

POLS 4419: Political Research Methods

Spring 2017

Department of Political Science
Idaho State University

1 Instructor Information

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Office Hours: Tuesdays: 12:30pm to 1:30pm,
Wednesdays 10:00am to 12:00pm
and by appointment
Class Location: Rendezvous 210
Course Time: 2:30 to 3:45 TR

Teaching Assistant

Travis Taylor
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Office Hours: Monday: 2:00pm-4:00pm,
Thursday: 10:00am-11:00am,
and by appointment

2 Course Description and Purpose

Political scientists explore a variety of intriguing questions. For example, some scholars are interested in explaining how voters choose between candidates. Others are interested in why democratization occurs in some countries but not others. I wonder how judges make decisions and how attorneys attempt to persuade judges. While it is tempting to explain these questions with conjecture or punditry, political scientists rely on empirical evidence to test their theories and claims. That is what puts the “science” in political science.

The goal of this course is to provide students with a toolset to address a range of questions and puzzles in the social sciences broadly (although many of our examples will be from political science). In particular, students in this course will learn how to create viable research questions rooted in theory, formulate hypotheses, locate data, and how to analyze that data to draw conclusions. Moreover, students should be able to understand the methods and analyses you will encounter in peer reviewed publications you read in your other classes.

In addition to the basics of research design and data analysis, another key component of this class are your critical reading, writing, and organizational skills. Toward that end, you will read several scholarly articles in an area of political science that interests you as you develop your research paper. This will help build your critical thinking skills while applying the methodological skills developed in the course readings. Additionally, the emphasis in the exams is applying what we have covered in class to broader contexts. Since writing is a critical skill that is important regardless of your major or eventual career, you will produce a group research paper that applies the skills we learn in class to a research project rooted in some topical area of interest to you. Feedback and direction will be provided on the research paper throughout the semester.

3 Course Format

This course is heavily readings based, from both the text books and supplemental materials available on Moodle. Past experience demonstrates that methods classes are much more effective when everyone reads in advance, even if you do not fully understand the material you will at least have a familiarity with the material. Many weeks, we will also have a “lab” element of the class where you will have time in class to work on the Stata assignment and ask Travis or me for help.

4 Requirements

Text

There are two required books, which the majority of our readings will come from. Other readings will be posted to Moodle as PDF files, or be posted on YouTube as videos with supplementary computer files.

The books are available at the campus bookstore as a discounted bundle, although it is available at a *substantially* lower rate online. To this end, I provide the ISBN for the book below and have placed all of the first week’s readings on Moodle to allow for shipping time. After the first week I expect you to have the book and bring it with you to class. Unfortunately, I will not be able to place the book on course reserve at the library.

1. Pollock, Phillip P. 2016. *The Essentials of Political Analysis*. Congressional Quarterly Press: Washington.
ISBN: 978-1-5063-0583-7
2. Powner, Leanne C. 2015. *Emperical Research and Writing: A Political Science Student’s Practical Guide*. Congressional Quarterly Press: Washington.
ISBN: 978-1-4833-6963-1

Software

While statistical analysis can be done by hand or through Excel formulas, it is most commonly done through specialized statistical software. While there are many, such as R, SAS, SPSS, we will use Stata. Stata has the benefit of wide use in political science, general ease of use, and it is relatively inexpensive. There are several purchase options, including a course discount which is detailed further on the Stata handout on Moodle.

Assessment¹

This course is worth 100 points which are broken up over several different items

- Exams: 30 points
- Research Paper Assignment: 50 points
- Quizzes: 10 points

¹This assessment scale applies to both graduate and undergraduate students.

- Participation: 10 points

This course also has a one credit hour online lab. The lab is mandatory and is made up of three homework assignments due throughout the semester. These assignments are spaced out roughly evenly throughout the semester are worth 33 points each (for a total of 100 points). For more information see the Homework handout on Moodle.

1. **Exams (30 points)**—There are two exams, each is worth 15 points. This is to say each exam is worth one and a half letter grades. Exams will consist of short identification terms and a handful of short response items where you will be asked to create models or apply concepts to a given research problem. At least one week before each exam I will give you a study guide which lists several possible questions for the exam. A subset of those questions will appear on the actual exam. The final exam will be a take-home exam. You should note that if you are unable to take the exam at the scheduled time, the make-up exam will be a separate research paper.
2. **Research Project (50 points)**— You will write a research paper exploring a research question that is of interest to you with the methods we have discussed in class. The writing assignment will be broken up over several smaller assignments which build upon each other. I will provide feedback on each assignment which will help you in preparing the next assignment. For more information on the writing assignment please see the writing assignment handout available on Moodle.
3. **Quizzes (10 points)**— Periodically throughout the semester I will administer unannounced quizzes. These quizzes will be given at the start of class and will consist of multiple choice, true or false, fill in the blank, and/or short answer items. They can cover anything previously discussed in class or anything from that day's readings. Quizzes will be passed out at exactly 2:30PM and no quizzes will be passed out after that time, so it is important to arrive to class on time. There will be a total of seven quizzes; I will take your top five quizzes over the course of the semester to compile your total quiz score (with each worth 2% of your final grade). Quizzes cannot be made up, therefore it is imperative you attend class regularly, read for class, and are on time for class.
4. **Participation (10 points)**— Class is more fun when it is not just me talking and I will accordingly call on students to provide summaries of the readings. I am aware, however, that not everyone is an outgoing person that enjoys talking. To this end, I consider active listening to be participation.

Assessment Scale

A: 93-100	A-: 90-92	B+: 87-89	B: 83-86	B-: 80-82	C+: 77-79
C: 73-76	C-: 70-72	D+: 67-69	D: 63-66	D-: 60-62	F: <60

5 Course Policies

Contacting the Instructor

I am happy to help you via e-mail, telephone, and in person. I have several office hours posted, if my office hours do not fit your schedule let me know and we can schedule a meeting at a time

that is more convenient. If you come to office hours you should come prepared; bring your book and notes and read the material in advance. You can call me on my office phone if you like, but e-mail may be faster if I am away from my desk. If you contact me via e-mail, I will respond within 48 hours, though in most cases it will be less than six hours. However, in any e-mail you must identify yourself and use proper format which consists of an opening (As simple as the recipient's name), a closing (as simple as your name), and a descriptive message subject. If you do not follow that convention or if you use Internet shorthand (ie: "u" instead of "you,") I will not reply to the message.

Make-up Exams and Assignments

To qualify for a make-up test a student must notify me of the absence in advance via e-mail and provide documentation. Make-up exams will be a written research paper.

Papers are due in hard copy at the beginning of the class on the date indicated in the schedule and must also be uploaded to Turnitin.com. I will not accept e-mail copies or papers placed under my door. Please do not be afraid to print multiple rough drafts and revise them before turning them in. I am happy to look at drafts and help you with crafting your final paper. I do not accept excuses about dogs, computers, or traffic. Be responsible.

Technology in the Classroom

I understand that laptops and tablets have become the primary means of note taking for many of you. To this end, you are welcome to bring those devices to class. *However*, I ask that you only use them for class purposes. So, you can take notes and view the readings, but please do not browse the Internet or update Facebook in class. The screens are distracting to those around you and takes away from learning. No cell phones are permitted to be out in class without first notifying me of a valid reason (i.e.: You're waiting on a phone call/ your kids are home alone).

Particularly with new technology, some students opt to record lectures to compliment their notes. If you wish to do so, please let me know before you record me. You are more than welcome to record, I just want to know when/if I am being recorded.

Extra Credit

Extra credit is only available for undergraduate students. The only extra credit I offer is a one point bonus on each writing assignment for going to the writing center. Since the research paper is split over multiple assignments, you can potentially increase your grade by up to 6% (the first assignment is not writing center eligible). While graduate students are not eligible for extra credit, I still encourage them to make use of the writing center.

Academic Honor Code

Academic integrity is the expected norm for all academic activity at ISU, and all members of the ISU community are expected to act in accordance with this principle. Academic integrity is the pursuit of scholarly activity in an open, honest, and responsible manner. Consistent with this expectation is an ISU code of conduct that all students should act with personal integrity, respect

other students dignity, rights and property, and help create and maintain an environment in which all can succeed through the fruits of their efforts. Academic integrity includes a commitment not to engage in or tolerate acts of deception, falsification, or misrepresentation. Such acts of dishonesty violate the fundamental ethical principles of the University community and compromise the worth of the work completed by others.

Plagiarism is an act of academic dishonesty and shall be dealt with according to ISU policy. Plagiarism is any misrepresentation of another's work as your own. For example, copying portions of articles, papers, web pages, etc, or using portions of another person's work (either word for word or paraphrasing) without proper citations. If you have questions about plagiarism, please come talk to me, or refer to Plagiarism Statement written by the ISU Department of English and Philosophy: (<http://www.isu.edu/english/DeptDocs/PlagiarismStatement.pdf>).

I adhere to the University policy regarding academic misconduct and expect academic integrity. Academic misconduct will result in an "F" for the assignment, a possible "F" for the course, and the filing of charges with the University against the student involved. Academic misconduct includes, but is not limited to, taking credit for work done by others, cheating, and helping others to cheat. I encourage students to study together and exchange ideas and information, but you must do your own work when taking exams and completing writing assignments. If you are unclear on this topic, please let me know. I am happy to discuss it further.

Students with Disabilities

ISU is committed to providing equal opportunity in education for all students. If you have a diagnosed disability or if you believe you have a disability (physical, learning, hearing, vision, psychiatric etc.) that might require reasonable accommodation in this course, please contact the Disability Services Center, Rendezvous Building, Room 125 (282-3599) or on the web at <http://www.isu.edu/ada4isu>. It is the responsibility of students to contact instructors during the first week of each semester to discuss appropriate accommodations. Of course any communication with me about disabilities remains strictly confidential.

Classroom Courtesy

Classroom courtesy is an essential component of creating an effective learning environment. All students have the right to learn without unnecessary distractions. These distractions include: cell phones, talking during lectures (unless recognized by the instructor), reading newspapers, falling asleep, etc. If you need a cell phone for emergency purposes, leave it on vibrate. Entering and leaving are also significant sources of distraction. It is your responsibility to be on time and to stay for the entire period. In circumstances where you need to leave early, tell the instructor beforehand. Repeated disruptions of class will lead to a reduction in your final grade.

Most importantly, class discussions of law will include several sensitive topics which can lead to strong feelings and heated debate. Because this is a college classroom, all discussion must be respectful and scholarly. This is to say you must be respectful, in both content and tone, of diverse opinions and not make personal or partisan attacks.

Acceptable Comments

- are respectful of diverse opinions and open to follow up questions and/or disagreement
- are related to class and/or the course material
- focus on advancing the discussion about issues related to the course and/or course material rather than personal beliefs, and
- are delivered in normal tones and a non-aggressive manner.

Unacceptable Comments

- are personal in nature. This includes attacks on a person's appearance, demeanor, or political beliefs.
- include interrupting the instructor or other students. Raise your hand and wait to be recognized.
- often use the discussion to argue for political positions and/or beliefs. If political discussions arise, they must be discussed in a scholarly way (see above).
- may include using raised tones, yelling, engaging in arguments with other students and being threatening in any manner.
- include ignoring the instructor's authority to maintain the integrity of the classroom environment.

Disclaimer

While research methods is typically thought of as “dry,” it is possible that some of the topics used as examples might be considered disturbing. You have my assurance that I will do everything reasonably related to keeping these discussions academic, though the very subject matter may be disturbing to some.

Syllabus Change Policy

This syllabus is a guide for the course and is subject to change with advanced notice. These changes may come via e-mail. Make sure to check your university supplied email regularly. You are accountable for all such communications.

6 Tentative Course Schedule

A few notes about reading the course schedule:

- “*Pollock*” refers to the required Pollock book
- “*Powner*” refers to the required Powner book
- “*YouTube*” refers to posted Stata Youtube videos & associated computer files on Moodle
- “(M)” means that reading can be found on Moodle

Course Introduction

Tuesday January 10– Introduction to the Course

- *No readings*

Research Questions, Theories, & Hypotheses

Thursday January 12– What is a Research Question?

- Powner: Chapter 1

Tuesday January 17– Conceptual Definitions

- Pollock: Chapter 1

Thursday January 19– Getting to Hypotheses

- Powner: Chapter 2

Tuesday January 24– Building a Good Theory

- Lave & March, Chapter 2 (M)

Thursday January 26– Building a Good Theory (2)

- Lave & March, Chapter 3 (M)

Tuesday January 31– Library Research Tutorial

- *No readings, class meets in Library 212*

Thursday February 2– Conceptual Definitions

- Pollock: Chapter 1

Tuesday February 7– Getting Nitty & Gritty with Hypotheses

- Powner: Chapter 4

Thursday February 9– Variables: The Pieces-Parts of Hypotheses

- Pollock: Chapter 2

Tuesday February 14– Writing a “Good” Hypothesis

- Pollock: Chapter 3

Thursday February 18– So, How Do We Structure Research?

- Powner: Chapter 3

Qualitative Methods

Tuesday February 21– Qualitative Methods

- Powner: Chapter 5

Thursday February 23– The Experimental Ideal

- Pollock: Chapter 4

Tuesday February 28– The Basics of Quantitative Methods

- Powner: Chapter 7

Thursday March 2– The Basics of Quantitative Methods (2)

- Pollock: Chapter 6

Tuesday March 7– Cleaning Up Data

- Powner: Chapter 8

Thursday March 9 – Stata Basics: Creating and Identifying Variables

- Youtube: Stata Basics

Descriptive Statistics

Tuesday March 14– Descriptive Statistics

- Pollock: Chapter 6

Thursday March 16– Descriptive Statistics in Stata

- Youtube: Descriptive Statistics

Tuesday March 21– **NO CLASS: SPRING BREAK**

Thursday March 23– **NO CLASS: SPRING BREAK**

Statistical Relationships

Tuesday March 28– Measuring Statistical Relationships

- Pollock: Chapter 7

Thursday March 30– Measuring Statistical Relationships (2)

- Pollock: Chapter 7

Tuesday April 4– Statistical Relationships in Stata

- Youtube: Statistical Relationships

Thursday April 6– **NO CLASS: MIDWEST POLITICAL SCIENCE ASSOCIATION MEETING**

Tuesday April 11– Statistical Relationships in Stata (2)

- Youtube: Statistical Relationships

Thursday April 13– What Could Possibly Go Wrong?!

- Powner: Chapter 8

Regression Analysis

Tuesday April 18– Regression

- Pollock: Chapter 8

Thursday April 20– Regression (2)

- YouTube: Stata Regression

Tuesday April 25– Regression (3)

- Pollock: Chapter 8

Thursday April 27– Catch-Up Day

- *Class may or may not meet*

Final Exam: Friday May 5, 10:00am to 12:00pm in our normal classroom