

Syllabus for Government 2020: The Hidden Curriculum

Gary King*

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Fall 2026; Mondays 3–5pm, following Harvard’s class schedule, starting 9/1/2026 (yes, that’s a Wednesday everywhere in the world but Harvard), in CGIS 354N. Sections are held Tuesdays 4:30-5:30pm (K450) or Wednesdays 9:00-10:00am (K354)

This document contains only a brief overview. See [GaryKing.org/Gov2020](https://garyking.org/Gov2020) for details on weekly topics, assignments, instructor’s notes, lecture slides, TF’s section notes, and more.

1 What’s it about?

Gov 2020 has two components.

1. A popular semester-long project where students learn how to write and publish an article in a scholarly journal, beginning with an article replication. This assignment, an early version of which was described in the article “**Publication, Publication**,” has resulted in many students’ first publications, conference presentations, dissertations, and awards.¹
2. A collection of projects designed to teach how science (and the profession) works — *optimizing the use of, and teaching the skills not yet subsumed by, AI*. It includes what a big idea is in our field; developing defensible answers; co-authoring; writing for impact; effective presentations; solving problems by changing the question; going beyond publication to impact; managing the transition academics undergo from private to public figure; leveraging universities, startups, industry, and government for research; and more.

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¹This assignment was previously part of Gov2001. A new version of Gov 2001, excluding this replication exercise, is now offered by others. Materials from when I taught Gov 2001 remain available, including the book **Unifying Political Methodology**; my **class lectures**; an app **2k1-in-silico: An Interactive Methods Non-Textbook** and related paper “**Statistical Intuition Without Coding (or Teachers)**”; and the **course website**.

A considerable body of wisdom about how to succeed in our profession accumulates informally as each PhD cohort learns, improves, and passes knowledge on to its successors. Most of this “hidden curriculum” is not taught in formal classes, but is essential to making the most of graduate school, producing high quality research, and securing the best jobs. Unfortunately, the 2020 pandemic severed the connection between cohorts, leaving individual students to try to piece together this knowledge on their own. We formalize much of this informal wisdom to provide 20/20 vision (remember the course number yet?) into the hidden curriculum and go well beyond what had been possible even before the pandemic, and increase the chances of success in graduate school and the profession.

2 What’s the difference from standard methods classes?

The biggest impact methodologists make when asked for advice is rarely the answers to technical questions. Instead, it is providing the big picture and reorienting research directions. Many often pose what they think is a technical question (and sometimes sounds like “Someone told me I have a problem called ‘endogeneity’. Where is the button in SPSS to fix it?”), but which has no answer, isn’t a coherent question, or doesn’t matter even if it could be answered. When we get them to tell us about their project, we may learn that they have unsolvable methodological problems (such as impossible identification issues, 85% missing data, theory and data with little correspondence, or research questions that no one would care about even if they could be answered, etc.). When successful, we work out the bigger picture with them and reframe the research question into one that other scholars will care about and which can be answered without impossible-to-defend technical assumptions. Completion, fencing with anonymous reviewers, and publication become far easier too. This is by far the most common important impact good methodologists have on those around them. This material isn’t covered in technical classes (which you should also take), but it is far more impactful.

3 Who Can Take It?

The collaborative nature of Gov 2020 requires limited enrollment. We give priority, roughly in this order: graduate students in the Government Department, the FAS social sciences, and professional schools, and then to undergraduates who have a real interest in pursuing research.

4 A Collective Class Format

This is a small, seminar-style class with short lectures, and with everyone expected to participate. Important parts are collective experiences — with pedagogy designed on the basis of social science research to help us all learn more, understand the material faster, and remember it longer. This means that other students are counting on you (and you on them), and so not meeting a deadline or not attending class hurts you *and* all those around you. Please come to class prepared and meet all assignments as listed on the class

website. Not meeting one assignment can have cascading effects on everyone. If you don't understand something, that's perfectly fine; we'll figure it out together and make sure no one is left behind. Your job is to try, and to stay engaged.

5 Technology

We will acquire, read, distribute, and collaboratively annotate readings at [Perusall.com](https://perusall.com), which will be available through Harvard's learning management system, Canvas. You will also use Perusall to post announcements and communicate in chat channels privately with instructors, privately with other students in your group (without having to share personal information like cell numbers), one-on-one with any other student in class, or with the whole class or section. If you have a question, comment, or suggestion, add an annotation to a document or a comment in a chat channel in Perusall. If you think you may know an answer to a query another student posted, or have a suggestion, please try to answer it. If you have an interesting idea that might be of interest to others in class, please contribute that as well. It doesn't matter if you say something wrong (if you don't, you're not learning), or get the wrong answer in these discussions, but it does matter a lot that you be engaged with the material and others in class.

Perusall is a project my collaborators and I designed, on the basis of our research and teaching, to help you learn. If you have suggestions, or ideas for features, I'd love to hear them. More than 7M students in > 100 countries use it, and so your suggestions can have a lot of impact.

6 How to Find Me

I regard teaching and advising as the most important professional activities I do on a regular basis. I do not have office hours (which, to me, seem designed to keep students away most of the time). Instead, I'm usually in my office at K313 CGIS with the door open; come by when it is convenient (assuming no one else is there), send me a note on Perusall or by email, or talk to my Executive Assistant in the office next to mine. You can also contact her within Perusall by opening a chat channel with "@Maria Martins" (be sure to tag any follow up messages with her name so she gets a notification). Obviously, the TF and your fellow students are also a tremendous resource (to you and me both).

Also, if you are (or were) registered for this course, please join a private Facebook group we set up for alumni of my courses, [j.mp/G2001fb](https://www.facebook.com/j.mp/G2001fb); you'll receive occasional private posts with job info, consulting gigs, and other information.

7 Class Grades

As we discuss in class: no one cares what your grades are in grad school. They likely won't matter to your dissertation committee (who usually don't even look), the probability of or time to graduation, or the quality of the job you get afterwards. What is essential is what you learn how to contribute to cutting edge research projects.

That said, we have to assign grades and so here's our rubric: Final grades are based on a combination of performance on three essential components: the replication paper, weekly assignments, and engagement. "Engagement" includes working hard; coming to every class prepared; joining in the class discussions; participating outside of class through Perusall and in assignment and paper groups; going out of your way to help your classmates learn; and any novel efforts you think of to build class camaraderie.

AI Policy Harvard requires that faculty give their policy on using LLMs, and so please follow my suggestions here: [GaryKing.org/aiwrite](https://garyking.org/aiwrite).

8 Classes follow Harvard's Schedule

For content and other details, see [GaryKing.org/Gov2020](https://garyking.org/Gov2020). Fall 2026 Classes follow Harvard's Schedule on Mondays, 3-5pm, on these dates:

1. 9/2 (Wednesday; Harvard classes follow a Monday schedule)
2. 9/14
3. 9/21
4. 9/28
5. 10/5
(No class on 10/12)
6. 10/19
7. 10/26
8. 11/2
9. 11/9
10. 11/16
11. 11/23 (Thanksgiving break: 11/25-11/29)
12. 11/30