

PLS 436/536
Research project instructions

The research project is the main assignment in the course. Its primary purpose is to help you to develop your research skills, gain hands-on experience of conducting your own research, and, in the process, consolidate your knowledge and understanding of the politics of development. The project has three components: a research proposal and two drafts—initial and final—of the research paper.

All components of the research project 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.

Lists of sources do not count towards the specified assignment length. If you choose to include cover pages, they also do not count towards the assignment length.

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

Research proposal

The purpose of the research proposal is to assist you in selecting a topic for your research paper, 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 paper.

The proposal should be 1-2 pages 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) specify your case selection, independent and dependent variables, and overall research design; and
- e) explain what scholarly and nonacademic sources you will draw on in your research paper, justify your selection, and provide your initial assessment of the literature.

You should attach a proposed bibliography to your proposal. The bibliography should include most of the academic sources that you will use in the research paper. You do not need to have read all the sources prior to proposal submission, but you will need to justify your choices.

Research paper

In the research paper 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 paper must be on the same topic as the research proposal.

If you are an undergraduate student, your paper should be 3,000 words 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, explain your research design, 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 that I have provided to you offers suggestions on building your argument and structuring your paper that you should follow in this assignment. Your paper should draw upon at least 25–30 academic sources; you may also use nonacademic sources.

If you are a graduate student, you will write a 6,000-word-long research paper in the style of a journal article. Your paper will share many elements, which the essay-writing tips can help you to identify, with good undergraduate essays. In addition, you will need to provide a thorough review of the scholarly literature on your chosen topic, present a theory that explains the phenomenon you investigate, and substantiate your claims with a range of evidence you collect. The paper should draw upon at least 30–35 academic sources; you may—and most likely will need to—use nonacademic sources.

Assessment of the research paper will be in two parts.

First, you will prepare and submit to me an initial draft of your research paper. The initial draft , which is due by 11.59 pm on March 27, should be a polished, high-quality paper that represents the best work that you can complete at the time of submission; crucially, it should not be a rough draft. Following submission, I will read the draft, assign the first grade for the paper, and provide you with feedback.

Second, you will revise the paper into an even higher-quality final draft based on received feedback. The final draft is due by 11.59 pm on April 24. The second grade for the paper 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.

Research proposal rubric

	Failure	Minimally acceptable	Acceptable	Good	Excellent
Thesis statement and argument outline	The proposal does not address the question and / or shows limited or no understanding of the topic. The thesis statement and argument outline are missing or not comprehensible.	The proposal seems to respond to the question, but the thesis and argument outline are unclear.	The thesis answers the question, 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	The proposal does not explain what sources will be used in the project. Inadequate citations and / or insufficient number of sources.	The proposal includes a list of sources, but does not explain their relevance or value. Referencing does not follow the required citation style. In some cases excessive use of quotations. Sufficient number of sources.	The proposal includes a list of sources and provides a poorly developed explanation of their relevance or value. Referencing follows the required citation style, with some errors. Sufficient number of sources.	The proposal includes a list of sources and provides some explanation of their relevance or value. Mostly correct referencing, with a few minor errors. Sufficient number of sources.	The proposal includes an extensive list of sources and provides comprehensive explanation of their relevance and value. Correct referencing. Number of sources which is at least sufficient and likely exceeds the requirements.
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	The proposal does not include an outline of the existing literature.	The proposal includes an outline, but it is excessively short and/or shows limited understanding of the existing literature.	The proposal includes an outline and demonstrates some understanding of the existing literature.	The proposal includes an outline and demonstrates good understanding of the existing literature.	The proposal includes an outline and demonstrates excellent understanding of the literature.
Literature critique	The proposal does not address the limitations of the existing literature.	The proposal addresses the limitations of the literature, but does so excessively briefly and/or in a reductive, superficial, or confusing way.	The proposal addresses the limitations of the literature, but does not provide a proper critique of the existing literature.	The proposal provides an interesting, but not fully developed (or deficient in some other way) critique of the existing literature.	The proposal provides a compelling and well-developed (given the nature of the assignment) critique of the literature.
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 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 argument. The proposal 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 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 / page count instructions.

Research paper rubric

	Failure	Minimally acceptable	Acceptable	Good	Excellent
Thesis statement and argument outline	The paper 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 paper shows limited or no understanding of the topic.	The paper 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 paper defines the scope of the argument and key concepts. The paper shows a moderately good understanding of the topic.	The thesis is focused, clear, and directly answers the question. An outline of a compelling argument is developed. The paper defines the scope of the argument and key concepts. The paper shows a very 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 paper does not address the existing literature or identify the sources on which it is based.	The paper addresses the literature and sources, but shows limited understanding of them and does not explain their relevance and value.	The paper provides an outline of the literature and a list of sources. It demonstrates some understanding of the literature and data.	The paper provides an outline of the literature and a list of sources. It demonstrates good understanding of the literature and data.	The paper 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 paper does not address the limitations of the existing literature.	The paper addresses the limitations of the literature, but does so excessively briefly and/or in a reductive, superficial, or confusing way.	The paper addresses the limitations of the literature, but does not provide a proper critique of the existing literature.	The paper provides an interesting, but not fully developed (or deficient in some other way) critique of the existing literature.	The paper 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 paper 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 paper 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.

Quality of evidence	The paper includes little to no supporting evidence.	Provided is of low quality and/ or not used effectively to substantiate the author's claims.	The author provides some evidence to support their claims but does not use it effectively and/ or the quality of this evidence is limited.	Provided evidence is of high quality and enables the author to substantiate their claims, albeit not entirely successfully.	Provided evidence is of very high quality and the author uses it effectively to substantiate their claims.
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 paper is too short or too long.	The paper needs better transition and flow between ideas. Some awkward and confusing passages detract from a thorough understanding of the paper. The paper 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 paper. The paper 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 paper 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 paper 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 / initial draft feedback	Feedback is not addressed.	Some effort has been made to incorporate feedback into the paper.	Feedback has been incorporated into the paper, but issues identified in the proposal have not been fully addressed.	Feedback has been incorporated into the paper and there is some evidence of critical reflection about the feedback.	Feedback has been incorporated into the paper and the student has evidently reflected on the feedback.