

# **POL 210: Experimental Research in Social Science**

**Spring 2026 (Syllabus Version: 1/13/2026)**

**Manchester 121: T R 3:30p-4:45p**

Dr. Justin Esarey  
Professor of Politics  
E-mail: esareyje@wfu.edu

Office: 319 Kirby Hall  
Phone: 678-383-9629  
Fax: 336-758-6104

Book an Office Hours Meeting: <https://calendar.app.google/YekNaM3fasJz2sNg8>

## **COURSE OBJECTIVES AND LEARNING OUTCOMES**

This course introduces students to how experiments are used to study political and social science.

Students will work together to formulate a research question, research the relevant literature, design an experiment to answer the research question, collect and analyze the data, and write a professional paper summarizing the project.

POL 280 (Research Methods) or equivalent coursework is a prerequisite for this class.

## **GRADING POLICIES AND ASSIGNMENT DETAILS**

### **Grade Components:**

- Discussion Group Responses: 20%
- Research Tasks: 20%
- Small Group Participation: 10%
- Final Paper & Poster: 50%

### **Grading Scale:**

100%-93%: A	82.9%-80%: B-	69.9%-67%: D+
92.9%-90%: A-	79.9%-77%: C+	66.9%-63%: D
89.9%-87%: B+	76.9%-73%: C	62.9%-60%: D-
86.9%-83%: B	72.9%-70%: C-	>59.5%: F

**Small Group Discussion:** Everyone in class will be randomly assigned to a small group. Each group must meet and discuss the discussion questions and/or the research tasks for that day. Grading for this assignment is 100% or 0% based on attendance and active participation in the discussion. The grade will be assessed by your peers; after each meeting, your group will indicate on Canvas who meaningfully participated in the discussion and those who did so will receive full credit. Ten missed attendances for the Small Group Discussion will be dropped; the rest will be averaged to form this portion of the grade.

**In-Class Discussion Responses and Research Tasks:** At the beginning of class, a *question or research task* will be distributed. If this is a discussion question, you will have a set amount of time (typically between 10 and 20 minutes) to meet in class with your small group and formulate a response together. If this is a research task, you will need to submit your work product related to this task and/or present your progress to the group in person. You may use your notes and printouts of assigned readings, but *you may not use any internet resources (including generative AI programs such as ChatGPT)*. For discussion questions, your group will submit a single response, under the names of all group members who participated; this will be graded. For research tasks, you might submit individual or group work products depending on the nature of the task. Students who are not present will receive a zero for that day's response. The ten lowest discussion response/research task grades for each person will be dropped; the rest will be averaged to form this portion of the grade.

**Attendance:** Regular attendance is typically a prerequisite for success in the class, although no points are deducted because of an absence alone. Anything taught in class is testable material, and not everything I teach in class is guaranteed to be in the course reading material.

#### **ASSIGNMENT POLICIES**

1. **Discussion responses and small group participation credits MAY NOT BE TAKEN LATE OR RESCHEDULED, including due to short-term illness or one-off academic or scholarly activities. Ten missed responses/group meetings, corresponding to over 35% of class meetings, are already dropped from the grade to account for these circumstances.** Exceptions to this policy will only be made in unusual circumstances on a case-by-case basis. If you develop a severe illness that you believe will interfere with your ability to complete more than a few discussion responses or small group discussions, please contact Dr. Esarey immediately.
2. **Students will not receive credit for discussion responses or research tasks unless the student attends the full class period. If a student comes to class to complete the discussion response and then leaves, they will receive a zero.**
3. **Assignments are due at the date and time I specify for the assignment.**

#### **OTHER COURSE POLICIES**

**Honor Code/Academic Misconduct:** All forms of academic misconduct will be handled according to the Wake Forest University Honor Code. Details on the Honor Code are available at <https://studentconduct.wfu.edu/honor-system-wfu/>.

If you ever have any questions about what you should do to stay within the honor code on a particular assignment, *contact me with your question and I can assist you*. I cannot guarantee a timely response unless you contact me at least 24 hours in advance of the time the assignment is due.

**Statement on use of Artificial Intelligence Resources:** Students must treat receiving assistance from artificially intelligent computer programs (such as ChatGPT or WolframAlpha) in the same way that they would treat receiving assistance from a human being. Any assistance that would be treated as a violation of the Honor Code if performed by a person will be treated as a violation of the Honor Code if it is performed by a computer program. Some illustrative examples:

1. Uploading discussion questions to ChatGPT and asking it to draft answers for you *is a violation* of the honor code (plagiarism).
2. Writing your own answer to a discussion question and uploading this to ChatGPT to ask for improvements in grammar or clarity *is **not** a violation* of the honor code as long as the written work remains substantially your own.
3. Using ChatGPT, WolframAlpha, or any other artificially intelligent system for any kind of assistance on an exam or quiz *is a violation* of the honor code (a form of cheating: it violates the rules against getting help from anyone except Dr. Esarey).
4. Uploading a section of a reading assignment to ChatGPT and asking it to explain the concept to you in different words *is **not** a violation* of the honor code, as long as you do not use its description verbatim in a submission of written work.

**Students with Disabilities:** If you have a disability and require accommodation in this class, please contact me as soon as possible (within the first two weeks of class) to discuss these accommodations. You will also need to contact the Disability Services Office (telephone extension: 5929) in 118 Reynolda Hall. More information is available at <https://lac.wfu.edu/disability-services/>.

**Syllabus Change Policy:** All policies of this syllabus may be changed by Prof. Esarey with advance notice.

## **COURSE MATERIALS**

### **Required Texts:**

- Druckman, James N., Donald P. Green, James H. Kuklinski, and Arthur Lupia, eds. 2012. *Cambridge Handbook of Experimental Political Science*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK. Available via WFU at <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/cambridge-handbook-of-experimental-political-science/CCEA698DB2EB4FF270D988F84EA90377>.
- Druckman, James N. and Donald P. Green, eds. 2021. *Advances in Experimental Political Science*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK. Available via WFU at <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/advances-in-experimental-political-science/51EECAC7C72DC21B2DBFEDE2093E2EC3>.

## COURSE OUTLINE AND ASSIGNED READINGS

Date	Topic	Readings
1/13	Course Overview	<i>Recommended:</i> Druckman et al. "Experimentation in Political Science." Chapter 1 in the <i>Cambridge Handbook of Experimental Political Science</i> : pp. 3-12.
1/15	Core Concepts	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Druckman et al. "Experiments: An Introduction to Core Concepts." Chapter 2 in the <i>Cambridge Handbook of Experimental Political Science</i>: pp. 15-26.</li> <li>2. Iyengar, Shanto. "Laboratory Experiments in Political Science." Chapter 6 in the <i>Cambridge Handbook of Experimental Political Science</i>: pp. 73-88.</li> </ol>
1/20	Internal and External Validity	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. McDermott, Rose. "Internal and External Validity." Chapter 3 in the <i>Cambridge Handbook of Experimental Political Science</i>: pp. 27-40.</li> <li>2. Druckman, James N., and Cindy D. Kam. "Students as Experimental Participants." Chapter 4 in the <i>Cambridge Handbook of Experimental Political Science</i>: pp. 41-57.</li> </ol>
1/22	Survey Experiments	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Sniderman, Paul M. "The Logic and Design of the Survey Experiment." Chapter 8 in the <i>Cambridge Handbook of Experimental Political Science</i>: pp. 102-114.</li> <li>2. Bansak, Kirk, Jens Hainmueller, Daniel J. Hopkins, and Teppei Yamamoto. "Conjoint Survey Experiments." Chapter 2 in <i>Advances in Experimental Political Science</i>: pp. 19-41.</li> </ol>
1/27	Applied Topics: Vote Choice and Candidate Evaluation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. McGraw, Kathleen M. "Candidate Impressions and Evaluations." Chapter 13 in the <i>Cambridge Handbook of Experimental Political Science</i>: pp. 187-200.</li> <li>2. Gadarian, Shana K. and Richard R. Lau. "Candidate Advertisements." Chapter 15 in <i>Cambridge Handbook of Experimental Political Science</i>: pp. 214-227.</li> </ol>
1/29	Applied Topics: Corruption	Lagunes, Paul, and Brigitte Seim. 2021. "The State of Experimental Research on Corruption Control." Chapter 28 in <i>Advances in Experimental Political Science</i> : pp. 526-543.
2/3	Conducting a Literature Review	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Miller (2017). "How to do a Literature Review." URL: <a href="https://www.dropbox.com/s/q6j5zfg5ctbbynd/svm-literature-review.pdf?dl=0">https://www.dropbox.com/s/q6j5zfg5ctbbynd/svm-literature-review.pdf?dl=0</a></li> <li>2. Knopf (2006). "Doing a Literature Review." PS: Political Science and Politics 39(1): pp. 127-132. URL: <a href="https://www.jstor.org/stable/20451692">https://www.jstor.org/stable/20451692</a></li> </ol> <p>Note: The class will discuss and select a topic for the course paper on this date.</p>

2/5	Literature Pertaining to Class Project	TBA: Readings will be selected according to class decision.
2/10	Literature Pertaining to Class Project	TBA: Readings will be selected according to class decision.  Note: the class will begin working on an experimental protocol on this date.
2/12	Developing an Experimental Protocol and Designing an IRB Application	Take the CITI Human Subjects protection training course, Group 1 (Social/Humanistic/Behavioral Research program for graduate and undergraduate students, faculty, and staff). Bring your completion certificate to class. The training course is available at <a href="https://research.wfu.edu/irb/education-training/">https://research.wfu.edu/irb/education-training/</a> .  Note: the class will work on an experimental protocol and begin drafting the application to IRB on this date.
2/17	Qualtrics Survey Software	Watch three videos at <a href="#">Learn to use Qualtrics for Research</a> :  1. Configuring your Research Project 2. Customizing your Research Project 3. Sharing Your Research Project  Note: The class will work on developing the survey instrument for the experiment on this date.
2/19	Finalizing the Survey Instrument and Protocol	The class will work on developing the survey instrument for the experiment and the IRB application on this date.
2/24	Finalizing the Survey Instrument and Protocol	The class will work on developing the survey instrument for the experiment and the IRB application on this date.
2/26	Finalizing the Survey Instrument and Protocol	The class will work on developing the survey instrument for the experiment and the IRB application on this date.  The application to IRB should be made on or about this date.
3/3	Preregistration	1. Nosek, Brian A., et al. 2018. "The preregistration revolution." <i>Proceedings of the National Academy of Science</i> 115(11): 2600-2606. URL: <a href="#">click here</a> . 2. Simmons, Joseph P., Leif D. Nelson, and Uri Simonsohn. 2021. "Pre-registration: Why and How." <i>Journal of Consumer Psychology</i> 31(1): 151-162. URL: <a href="#">click here</a> .  Note: the class will work on preregistering the experiment on this date.
3/5	Cleanup	The class will do any work necessary to finalize preregistration and make the experiment ready to be conducted.

3/10	No Class: Spring Break	
3/12	No Class: Spring Break	
3/17	Other topics: Economic Experiments vs. Psychological Experiments	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Dickson, Eric S. "Economics versus Psychology Experiments." Chapter 5 in the <i>Cambridge Handbook of Experimental Political Science</i>: pp. 58-70.</li> <li>2. Aldrich, John H. and Arthur Lupia. "Experiments and Game Theory's Value to Political Science." Chapter 7 in the <i>Cambridge Handbook of Experimental Political Science</i>: pp. 89-101.</li> </ol> <p>Note: the class may be waiting to receive experimental results on this date.</p>
3/19	Other topics: Field Experiments	<p>Gerber, Alan S. "Field Experiments in Political Science." Chapter 9 in the <i>Cambridge Handbook of Experimental Political Science</i>: pp. 115-138.</p> <p>Note: the class may be waiting to receive experimental results on this date.</p>
3/24	Doing Reproducible Research	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Gandrud, Christopher. "Getting Started with Reproducible Research." Chapter 2 in <i>Reproducible Research with R and RStudio, Second Ed.</i>, pp. 19-28.</li> <li>2. Gandrud, Christopher. "Getting Started with R, RStudio, and knitr/rmarkdown." Chapter 3 in <i>Reproducible Research with R and RStudio, Second Ed.</i>, pp. 29-64.</li> </ol> <p>Note: the class may be waiting to receive experimental results on this date.</p>
3/26	Data Analysis and Visualization	The class will work on analyzing the experimental data on this date.
3/31	Data Analysis and Visualization	The class will work on analyzing experimental data on this date.
4/2	Data Analysis and Visualization	The class will work on analyzing experimental data on this date.
4/7	Creating a Poster	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Powner, Leanne C. 2017. "Posters, Presentations, and Publishing." Chapter 11 in <i>Empirical Research and Writing: A Political Science Student's Practical Guide</i>: pp. 245-268. Available via WFU at <a href="https://doi.org/10.4135/9781483395906.n11">https://doi.org/10.4135/9781483395906.n11</a>.</li> <li>2. "How to Create a Research Poster." <a href="#">Link here</a></li> <li>3. A collection of Political Science student capstone posters from EIU is available <a href="#">at this link</a>.</li> </ol> <p>Note: The class will work on analyzing experimental data and using the graphics and tables to create a poster on this date.</p>

4/9	Creating a Poster	The class will work on analyzing experimental data and using the graphics and tables to create a poster on this date.
4/14	Drafting Paper	King, G., 2006. "Publication, publication." <i>PS: Political Science &amp; Politics</i> 39(1): 119-125.  Note: the class will begin drafting a paper presenting the project and its results on this date.
4/16	Drafting Paper	The class will work on drafting a paper presenting the project and its results on this date.
4/21	Drafting Paper	The class will work on drafting a paper presenting the project and its results on this date.
4/23	No Class: MPSA Conference	
4/28	Finalize Paper	The class will work on drafting a paper presenting the project and its results on this date.