**PSC-4099**

**Thesis Assignment #1:**

**Research Question**

**This assignment is due in electronic form Sunday, September 1 by 10pm; then bring a hard copy to class.** To summit the assignment electronically, e-mail the work as *an attachment* (i.e. a pdf, doc, docx, or rtf formatted file) to [msetzler@highpoint.edu](mailto:msetzler@highpoint.edu). To be accepted as on-time work, *the subject line of the email with the attached assignment must be:* ***psc4099 Assignment 1*.**

Please do your best work. You will receive one grade for the two assignments related to topic choice. Your work will be evaluated on the basis of effort and professionalism. A = Excellent in all respects; B = Good work with evident room for improvement; C = Minimally satisfactory work that obviously could be much stronger; D = Poor work. Late work on either topic assignment will result in a 10% per-day deduction for the combined grade.

The assignment asks you to find and summarize 2 or 3 potential research questions that may be the focus of your senior thesis. These can be questions on topics that are closely related or that focus on completely different issues or groups. List your topics in order of preference. For each, please provide the following information:

* The research question you are interested in asking. For this exercise, your question should specifically identify **the individual-level** political attitude or behavior you would like to study. While you choose your research topic, one of the main ways that we ensure that you will be successful with this project and complete it in a semester is to impose methodological constraints. Your research question needs to be structured so that it asks why some kinds of people do or think something, while other types of people do not. While you will likely focus on groups (e.g., How do young Republicans’ views about climate change differ from those of non-Republicans and older Republicans?), **the unit of analysis for your project needs to be measured at the individual level.**
* Keep in mind that for the type of project you will be doing, your thesis project **must analyze a large *public opinion* dataset** of some type. Specifically, **your project requires a dataset that asks individuals the questions you need for your independent and dependent variables**. While you can study a specific group (e.g., Republicans, women, veterans, Catholics), your project needs to focus on a behavior or attitude that is shared by enough people so that reliable statistical analysis is possible. As a general rule of thumb, you will need to have a dataset that has a few hundred respondents for any group or subgroup in which you are interested AND at least 100 of those respondents must have the attitude or behavior you are interested in explaining.
* The name and date of the Pew Report (or similar type of document if working with another organization’s data) that inspired this question.
* A justification for why you are interested in this question
* An explanation of how it is a political or IR issue, if it is not immediately clear (see the caveats below on choosing at topic that is appropriate for your major

For example, a sample research question might look like:

*Question:* Do men and women share similar views of the Supreme Court? Why do their opinions differ (or move together)?

*Pew Report:* “Republicans Less Positive toward Supreme Court,” July 9, 2010

*Survey date and number of respondents:* May 2010, 850 respondents.

*Interest in Issue:* Empirical evidence demonstrates that the Roberts Court is the most conservative Supreme Court in more than fifty years. Yet, a recent Pew Research Center Survey reveals that Republicans’ views toward the Court became increasingly negative during the Obama administration. I am curious if the views of the Supreme Court among Republican women and Republican men moved together or in different directions during the Obama administration. It may be that the views of both Republican men and women became more negative because President Obama appointed more liberal justices. On the other hand, Republican women may have responded differently than their male counterparts, in part because Obama’s appointees—regardless of ideology—were both women.

**A Few Caveats**

If you are a political science major, your research must relate to a political science research question (including support for particular policies). If is not immediately clear that your question is political, please be sure to defend this in your assignment. If you are an international relations major, you must use a dataset from the Pew Global Attitudes Project or another dataset that is focused on international issues or attitudes in foreign countries. INR majors may focus on either political or economic research questions. If it is not immediately clear that your question is political or economic, please be sure to defend your topic choice/s in your assignment.

You are encouraged to use AI in the ways that are specified in the syllabus. Remember, different courses and instructors have different learning outcomes and rules, so the guidelines I have provided are for this class only. Early on, Consensus (<https://consensus.app/>) will be a great resource to help you narrow down a topic. You can do a limited number of searches on the free version. The academic version is not very expensive and can be purchased by the month (you can also look for an academic discount).

At a minimum, use Grammarly or similar AI to identify any remaining glitches after you have carefully proofread your work. If your submission is poorly edited, you will receive a lower grade. You also are encouraged to use AI (Claude is a good choice) to help you make sure that your writing is clear as it can be. Here are some prompts you might try to improve your writing after YOU have drafted and edited the assignment (remember, you may use AI to edit, but not to do the writing for you):

*“I am a college senior writing a senior thesis paper. This is my first assignment in the class, and I have been asked to identify several potential thesis topics and explain what dataset might be used to examine them. This assignment is written for an academic audience of college students and professors who do not necessarily have a background in my topic area. Give me feedback on the clarity and elegance of my writing. Are there general areas or specific instances where the writing could be more effective? As you are suggesting edits, keep in mind that this needs to be my writing and in my voice: (And then paste or upload the full assignment).*

Here are some follow-up prompts you might use after you use the original feedback:

*Are there additional areas or specific sentences that could be clearer? Are there places where the argument could be stronger or benefit from additional examples or citation?*

AI won’t identify all of a paper’s issues, but they often can give you top-level feedback that is virtually identical to what I would give you regarding your use of writing and evidence. The more issues you address in your writing before you submit it, the better feedback I can give you on the content and analysis in your writing.