

Research Methods in Political Science

POLS 3000

Spring 2017

2:30-3:20 M/W/F

Old Main 304

Instructor: Dr. Damon Cann

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TA Office Hours: Noon-1pm T/Th

Goals of the Course

This course focuses on the scientific approach to politics. Students will be introduced to the logic of scientific inquiry and to basic statistical methods used in the study of government and politics. Statistics are an efficient and accepted way of communicating ideas; they are a means of bridging the gap between implication and inference. Contemporary political science research – especially public opinion and policy research – utilizes statistical techniques and, consequently, a basic understanding of these methods is crucial. In addition, the lectures will illustrate how human reasoning is oftentimes flawed by illogical and otherwise biased processes, which oftentimes lead to erroneous conclusions. Statistical thinking can be a corrective to many such biases. The lectures, homework, and exams are designed to instruct you in the understanding and proper use of social science methods and promote your critical analysis of statistical findings. Students will learn to describe data, understand the impact of randomness in statistical research, conduct statistical tests, and most importantly learn to evaluate the implications of quantitative results. Students will learn to compute most of the techniques discussed in class both “by hand” and “by computer.”

Text and Materials

There are two required texts for the course: Philip Pollock's *The Essentials of Political Analysis*, 5th edition and Pollock's *An SPSS Companion to Political Analysis*, both published by Sage/CQ Press. The books can be purchased together in a cost-saving bundle at the bookstore or separately through some online outlets (ISBN 9781506328928). For the books separately, the ISBNs are 9781506305837 for the Essentials of Political Analysis and 9781506305790 for the SPSS Companion if you want to shop for used copies that are not bundled.

Grading

The assignment of final grades will be based on 4 criteria: midterm exams, a final exam, homework, and a paper.

1. *Midterms*: There will be two midterm examinations, each worth 20% of the final grade. Since the dates of the in-class exams are set, there will be no make-up exams. If a student misses the in-class exam, the value of the missed exam will be added to that of the final exam less a 1% penalty, thereupon making the final exam worth 49% of the final grade. Should you miss both exams, the final will be worth 68% of your final grade. You are encouraged to bring to the exams a non-graphing calculator (no cell phones!) and a one-sided 8 1/2" x 5.5" index card on which you may write formulas.
2. *Final*: The final examination will be worth 30% of the final grade.
3. *Homework*: There will be several homework assignments, each one equal in point value. Homework scores comprise 20% of the final grade. Students will generally have about 1 week to complete assignments. Late homework will be accepted up until the exam on which that homeworks material appears, but students will receive only partial credit for late work. The penalty for late work is 10% if it is handed in after class on the due date, and 10% each additional day after that. After the midterm exam on which a topic is covered passes, late work on that topic will no longer be accepted.

4. *Paper*: You will be required to write a brief (4-5 page) paper utilizing statistics (worth 10% of your grade). Using any statistical technique you deem appropriate, analyze the relationship between any political dependent variable of interest and one or more explanatory variables. Whatever your topic, collect quantitative data on the variables of interest and statistically analyze the relationship. Append to your analysis a copy of your data. Feel free to talk to me about possible data sources. Papers will be due on the last day of class prior to the final. Whatever your analysis:
- In 1 page or less, introduce your research question. Explain why it is important.
 - In 1 page or less, state and justify your operationalization of the variables and state the null and alternative hypothesis
 - In about 2 pages, execute the statistical test (and justify your choice of tests) then state conclusion in terms of your hypotheses
 - Present your results in tables and/or graphs as appropriate
 - Cite relevant sources in a bibliography (the works cited page does not count toward the 4-5 pages)

Course Policies

- Attendance: My perspective is that you, as university students, have matured to a level where you can take responsibility for yourselves. As such, I will not make attendance a required component of the course. That being said, experience has shown that students who attend class regularly generally outperform their peers by a large margin. I rarely have a student who misses more than 2 classes who gets an A, not because I penalize the student, but because it is very difficult to make-up for the missed class time. I will not police your attendance, but it is clearly in the interest of students who aspire to be successful to attend every day.
- Grade Changes: Grade changes will only be made at the end of the semester in the event of a factual error. There is a great deal of importance that rides on your final grade for this course (law school, grad

school, scholarships, staying off/getting off academic probation, etc.). Since there is so much riding on your grades, I promise to be careful and precise in grading and calculating. In return, however, I ask you to take your responsibilities for completing quality academic work seriously as well. At the end of every semester after final grades have been issued, I am inevitably asked, “Is there anything I can do to raise my grade?” Once final grades are in, barring a factual error in grading or calculation, the answer will be no.

- Teaching Assistant Grading: Some of the homework and exams in this class may be graded by a graduate student TA. You may appeal your score on any TA graded assignment or exam to me. I will re-grade the *entire* assignment or exam myself and your score may either go up or down depending on my assessment. My assessment will be the final grade you are assigned on the assignment or exam; you may not revert back to the TA’s grade.
- Serious Hardship: If you encounter a serious hardship during the course of the semester, you may petition for a withdrawal from the course. Note, however, that if you complete a piece of work in the class (e.g. an exam or a paper) you are warranting that your condition is such that you are capable of completing the assignment. Once you have completed an assignment, it will be scored as it has been completed. If you are in a situation of severe hardship, please talk to me and so can discuss options before deadlines and exams. You may not re-take an exam or re-submit a paper because it was performed while you were experiencing hardship. You must notify me of your situation *before* you submit the work and we’ll work together to try to address the situation. See the emergencies listed under the discussion of “Withdrawals and Incompletes” below for the types of hardships I will consider for restructuring workload in hardship situations.
- Academic Honesty: Students are expected to uphold the highest standards of academic honesty. All academic work must meet university standards for academic honesty. Students are responsible for informing themselves about those standards before performing any academic work. Examples of inappropriate activities include, but are not limited to: unauthorized assistance from other persons, copying, using unauthorized materials for exams and homeworks, and plagiarism.

- Tape Recording: The tape recording of lectures is not permitted. Occasionally I will make exceptions to this policy for a student with disabilities.
- Classroom Civility: Occasionally students demonstrate discourtesy to other students and to instructors by disrupting classes unnecessarily. Common disruptions that irritate other students (and me!) include talking to friends, text messaging, leaving cellular phones on (and even answering them!), bringing infants/children to class, reading newspapers, internet surfing, packing belongings prior to the end of lecture, and late arrivals to class. Don't sit there and wonder if everyone else notices your discourteous act—they notice, and I notice. Discourtesy and disruptions will not be tolerated. If you cannot adhere to these basic standards of civility, you should drop this course. Students who violate this policy will receive one firm warning, and will be dismissed from class if they cause any further problem.
- Students with Disabilities: If you have a physical, mental, emotional, learning or other disability that requires accommodation, please contact the Disability Resource Center within the first week of class. Disability Services will document the disability and I will work with them and you to make appropriate accommodations based on your needs. All information regarding these matters will be kept confidential. Requests for special considerations relating to attendance, pedagogy, or exams, etc. must be approved by the instructor.
- Withdrawals and Incompletes: Students are required to complete all courses for which they are registered by the end of the semester. In some cases, a student may be unable to complete all of the coursework because of extenuating circumstances, but not due to poor performance or to retain financial aid. The term “extenuating” circumstances includes: (1) incapacitating illness which prevents a student from attending classes for a minimum period of two weeks, (2) a death in the immediate family, (3) financial responsibilities requiring a student to alter a work schedule to secure employment, (4) change in work schedule as required by an employer, or (5) other emergencies deemed appropriate by the instructor. Note that I cannot think of many other reasons to give an I than the 4 listed above.

- Syllabus and Course Changes: The course syllabus is a general plan for the course; deviations announced to the class by the instructor may be necessary. The most likely changes will be to the dates on the course schedule. This syllabus is not a contract and is subject to change at the sole discretion of the instructor as announced in class.

Date	Topic	Reading
Jan. 9	Introduction, Math Review	Essentials Introduction
11	Measurement	Essentials ch. 1 & 2 except p. 15-18
13	Measurement	
16	No Class–MLK Jr. Day	
18	Reliability & Validity	Essentials p. 15-18
20	Scientific Method	Essentials ch. 3 & ch. 4 up to p. 86
23	Crosstabs	Essentials Ch. 4 p.86-end
25	Crosstabs with Controls	Ch. 5
27	Computer Day	Companion Ch. 1, 4, & 5
30	Central Tendency	
Feb. 1	Dispersion	
3	Dispersion	
6	Summarizing Distributions with Graphs	Companion Ch. 2
8	Computer Day / Review	
10	Midterm 1	
13	Probability	
15	Probability	
17	Probability	
20	No Class–Presidents Day	
21	Probability	
22	Z-scores & the Normal Distribution	
24	Z-scores & the Normal Distribution	
27	Sampling	
Mar. 1	Sampling Distributions	Essentials p. 122-127
3	Confidence Intervals	Essentials p. 140-147
6-10	Spring Break	
13	Confidence Intervals	Essentials p. 140-147

	15	Confidence Intervals	Essentials p. 147-152
	17	Computer Day	Companion Ch. 6
	20	Midterm 2	
	22	Hypothesis Testing	Essentials p.155-162
	24	Hypothesis Testing	Essentials p.155-162
	27	Hypothesis Testing	Essentials p. 162-164
	29	Computer Day	
	31	Chi-square	Essentials p. 164-169
Apr.	3	Chi-square	Essentials p. 164-169
	5	Chi-square	Essentials p. 164-169
	7	No Class–MPSA Conference	
	10	Measures of Association	Essentials p. 169-176
	12	Computer Day	
	14	Linefitting & Correlation	Ch. 8
	17	Linefitting & Correlation	Ch. 8
	19	Regression	Companion Ch. 8
	21	Regression	Companion Ch. 8
	24	Regression	Companion Ch. 8
	26	Computer Day	
	28	Review	
	30	Review, Paper Due	
May	4	Final Exam 1:30-3:20	
