

PLS 210
Research design instructions

In this assignment, the second component of your research project, you will build on your review of the scholarly literature on your chosen research topic and detail the design a project that 1) addresses (some of) the gap(s) in that literature that you have identified and 2) can provide an answer to your research question. Your research design should specify all the constituent parts of research projects discussed in the course with the exception of the literature review, which you have already completed, and comprehensive discussion of data collection and analysis, which you will undertake in the third, final component of your research project. Specifically, you will need to detail the following elements of your research project and, crucially, explain why your choices are appropriate for your particular topic:

- 1) Limitation(s) of the scholarly literature that your research project is intended to address.
- 2) Research question and the rationale for your choice of the question, which should build on your identification of the existing literature's limitations.
- 3) Hypothesis or hypotheses and a brief explanation of their formulation. Optionally, you may provide a more complete explanation, i.e. develop a fully-fledged theory, but note that this is a very difficult task.
- 4) Definitions of key concepts.
- 5) Measures that you intend to use to connect the concepts to the empirical phenomena that you investigate in your project. It is very important that you discuss the rationale for your choices of measures and address challenges to their validity and reliability.
- 6) Selection of cases, along with its justification, including explanation of its appropriateness in the context of your project and its advantages and limitations.
- 7) Discussion of the inferential benefits and drawbacks of your research design, that is, an explanation of the kinds of inferences your design makes possible, the assistance it offers in answering your research question, and the disadvantages of using this design to study your research topic.
- 8) Brief identification of the data collection methods that you intend to use in your research project. It should be limited to specification of the approximate number and kind of observations that you will collect for the project using one or more of the data collection methods covered in the course. For example, you may write that you plan to conduct approximately ten interviews with local government officials or review 200 newspaper articles on your research topic. Remember that you will need to collect those data, so make sure that your plans are feasible.

You are not bound by the structure of the assignment suggested by the foregoing points and you are welcome to move individual elements of your research design around if you think it helps you to better organize the assignment. That said, the structure of most excellent assignments is likely to approximate the order of the eight points. In addition, the assignment should start with 1) a clear and concise overview of the research design that very briefly introduces its primary constituent parts, with more details about them provided in the following 2) main body, which should also discuss the rationale for your choices. A separate conclusion is optional, but you may want to include one to tie up any loose ends from your explanation of the research design.

The assignment should be no shorter than 1,000 words long. There is no upper word count limit and you may write a longer assignment if you think you need additional space. However, highest-quality assignments are likely to explain the research designs they detail with concision and precision,

providing only the information that the reader needs to develop a good understanding of the research project, and avoiding superfluous information.

You may include a list of sources if you refer to them in the assignment. It does not count towards the specified assignment length. Neither does a cover page if you choose to include one.

The assignment should be double-spaced with one-inch margins in Times New Roman 12-point font. All citations should follow the American Political Science Association Style Manual (<https://connect.apsanet.org/stylemanual/>), which is the citation style used in the course syllabus.

The assignment is worth 15% of the course grade. It is due at by 11.59 pm on October 26.

You can optionally participate in peer review of the assignment. If you choose to do so, you must sign up to participate prior to the submission deadline, submit the initial version of the assignment, provide your feedback on the work of the peer with whom you have been matched, and revise your assignment in response to the comments that you receive from them. I will share the link to the sign-up spreadsheet on Moodle. Peer feedback is most useful when it identifies specific areas for improvement and involves detailed, actionable suggestions for changes; conversely, vague, overly broad, and difficult-to-implement comments offer little value. I suggest that peer reviewers use the assignment rubric to assess the initial drafts and complement it with specific suggestions for improvement. You are by no means obliged to accept your peer reviewer’s feedback. Your revised assignment is due at 11.59 pm on November 2.

Submission details and other assessment policies can be found in the syllabus.

Research design rubric

| | Failure | Minimally acceptable | Acceptable | Good | Excellent |
|---------------------|---|--|---|---|--|
| Introduction | The assignment does not identify the constituent parts of the research design in the introduction. Alternatively, the introduction is not comprehensible. | The assignment identifies at least some of the constituent parts of the research design in the introduction, but crucial details are missing or unclear. Conversely, the introduction may contain superfluous details. | The assignment identifies the constituent parts of the research design in the introduction, but the brief overview of the research project could be presented better and in a more focused way. | The assignment clearly identifies the constituent parts of the research design in the introduction and provides a reasonably compelling brief overview of the research project. | The introduction is focused and clear. It directly identifies the constituent parts of the research design and provides a compelling brief overview of the research project. |

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| Limitations of the scholarly literature | The assignment fails to identify gaps in the literature. | The assignment identifies some limitations of existing scholarship but shows limited understanding of the literature and does not successfully explain the stated limitations. | The assignment identifies the limitations of existing scholarship that the research project addresses, but the discussion lacks cogency. | The assignment identifies the limitations of existing scholarship that the research project addresses and provides a reasonably compelling brief explanation of these limitations. | The assignment effectively outlines the limitations of existing scholarship that the research project addresses and provides a compelling brief explanation of these limitations. |
| Main elements of research design | The assignment fails to specify the required components of the research design. Where some components are specified, the author's choices are not explained. | The assignment specifies each required component of the research design, but provides no, very limited, or exceedingly unsatisfactory explanation of the author's choices, but this explanation is not convincing or otherwise unsatisfactory. | The assignment specifies each required component of the research design and provides an explanation of the author's choices, but this explanation is not convincing or otherwise unsatisfactory. | The assignment specifies each required component of the research design and provides a reasonably compelling explanation of the author's choices. | The assignment clearly and effectively specifies each required component of the research design and provides a compelling explanation of the author's choices. |
| <i>Research question</i> | | | | | |
| <i>Hypothesis or hypotheses</i> | | | | | |
| <i>Concepts</i> | | | | | |
| <i>Measurement</i> | | | | | |
| <i>Case selection</i> | | | | | |
| <i>Inferential leverage</i> | | | | | |
| <i>Data collection methods</i> | | | | | |

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| Conclusion (where needed) | The conclusion is superfluous. | The conclusion addresses only some of the loose threads from preceding discussion of the research design and does not do so successfully. | The conclusion addresses loose threads from preceding discussion of the research design, but does not do so successfully. | The conclusion ties up any loose ends from preceding discussion in a reasonably compelling manner. | The conclusion concisely and effectively ties up any loose ends from preceding discussion. |
| 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 assignment is too short or too long. | The assignment needs better transition and flow between ideas. Some awkward and confusing passages detract from a thorough understanding of the research design. The assignment follows the word 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 research design. The assignment follows the word count instructions. | Mostly logical progression of ideas, but the writer must do more to make connections. A few distracting errors or awkward phrasing. The assignment follows the word count instructions. | Good flow or progression of ideas and good presentation of how the points made fit into the overall research design. Eloquent expression of ideas with no distracting or obvious grammatical or mechanical errors. The assignment follows the word count instructions. |
| Citations, quotations, and bibliography (where needed) | Missing or inadequate citations. | Referencing does not follow the required citation style. | Referencing follows the required citation style, with some errors. | Mostly correct referencing, with a few minor errors. | Correct referencing. |