

Political Science in Practice Applied Research Projects as Career Preparation

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Abstract

How can curricular activities help students learn how to apply political science across professional fields? In this study, I detail and document a new format for a seminar final project that simulates how political science is employed across professional fields. Instead of emulating an academic research paper, students are encouraged to frame their research in a format they choose, from long-form journalism to public policy white papers to lobbying or campaigning strategy memos. This assessment strategy serves multiple purposes. First, much like the standard research paper, it provides an opportunity for active learning within a topic of interest. Second, it sharpens the student's research capabilities. Finally, represents a unique avenue of career preparation, allowing students to explore how their studies may serve them as political science practitioners. Furthermore, I propose structuring this educational strategy within a milestone framework that spreads the workload across the course timeline. Week after week, students deliver different project components that build toward the final paper (e.g., a research question, an argument, or a data plan). This approach helps instructors standardize the requirements for students across chosen formats, ensuring the equitability of assessment. Based on two quarter-length undergraduate senior seminars at Stanford University, I provide preliminary evidence on how this format affects student learning. Through a mix of surveys, student interviews, and classroom experience, I show that this assessment strategy offers the potential for valuable professionalizing experience.

Keywords: Political Science Education; Career Preparation; Experiential Learning; Applied Research

Political Science Department, Stanford University

1 Introduction

Political science education has long grappled with the challenge of preparing students for careers outside academia. While the discipline emphasizes theoretical frameworks and analytical rigor, these strengths are often perceived as disconnected from "real-world" professional applications. For instance, Collins, Knotts and Schiff (2012) documents the lack of explicit career preparation across U.S. political science departments, highlighting a persistent gap between curricular goals and professional outcomes. Similarly, Ahmad (2019) critiques the divergence between undergraduate training and the skill sets demanded in private-sector careers. Further complicating this issue is the diversity of occupations pursued by political science graduates. According to the large-scale survey analysis by Lewis (2017), political science majors enter fields ranging from law to consulting to marketing, many of which bear only tangential connections to politics or government. This occupational variety renders professionally relevant training difficult to achieve within a single curriculum.

Addressing this question, this study explores how curricular activities, and in particular the ever-present research paper, can help students learn to apply political science across professional fields (Pennock, 2011). I argue that applied research is a key skill that bridges the theoretical and professional domains (Baglione, 2008). Whether working as research associates in law firms, consultants in the private sector, or policy analysts in government, the ability to conduct and communicate research is foundational across many career paths. Furthermore, within political science education, student research projects are a classic assignment, making them a natural and flexible conduit for career exploration and preparation. However, these projects are rarely framed as opportunities for students to simulate professional applications of political science knowledge.

With career preparation in mind, I propose a modification to the traditional seminar final research project. Specifically, I encourage students to produce outputs that mimic real-world applications of political science, such as white papers, lobbying memos, and policy briefs. This approach take a step further than recent recommendations that focus on policy writing (Pennock, 2011; Trueb, 2013; Judge, 2021). In doing so, I aim at providing students with a structured avenue for an expansive exploration of how political science can be leveraged across professional contexts.

My proposed design offers several benefits. First, it aligns with active learning principles by prompting students to directly engage with their topic and professional field of interest. Second, it incorporates elements of experiential learning without imposing the logistical burden of arranging partnerships with external clients. Third, it relies on a scaffolding approach to guide students through the research process step-by-step, helping instructors standardize the requirements for students across chosen formats and ensuring the equitability of assessment.

This paper draws on my experience designing and teaching the capstone project course at Stanford University to illustrate how such a framework can be implemented. I detail the assignment structure, including a and mini-lectures showcasing examples of political science applications in diverse fields. I also provide preliminary evidence on the effectiveness of this approach based on the first two iterations of the course. While students found the research projects engaging and appreciated the structured guidance, the career preparation component fell short of expectations. Uptake of professional formats was limited, mini-lectures on professional applications were met with lukewarm interest, and student perceptions of how much political science would matter for their careers remained largely unchanged. These findings underscore the need for further refinement in aligning academic assignments with professional

preparation.

2 The Challenges of Career Preparation in Political Science

Political science educators face an enduring challenge when trying to balance the teaching of foundational knowledge and analytical skills with the inclusion of more practical and career-oriented content (Moulton, 2024). While many of the analytical tools taught in political science courses provide students with transferable skills such as critical thinking, data analysis, and argumentation, there is a growing recognition of the need for more direct employability-related teaching and opportunities for curricular career exploration (Collins, Knotts and Schiff, 2012; Broms and de Fine Licht, 2019). This trend reflects a broader demand among students and employers for skills and experiences that can be immediately applied in professional contexts.

In response to this growing demand, the political science education community has introduced several approaches. For example, career-focused curricular additions have gained traction as universities strive to prepare students for the diverse career paths they might pursue¹. Such efforts include programs and resources specifically designed to help political science majors transition into the workforce, offering tailored guidance on careers in government, non-profits, and private industry. The growing literature on experiential learning emphasizes introducing curricular opportunities for hands-on experience (Kolb, 2014; Bradberry and De Maio, 2019). Others yet have proposed benchmarking initiatives that aim to identify and promote best

¹See for instance such initiatives at the University of Wisconsin Madison <https://polisci.wisc.edu/careers-in-political-science/>, and works such as (Clark, 2003).

practices for linking political science education to professional outcomes (Moulton, 2024).

One specific area of reform has been the research paper. Historically, research assignments in political science have focused on developing academic writing and analytical rigor. However, many educators have advocated for formats that better reflect real-world applications, particularly policy-oriented work (Pennock, 2011; Trueb, 2013; Judge, 2021). These pedagogical contributions emphasize the importance of front-loaded conciseness, practical applicability, and relevance to contemporary policy debates. Despite these innovations, it is important to note that policy-oriented careers represent only a fraction of the career trajectories chosen by political science graduates. Other fields, such as business, technology, and consulting, remain significant pathways (Lewis, 2017). This highlights the potential for a broader reimagining of research assignments to align with the diverse aspirations of political science students.

3 Applied Research Projects

In this study, I present a modified version of the final research paper that provides students with the opportunity to explore how applied research is used across professional fields and replicate a professional product with their paper. This approach was developed for the capstone program for the political science major at Stanford (see syllabus in the appendix). By reframing the traditional research paper assignment, the program aims to bridge academic inquiry with practical application, offering students a platform to simulate real-world professional research tasks.

The key approach is that students are expected to develop the core ingredients of a research paper: a research question or problem, a thesis and argument, and a data analysis plan. However, they are given the freedom to choose the format through which they motivate and present their work. Table 1 illustrates the potential formats proposed in the syllabus, which include traditional academic papers, strategy memos, policy white papers, or specialized research reports (see Table 1). Students were also encouraged to propose alternative formats that aligned with their career aspirations or academic interests, fostering creativity and ownership over their work.

Table 1: Potential Capstone Formats by Field

Fields	Potential Capstone Format
Research	Research paper or report
Journalism	Long-form article
Campaigning	Strategy paper for an electoral campaign
Lobbying	Strategy paper for a lobbying effort
Public Policy	Green paper (policy proposal report)
Diplomacy	Green paper (policy proposal report)
Management consulting	White paper (firm policy report)
Nonprofit management	White paper (firm policy report)
Political risk	Risk analysis report

To support students throughout the research and writing process, the assignment was structured through a tightly-knit scaffolding framework with weekly milestones (see Table 2). The first goal of this structured timeline was to ensure student success by distributing the workload evenly and avoiding a “final rush” at the end of the quarter. Additionally, each milestone provided opportunities for instructor feedback and a chance to address student challenges proactively, whether related to research design, data analysis, or writing clarity.

Table 2: Capstone Project Milestones and Expectations

Milestones	Due Date	Expectations
Project Question	Week 1	- Motivate the project - Identify a question, puzzle, or problem - Employ clear theoretical variables
Working Thesis	Week 2	- Propose an answer, strategy, or solution - Draw insights from political science literature - Describe mechanisms underlying the thesis
Data Plan	Week 3	- Propose a concrete measurement strategy - Identify and describe accessible data sources - Discuss the mode of analysis
Preliminary Results	Week 4	- Implement the proposed data analysis - Present and discuss preliminary results
Rough Draft	Week 5	- Combine all previous milestones - Structure the final project paper - Integrate and expand each section
Edit	Week 6	- Focus on theoretical/analytical sections - Refine thesis - Complete literature review
Edit	Week 7	- Focus on empirical sections - Conclude data analysis - Discuss robustness and limitations
Edit	Week 8	- Focus on introduction and conclusion - Finalize framing of the project
Edit	Week 9	- Polish final draft

The second goal of this approach is to ensure equitable assessment of the final papers, regardless of format. By requiring all students to adhere to the same foundational elements (a clearly defined research question, a coherent argument, and a robust data analysis plan), the content of the papers becomes comparable. This comparability allowed the instructor to evaluate the quality of the work fairly, even as students pursued diverse presentation formats.

In terms of career preparation, this format enabled students to engage in quasi-experiential learning. Those who chose professional formats were tasked with iden-

tifying existing written products in their chosen field as templates to mimic. This exercise provided them with a practical understanding of genre-specific conventions and the nuances of professional communication. Furthermore, by undertaking this exercise, students gained insight into how their political science training might be applied in various professional contexts, from policymaking to advocacy, thereby enriching their academic and career trajectories.

Finally, as illustrated in the syllabus, the class combined research workshops with mini-lectures. The former allowed for peer-to-peer feedback, opportunities for student presentations, and in-class active learning. The latter further reinforced the career-preparation ambitious of the course with instructor input about both practical research methodology and examples of how political science is used across professional fields.

4 Preliminary Evidence

To illustrate how the proposed approach works in practice, I draw on the experience from two undergraduate senior seminars conducted at Stanford University in Fall 2024 and Winter 2025. The class satisfies the capstone requirement for political science majors. This course was designed to guide senior undergraduates through the process of conceptualizing and implementing a research project. The class sizes were small, with nine students in the Fall quarter and ten in the Winter. Student demographics reflected the broad diversity of Stanford's undergraduate population.

I deployed several strategies to gather evidence on the effectiveness of the assignment structure and other career preparation approaches. Students completed intake

surveys at the start of each quarter, as well as mid-course and exit surveys. The surveys were designed to capture students' expectations, experiences, and perceived learning outcomes. I additionally tap into end-of-course evaluations and structured observations recorded by the instructor throughout the quarter.

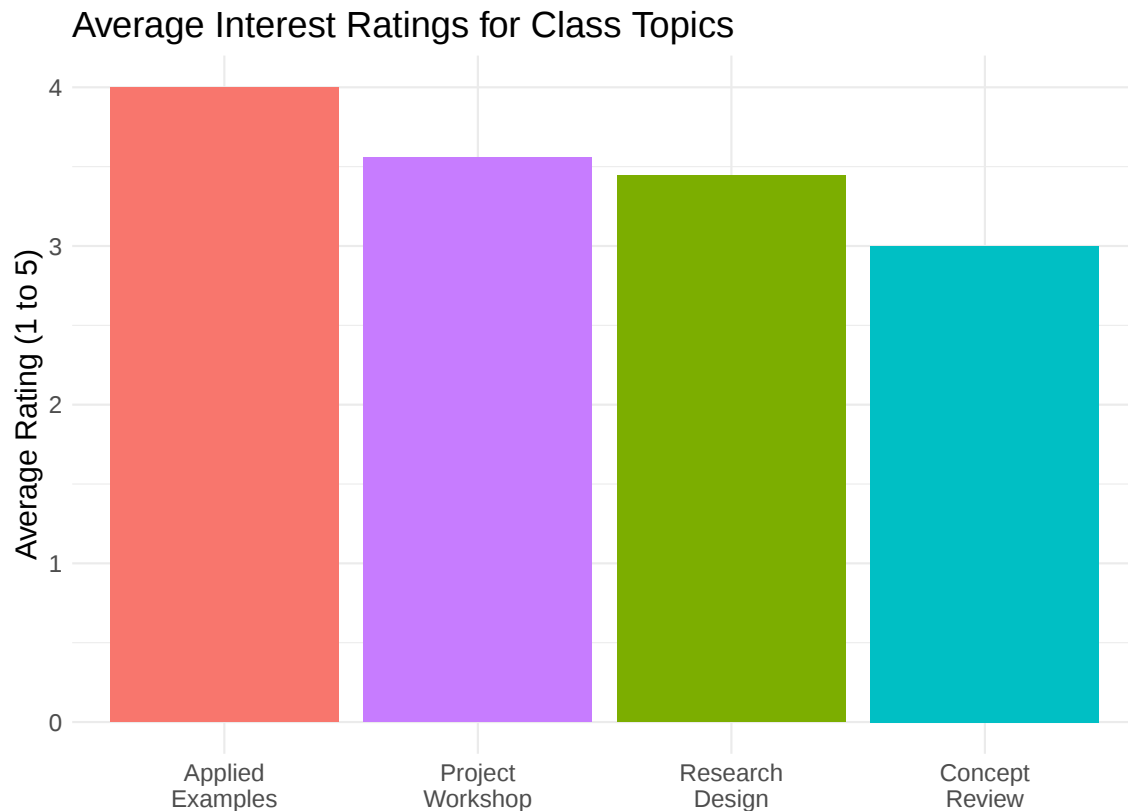
The evidence on the impact of the paper format was mixed. While most students chose topics that aligned with their professional goals, the majority of students opted to write traditional research papers rather than professional formats. For instance, students aiming for careers in law explored topics in judiciary politics, while their classmates with interests in immigration wrote papers in this policy space.

So far, only two students chose to pursue non-standard formats, demonstrating a distinct application of political science principles to real-world contexts. One student authored a political risk report analyzing the implications of a potential US-China confrontation over Taiwan. Another developed a corporate consulting strategy memo examining the effects of corporate political endorsements on sales performance in the tech industry.

Notably, the seminars included mini-lectures that aimed to showcase the applications of political science across various professional fields. These lectures sought to cover a broad array of theoretical and analytical concepts, employing examples from industry and government. For example, my lecture on political journalism drew on work by Nyhan and Sides (2011). In other instances, I invited guest speakers to discuss their career and work in the space, including a researcher from a survey firm and an electoral campaign consultant.

Students seemed receptive of this approach. Leveraging the end-of-quarter survey, Figure 1 shows how this class component fared above all other approaches. However,

Figure 1: Student-Reported Career Relevance of Political Science

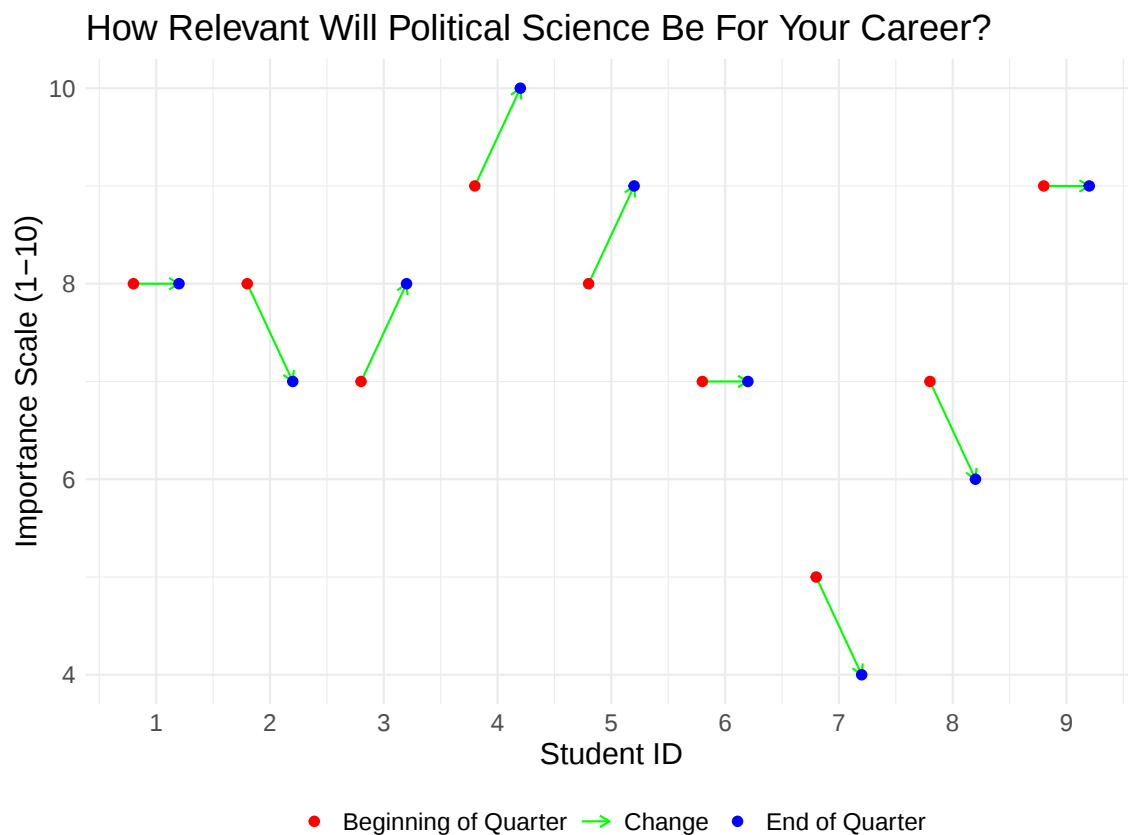


reviewing concepts from political science, which was often paired with their practical application, did not garner as much student interest. This preliminary finding indicates that the potential of a focus on pure applications, without much time spent on the theoretical underpinning.

Based on the only completed course with the proposed format, self-reported student perceptions of career preparations did not shift significantly. The surveys administered at the beginning and end of each quarter sought to measure students' perceptions of the relevance of their political science training to their future careers. Figure 2 suggests that the course experience neither significantly impact students' views on the applicability of their academic background to their professional ambi-

tions. While the very low sample size advises caution, a pattern emerges indicating that the class experience perhaps reinforced students' initial perceptions. Indeed, participants who has a strong prior belief of the relevance of political science for their career were more likely to strengthen such belief, and vice versa for students who reported weaker initial perceptions.

Figure 2: Student-Reported Career Relevance of Political Science



From instructor observations and conversations with students, the proposed applied research format did not seem to resonate with the students' prior coursework,

background, and expectations. Students reported having very little exposure to applied research work, while they instead could draw on their experience with the standard academic research paper from other courses. This training may have influenced their decision to stick with known formats rather than try to explore new typologies of research products. In some sense, the former approach constituted the “path of least resistance”, while latter avenue appeared to require additional work from the students. Another, more generous reading is that students welcomed the opportunity to develop their own academic product, reproducing what they had been taught so far in other seminars, which would not be possible outside of a university course in future phases of their careers.

Additionally, the approach from the proposed syllabus structure did not allow for substantial content difference between the standard research paper and the applied research formats. Both options required the same milestones, that is the same analytical and empirical components. This strategy aimed at equitability of assessment, asking students to produce comparable deliverables regardless of the format choice. However, the unintended consequences was that the choice of format was reduced to a question of “packaging”, potentially diminishing its attractiveness.

Finally, student feedback points at a potential mismatch between the proposed format and the type of class in which it was implemented, the final thesis/capstone course for senior majors. Exit surveys and interviews the end of the first class suggested that students would have preferred a course solely focused on the research project. Several students directly suggested that future versions of the class remove the lecture component on reviews and applications of political science in favor of more work-shopping and one-on-one advising.

5 Conclusion and Initial Takeaways

In conclusion, this paper offers an innovative assignment structure that integrates professional relevance into the traditional final research paper. By encouraging students to produce applied outputs such as white papers, lobbying memos, and risk analysis reports, this framework bridges academic rigor with professional applicability. In doing so, it heeds the call for more attention to career preparation in political science curricula (Collins, Knotts and Schiff, 2012). Building on existing work on more applied research assignments, my proposed format expands beyond the policy space (Pennock, 2011; Trueb, 2013; Judge, 2021). Through a scaffolding approach and structured weekly milestones, the design not only facilitates the research process but also ensures equitable assessment across diverse formats.

The evidence from the initial implementations of this format in two senior seminars yielded mixed results. While students generally engaged with the structured process and appreciated the opportunity to align their projects with professional interests, the uptake of alternative formats remained low. Most students gravitated toward traditional academic papers, likely due to their familiarity with this format and its alignment with their prior coursework. Furthermore, while mini-lectures aimed at showcasing the relevance of political science across fields were positively received, the course experience did not significantly shift students' perceptions of how political science training could inform their careers.

Future iterations of this assessment strategy should consider integrating more guidance and examples of different professional formats to encourage exploration beyond traditional research papers. Instructors might also emphasize the distinct skills gained through professional formats, such as targeted communication and real-world

applicability. Additionally, expanding this approach to other senior seminar courses — not solely capstone classes — may help expose students earlier in their academic journey to the diverse applications of political science. By doing so, educators can better prepare students for a range of professional paths.

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Appendix

POLISCI 290A – Capstone Project

Course Information

Fall Quarter 2024

5 Units

Tuesday-Thursday 4:30pm-5:50pm

Location 260-008 (Main Quad, Pigott Hall)

Course Instructor

Simone Paci, Ph.D.

Email: simone.paci@stanford.edu

Office: Encina Hall 410

Meeting hours: [Tuesday & Thursday 2:30-4:30](#) or by appointment

Course Overview

How does political science inform leaders across industries? This course will explore how applied research is employed in a diverse array of professional fields, from journalism to consulting, from nonprofit management to campaigning. Students will learn how practitioners and decision-makers leverage the analytical and methodological tools of political science, reviewing key insights from the discipline and evaluating their “real world” relevance.

Throughout the course, students will develop an applied research project, focusing on a field of their choice. The final paper will serve as capstone for seniors graduating in political science, integrating and applying knowledge accumulated throughout their prior coursework. For their project, students will identify a real-world problem or puzzle, formulate a thesis, argument, or actionable strategy that draws on political science insights, and support their claims with empirical analysis.

The capstone seminar will run on two parallel tracks. Each week, the first session will focus on an applied professional setting, assessing how analytical frameworks from political science are employed in real-world cases. The second session will focus on the development of students’ capstone projects, covering elements of applied research design, implementation, and communication.

The course will combine a variety of learning approaches. Class will include mini-lectures from the main instructor and from guest speakers, as well as class activities, such as project workshops, student presentations, and seminar-style discussion.

Course Timeline

Week 1		
Session 1.a	Theoretical & Applied Research	September 24 th
Session 1.b	Developing Project Ideas	September 26 th
Week 2		
Session 2.a	Political Journalism	October 1 st
Session 2.b	Drawing Insights from Scientific Literature	October 3 rd
Week 3		
Session 3.a	Public Policy	October 8 th
Session 3.b	Developing a Data Plan	October 10 th
Week 4		
Session 4.a	Political Science & Nonprofit Management	October 15 th
Session 4.b	Implementing Empirical Analysis	October 17 th
Week 5		
Session 5.a	Lobbying	October 22 nd
Session 5.b	Framing & Selling a Project	October 24 th
Week 6		
Session 6.a	Polling & Campaigning	October 29 th
Session 6.b	Strengthening Analytical Frameworks	October 31 st
Week 7		
Session 7.a	Diplomacy	November 5 th
Session 7.b	Empirical Validity & Evidence Robustness	November 7 th
Week 8		
Session 8.a	Political Risk	November 12 th
Session 8.b	Formulating Conclusions & Recommendations	November 14 th
Week 9		
Session 9.a	Management Consulting	November 19 th
Session 9.b	Presenting, Visualizing, and Communicating Results	November 21 st
Week 10		
<i>Thanksgiving Break</i>		
Week 11		
<i>Class Research Conference</i>		

Course Learning Goals



Evaluate how political science research is employed across professional fields and informs stakeholders in diverse analytical and empirical ways.



Apply analytical insights from political science to applied problems, generating arguments and actionable strategies from theoretical models.



Leverage political science methodologies to produce data-driven insights, testing hypotheses and backing analytical claims with robust evidence.



Develop a final applied research project that engages a real-world problem, formulates an argument, and implements a data strategy.

Course Requirements

Enrollment in the capstone project seminar will be limited to juniors and seniors (with priority to seniors) majoring in political science.

Before enrolling, each student must submit, and the department must approve, a description of the intended capstone project.

For more information, please see:

<https://politicalscience.stanford.edu/undergraduate-program/capstone>

Student Expectations

- **Weekly Preparation** (due before class)
Each week, there will be brief material to review for the first session. This may include academic papers, news articles, reports, podcasts, or YouTube videos.
- **Class Participation**
Much of class time will be devoted to conversations around applications of political science across professional settings. Students will also be expected to engage actively in class discussions, activities, and comment each other's presentations.
- **Office Hours**
Students are required to attend at least two office hours to discuss progress. One should be scheduled early in the quarter and one towards the end of the course.
- **Class Presentations** (3 per quarter):
Presentation #1 – Planned Progress Report
Presentation #2 – Random-Draw Progress Report
Presentation #3 – Final Project
- **Capstone Project** (minimum 20 pages / 5000 words)
Students will complete a research project on a topic related to one of the course sessions (see details below).

Grading

(ToC)

PARTICIPATION		20%
Class Discussion and Activities		20%
PRESENTATIONS		20%
Progress Reports		5%
Final Research Presentation		10%
CAPSTONE PROJECT		60%
Progress Milestones		2% each
Final Capstone Project		40%

Presentation Guidelines

Progress Report:

This is an opportunity for students to discuss challenges or doubts and get feedback from the instructor and the class.

When:

- Twice during the quarter:
 - One will be scheduled via a signup survey at the beginning of the quarter.
 - One will be assigned via random draw at the beginning of each session.

Content:

- Focus on the weekly milestone or one specific aspect of the capstone project.
- Discuss one analytical or empirical choice and elicit feedback from the class.

Length:

- 5-10 minutes with Q&A
 - 1-2 slides for the scheduled presentation, no slides for the random draw.
-

Final Research Presentation:

Pitch and describe your final project to the class!

When:

- All final research presentations will take place in the last week of class.

Content:

- Pitch your project: what is the motivating problem? Why is it interesting?
- Briefly illustrate your argument, thesis, or solution.
- Illustrate your empirical strategy, data sources, and analysis plan.
- Discuss and visualize your key results.

Length:

- 30 minutes with Q&A
- 5-10 slides

Capstone Project Guidelines

Each student will write an ***applied research paper***. The capstone project will integrate and apply what they have learned during their course of study. The final paper should identify a real-world problem or question, apply theoretical and analytical insights from political science, and employ an empirical methodology to support any claims with data-driven evidence.

Students will choose a specific field and capstone format, depending on their interests. The table below reports the main options available. The key idea is to replicate how political science is applied in professional settings across industries. If students have a field or format in mind that is not listed below, they should consult the instructor at the beginning of the quarter.

Fields	Potential Capstone Format
Research	Research paper / report
Journalism	Long-form article
Campaigning / Polling	Strategy memo for a campaign
Lobbying	Strategy memo for a campaign
Public Policy	Green paper (policy proposal report)
Diplomacy	Green paper (policy proposal report)
Management consulting	White paper (firm policy report)
Nonprofit management	White paper (firm policy report)
Political risk	Risk analysis report

Students may work on group capstone projects, with a maximum of three co-authors. In this case, the expectations for the final products will be multiplied by the number of students in the group, both in terms of length and complexity. Group projects will require a statement at the beginning of the quarter on the division of labor throughout the course.

Expectations and Formatting

- minimum 5000 words, about 20 pages (excluding bibliography, title page, and figures)
- times new roman, 12pt
- double-spaced
- any citation style is fine (MLA, Chicago, etc.) as long as it is consistent

In order to facilitate the research and writing process, students will follow a ***research timeline*** with ***weekly milestones***. The initial milestones are meant to summarize a section of the final paper. The later milestones include expanding, editing, and polishing the final draft.

Capstone Project Milestones

Milestones	Due Date	Expectations	Min. Requirements
Project Question	Week 1 (Sunday)	- Motivate the project - Identify a question, puzzle, or problem - Employ clear theoretical variables	250 words
Working Thesis	Week 2 (Sunday)	- Propose an answer, strategy, or solution - Draws insights from political science literature - Describes mechanisms underlying the thesis	350 words 5 citations
Data Plan	Week 3 (Sunday)	- Propose a concrete measurement strategy - Identifies and describe accessible data sources - Discusses the mode of analysis	350 words
Preliminary Results	Week 4 (Sunday)	- Implement the proposed data analysis - Present and discuss preliminary results	350 words
Rough Draft	Week 5 (Sunday)	- Combine all previous milestones - Structure the final project paper - Integrate and expand each section	10 pages
Edit	Week 6 (Sunday)	- Focus on theoretical/analytical sections - Refine thesis - Complete literature review	12 pages
Edit	Week 7 (Sunday)	- Focus on empirical sections - Conclude data analysis - Discuss robustness and limitations	15 pages
Edit	Week 8 (Sunday)	- Focus on introduction and conclusion - Finalize framing of the project	20 pages
Edit	Week 9 (Sunday)	- Polish final draft	20 pages

Course Policies

Absences

The course is highly interactive, and participation is key to its pedagogy and learning objectives. However, life happens to all of us and sporadic absences can be excused. Students can make up through a short ad-hoc assignment.

Extensions

The course follows a steady pace and is structured to even out student work. Therefore, I highly encourage students not to delay any assignments. I will consider students' personal circumstances in granting extensions.

Re-Grading

Each graded assessment has clearly stated expectations and grading rubrics. As such, the margin for re-grading will be slim. However, students who believe that their work deserves a major grade change (letter-grade), can bring this up either through office hours or email.

Instructor Communication

Reach out for questions, doubts, or problems. I welcome feedback and strive to incorporate student thoughts into my teaching practice. Email works best. I respond promptly during weekdays but may not always be available on weekends.

Creating a respectful environment

This course encourages lively and earnest discussion on political topics. As such, it is inevitable that people may disagree and hold starkly different opinions. However, without mutual respect, there is not hope for meaningful intellectual exchanges and conversations. We will briefly discuss classroom norms on our first session, but here are a couple of general guidelines I would like to adhere to: listen attentively to others, signal your wish to enter the conversation, critique ideas and not persons.

Inclusivity

As an instructor, I wish to recognize, celebrate and leverage a multitude of views and identities, coming together both in the syllabus and in the classroom. My course strives to include a diverse array of authors, opinions, cultural and intellectual backgrounds. Similarly, my assessment strategy offers a diverse structure of graded activities, recognizing that students may hold different strengths, due to individual and/or cultural differences.

Using Technology in the Classroom

During most of class time, including lectures, presentations, and class discussion, the use of laptops and electronics is not allowed. During specific activities, devices may be allowed to consult reading material, notes, and perform brief online research.

Generative AI

Depending on the context, artificial intelligence (AI) can either enhance and impede learning. There are times when these tools might provide us with new ideas and understandings (e.g., brainstorming or getting feedback). At other points, practicing skills and synthesizing ideas on our own will be crucial for the learning process. Thus, being mindful of when to use these tools will help us navigate the complexity of interacting with AI technologies in the classroom and beyond.

In this class, we will use AI tools, including ChatGPT, that harness large language models as pedagogical opportunities for learning and teaching in the course. Doing so will align with one of our course goals, which pertains to the evaluation of arguments and justification with evidence.

For this class, all assignments should be written in your own words. Just as you cannot take credit for others' writing in your assignments, you cannot use paraphrasing software ("spinbots") or AI writing software (like ChatGPT) and submit the output as your own. Doing so in this is a violation of the [Stanford Honor Code](#). At the beginning of the quarter, we will identify examples of AI tools and discuss what constitutes plagiarism, cheating, and academic dishonesty. This will help to ensure that we are all on the same page about the policies for this course and how they connect to our learning outcomes.

Academic Integrity

This class aims at creating a supportive and engaging learning environment. Academic integrity is vital to this goal, both in spirit and in practice.

Please review [Stanford's Honor Code](#), and [documentation and citation resources](#) from the Hume Center for Writing and Speaking. When in doubt, contact your section leader.

Academic Accommodations

If you find yourself struggling with any components of the course (readings, assignments, participation, etc.), please reach out to me or consult the list of campus resources below.

Students who may need an academic accommodation based on the impact of a disability must initiate the request with the Student Disability Resource Center (SDRC) located within the Office of Accessible Education (OAE). SDRC staff will evaluate the request with required documentation, recommend reasonable accommodations, and prepare an Accommodation Letter for faculty dated in the current quarter in which the request is being made. Students should contact the SDRC as soon as possible since timely notice is needed to coordinate accommodations.

The OAE is located at 563 Salvatierra Walk (723-1066). For more information, refer to: <http://studentaffairs.stanford.edu/oae>

Title IX

Title IX is a federal law that prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex and gender, including sexual harassment and sexual violence, in educational programs and activities that receive federal financial assistance. Stanford is committed to providing a campus environment that is free of such discrimination. If you are experiencing a Title IX-related concern, please be aware of the following confidential and non-confidential resources available to Stanford students.

Please note that many employees of Stanford, including course instructors and teaching assistants, are required to report Title IX-related concerns to the Title IX Office.

Confidential Resource:

The Confidential Support Team (CST) is reachable via a 24-7 hotline at 650-725-9955 for urgent support for at 650-736-6933 for non-urgent questions and appointments.

Non-Confidential Resource:

The Title IX Office is reachable at 650-397-4955 or via email at titleix@stanford.edu. The Office of Sexual Assault and Relationship Abuse Education and Response (SARA) is reachable at 650-725-1056 and saraoffice@stanford.edu.

Much more information, including full lists of both confidential and non-confidential resources, is available online at: sexualviolencesupport.stanford.edu, relationshipviolencesupport.stanford.edu, transgendersupport.stanford.edu

Learning Resources

- [Writing tutors](#) from the Hume Center for Writing and Speaking
- [Academic coaches](#) from the Center for Teaching and Learning
- [Study halls](#), organized by the Center for Teaching and Learning
- [Study Tips and Tools](#), from the Center for Teaching and Learning
- [Undergraduate Advising Directors](#), Academic Advising
- [Well-Being services](#), including [well-being coaches](#), Vaden Health Center
- [Subject Matter Tutoring](#), Center for Teaching and Learning
- [Language Conversation Partner Program](#), Center for Teaching and Learning
- [Tutoring for Student Athletes](#), AARC
- [English as a Second Language \(ESL\) courses](#) for international graduate students
- [Student Tech Resources & Support](#), includes support for personal devices and Stanford services

Academic Disruptions

Stanford as an institution is committed to the highest quality education, and as your teaching team, our priority is to uphold your educational experience. To that end we are committed to following the syllabus as written here, including through short or long-term disruptions, such as public health emergencies, natural disasters, or protests and demonstrations. However, there may be extenuating circumstances that necessitate some changes. Should adjustments be necessary we will communicate clearly and promptly to ensure you understand the expectations and are positioned for successful learning.

Course Schedule

Session 1.A – September 24th – Political Science Research: Theory & Applications

Class Topics

- What is political science?
- Applying political science analytical & methodological tools
- Identifying & developing research questions, puzzles, problems

Suggested Readings

Goodin, Robert E. "The State of the Discipline, the Discipline of the State." *Oxford Handbooks Online* (2011). Pages 2-7

Putnam, Robert D. "APSA presidential address: The public role of political science." *Perspectives on Politics* 1.2 (2003): 249-255.

Assignment (due next class)

Prepare a 3-minute pitch presentation for your capstone project idea

Session 1.B – September 26th – Developing Project Ideas

Class Topics

- Understanding the theoretical framework of your project
- Variable conceptualization & operationalization

Capstone Workshop

- Student capstone project idea pitch competition

Suggested Readings

Adcock, Robert, and David Collier. "Measurement validity: A shared standard for qualitative and quantitative research." *American political science review* 95.3 (2001): 529-546.

Wedeen, Lisa. "Conceptualizing culture: Possibilities for political science." *American political science review* 96.4 (2002): 713-728.

Wuttke, Alexander, Christian Schimpf, and Harald Schoen. "When the whole is greater than the sum of its parts: On the conceptualization and measurement of populist attitudes and other multidimensional constructs." *American Political Science Review* 114.2 (2020): 356-374.

Milestone Assignment (due on Sunday)

- Research Question / Problem statement

Session 2.A – October 1st – Political Journalism

Class Topics

- Social Capital (Robert Putnam) & its effects on democracy
- Using political science as a lens to frame and analyze current affairs
- Class prep: [NYT Daily interview with Robert Putnam](#)

Suggested Readings

Nyhan, Brendan, and John Sides. "How political science can help journalism (and still let journalists be journalists)." *The Forum*. Vol. 9. No. 1. De Gruyter, 2011.

Putnam, Robert D. *The upswing: How America came together a century ago and how we can do it again*. Simon and Schuster, 2020.

Satyanath, Shanker, Nico Voigtländer, and Hans-Joachim Voth. "Bowling for fascism: Social capital and the rise of the Nazi Party." *Journal of Political Economy* 125.2 (2017): 478-526.

Other Resources

The Monkey Cage. (2014-2023).

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2022/12/31/tmc-political-science-politics-explainer/>

Good Authority.

<https://goodauthority.org/>

Session 2.B – October 3rd – Developing Project Ideas

Class Topics

- Developing a theory: inductive and deductive approaches
- Leveraging the scientific literature: drawing theoretical & applied insights

Capstone Workshop

- Paired exercise: using LLMs as a brainstorming tool

Suggested Readings

Humphreys, Macartan, and Alan M. Jacobs. *Integrating Inferences: Causal Models for Qualitative and Mixed-Method Research*. Cambridge University Press, 2023.

https://macartan.github.io/integrated_inferences/HJC2.html

Yom, Sean. "From methodology to practice: Inductive iteration in comparative research." *Comparative Political Studies* 48.5 (2015): 616-644.

Milestone Assignment (due on Sunday)

- Working thesis

Session 3.A – October 8th – Public Policy

Class Topics

- Policy design and individual behavior
- Taxation: rate-setting, enforcement, and evasion

Suggested Readings

Castro, Lucio, and Carlos Scartascini. "Tax compliance and enforcement in the pampas evidence from a field experiment." *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization* 116 (2015): 65-82.

Hallsworth, Michael, et al. "The behavioralist as tax collector: Using natural field experiments to enhance tax compliance." *Journal of public economics* 148 (2017): 14-31.

Session 3.B – October 10th – Developing a Data Plan

Class Topics

- Qualitative & quantitative political science research
- Understanding the data generating process
- Developing a data plan: operationalization, source selection, expectations

Capstone Workshop

- Student walk & talk exercise: measuring the key variable

Suggested Readings

Grimmer, Justin, Margaret E. Roberts, and Brandon M. Stewart. "Machine learning for social science: An agnostic approach." *Annual Review of Political Science* 24.1 (2021): 395-419.

Seawright, Jason, and John Gerring. "Case selection techniques in case study research: A menu of qualitative and quantitative options." *Political research quarterly* 61.2 (2008): 294-308.

Koivu, Kendra L., and Annika Marlen Hinze. "Cases of convenience? The divergence of theory from practice in case selection in qualitative and mixed-methods research." *PS: Political science & politics* 50.4 (2017): 1023-1027.

Milestone Assignment (due on Sunday)

- Data analysis plan

Session 4.A – October 15th – Political Science & Nonprofit Management

Class Topics

- How nonprofits mount successful campaigns
- Collective action & environmental politics

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- Class prep: explore <https://www.sierraclub.org/take-action>

Suggested Readings

Giugni, Marco, and Maria T. Grasso. "Environmental movements in advanced industrial democracies: Heterogeneity, transformation, and institutionalization." *Annual Review of Environment and Resources* 40.1 (2015): 337-361.

Session 4.B – October 17th – Implementing Empirical Analysis

Class Topics

- Differentiating between types of evidence: suggestive, descriptive, predictive, causal
- Interpreting and using empirical results

Capstone Workshop

- Student exercise: Pass, pair, and critique key empirical result

Suggested Readings

Humphreys, Macartan, and Alan M. Jacobs. "Mixing methods: A Bayesian approach." *American Political Science Review* 109.4 (2015): 653-673.

Grimmer, Justin. "We are all social scientists now: How big data, machine learning, and causal inference work together." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 48.1 (2015): 80-83.

Milestone Assignment (due on Sunday)

- Preliminary data analysis

Session 5.A – October 22nd – Lobbying

Class Topics

- Applied insights from 2024 Money in Politics Conference (Copenhagen)
- Employing scientific empirical results to build a persuasive case for policy change

Suggested Readings

Egerod and Aaskoven (2022), "Why Don't Firms Lobby? Information failure on the market for lobbying services" *Working Paper*

https://github.com/BCEgerod/papers/blob/main/Political_Risk_and_Lobbying%20%283%29.pdf

Session 5.B – October 24th – Framing & Selling a Project

Class Topics

- How to frame a project in different ways
- Assessing the comparative advantage / value proposition of a study
- Targeting your audiences

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Capstone Workshop

- Individual work on annotated paper structure

Suggested Readings

Falchetti, Denise, Gino Cattani, and Simone Ferriani. "Start with “Why,” but only if you have to: The strategic framing of novel ideas across different audiences." *Strategic Management Journal* 43.1 (2022): 130-159.

Stanford Business School. “Value Proposition”. *The Impact BMC*. Chapter 4.

https://stanford.edu/dept/gsb-ds/Inkling/The_Impact_BMC/

Milestone Assignment (due on Sunday)

- First rough draft

Session 6.A – October 29th – Polling & Campaigning

Class Topics

- The science of public opinion and political persuasion
- Class prep: [presentation](#) by former director of Analytics for Obama’s campaign

Guest lecture by Dr. Anja Kilibarda (Meta, Decision Science)

Session 6.B – October 31st – Strengthening Analytical Frameworks

Class Topics

- Evaluating counterarguments
- Identifying theoretical conditions & conceptual boundaries of an argument

Capstone Workshop

- Paired exercise: find a foil for your argument

Suggested Readings

Fearon, James D. "Counterfactuals and hypothesis testing in political science." *World politics* 43.2 (1991): 169-195.

Milestone Assignment (due on Sunday)

- Editing the draft: first (theoretical) section

Session 7.A – November 5th – Diplomacy

Class Topics

- International relations theories
- Making sense of state behavior, analyzing foreign interest and foreign policy

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Guest Lecture

Suggested Readings

Weldes, Jutta. "Constructing national interests." *European journal of international relations* 2.3 (1996): 275-318.

Session 7.B – November 7th – Empirical Validity & Evidence Robustness

Class Topics

- Recognizing threats to internal & external validity
- Increasing robustness of empirical results

Capstone Workshop

- Group brainstorm quick session: develop a secondary empirical design

Suggested Readings

Egami, Naoki, and Erin Hartman. "Elements of external validity: Framework, design, and analysis." *American Political Science Review* 117.3 (2023): 1070-1088.

<https://statmodeling.stat.columbia.edu/2017/11/29/whats-point-robustness-check/>

Milestone Assignment (due on Sunday)

- Editing the draft: second (empirical) section

Session 8.A – November 12th – Political Risk

Class Topics

- Contentious domestic politics: protest movements

Suggested Readings

Brink, Charlotte H. *Measuring political risk: risks to foreign investment*. Routledge, 2017. Chapter 1.

<https://books.google.com/books?id=cZPjGJFE2tAC&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false>

Giambona, Erasmo, John R. Graham, and Campbell R. Harvey. "The management of political risk." *Journal of International Business Studies* 48 (2017): 523-533.

Session 8.B – November 14th – Formulating Conclusions & Recommendations

Class Topics

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- Turning empirical results into policy/strategy recommendations
- Looking ahead to the next study: developing an applied research agenda

Class prep:

<https://freakonomics.com/podcast/why-do-most-ideas-fail-to-scale/>

Capstone Workshop

- Individual work and round of executive-summary reports

Suggested Readings

Bogensneider, Karen, and Thomas J. Corbett. "Why There Is a Disconnect Between Research and Policy, and What We Can Do." *Evidence-Based Policymaking*. Routledge, 2021. 3-23. <https://searchworks.stanford.edu/view/8631645>

Milestone Assignment (due on Sunday)

- Full final draft

Session 9.A – November 19th – Political Science & Management Consulting

Class Topics

- Rawlsian justice & other frameworks of moral reasoning
- Ethics of applied research: subjects, clients, the “truth”
- Brief HBS case

Suggested Readings

Kvalnes, Øyvind. “Beyond Compliance”. *Moral reasoning at work: Rethinking ethics in organizations*. Springer Nature, 2019.

Session 9.B – November 21st – Presenting, Visualizing, and Communicating Results

Class Topics

- Communicating with diverse audiences
- Visualizing and presenting results

Capstone Workshop

- Applied research presentation demonstration

Suggested Readings

Stanford Hume Center. *Effective Speaking Guide*.

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1pS_QRRFisF7lREbpeAjAwUcmMP4HGWYz/view

Rojas-Padilla, Eduardo, Tamara Metze, and Katrien Termeer. "Seeing the visual: A literature review on why and how policy scholars would do well to study influential visualizations." *Policy Studies Yearbook* 12.1 (2022): 103-136.

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Week 10 – *Thanksgiving Break*

Week 11 – TBD – *Final Research Conference*