Political Science 105 - Fall 2017
Introduction to Politics
Mondays and Wednesdays 3:55 PM-5:10 PM in Petigru 108

Contact Information

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About the Course

This course introduces students to important research topics and methodological techniques within the discipline of Political Science. Given that Political Science is a huge and diverse field, no intro course could cover everything. Accordingly, we will concentrate on contemporary developments in social science, which political scientists increasingly use. Students will be introduced to examples of major questions across the subfields of American Politics, Comparative Politics, and International Relations, with an emphasis on understanding the challenges associated with identifying cause and effect, and the research techniques developed to overcome these challenges. We will focus primarily on the conceptual rather than technical aspects of research design and empirical analysis. However, students will be introduced to the collection and (very basic) analysis of data using free, open-source software.

Learning outcomes of the course include the following:

- Students will apply the scientific method to understand political phenomena
- Students will critically analyze public opinion polls and journalistic reports of scientific findings
- Students will manage raw data and create summary statistics
- Students will create useful graphics to illustrate associations in data
- Students will distinguish between narrative and social science

Course Requirements

Attendance and Participation

Although this course will consist primarily of lecture, some class time will be devoted to discuss readings and lecture material. I expect each student to come to class prepared to take part in the discussion. Attendance will not be graded for most of the class, but attendance is graded during weeks 12-15. I will take a photo of the classroom shortly into each class period; you must be visible in the photo (and refraining from obscene gestures) to receive credit for attendance.

I allow students to use laptops and tablets in class because these tools can be very useful for note-taking. However, internet access can be distracting; inattention to class is very likely to negatively affect grades. Please do not engage in technology-enabled behavior that would distract your classmates or me. Silence cell phones; if you are awaiting an urgent call, let me know before class, and then leave class before answering. Please do not talk to neighbors or otherwise make distracting noise during lecture and discussion.
Readings
Mastery of the readings is an important requirement for a good grade in the course. Readings will complement and expand on the material discussed in class; and some exam questions will come directly from the readings. Expect to read a substantial body of material each week. Some find it best to complete the required readings before coming to the class for which they are assigned, while others prefer to use the readings to fill in gaps from lecture.

All required readings are available through Blackboard or linked directly from this syllabus. Any changes to the schedule listed below will be discussed in class and posted on Blackboard at least one week in advance.

Group Projects
Shortly after the add-drop date passes, I will randomly assign students to groups of approximately 5 students. Each group will be responsible for choosing a topic on which to collect observational data that demonstrates the association (or lack thereof) between an explanatory variable and a dependent variable. At the end of the semester, each group will present (in no more than 10 minutes) a visualization of the association between these variables, and discuss the conceptual and empirical challenges that should caution us against a causal interpretation of the findings. The final project grade will incorporate evaluations of the presentation, the report, peer evaluations, and attendance during the final weeks of class. The project will be due in three stages.

- Raw data, along with a brief description of the explanatory and dependent variables, must be collected and submitted by October 25.
- Summary statistics, visualization, and the brief report must be submitted by December 6. Peer evaluations will also be due on the same day.
- In-class presentations are scheduled for the last four weeks of the course. Presentations should be practiced and timed to take no longer than 10 minutes.

Exams
There will be three exams, two of which count towards the final grade. The final exam will be cumulative and will include questions inspired by the group presentations. I drop the lowest exam score. Therefore, if you are happy with your grade going into the final exam, you can skip it (you will receive a 0, but it will then be dropped). **I offer makeup exams only under exceptional circumstances. If you experience car trouble, a short-term illness, etc., that leads you to miss an exam, you must count that as your dropped exam. I will allow makeups only in the case of a documented, major illness (e.g., requiring 3+ weeks in bed) or other long-term event.**

Grading
Grades are tabulated as the average of two exams and the final group project grade, all three of which items are weighted equally at one third. Final grades are recorded as follows:
Grades as calculated are final. There will be no individual extra credit, although I might offer the entire class extra credit assignments. Additionally, I do not raise grades due to job or scholarship requirements, or simply because a student was close to receiving a higher grade. Typically, I will not respond to emails asking for this type of preferential treatment. Of course, I am willing to double-check for errors in grade calculations. Finally, I typically do not accept late assignments without (1) a credible excuse for delay and (2) advance notice that an extension is needed. I might offer to accept a late assignment with a grade penalty (typically one letter grade for each week late), depending on the circumstances.

Incompletes

An incomplete grade is an exception and I will assign such a grade only if two criteria are met simultaneously: 1) the student is unable to complete the course due to a serious personal illness or tragedy, which is adequately documented; 2) the student has completed 50% of the course requirements and merely needs extra time to finish the remaining work. I will not assign an incomplete simply to allow extra time for students who fail to complete their work on time. Generally, makeup exams will not be possible. Students missing a single exam can drop it.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is a serious academic offense and will be treated as such. USC has severe penalties for cases of plagiarism. Should I determine that plagiarism has occurred, I will determine whether the seriousness of the situation warrants (1) a penalty to the assignment, up to assigning a score of 0 for the work, (2) a penalty to the course, up to assigning an ‘F,’ or (3) a more severe penalty in accordance with the approved university procedure.

Accommodating Disabilities

Reasonable accommodations are available for students with a documented disability. If you have a disability and may need accommodations to participate fully in this class, contact the Office of Student Disability Services: 777-6142, TDD 777-6744, email sasds@mailbox.sc.edu, or stop by LeConte College Room 112A. All accommodations must be approved through the Office of Student Disability Services.
Schedule

The schedule below is based on an estimate of the time required to cover each topic. I might adjust things slightly if topics require more or less time. I will announce any changes in advance on Blackboard.

Part 1: Introductory Material

Week 1 (August 28 and 30): What is Political Science?

Reading:
- This syllabus!
- *Science of Politics* intro chapter (Blackboard).
- Two web articles:
  - https://fivethirtyeight.com/datalab/as-a-major-retraction-shows-were-all-vulnerable-to-faked-data/

Week 2 (September 6): The Research Process 1: Research Questions and Theory-building

Reading:
- *Analyzing Politics* chapter 2 (Blackboard).
- Quackenbush 2004 II article (Blackboard)

Note: No class on Sept 4 (Labor Day)

Week 3 (September 11 and 13): The Research Process 2: Research Design

Reading:
- Kasten 2017 ISR article (Blackboard)
- Lindberg et al. 2014 JOD article (Blackboard)
- Hyde 2015 ARPS article (Blackboard)
- Dunning 2007 PRQ article (Blackboard)

Week 4 (September 18 and 20): The Research Process 3: Probability and Statistics, Presentation of Findings

Reading:
- Kastellec and Leoni 2007 POP article (Blackboard)

Part 2: Areas of Inquiry in Political Science

Week 5 (September 25 and 27): Political Behavior 1

Reading:
- Abromowitz and Webster ES article (Blackboard)
- Miller et al. 2015 AJPS article (Blackboard)
- Erikson and Stoker 2011 APSR article (Blackboard)
Week 6 (October 2 and 4): Catch-up, Review, Exam 1

*No reading*

*Note: Exam 1 in class on October 4*

Week 7 (October 9 and 11): Political Behavior 2, Data Tutorial

*Reading:*
- Goren and Chapp 2017 APSR article (Blackboard)
- Baker 2015 APSR article (Blackboard)
- Tomz and Weeks 2013 APSR article (Blackboard)

Week 8 (October 16 and 18): Political Institutions 1

*Reading:*
- Burden et al. 2014 AJPS article (Blackboard)
- Döring and Manow 2015 BJPS article (Blackboard)
- Monogan Konisky and Woods 2017 AJPS article (Blackboard)

Week 9 (October 23 and 25): Political Institutions 2

*Reading:*
- Goldsmith et al. 2017 WP article (Blackboard)
- Crabtree and Nelson ISQ article (Blackboard)
- Joshi et al. 2015 JPR article (Blackboard)

*Note: raw data and brief project description must be uploaded to Blackboard by the start of class on October 25*

Week 10 (October 30 and November 1): Category “Misfits”

*Reading:*
- Carter and Poast 2017 JCR article (Blackboard)
- Thomas 2014 AJPS article (Blackboard)
- Carnegie and Marinov 2017 AJPS article (Blackboard)
- Glynn and Sen 2014 AJPS article (Blackboard)

Week 11 (November 6 and 8): Catch-up, Review, Exam 2

*No reading*

*Note: Exam 2 in class on November 8*

Part 3: Project Presentations

Week 12 (November 13 and 15): Final Data Tutorial, Projects 1

*No reading*
Week 13 (November 20): Projects 2
No reading
Note: No class on November 22 (Thanksgiving)

Week 14 (November 27 and 29): Projects 3
No reading

Week 15 (December 4 and 6): Projects 4, Final Exam Review
No reading
Note: projects and peer evaluations must be uploaded to Blackboard by the start of class on December 6

Final exam on Wednesday, December 13, at 4:00 PM