PLSC 470/570, Sec. 001: Capstone on Experiments in Post-Conflict Societies

Course Syllabus

Tuesdays 3-5:30 p.m., 793 SWKT
Fall Semester 2010

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Office Hours: Tu/Th 9-10 am (or by appt)

Course Rationale

The capstone seminar is the crowning requirement for a degree in political science or international relations. It brings together your learning in political science theory, substance and methodology into a single course, where you conceive and complete a major research project of your own design. Capstones focus on a subject of research interest to the professor teaching the course, usually paralleling a major research project. In this case, the course dovetails with my work doing randomized controlled trials in international development and post-conflict societies. I will be sharing with you some of my research and research designs during the course. In this sense, we will all be undertaking the same basic enterprise: the completion of a major research endeavor. It is in the capstone that you finally employ all of your skills as a student of political science or international relations.

Although the substantive focus is on experiments in post-conflict peace-building, this course is primarily a research and writing class. You will write extensively throughout the entire semester and the finished product should be an excellent research paper. This course builds on Political Science 200 by requiring you to carry out the various stages of a research project. During the semester you will identify a research question, develop a theory to explain the question, and establish an adequate strategy to test the theory. The assignments will be build on each other and progress to a final, polished research paper. You will also practice writing to different audiences and present your research to the class and review the work of your peers.

Course Objectives

Students who complete this course successfully should:

- Master the key elements of field experiments, including randomization, intervention, measurement, and inference;
- Understand some of the most important concepts in the political economy of development and the politics of post-conflict societies as discussed by leading scholars;
- Become able to organize and develop a major research design in a professional format;
- Become “experts” in a single major aspect of development or post-conflict;
• Develop the ability to review the work of peers;
• Improve the ability to write clear and engaging prose.

Assignments and Grading:
Evaluations will consider the following elements (with weights included):

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<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
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<tr>
<td>Final Draft of Research Design</td>
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<td>Earlier Draft of Research Design</td>
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<td>Research Prospectus</td>
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<td>Institutional Review Board Application</td>
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<td>Critical Literature Review</td>
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<td>Participation</td>
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<td>Readings Emails</td>
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<td>Peer Reviews</td>
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<td>Abstract</td>
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<td>ETS Exam Required to Pass</td>
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Deadlines
All assignments, readings emails and the final exam are due on the date and time specified in the syllabus. Late assignments will be penalized. If assignments are turned in after the first five minutes of class but on the same day, a five percent penalty applies. If an assignment is turned in the day after it is due, a ten percent penalty applies. For each weekday after that an additional three percent penalty will accumulate. Thus, an assignment turned in five days late will receive a twenty-two percent penalty. Six days late, twenty-five percent, and so on.

Class Participation
This class is a research seminar. As such, participation in the discussions we have in class will be vital for the seminar’s success. Because of this, significant weight is placed on your preparation for and performance in class discussions. I expect you to come to each class period prepared to discuss the reading for the day. I will be evaluating your performance in each of our class discussions. You should be prepared to make comments on each topic we cover, demonstrating an understanding of the core concepts we address.

In addition, once or twice during the semester, each of you will lead the discussion on the readings and this will count as 25% of your overall participation grade. In leading the discussion, you will briefly summarize the reading and then ask the members of the seminar open-ended questions related to the strengths, weaknesses, and other aspects you find interesting/relevant in the readings. You also need to draw out lessons that apply (or will apply) to our capstone projects and discuss the connections in concrete ways. The key will be to draw out insights from your peers that enlighten the class and illuminate the readings.

Please note that you must submit a full outline detailing how you intend to lead the discussion so that I have time to offer feedback. The outline needs to be submitted to me by the Friday prior to class at 12 pm.
Email Responses
I borrowed this idea from my colleagues, Profs. Wade Jacoby and Dan Nielson. For each reading in the course, each of you is required to submit a short email of two paragraphs (500 words or less). I must receive the email before midnight on the Monday before we meet in class on Tuesday to discuss the relevant reading. The first paragraph must restate the main argument of the reading – identifying both independent and dependent variables – and summarize the author’s research strategy and data – analyzing how well it supports the author’s argument.

A summary paragraph is due for every reading we cover in class, but if there is more than one reading on a given day, please send your responses in a single email.

The last paragraph of the email needs to connect the assigned readings to a new article or paper published or written since 2000 – and not included on the course syllabus – that you have discovered using appropriate research methods. I recommend the Social Science Citation Index or Google Scholar, with special attention to articles receiving citations by other scholars.

In the last paragraph you can reflect on how the new article or paper answers an unanswered question in the assigned reading, corrects a conceptual or empirical error, solves a puzzle created by the assigned reading, suggests an alternative or critique, or otherwise improves on what is known about the topic. You can reflect on anything interesting about the new article, provided you connect it to the assigned reading. Students in the past have found it most useful to search for readings that respond to unanswered questions in the assigned readings.

To clarify, if there are three assigned articles for the day, then your email should consist of four paragraphs. You need to include one summary paragraph for each of the assigned readings and then a final paragraph in which you synthesize what you learned and compare to an outside article or book.

At the top of the email, please include a full citation of the new article or paper using appropriate Turabian style. Part of the grade for your emails will reflect the quality, novelty, and relevance of the article you chose and the insights you have in connecting it to the assigned reading. You do not need to select a new article for every assigned reading, although you should feel welcome to do so. One new article per class session/email will suffice. But you do need to connect each assigned reading to the one new article you chose.

Finding new articles frequently will help you learn how to answer unanswered questions and get up-to-date on the latest research. Hence, this assignment will help you become better researchers. Hint: you may find it helpful to find articles, if any are available, that cite the assigned readings.

Important Note: I sometimes receive more than 100 emails in a given day, and you will need to help me sort yours out of the mix. In the email’s subject line, please type “PLSC 470”: followed by the last name(s) of the author(s) so that we can better keep track of your emails. For example, an article by George Washington would be referenced in the subject as:

PLSC 470: Washington
If you do not do this, I may inadvertently fail to give you credit for your email. Do not put anything else in the subject line. That way, if you need to email me regarding something else, I won't mistake it for an assignment email.

I will provide feedback on how you are doing on the emails at a few points in the semester, but a far better way to have them evaluated is to print them, bring them to class, and use them as the basis for our discussions. In addition to enriching our discussions, they are a great way for me to prepare for class – they help me see which points came across well and which did not and need emphasis. Finally, they are also a chance to explore ideas without the pressure of expanding them into full papers, though it is likely that great papers may well get their start as smart emails.

You should submit emails for each reading assignment every day that we have a reading assignment, though each student can skip one email without penalty. You should feel free to discuss the readings together before composing the emails. Collaboration and discussion is encouraged. However, you will be graded on your independence of thought in your analysis, so copying each other’s work will be penalized severely.

The most important thing I am looking for is “evidence of intelligent life.” Engage the readings thoughtfully, critique them, ask questions of them, wonder what comes next – anything that demonstrates that you’ve expended intellectual energy on the ideas we’re covering.

**Research Paper**

This course is geared toward the successful completion of a major research paper. You should begin now to consider possible topics. You will prepare the paper in stages: (1) conceiving an abstract, (2) writing and presenting a prospectus; (3) gathering potential sources from which to draw and drafting a critical literature review situating your work; (4) preparing an application to the Institutional Review Board, which governs research on human subjects (5) writing an earlier draft of the research design or research paper; (6) submitting the final draft and presenting it for review by peers and the professor; and (7) revising and polishing the final draft.

The paper should be sound methodologically. That is, it should posit a set of related hypotheses about the politics of development or post-conflict societies – including clearly specified relationships between independent and dependent variables – and then design a field experiment to evaluate the hypotheses using a randomized controlled trial. You are not restricted as to which variables you choose, so long as they relate directly to the broad themes of the course: development and post-conflict. The one stipulation is that some aspect of politics must be included somewhere in the independent or dependent variables.

The research design paper should be 6,500 to 9,000 words in length on double-spaced pages (roughly 25-35 pages). It should be prepared in Turabian or Chicago Manual of Style citation style, and it should be written in clear, grammatically correct and engaging prose.

Including the abstract, literature review, prospectus and two drafts, the paper will encompass more than three fourths (77 percent) of your total grade for this course and should occupy a significant amount of your attention this semester. The earlier draft of the paper (which should not be your very first draft, or the grade will probably suffer) will be submitted to the peers in your group and to
the professors for initial review. The final draft should address/incorporate your peers’ and professor’s comments and criticisms.

**Presentation**
You will be required to present your paper to the members of the class and defend your ideas against criticisms and objections they have. We will likely set up the presentations as a scholarly panel, where there are presenters, discussants and an audience that engage in a discussion of the papers. Your performance in the presentation will be calculated as 15% of the grade on the final paper.

**Abstract**
The earlier draft and final draft of the paper must include an abstract. This will also be the first assignment in the class, due at the third week we meet (and worth 4% of the overall grade). An abstract is a terse, one-paragraph summary of the paper’s question, argument and research design. It is required for most scholarly writing. It greatly helps the reader identify the main points of a paper and follow its contents. It should not be longer than 200 words.

**Prospectus**
Early in the semester, you will be required to submit a research proposal or prospectus. A research prospectus is a plan of attack for a research problem. The audience for the prospectus is the instructor and your peers in the class. Each of you should meet with me one-on-one at least one week before the prospectus is due so that I can suggest useful sources, possible angles of attack, and potential problems.

A quality prospectus includes the following:
1. It should clearly state a research question (which is not the same as a topic). The question should ask about relationships between variables.
2. It should apply a theoretical approach to research the question, drawing on relevant literature in political science (from this course and beyond it).
3. From that theoretical approach should stem hypotheses about relationships among independent and dependent variables. The hypotheses should point to causal relationships, e.g. if A then B. These hypotheses should be very clearly stated. You must include an explanation of the *causal mechanism(s)* that connects the independent to the dependent variable. You must explain the connections.
4. It should contain a discussion on how you will broadly design the relevant field experiment. You do not need to discuss these methods and sources at length, but you do need to identify them.
5. It should briefly discuss possible limitations to the research endeavor.
6. The prospectus should be 1000-1250 words in length on double-spaced pages.

**Critical Literature Review**
A critical literature review situates your research in the broader context of similar writings. It should be 1000 to 1250 words in length on double-spaced pages, intended for an audience of scholars and
analysts doing work related to your topic. The review should cover the main arguments related to (both supporting and attacking) the theoretical approach you have adopted and the cases you have chosen. Of course, since your argument will be unique, no one will have addressed your specific approach directly, but many analysts will have developed and commented on related approaches. It is this literature you should cover in the review.

Your review should be analytical (unpacks and examines the arguments) and critical (points out flaws and weaknesses in logic, reasoning and evidence). Excellent examples of the style – though not the length – of critical literature reviews are review essays in journals such as *International Organization, World Politics*, and *International Studies Review*. You are invited to look at them as reference points for your work.

**Institutional Review Board Application**

All research projects involving human subjects must be evaluated and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). To learn how this process works and about the importance of obtaining IRB approval, you need to prepare an application and turn it in to us. Note: Please do not turn it in to the IRB, unless you have immediate plans to carry out the research, which you should discuss with me.

The application can be found here: [http://orca.byu.edu/IRB/](http://orca.byu.edu/IRB/). There is no length requirement, but you need to fill out all parts of the application, including the 12 sections of part D and the Appendixes, if necessary. Note that understanding and anticipating the IRB’s concerns is difficult and you will need to think carefully and repeatedly about this. You may use material already written from your abstract, prospectus, literature review, or research paper (or that will be in these documents), but the material should be used appropriately to answer the questions and address the IRB’s concerns. In other words, if you simply copy and paste, you will likely miss the point of the questions in the application.

**Peer Reviews**

You will write four reviews during the semester – one each for two seminar members’ prospectuses, one each for two research papers. These reviews will be used to revise the prospectuses and papers for the next stage. Your reviews will be evaluated and my assessment of them included in your final grade. You will act as the “discussant” on the panel for the papers you evaluate during the class presentation sessions.

Peer reviews should:

1. Restate the main point of the paper (or prospectus) succinctly to make sure that it is understood.
2. Analyze and critique the argument. (Points of analysis could include the paper’s scope, quality of research question, clarity of ideas and expression, depth of inquiry, appropriateness to target audience, etc.)
3. Assess the quality of the evidence promised (in the prospectus) or provided (in the paper).
4. Praise the paper’s strengths.
5. Check the sources carefully.
6. Correct style errors.
7. Make recommendations for improvement.

ETS Exam

All political science majors need to take the ETS Exam for seniors. The following exam dates/times have been scheduled. You must complete the exam in order to pass this class. Note that your score on the exam will not be factored into the score for the course. You simply need to take the exam during one of the offered dates/times below. Please email the political science secretaries (polysec@byu.edu) to schedule an exam time.

Thursday, September 16
5-8 pm
102 SWKT

Friday, September 17
5-8 pm
102 SWKT

Saturday, September 18
9am-12pm
102 SWKT

If you are not a political science major, you need to complete a commensurate amount of work to fulfill this requirement. Examples include attending a Kennedy Center talk and writing up a one-page summary of what you learned. Please check with me and clear an appropriate activity.

Plagiarism

While all students sign the honor code, there are still specific skills most students need to master over time in order to correctly cite sources, especially in this new age of the internet; as well as deal with the stress and strain of college life without resorting to cheating. Please know that as your professor I will notice instances of cheating on exams or plagiarizing on papers. General information about the honor code can be found at honorcode.byu.edu. Details about Academic Honesty are found at http://saas.byu.edu/catalog/2009-2010ucat/GeneralInfo/HonorCode.php#HCOfficeInvolvement.

Writing submitted for credit at BYU must consist of the student's own ideas presented in sentences and paragraphs of his or her own construction. The work of other writers or speakers may be included when appropriate (as in a research paper or book review), but such material must support the student's own work (not substitute for it) and must be clearly identified by appropriate introduction and punctuation and by footnoting or other standard referencing.
The substitution of another person's work for the student's own or the inclusion of another person's work without adequate acknowledgment (whether done intentionally or not) is known as plagiarism. It is a violation of academic, ethical, and legal standards and can result in a failing grade not only for the paper but also for the course in which the paper is written. In extreme cases, it can justify expulsion from the University. Because of the seriousness of the possible consequences, students who wonder if their papers are within these guidelines should visit the Writing Lab or consult a faculty member who specializes in the teaching of writing or who specializes in the subject discussed in the paper. Useful books to consult on the topic include the current Harbrace College Handbook, the MLA Handbook, and James D. Lester's Writing Research Papers.

Sexual Harassment

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 prohibits sex discrimination against any participant in an educational program or activity that receives federal funds. The act is intended to eliminate sex discrimination in education. Title IX covers discrimination in programs, admissions, activities, and student-to-student sexual harassment. BYU’s policy against sexual harassment extends not only to employees of the university but to students as well. If you encounter unlawful sexual harassment or gender based discrimination, please talk to your professor; contact the Equal Employment Opportunities Office at 422-5895 or 367-5689 (24-hours); or contact the Honor Code Office at 422-2847.

People with Disabilities

Brigham Young University is committed to providing a working and learning atmosphere which reasonably accommodates qualified persons with disabilities. If you have any disability which may impair your ability to complete this course successfully, please contact the University Accessibility Center (422-2767). Reasonable academic accommodations are reviewed for all students who have qualified documented disabilities. Services are coordinated with the student and instructor by the UAC office. If you need assistance or if you feel you have been unlawfully discriminated against on the basis of disability, you may seek resolution through established grievance policy and procedures. You should contact the Equal Employment Opportunity Office at 422-5895, D-282 ASB.

Readings

There are three required textbooks, all available for purchase at the bookstore.


We will be covering many other readings that are not included in the texts. Most journal articles and book chapters will be available online through Blackboard.

In addition to the required readings, you should also accompany international political and economic reporting in the *New York Times*. Many of our class discussions will draw on current international events. The *NYT* can also be excellent source material for your research paper. Subscriptions to the *New York Times* are available to BYU students at a steep discount, so I encourage you to take advantage of it.

**Proviso**

The guidelines above and the course schedule below are very likely to be followed, but I reserve the right to modify them as I see fit during the course of the term. Especially given that this is a research seminar, you should expect changes in the structure of the course as your interests and strengths become clearer to me.
## Course Schedule

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<th>Topic</th>
<th>Readings/Assignments</th>
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<td>- Paluck. 2008. “Qualitative Methods…”</td>
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<td>- Paluck. 2008. “Methods and Ethics…”</td>
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<td>- Cohen and Easterly. 2009. “The Other Invisible Hand…” Chapter 6 in What Works in Development by Hausmann (also read responses by Ashraf and Levine)</td>
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<td>- Cohen and Easterly. 2009. “Big Answers for Big Questions…” Chapter 7 in What Works in Development by Banerjee (also read responses by Klenow and Easterly)</td>
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<td>- Critical literature review due today</td>
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### Syllabus – Field Experiments

#### Oct 26 9 Reconciliation and Prejudice
- Blattman. 2009. “From Violence to Voting…”

**Discussion of IRB applications**

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#### Nov 2 10 Education and Gender
- Paluck and Green. 2009. “Deference, Dissent…”
- Fearon, Humphreys, Weinstein. 2009. “Can Development Aid…”
- Bertrand and Mullanathan. 2004. “Are Emily and Greg…”

**IRB application due today**

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#### Nov 9 11 Health
  Chapter 4 in *What Works in Development* by Kremer and Holla (also read responses by Weil and Romer)

**Early draft of research design due today**

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#### Nov 16 12 Corruption
- Fisman and Miguel. 2007. “Corruption, Norms…”
- Rothstein and Eek. 2009. “Political Corruption…”

**Early draft peer reviews due today**

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#### Nov 30 13 Panel Presentations
No additional readings

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#### Dec 7 14 Panel Presentations
No additional readings

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#### 16-Dec Finals week
*Final draft of research design due today by noon*