Fall 2025 GOV 388L: Research in International Politics
M 9:00 – 11:45 AM (BAT 5.102)

Professor: Dr. Rachel Wellhausen
(rwellhausen@utexas.edu)
Office hours: W 9:00 AM – 12:00 PM (Batts 4.138)
Notes: Please book an appointment via my webpage/Calendly to make sure we have enough dedicated time. Y'all are a priority, so I am especially happy to meet with you outside of these times as needed; just reach out with some times and we'll figure it out.

Course Description:
This course is designed to help you transition from coursework to producing original research. Producing original research is challenging, and there is no magic formula for doing it well. But there are some approaches that work better than others. Seeing examples and learning from others is critical. Science is a social activity; research is made better by sharing it and getting feedback. Therefore, much of the class will be cooperative and involve review and criticism from your peers. Note that you can learn much from doing a good job peer reviewing as well as from the criticism you receive on your own work.

A parallel purpose of this course is to gain familiarity with the process of academic publishing. There are many aspects of the publication process that are not readily apparent when viewed from the outside. These include how to format an article for submission, how to submit it, what happens when it is under review, how to respond to reviews, how to navigate the revision process, etc. There are also many unwritten rules or common understandings that faculty often take for granted but didn't know when they were students. This course will try to demystify some of that.

Goals:
Your aim is to produce a **fully realized** piece of research by semester's end. This may be a **solo-authored journal article**, or a **solo-authored dissertation proposal**, or a **solo-authored piece of your dissertation**.

What does "fully realized" mean? The baseline criterion is that you have a full draft of a paper that you would be proud to present at a conference. That means you would distribute the draft to the panel discussant and professional colleagues on your conference panel, without any disclaimers such as "do not circulate." You would be proud to post this as a work in progress on a "preprint" outlet, which most conferences in our discipline offer. You would be proud to have this on your professional website as a sample of your work in progress. You would be proud to submit this to consideration for an award designed for graduate student work.

This criterion holds whether you choose to complete a journal article or element of your dissertation. If you choose to complete an element of your dissertation, this too should be fully realized. You should feel confident in distributing the draft to your committee and

defending it, whether in a formal dissertation defense or as a complete portion of your project. You should be proud to link this on your professional website, in some form, as an introduction to the reader of your dissertation project and/or an example of your dissertation work in progress. There are sometimes awards available in the discipline for dissertation proposals; you should be proud to submit your work for consideration for such an award.

Why solo-authored? In my opinion, a commonality signaled by the degree of PhD in whatever discipline is that you can conceptualize and see a high-quality project through from beginning to end. As a professor, this is expected of you if you are in a research-intensive institution. If you are in a teaching-intensive role, still you must demonstrate you have done this yourself, because you will be expected to be able to guide others to do the same. If you find yourself participating in or leading a research lab, you must have expertise in all parts of the process, from "soup to nuts," to maximize your ability to produce output of the highest quality. If you follow a different, "alt-ac" career path, a key selling point as to why they should hire you as a PhD is that you have the creativity, leadership, and follow-through to conceptualize and complete a large project. People without PhDs do not have this same depth of experience.

In your graduate school career thus far, you have likely worked on collaborative projects with graduate student colleagues and/or faculty members. These efforts are crucial, especially in a discipline that is increasingly moving toward co-authorships as a means of accomplishing large and complex projects. And yet, you must also be able to "stand on your own two feet" as an independent scholar. In your career, you must have the capability to successfully move from collaboration to collaboration. And, as stated above, my opinion is that your ability to be independent is a key selling point of being a PhD holder. This is an opportunity to produce output that demonstrates your capabilities – why someone should invite you to join their team.

What should I pick to work on? You will be required to make and defend an active choice as to why you are working on X rather than Y or Z. This is by design. In my opinion, it is an error to get locked into one idea without at least considering different ideas. In your career, whatever path you follow, you will work on many different research questions. I want you to know for yourself why you are working on *this* and not *that* at this moment.

In your graduate career thus far, you have likely pursued several ideas and beginnings of drafts in different courses. Some should surely go to the file drawer as good practice but not something to prioritize further. You might have pursued related research questions but in different formats and with different emphases across courses. You might have a well-defined research question in mind to pursue for your dissertation. Wherever you find yourself, the goal of this course is to see something through. I want you to pick something you have started on already. Maybe you'll end up throwing out most of what you have thus far! Nonetheless, I want you to choose between projects that you think "have legs," and you would be happy and proud to pursue further.

Disclaimer: You should expect to do poorly in the course if you do not commit to a topic as instructed early in the course and then follow it through. I will provide my input as to whether I would make the same choice as you, were I in your shoes. I expect you to confer with your advisor for input into your choice. However, it is ultimately your choice. Your ability to make and defend a choice is a key course objective and one that, again, will in my opinion be crucial in your future career.

Details if you choose to work on a dissertation prospectus/element: Much of the approach in the course will start from the premise of a journal article, simply because that is a if not the key form of scholarly communication in contemporary political science. I want you to take ownership of your project and deviate from journal article-based guidance and assignments when they do not suit your needs. I expect you to have had a serious conversation with your (potential) dissertation advisor and at least one other (potential) member of your committee as to what they expect when it comes to a dissertation prospectus/element. Their guidance and expectations should take precedent over mine. I need you to take leadership in telling me when you will deviate because that is what you think is best for you and your ability to meet the course goals.

Formal learning outcomes:

At the conclusion of this course, students will be able to:

- Produce a fully realized piece of original research.
- Demonstrate increased confidence and resilience in carrying out solo work.
- Solidify peer review skills.
- Gain insights into the profession and how to participate in a scholarly community.
- Synthesize and repurpose skills learned in coursework in pursuit of a research agenda.

Grading:

Participation in scholarly life **20%**

- Attendance at IR speaker series
- Attendance at job talks
- Formulating and asking questions of speakers
- Attendance at other departmental/UT/online/etc. events of interest to you

How to earn this portion of the grade: Shortly after each event you attend, I would like you to submit to me on Canvas at least a few lines reflecting on what you got out of the event. This is good practice for your career, to make sure you find ways to make the time you spend outside of doing your own research purposeful and useful. The inputs to this grade are endogenous depending on how the semester and scheduled events play out. The grade is ultimately based on your demonstrated effort.

Participation in class **20%**

- Quality of peer review feedback
- Good faith effort on our various assignments

- Quality of output on our various assignments
- Demonstrating leadership in owning your project and pushing back on course activities that are less helpful to you, and instead proposing adaptations that meet your needs
- Attendance + personal initiative if you must miss a session

How to earn this portion of the grade: To be fully successful, you need to be committed to achieving your own goals and also helping others achieve their goals. You need to be receptive to critical feedback. You need to also learn and practice giving critical feedback. This is different from a traditional course in which you might be a more passive participant, waiting to learn content and be given instructions. You need to be an active leader in the course, for the purpose of helping yourself and your colleagues to achieve the course goal.

Your final output + incremental progress in achieving it 60%

Inputs into this portion of this grade are more fluid and endogenous. They may include but are not limited to:

- Choosing and committing to a solo-authored project
- Defending the "so what?" of that project, with different audiences in mind, such as yourself, your advisor, your peers, potential grant funders, the public, and potential skeptical or "hostile" audiences
- Draft introduction
- Draft literature review
- Draft theory
- Draft research design
- Draft results
- Draft conclusion
- Evidence of improvement on multiple iterations of draft elements
- Conference-style presentation
- The quality of your final output

How to earn this portion of the grade: We all have different tendencies in how we progress through completing a project. Each project also comes with its own twists, turns, and hurdles. That's OK. I expect you to take leadership in demonstrating incremental progress and thorough revisions throughout the semester to set yourself up for success in achieving the course goal. I promise you that your final output cannot "parachute in" as excellent if you are not making incremental progress, and if you follow such a path you will be unsuccessful in earning this portion of the grade.

Additional Policies:

See UT Austin official policies at: https://utexas.instructure.com/courses/1377522

SCHEDULE

**** All assignments are due at least 24 hours before class, which is: 9 AM on Sundays ****

25 August: Course Overview
**** IR lunch after class at noon**

Due on Canvas:
- None

In-class work:
- Introductions
- Course goals
- Assignment explanations

Assignment(s):
- Weekly research log
- Shadow CV
- Proposal + "so what" for the project you would like to work on in class

1 September NO CLASS (Labor Day)

8 September: Productivity + "So what?"

Due on Canvas:
- Weekly research log
- Shadow CV
- Proposal + "so what" for the project you would like to work on in class

In-class work:
- Productivity workshop with outside leader (45 min)
- Around the room: Research log report
- Check-in on shadow CV assignment – reflections?
- Oral "defense": "So what" of your project?

Assignment(s):
- Weekly research log
- Commit to research project
- New draft element (recommended: Introduction/motivation)

15 September: Learning from published work

Due on Canvas:
- Weekly research log
- Project commitment
- New draft element (recommended: Introduction/motivation)

In-class work:
- Around the room: Research log report
- Peer discussion: How did it go with producing draft elements?
- Find examples…
    - of excellent article titles – what makes them so?
    - of excellent abstracts – what makes them so?
    - of excellent subheadings/organization – what makes them so?
    - of highly cited articles – what makes them so?
    - of award-winning articles – what makes them so?

Assignment(s):
- Read + comment on a colleague's draft element
- New draft element (recommended: Whichever "chunk" you feel least confident about at this point [eat the frog])
- 2 "template" articles
- Weekly research log

<u>22 September: Peer review</u>

Due on Canvas:
- Weekly research log
- Read + comment on a colleague's draft element
- New draft element (recommended: Whichever "chunk" you feel least confident about at this point [eat the frog])
- "Template" articles

In-class work:
- Around the room: Research log report
- Discussion: "Template" articles?
- Discussion: What are your instincts when it comes to peer review?
- Discussion: Expectations in the discipline around peer review
- Peer review

Assignment(s):
- Peer review takeaways + actionable next steps
- New draft element (recommended: Whichever "chunk" you feel will benefit most from your peer review takeaways)
- Weekly research log

29 September: Literature

Due on Canvas:
- Weekly research log
- Peer review takeaways + actionable next steps
- New draft element

In-class work:
- Around the room: Research log report
- Discussion: What is a literature review? Why do we bother?
- Discussion: Best practices for organizing/managing literature?
- Peer swap – collecting literature for a colleague's project
- On your own – class time to work on literature for your project
- One-on-one check-ins

Assignment(s):
- New draft element (required: Literature review)
- Weekly research log

6 October: Making an argument (1/2)

Due on Canvas:
- Weekly research log
- Draft element (Literature review)

In-class work:
- Around the room: Research log report
- Peer review: Quick read of peers' literature reviews – can you get the gist in 10 minutes? Is it purposeful? Is the "so what" there? Critique.
- Discussion: How to make an argument (= Theory)?
- Discussion: Best practices for articulating stand-alone hypotheses?
- Peer swap – brainstorming observable implications for a colleague's project
- On your own – brainstorming observable implications for your project

Assignment(s):
- New draft element (required: Theory section)
- Weekly research log

13 October: Making an argument (2/2)

Due on Canvas:
- Weekly research log
- Draft element (Theory)

In-class work:
- Around the room: Research log report
- Discussion: What does it mean when you get the critique that something is "under-theorized"? How do we avoid that? How does the literature help us in building a theory?
- In-class peer review: Today's submissions.

Assignment(s):
- Revisions (required: Extensive revisions to Literature + Theory sections)
- Weekly research log

20 October: Research design

Due on Canvas:
- Weekly research log
- Revisions to Literature + Theory

In-class work:
- Around the room: Research log report
- Discussion: "Answering the research question is priority #1, research design and data considerations are in service toward that goal."
- Best practices for writing research designs + appendices.
- In-class peer review: Today's submissions. Sketch out where you *think* your peer is going with their research design, given their literature and theory. What would you design if it were you? Discuss and compare/contrast with peer's plans.

Assignment(s):
- New draft element (required: your equivalent of Research Design + Results), due in 2 weeks
- Weekly research log

27 October: Carrying out the research design
**** IR speaker at noon**

Due on Canvas:
- Weekly research log
- [No writing officially due; you are free to submit something if you would like]

In-class work:
- Around the room: Research log report
- Discussion: Approaching research from a "pre-registration" mindset.
- Discussion: Multi-method work.
- Exercise: Derive lessons in carrying out a research design from articles you are citing in your own project/literature review.

- In-class peer review: Today's submissions. Sketch out what results you will expect to see, given the research design. What tables/figures/descriptive statistics would you provide if it were your project? Discuss and compare/contrast with peer's plans.

Assignment(s):
- Weekly research log
- [Research Design + Results draft element in progress]

3 November: Pinning down + reporting results

Due on Canvas:
- Weekly research log
- Draft element (required: your equivalent of Research Design + Results)

In-class work:
- Around the room: Research log report
- Discussion: Descriptive statistics and knowing your data intimately.
- Discussion: Main results v. robustness.
- Exercise: Search through articles you are citing in your literature review. Critique their presentation of results. Identify better/worse examples. How long does it take you as the reader to understand what they found?
- Peer reflection/discussion of best practices + strategies in presenting results.

Assignment(s):
- 15+ complete, sequential pages including substantial revisions, due in 2 weeks
- Weekly research log

10 November: Conclusions and future research

Due on Canvas:
- Weekly research log
- [No writing officially due; keep working!]

In-class work:
- Around the room: Research log report
- Discussion: Abstract and title. Why talk about this in "conclusions" week?
- Discussion: Purposes of the conclusion? How to lay out serious future research?
- Exercise: Playing with AI – what does the algorithm think your paper is about?
- One-on-one check-ins

Assignment(s):
- Draft abstract (150-word version and 250-word version)
- Draft title (main choice and 2-3 other options)
- Weekly research log

17 November: Publishing + formal peer reviewing

Due on Canvas:
- Weekly research log
- Submission of 15+ complete, sequential pages including substantial revisions, abstract (short and long), title and backup title ideas

In-class work:
- Around the room: Research log report
- Publishing process
- Extensive Q&A
- Formal peer review expectations

Assignment(s):
- Formal peer review of two of your colleagues' 15+ complete pages

24 November – NO CLASS (Thanksgiving Break)
- Please turn in formal peer reviews (#1 and #2) by our normal class time, so your colleagues can make use of them over the break.

1 December: Presentation prep + professionalization

Due on Canvas:
- Weekly research log
- [No official writing due, but a submission is welcome if feedback would be of use!]

In-class work:
- Around the room: Research log report
- Presentations (conference, job talk, etc.)
- Slide design best practices
- Reflections on asking questions/providing feedback around presentations
- Professionalization + additional TBD based on progress

Assignment(s):
- Complete slide deck
- Written 12-minute conference-style presentation outline + goals
- [Oral presentations in next class session]

8 December: Conference-style presentations + wrap-up

Due on Canvas:

- Weekly research log
- Slide deck and presentation outline + goals

In-class work:

- Oral presentations
- Expectations for final paper submission
- Reflections on your progress – what are your strengths and weaknesses at this point?

Assignment(s):

- Final paper

12 December (Friday), 11:59 PM: Deadline for submitting final paper on Canvas

(Notes: Hard deadline, because I must submit course grades on the 16th)