

## POLS 4900: Senior Experience

CLASS LOCATION: Nicolls Building 208

CLASS TIME: TR 09:30 am – 10:45 am

INSTRUCTOR: Chen Wang, Ph.D.

OFFICE: Admin 319

OFFICE HOURS: Tuesday/Thursday 12:15 pm – 2:15 pm or by appointment

EMAIL: [chenw@uidaho.edu](mailto:chenw@uidaho.edu)

PHONE: (208) 885-6032

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### COURSE DESCRIPTION

The purpose of the Senior Experience class is to assist students in refining and extending the research skills that they acquired throughout their undergraduate careers. The aim of this refinement and extension is to enable students to write an original, social scientific research paper of **publishable quality** in the field of **Political Science** at the undergraduate level. This is **not a lecture-based** course. Instead, the course will be organized as **a series of workshops and seminars** where we will discuss and practice:

1. Identifying research questions in political science
  2. Situating that question in the existing body of knowledge
  3. Constructing theories (and identifying the criteria of a good theory)
  4. The derivation of hypotheses that follow logically from the theoretical model
  5. Strategies for empirically testing these hypotheses
  6. Professional development
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### COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the end of the course, students are expected to be able to:

- Demonstrate a deeper and more sophisticated understanding of the theories, hypotheses, and methods employed in the discipline of Political Science.
  - Evaluate the major theoretical and empirical debates in the field and employ logic and evidence-based arguments to defend your position in the foregoing debates.
  - Employ the major components involved in the research process to produce a paper of publishable quality based on standards of the discipline.
  - Disseminate knowledge acquired publicly via a professional presentation of your research project.
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## COURSE MATERIALS

Most of our weekly readings will come from this book:

- Baglione, Lisa (2020). *Writing a Research Paper in Political Science. A Practical Guide to Inquiry, Structure, & Methods. Fourth Edition.* Thousand Oaks, CA: CQ Press (buy the 4th edition – older editions have different page and chapter numbers!).
- The book is available for purchase or rent at [Sage](#), [VitalSource](#), or [Amazon](#).

All other readings on the syllabus will be made available on Canvas. It is absolutely essential that you carefully read all of the required material prior to coming to each class session. I expect that you take your responsibilities seriously. Failing to do so will both significantly impact your grade and the quality of our in-class activities.

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## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Your grade in this course will be based on your performance on the following components:

- **Professionalism: 20%**

Professionalism means a few things. Primarily, it entails acting like the budding professional that you are. That means reading materials before class, attending class, completing tasks, meeting deadlines, participating regularly, keeping phones silenced, contributing substantially to discussion, and providing encouragement to your peers. It also entails being respectful, courteous, thoughtful, ethical, and attuned to different perspectives expressed in the class. If it becomes clear that you are not reading, the Instructor may employ reading quizzes in class, and your professionalism grade will be based off of those scores. Ultimately, I expect you to attend class and participate regularly, as your professionalism grade will be based on the quality and quantity of your contributions during discussion—this is worth 20% of your grade.

During the semester, you are allowed **three unexcused absences**. For every class you miss beyond that, **one point** will be deducted from your professionalism points. Excused absences (e.g., illness, sports events for athletes, religious holidays) will not be deducted from your professionalism grade. About **20 random attendance checks** will be conducted throughout the semester.

- **Guest Lecture Feedback Survey: 5%**

The Department is conducting a search for a new faculty member in Public Law, Constitutional Law, or Judicial Politics. Short-listed candidates will deliver guest lectures (teaching demonstrations) in this class on **January 22, 27, and 29**. As the Department's most senior students, you will be tasked to complete evaluation surveys for each candidate.

The evaluation surveys will be distributed in person during these three class sessions. Attendance on these dates is therefore required to complete this assignment. To receive full credit for this assignment (worth 5% of your final course grade), **you must attend all three sessions**.

- **Mini Presentations: 15%**

You will deliver **three mini presentations** over the course of the semester, each focusing on a different component of your research project: *(a) research question and literature, (b) theory, and (c) empirical strategy*. These presentations are scheduled for **Weeks 6, 9, and 13**. Each mini presentation is worth 5% of your final course grade. Detailed expectations and guidelines will be discussed in class.

These mini presentations are **not tests**, and you are not expected to deliver polished or final work. Instead, they are designed to serve two purposes:

1. To solicit feedback from the class that will help you refine each section of your paper.
2. To help you prepare for the final presentation of your completed research (see below).

- **Final Presentation: 20%**

The capstone experience will culminate with students giving a **professional presentation of their completed research** to their colleagues (students, postdocs, and faculty members of the Department) **during the last two weeks of this semester**. I will arrange you into panels based on themes of your projects. Your presentations will be **approximately 12 minutes** where you walk us through your research from this semester. Each presentation will also be followed by **approximately 3 minutes Q&A**. Detailed guidelines and expectations for the final presentation will be provided in class.

- **Research Paper: 40%**

The ultimate product will be a **research paper** in a journal article format, similar to those published in the American Journal of Political Science. The paper should be approximately **20 pages long, double-spaced, with a 12-point font**. The research paper must include the following components: *an abstract, introduction, literature review, theory and hypotheses, data and methods, results, discussion, and conclusion*. You will complete this paper in stages, with the following deadlines:

- Stage I (Feb 27): Research Question and Literature Review (5% of your final grade)
- Stage II (Mar 26): Theory and hypotheses (5% of your final grade)
- Stage III (Apr 16): Research Design (10% of your final grade)
- Final paper submission (May 12) (20% of your final grade)

The **final paper submission's** grade will be based on (a) your discussion of the findings (results), (b) whether you incorporated feedback from the Instructor and your peers on previous sections, and (c) new portions you added, like the Abstract, Introduction, Discussion, and Conclusion.

- **Grade Scale**

There will be no curving in this class. Final letter grades will be calculated as follows:

[90, 100]	A
[80, 90)	B
[70, 80)	C
[60, 70)	D
[0, 60)	F

## COURSE POLICIES

- **Deadlines**

Late submissions without proper documentations (e.g., doctor's note) will be accepted **up until one week after the due date**, with a **5-point penalty for each day late**. If there is a documented emergency that prevents you from completing one of the class assignments at the scheduled date, I would be happy to work with you. **However, you have to reach out to me prior to the due date for a given assignment.**

- **Academic Integrity**

A core value at UI is the ideal of academic honesty and integrity. UI students live and work in a community which emphasizes their responsibility for helping to determine and enforce high standards of academic conduct. The University of Idaho expects all students to adhere to the highest standards of academic honesty, and to refrain from any action which infringes upon academic freedom of other members of the community. Please review the [UI Student Code of Conduct and Resolution Process - Academic Dishonesty](#).

Note that forming a group to study for homework assignments or offering feedback on a draft of another student's paper are not considered violations of academic integrity. On the other hand, writing portions of a classmate's paper or copying a paragraph from a book or website without attribution are very serious violations. If you are unsure whether you are committing plagiarism, do not hesitate to ask me for guidance (before you submit your work).

- **Accommodations**

University of Idaho is committed to ensuring an accessible learning environment where course or instructional content are usable by all students and faculty. If you believe that you require disability-related academic adjustments for this class (including pregnancy-related disabilities), please contact Center for Disability Access and Resources (CDAR) to discuss eligibility. A current accommodation letter from CDAR is required before any modifications, above and beyond what is otherwise available for all other students in this class will be provided. Please be advised that disability-related academic adjustments are **not retroactive**. CDAR is located at the Bruce Pitman Building, Suite 127. Phone is 208-885-6307 and e-mail is [cdar@uidaho.edu](mailto:cdar@uidaho.edu). For a complete listing of services and current business hours visit <https://www.uidaho.edu/cdar>.

- **Learning Environment Civility**

In any environment in which people gather to learn, it is essential that all members feel as free and safe as possible in their participation. To this end, it is expected that everyone in this course will be treated with mutual respect and civility, with an understanding that all of us (students, instructors, professors, guests, teaching assistants, etc.) will be respectful and civil to one another in discussion, in action, in teaching, and in learning.

Should you feel any classroom interactions do not reflect an environment of civility and respect, you are encouraged to reach out to me or an appropriate campus resource to discuss your concern. Some appropriate campus resources to express a concern or request support include the [Dean of Students Office](#) (208-885-6757 or [VandalCARE referral](#)), the [Counseling](#)

and Mental Health Center (208-885-6716), or the Office of Civil Rights and Investigations (208-885-4285).

- **Tutoring and College Success (TCS)**

TCS offers three distinct services dedicated to student success: tutoring, SI-PASS, and Academic Coaching. [Vandal Tutoring](#) provides drop-in style tutoring in person at the Library at no cost to undergraduates. [SI-PASS](#) provides peer assisted study sessions for difficult courses. [Academic Coaching](#) offers students an opportunity to work with a coach, one-on-one, to improve their academic skills such as: effective studying, test taking, time management, and note taking.

- **Grade Appeals**

Hopefully there will be no reason to contest a grade. However, a student who believes strongly that a homework assignment or the paper has been graded incorrectly may appeal by submitting a typed memo (no longer than one page) explaining why the grade was inappropriate. No sooner than 72 hours and no later than 10 days after the original grade was issued, the memo must be submitted along with the original graded assignment to me for re-grading.

- **AI Use Policy**

In this class, every student will acquire the necessary skills to write a formal research paper in political science. As such, it is essential that every language in every assignment is produced by you! The use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools—including but not limited to Chat-GPT, Copilot, Perplexity, Grammarly, image generators, and automated coding/writing assistants—is **NOT** permitted. Any evidence of AI usage will be treated as plagiarism.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

**This is only a tentative schedule for this course. Content may change**

### Week 1: Course Introduction

Jan 12: Read this syllabus

### Week 2 & 3: Résumé Workshop & Department Faculty Search Teaching Demos

Jan 20: Workshop on Résumé-building and Career Path for PolitSci Majors  
– [CLASS Career Consultant](#) can provide feedback on your own résumé

Jan 22: Teaching Demo 1

Jan 27: Teaching Demo 2

Jan 29: Teaching Demo 3

– **Submit evaluation surveys after each teaching demo**

### Week 4: Research Questions

Feb 3: This session consists of (1) a short lecture and (2) in-class group exercises  
• Read: Baglione, Chapters 1 & 2

Feb 5: This session consists of a series of in-class group activities based on the assigned documentary  
• Watch: “*Netanyahu, America & The Road to War in Gaza*” (PBS Production): [available here](#)

### Week 5: Literature Review

Feb 10: This session consists of a (1) a short lecture on **literature review** and (2) group discussions of the King et al. (2008) article  
• Read: King, Gary, Ori Rosen, Martin Tanner, and Alexander F. Wagner. 2008. “Ordinary economic voting behavior in the extraordinary election of Adolf Hitler.” *The Journal of Economic History*  
• Also read Baglione Chapter 4 and “*Strategies for conducting your own literature review*” (available on [Yale Political Science Subject Guide](#)) if you need a recap on what Literature Review is

Feb 12: Workshop on Literature Review, short readings will be provided in-class

### Week 6: **Mini Presentation on Research Question and Literature Review**

Feb 17: Group 1

Feb 19: Group 2

**Week 7: Theory and Hypothesis**

Feb 24: This session consists of a long lecture on **theory-building** and **hypothesis-developing**

- Read: Mearsheimer, John J., and Stephen M. Walt. 2013. "Leaving theory behind: Why simplistic hypothesis testing is bad for International Relations." *European Journal of International Relations*.
- Skim: Baglione, Chapter 5

Feb 26: Workshop on Theory-Building, short readings will be provided in-class.  
– **Submit Stage I of research paper on Canvas by 9:30 am**

**Week 8: One-on-One Meetings**

Mar 3 & 5: We will hold an individual, approximately **10-minute one-on-one meeting** with each of you to discuss your project's progress, any challenges you may be facing, and—if appropriate—the possibility of refining or changing your topic. A meeting sign-up sheet will be shared later in the semester.

**Week 9: Mini Presentation on Theory**

Mar 10: Group 1

Mar 12: Group 2

**Week 10: Spring Break!****Week 11: Empirical Strategies I**

Mar 24: **No Class – the instructor will be away for a conference**

Mar 26: This session consists of a long lecture on an **overview of Research Design and Measurement**

- Read: Kellstedt and Whitten, Chapter 9
- **Submit Stage II of research paper on Canvas by 9:30 am**

**Week 12: Empirical Strategies II**

Mar 31: Workshop on quantitative methods, short readings will be provided in-class

Apr 2: Workshop on qualitative methods

- Read: Collier (1993) on *The Comparative Method* and Collier (2001) on *Understanding Process Tracing*

**Week 13: Mini Presentation on Empirical Strategy**

Apr 7: Group 1

Apr 9: Group 2

**Week 14: Results & Discussion**

- Apr 14: This session consists of (1) a short lecture on **presenting results** and (2) in-class group exercises
- Read: Baglione, Chapter 8 and 9

- Apr 16: Workshop on Final Presentation and Final Manuscript Preparation  
– **Submit Stage III of research paper on Canvas by 9:30 am**

**Week 15: Another Round of One-on-One Meetings (optional)**

- Apr 21 & Apr 23: **The goal of these meetings is to make sure that your findings are taking shape**

**Week 16: Final Presentation I**

- Apr 28: Group 1: Theme TBD  
Apr 30: Group 2: Theme TBD

**Week 17: Final Presentation II**

- May 5: Group 3: Theme TBD  
May 7: Group 4: Theme TBD

**May 12 (T): Final Paper Due by Midnight**