POS 6736: Conduct of Political Inquiry (85908)

ᘓ University of Central Florida, Fall 2025 ᘐ

Instructor:	**Dr. Suman Acharya**	**Class meetings:**
Email:	suman.acharya@ucf.edu	Mon 6:00-8:50pm
SPSIA Office:	HPH 302D	**BA1 O213**
Telephone:	207-907-5073	
Office hours:	Tue 1-2 pm & Wed 1-3 pm	

**** The syllabus is a general plan for the course; deviations may be necessary and will be announced in class ****

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course places emphasis on the elements and logic of research design in political inquiry. This seminar course is designed to guide students through the process of developing a strong, fundable research proposal. Emphasizing the integration of social science theories and methods, the course helps students define a research problem, formulate research questions or hypotheses, and design a plan for conducting original research. Students will gain familiarity with research ethics, IRB protocols, and a range of methodological tools used by political science scholars and other social scientists. Weekly discussions will critically assess the strengths and limitations of qualitative and quantitative methods, field techniques, and analytical approaches. In-class workshops will provide structured opportunities for students to present and refine their research ideas with peer and instructor feedback. By the end of the course, students will have produced a polished research proposal suitable for submission to funding agencies or for use in dissertation planning.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this course, students will:

1) Understand the fundamentals of research design, including the structure, purpose, and key components of a research proposal.
2) Critically frame a research topic by identifying significant gaps in the existing literature and engaging with relevant theoretical and empirical debates.
3) Develop a coherent and feasible research plan, including a detailed methodological approach that demonstrates preparedness for independent research.
4) Evaluate the strengths and limitations of qualitative research designs in political and social science research.
5) Contribute to an academic environment that promotes mutual support, critical engagement, and collaborative scholarship.
6) Review peer research proposals and provide constructive feedback to improve scholarly work.
7) Demonstrate effective presentation skills in group settings.

REQUIRED TEXTS

McNabb, David E. 2020. *Research methods for political science: quantitative, qualitative and mixed method approaches*. (McNabb in the Course Schedule.) Routledge, 2020.
ISBN: 9781003103141
https://go.openathens.net/redirector/ucf.edu?url=https%3A%2F%2Fdoi.org%2F10.4324%2F9781003103141

Powner, Leanne C. 2015. Empirical Research and Writing. A Political Science Student's Practical Guide. (Powner in the Course Schedule). Sage Publishing.

ISBN: 9781483369631
https://go.openathens.net/redirector/ucf.edu?url=https://methods.sagepub.com/book/mono/empirical-research-and-writing-a-political-science-students-practical-guide/toc

King, Gary, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba. 1994. *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research.* (King et al. in the Course Schedule.) Princeton University Press. ISBN-13: 978-0691034713
https://go.openathens.net/redirector/ucf.edu?url=https%3A%2F%2Fmuse.jhu.edu%2Fpub%2F267%2Fmonograph%2Fbook%2F61837

GRADING AND COURSE EXPECTATIONS (*see course schedule page for due dates*)

Research Proposal (50%) to be submitted in multiple stages (10-12 pages):

1. **Problem statement and research question (5%):** Students will submit general and specific research questions for their course project. The submission should provide a short discussion (2-3 paragraphs) of why the question is important with some discussion of both theoretical and practice significance.
2. **Literature Review (5%):** 3–5-page review (750-1250 words) of the literature identifying major debates and gaps to help you define your research problem and refine your research questions. Should draw on a minimum of 10 peer-reviewed sources. If the research question is hypothesis-driven, then the literature review should end with a statement of the hypotheses.
3. **Theory/Framework (5%)**: A comprehensive exploration of the theoretical framework or conceptual model guiding the research should be explored.
4. **Research Design and Methodology (10%)**: Detailed information on each section including study area, data collection instruments (methods), sampling, limitations of study, broader impacts, and research timeline should be explored.
5. **Full Proposal, Draft #1 (10%)**
6. **Final Proposal (15%)**

Participation and Discussion (30%): All classes will be Face to Face (FTF). Most of the seminar time will be taken up by open discussion about the assigned readings, which would not be possible without your adequate preparation. **Therefore, your attendance is very important for both the individual and collective benefits that come from class discussion.** Acceptable excuses for missing class may include things like illness, conference presentations or other kinds of professional development. Absences may be excused at my discretion with written documentation. You are still responsible for submitting your assignments on time. Late submissions would be subject to significant penalties (drop one letter grade for each day).

CITI Training (2%): All students will complete UCF's CITI **training (Human Subjects Protection – Group 2: Social/Behavioral Research)**. Credit is given when instructor is provided with documentation.

Peer Review Assignment (8%): Each student will be assigned a peer's full proposal to review. Assignments will be made by the instructor. Students are expected to **provide thoughtful, constructive feedback and evaluate the proposal** using the criteria outlined in a handout that will be provided.

Proposal Presentation (10%): Students will deliver a **10–12-minute formal presentation** of their proposal near the end of the semester, followed by a **5-minute Q&A** session. **Attendance is required** for all class sessions during the presentation weeks to ensure that everyone can both present and engage as audience members.

Grades will be determined based on the following scale:

Numeric	93+	90+	87+	80+	77+	70+	67+	60+	0+
Letter	A	A-	B+	B	C+	C	D+	D	F

FEDERAL FINANCIAL AID REQUIREMENT: RECORDING ACADEMIC ACTIVITY POLICY

UCF must comply with a federal financial aid regulation that states that in order to receive federal aid, students must be actively academically engaged (according to a federal definition) in each course in which they are enrolled. All faculty are required to document students' academic activity at the beginning of each course. Without verification of this engagement, students will not receive their aid.

In order to document that you began this course, please **complete the canvas assignment** by the end of the first week of classes, or as soon as possible after adding the course, but **no later than August 22. Failure to do so will result in a delay in the disbursement of your financial aid.**

POLICY STATEMENTS

COVID

There are presently no required COVID-related syllabus policies at the university level. For guidance regarding COVID please visit the official CDC webpage (https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html). The COVID line at UCF no longer exists, however Student Health Services has resumed normal operations for providing care to students. This care includes providing COVID testing and care for students, and vaccination for everyone.

PROFESSIONALISM AND STUDENT CONDUCT

Students are expected to conduct themselves in a civil and professional manner. Disrupted behavior, profanity, or any other offensive behavior will not be tolerated. All mobile devices must be turned off and put out of view during class meetings. Repeated professionalism violations will result in a reduction in course grades. **If there is anything in the syllabus that is unclear, it is up to the student to contact the professor for clarification.** Also, it is the student's responsibility to be informed of any announcements made in class meetings.

ACADEMIC HONESTY

Students should familiarize themselves with UCF's Rules of Conduct. According to Section 1, "Academic Misconduct," students are prohibited from engaging in

1. Unauthorized assistance: Using or attempting to use unauthorized materials, information or study aids in any academic exercise unless specifically authorized by the instructor of record. The unauthorized possession of examination or course-related material also constitutes cheating.
2. Communication to another through written, visual, electronic, or oral means: The presentation of material which has not been studied or learned but rather was obtained through someone else's efforts and used as part of an examination, course assignment, or project.
3. Commercial Use of Academic Material: Selling of course material to another person, student, and/or uploading course material to a third-party vendor without authorization or without the express written permission of the university and the instructor. Course materials include but are not limited to class notes, Instructor's PowerPoints, course syllabi, tests, quizzes, labs, instruction sheets, homework, study guides, handouts, etc.
4. Falsifying or misrepresenting the student's own academic work.
5. Plagiarism: Using or appropriating another's work without any indication of the source, thereby attempting to convey the impression that such work is the student's own.

6. Multiple Submissions: Submitting the same academic work for credit more than once without the express written permission of the instructor.
7. Helping another violate academic behavior standards.

For more information about Academic Integrity, students may consult The Center for Academic Integrity. For more information about plagiarism and misuse of sources, see "Defining and Avoiding Plagiarism: The WPA Statement on Best Practices."

RESPONSES TO ACADEMIC DISHONESTY, PLAGIARISM, OR CHEATING

Students should also familiarize themselves with the procedures for academic misconduct in UCF's student handbook, *The Golden Rule*. UCF faculty members have a responsibility for students' education and the value of a UCF degree and so seek to prevent unethical behavior and when necessary, respond to academic misconduct. Penalties can include a failing grade in an assignment or in the course, suspension or expulsion from the university, and/or a "Z Designation" on a student's official transcript indicating academic dishonesty, where the final grade for this course will be preceded by the letter Z. For more information about the Z Designation, click here.

STUDENT ACCESSIBILITY

The University of Central Florida is committed to providing access and inclusion for all people with disabilities. Students with disabilities who need disability-related access to this course should contact the professor as soon as possible. Students should also connect with Student Accessibility Services (SAS) <https://sas.sswb.ucf.edu/> (Ferrell Commons 185, sas@ucf.edu, phone 407-823-2371). Through Student Accessibility Services, a Course Accessibility Letter may be created and sent to professors, which informs faculty of potential access and accommodations that might be reasonable. Determining reasonable access and accommodation requires consideration of the course design, course learning objectives and the individual academic and course barriers experienced by the student.

CAMPUS SAFETY STATEMENT

Emergencies on campus are rare, but if one should arise during class, everyone needs to work together. Students should be aware of their surroundings and familiar with some basic safety and security concepts.

1. In case of an emergency, dial 911 for assistance.
2. Every UCF classroom contains an emergency procedure guide posted on a wall near the door. Students should make a note of the guide's physical location and review the online version at <https://centralflorida-prod.modolabs.net/student/safety/index>.
3. Students should know the evacuation routes from each of their classrooms and have a plan for finding safety in case of an emergency.
4. If there is a medical emergency during class, students may need to access a first-aid kit or AED (Automated External Defibrillator). To learn where those are located, see <https://ehs.ucf.edu/automated-external-defibrillator-aed-locations>.
5. To stay informed about emergency situations, students can sign up to receive UCF text alerts by going to <www.getrave.com/login/ucf> and logging in. On the "My Account" tab, fill out the information, including e-mail address and cell phone number.
6. Students with special needs related to emergency situations should speak with their instructors outside of class.
7. To learn about how to manage an active-shooter situation on campus or elsewhere, consider viewing this video (<https://youtu.be/NIKYajEx4pk>).

VIRUSES

It is important to use a reputable anti-virus program (good ones include McAfee or Norton). Also, **back up your files**: Hard drives do crash, and it is really inconvenient when they do. However, this is not a valid excuse for failing to get your work in on time.

E-MAIL PROTOCOLS

Do not expect an immediate response when you send a message. Generally, two days is considered a reasonable amount of time to receive a reply. Please note that your professor only checks and answers e-mails during regular business hours.
In the "Subject" heading include the course ID, *POS 6746.0W60* and your *last name*.

COPYRIGHT

This course may contain copyright protected materials such as audio or video clips, images, text materials, etc. These items are being used with regard to the Fair Use doctrine in order to enhance the learning environment. Please do not copy, duplicate, download or distribute these items. The use of these materials is strictly reserved for this online classroom environment and your use only. All copyright materials are credited to the copyright holder.

DEPLOYED ACTIVE-DUTY MILITARY STUDENTS

If you are a deployed active-duty military student and feel that you may need special accommodation due to that unique status, please contact me to discuss your circumstances.

MAKE-UP ASSIGNMENTS FOR AUTHORIZED EVENTS OR CO-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Students who represent the university in an authorized event or activity (for example, student-athletes) and who are unable to meet a course deadline due to a conflict with that event must provide the instructor with documentation in advance to arrange make-up. No penalty will be applied. For more information, see the UCF policy at <https://policies.ucf.edu/documents/4-401.pdf>

RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES

Students must notify their instructor in advance if they intend to miss class for a religious observance. For more information, see the UCF policy at
<http://regulations.ucf.edu/chapter5/documents/5.020ReligiousObservancesFINALJan19.pdf>.

TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE

Note: This schedule is subject to change depending on the needs of the class. *Students are responsible for any changes in syllabus/schedule which are announced in class.*

Week 1 (August 18) **Introduction & Course Overview**	
Welcome, Introduction, and Course overview (reading material, assignments, and expectations) Discussion Facilitation Sign-up	
Week 2 (August 25) **Theme: Scientific Methods Elements of Research**	
Watch: Naomi Oreskes, "Why we should trust scientists" Naomi Oreskes, "Why we should trust scientists" https://www.ted.com/talks/naomi_oreskes_why_we_should_trust_scientists **Read:** **King et al., (Chapter 1, Sections 1.1 & 1.2)** **McNabb, (Chapter 1, 3, 4)** Moon, K., & Blackman, D. (2014). A guide to understanding social science research for natural scientists. *Conservation biology*, *28*(5), 1167-1177. Hammersley, M., Iphofen, R., & Tolich, M. (2018). Values in Social Research. In *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research Ethics* (pp. 23–34). SAGE Publications Ltd. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526435446.n2	
Week 3 (September 1)	
No Class- Labor Day	
Week 4 (September 8) **Theme: Understanding Qualitative Methods in Theory and Practice**	
Read: **McNabb, (Chapter 17)** **King et al., (Chapter 2)** Emmons, C. V., & Moravcsik, A. M. (2020). Graduate qualitative methods training in political science: a disciplinary crisis. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, *53*(2), 258-264. Christians, C. G. (2008). Ethics and politics in qualitative research. *The landscape of qualitative research*, *3*, 185-220.	

<u>Week 5 (September 15)</u> **Theme: Literature Review and Framing Research Questions**	
Guest: Jason Phillips (UCF Library, Room 175) **Read:** **Powner, (Chapter 1, 3)** Agee, J. (2009). Developing qualitative research questions: A reflective process. *International journal of qualitative studies in education*, *22*(4), 431-447. Bryman, A. (2007). The research question in social research: what is its role? *International journal of social research methodology*, *10*(1), 5-20. Knopf, J. W. (2006). Doing a literature review. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, *39*(1), 127-132. Przeworski, A., & Salomon, F. (1995). The art of writing proposals. *Brooklyn NY, Social science researh council*.	**Due: 9/15, 12:00 PM Problem statement and Research Question (context/motivation; one page)**
<u>Week 6 (September 22)</u> **Theme: Ethics and Institutional Review Board Issues**	
Guest: Douglas Backman (Director of Compliance, Office of Research, UCF) **Read:** **McNabb, (Chapter 2)** Fujii, L. A. (2012). Research ethics 101: Dilemmas and responsibilities. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, *45*(4), 717-723. Steneck, N. H., & United States. Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health. Office of Research Integrity. (2004). *ORI introduction to the responsible conduct of research*. U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, Office of Research Integrity]. **(Chapters 2, 3, & 5)** Wadams, M., & Park, T. (2018). Qualitative research in correctional settings: Researcher bias, western ideological influences, and social justice. *Journal of forensic nursing*, *14*(2), 72-79. Berger, R. (2015). Now I see it, now I don't: Researcher's position and reflexivity in qualitative research. *Qualitative research*, *15*(2), 219-234.	**Due: 9/22, 12:00 PM Literature Review (3-5 page; 750-1250 words)** <u>#Should draw on a minimum of 10 peer-reviewed sources</u>
<u>Week 7 (September 29)</u> **Theme: Research Design and Theory**	
Guest: Renea Carver (IRB Manager, UCF) **Read:** **Powner, (Chapter 2, 4)**	**Due: 9/29, 12:00 PM Theory/Framework (1-2 pages)**

King et al., (Chapter 1, Sections 1.3) **McNabb, (Chapters 5, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24)** Gaus, N. (2017). Selecting research approaches and research designs: A reflective essay. *Qualitative Research Journal*, *17*(2), 99-112.	
<u>Week 8 (October 6)</u> **Theme: Field Work and Data Collection: Interviewing, Observation, and Focus Group Discussion**	
Guest: Sara S Lowden, Ph.D. (Assistant Professor, Sociology, Northern Arizona University) **Read:** **Powner, (Chapter 6)** **McNabb, (Chapters 18)** **Creswell, (Chapter 7)** Guest, G., Bunce, A., & Johnson, L. (2006). How many interviews are enough? An experiment with data saturation and variability. *Field methods*, *18*(1), 59-82. Wutich, A., Beresford, M., & Bernard, H. R. (2024). Sample sizes for 10 types of qualitative data analysis: An integrative review, empirical guidance, and next steps. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *23*, 16094069241296206.	**Due: 10/06, 12:00 PM CITI Training**
<u>Week 9 (October 13)</u> **Theme: Democratizing Research & Participatory Action Research**	
Guest: Tashi Wongdi Gurung, Ph.D. (Founder, Qualz.ai) **Read:** **McNabb, (Chapters 25, 26)** Edwards, R., & Brannelly, T. (2017). Approaches to democratising qualitative research methods. *Qualitative Research*, *17*(3), 271-277. Long, J. W., Ballard, H. L., Fisher, L. A., & Belsky, J. M. (2016). Questions that won't go away in participatory research. *Society & Natural Resources*, *29*(2), 250-263. Haverkamp, J. (2021). Collaborative survival and the politics of livability: Towards adaptation otherwise. *World Development*, *137*, 105152. Steneck, N. H., & United States. Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health. Office of Research Integrity. (2004). *ORI introduction to the responsible conduct of research*. U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, Office of Research Integrity]. **(Chapters 6, 7, & 8)**	**Due: 10/13, 12:00 PM Design, Study Area, Methodology (data collection instruments), sampling, anticipated problems encounter (limitations), broader impact, & Research Timeline (2-3 pages)**
<u>Week 10 (November 20)</u> **Theme: Ethnographic Research and Ethical Considerations**	
Guest: Morgan Bauer (Director, Office of Prestigious Awards, UCF)	

Read: Griffin, C., & Bengry-Howell, A. (2010). Ethnography. In *The Sage handbook of qualitative research in psychology* (pp. 15-31). SAGE Publications Ltd. Artur, L., & Hilhorst, D. (2012). Everyday realities of climate change adaptation in Mozambique. *Global Environmental Change*, *22*(2), 529-536. Billo, E., & Mountz, A. (2016). For institutional ethnography: Geographical approaches to institutions and the everyday. *Progress in Human Geography*, *40*(2), 199-220. Rashid, M., Caine, V., & Goez, H. (2015). The encounters and challenges of ethnography as a methodology in health research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *14*(5), 1609406915621421. Russell, L., & Barley, R. (2020). Ethnography, ethics and ownership of data. *Ethnography*, *21*(1), 5-25.	
Week 11 (October 27) **Theme: Mixed Method**	
Read: **McNabb, (Chapters 27 and 28)** Dawadi, S., Shrestha, S., & Giri, R. A. (2021). Mixed-methods research: A discussion on its types, challenges, and criticisms. *Journal of Practical Studies in Education*, *2*(2), 25-36. Taherdoost, H. (2022). What are different research approaches? Comprehensive review of qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method research, their applications, types, and limitations. *Journal of Management Science & Engineering Research*, *5*(1), 53-63.	**Due: 10/27 12:00 PM Full Proposal Draft 1**
Week 12 (November 3) **Theme: Scholarly Writing – Thesis Development and Publication-Ready Manuscripts**	
Guest: Saugat Bolakhe (Science Writer/ Journalist, Scientific American) **Read:** **Powner, (Chapter 9)** Clark, A. M., & Thompson, D. R. (2016). Five tips for writing qualitative research in high-impact journals: moving from# BMJnoQual. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *15*(1), 1609406916641250. **Optional:** **Powner, (Chapter 10, 11)**	**DUE: 11/03 12:00 PM Peer Reviews**
Week 13, 14, & 15 **(November 10, 17, & 24)**	**Research Proposal Presentations**

December 6	**Due: 12/06 11:59 PM Final Proposal Due**