argument outline	The essay does not address the question and provide a thesis statement, or the thesis statement is not comprehensible. The scope of the argument is unclear. Key concepts are not defined. The essay shows limited or no understanding of the topic.	The essay seems to respond to the question, but the thesis and argument outline are unclear. The scope of the argument is addressed, but may not be clear. Definitions of key concepts are provided, but may not be clear.	The thesis answers the question and is focused, but could be stated better and in a more focused way. The outlined argument may not be compelling. Definitions of key concepts are provided, but may not be clear.	The thesis answers the question and is focused. An outline of a reasonably compelling argument is developed. The essay defines the scope of the argument and key concepts.	The thesis is focused, clear, and directly answers the question. An outline of a compelling argument is developed. The essay defines the scope of the argument and key concepts. The essay shows a good understanding of the topic.
Research design	The research design is not explained.	At least one of the following research design components is identified: overall research design; case selection; independent and dependent variables.	Some of the following research design components are identified: overall research design; case selection; independent and dependent variables. Justification of the research design choices is not entirely convincing.	Most of the following research design components are identified: overall research design; case selection; independent and dependent variables. Justification of the research design choices is mostly convincing.	All of the following research design components are identified: overall research design; case selection; independent and dependent variables. Justification of the research design choices is convincing.
Literature outline and sources	The essay does not address the existing literature or identify the sources on which it is based.	The essay addresses the literature and sources, but shows limited understanding of them and does not explain their relevance and value.	The essay provides an outline of the literature and a list of sources. It demonstrates some understanding of the literature and data.	The essay provides an outline of the literature and a list of sources. It demonstrates good understanding of the literature and data.	The essay provides an outline of the literature and an extensive list of sources. It demonstrates an excellent understanding of the literature and provides a comprehensive explanation of the relevance and value of the data on which it is based.

Literature critique	The essay does not address the limitations of the existing literature.	The essay addresses the limitations of the literature, but does so excessively briefly and/or in a reductive, superficial, or confusing way.	The essay addresses the limitations of the literature, but does not provide a proper critique of the existing literature.	The essay provides an interesting, but not fully developed (or deficient in some other way) critique of the existing literature.	The essay provides a compelling and well-developed (given the nature of the assignment) critique of the literature.
Cogency of the argument	The argument is simplistic and/or poorly developed. Analysis indicates little understanding of the topic and no originality of thought.	The essay is somewhat developed, but may not have a clear focus and be logically constructed and internally coherent. Analysis displays some understanding of the topic, but little originality of thought.	The essay is somewhat developed. Analysis displays some understanding of the topic and, in some cases, some originality of thought.	The argument has a clear focus. It is logically constructed and internally coherent, but not fully developed or deficient in some other way. Analysis displays a solid grasp of the topic and some originality of thought.	The argument has a clear focus. It is logically constructed and internally coherent. Analysis displays a solid grasp of the topic and originality of thought.
Organization, writing style, spelling, and grammar	Weak or no organization. Random expression of ideas. Thoughts are expressed in a disjointed or incomprehensible way. Writing style, spelling, and grammar need major improvement. The essay is too short or too long.	The essay needs better transition and flow between ideas. Some awkward and confusing passages detract from a thorough understanding of the essay. The essay follows the length / page count instructions.	Mostly logical progression of ideas, but the writer must do more to make connections. Some awkward and confusing passages detract from a thorough understanding of the essay. The essay follows the length / page count instructions.	Mostly logical progression of ideas, but the writer must do more to make connections. A few distracting errors or awkward phrasing. The essay follows the length / page count instructions.	Good flow or progression of ideas and good presentation of how the points made fit into a broader argument. Eloquent expression of ideas with no distracting or obvious grammatical or mechanical errors. The essay follows the length / page count instructions.
Citations, quotations, and bibliography	Missing or inadequate citations, insufficient number of sources.	Referencing does not follow the required citation style. In some cases excessive use of quotations. Sufficient number of sources.	Referencing follows the required citation style, with some errors. Sufficient number of sources.	Mostly correct referencing, with a few minor errors. Sufficient number of sources.	Correct referencing. Number of sources which is at least sufficient and likely exceeds the requirements.

Initial draft feedback	Initial draft feedback is not addressed.	Some effort has been made to incorporate initial draft feedback into the essay.	Initial draft has been incorporated into the essay, but issues identified in the proposal have not been fully addressed.	Initial draft has been incorporated into the essay and there is some evidence of critical reflection about the feedback.	Initial draft has been incorporated into the essay and the student has evidently reflected on the feedback.