POL 30: Political Inquiry

Fall, 2016

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Lecture: MW 12:00 - 12:50

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Introduction

This course provides an introduction to the tools of political inquiry, including research design, causal inference, and basic statistical methods. Understanding these topics is essential for assessing the validity of others’ studies and for conducting your own research.

Course Objectives

We have three basic goals in the course. First, after this course, you will have a strong intuitive understanding of research design, hypothesis testing, and theory building. Second, you will be capable and critical consumers of qualitative and quantitative research, in political research and other areas of scientific inquiry. Finally, you will acquire the basic applied skills needed to conduct your own research projects and answer your own questions.

Practically, this means that by the end of this course, you will be equipped to critically analyze others’ work, including their sample framework, measurement, design, methods, and analysis. You will be able to create and explain a variety of statistics, both graphical and numerical. You will also learn how to use a statistical software program, SPSS. These skills will be useful in reading, understanding, and conducting research in political science, as well as in many other disciplines.
Reasons to take this course

1. To understand research in political science, you need to understand these methods. Open any one of the top political science journals where the best scholarship is published and you will see that almost every article uses the basic techniques that we will learn in this class.

2. The skills you will learn in this course are valuable. Many of you will go on to run government agencies, administer nonprofit organizations, or have your own businesses or law practices. The logic of political research will provide a powerful set of tools for understanding problems and making decisions. If you master the material in this course, you will have an additional set of resources for your future career. If you do not, you will always be at the mercy of those that are trained in these methods. In addition, we are in the midst of an explosion in data availability, which has been accompanied a dramatic growth in demand for skilled professionals capable of analyzing such data. If you like this course, you may wish to consider our advanced classes and certificates.

3. The material is challenging, but many students enjoy it. Research methodology can be abused, but it has an underlying logic and objectivity that many students find appealing. In addition, the basic analysis skills you learn in this class will empower you to ask and answer innumerable questions about the world.

4. And of course, the best reason to take this course: you have to.

Preparation

Whatever your background, you can do this if you are willing to work at it. This course is heavy on intuition and logic, and only requires rudimentary math. You may have some basic calculations to perform, but we will minimize the math and focus on the intuition.

Study Methods

You should stay on top of the material and not leave anything until the last minute. The material covered in this course is inherently cumulative. If you do not keep up, you will quickly find yourself too far behind to catch up. Hence you should not expect to be able to blow off this class until the week before the final, unless you are trying to fail.

A great deal of your grade comes from the homework assignments. Take them very seriously and do not wait until the day before they are due to start!

I believe that anyone can get any grade they want in this course. I will work with you to achieve your goals and encourage you to contact me with any questions. Drop by during any of my regular office hours, or let me know if you need to meet at some other time.
Evaluation

- Final Exam
  There will be a cumulative final exam as per the official Schedule of Classes. It will be worth thirty percent of your grade.

- Homework
  There will be four homework assignments, worth a total of sixty percent of your grade. Homework will cover most of the core material on the final examination, but it is not just an exam preparation tool. An important component of the homework will be your conducting independent and original research, using the datasets provided in class, or even some other dataset should you so desire. Some problems will come straight from the text, others from the workbook, and others from me.

  Your lowest-scoring homework will be weighted downward, so that the final formula for your homework score will be:

  \[
  \text{HW Score} = (\frac{15}{16} \times \text{Average of Three Best Scores}) + (\frac{1}{16} \times \text{Lowest Homework Scores})
  \]

  The homework schedule will be:
  - HW1: Assigned on October 3, Due October 12.
  - HW2: Assigned on October 12, Due on October 31
  - HW3: Assigned on October 31, Due on November 14
  - HW4: Assigned on November 14, Due on December 1.

- Quizzes/Participation
  Ten percent of your grade will reflect section attendance and participation. There may be unscheduled quizzes in section as well.

- Extra Credit
  There will be two extra credit assignments, and I may offer more later in the quarter.

  The first is that you may either participate in a political science experiment by taking a survey or you may read and comment on a short paper.

  The second is a “Data of the Day” report. This assignment will involve finding and assessing a published representation of data. You can use a newspaper or magazine, or a research journal. You will write a summary of your observations in one page or less, and present your results to the class. More details will be provided in class and on the class Tritoned website.
Late Assignments and Exams
Late homework assignments will be marked down by 5 percent per day. Final examinations cannot be rescheduled; please plan your travel and other obligations accordingly. Medical and family emergencies will be accommodated with standard documentation and conditions.

Policy on Academic Integrity
Students are expected to maintain the highest standards of academic integrity. Cheating, plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated and will be subject to disciplinary action consistent with University rules and regulations. Students are expected to familiarize themselves with University regulations regarding plagiarism and academic dishonesty.

Syllabus
The syllabus and course outline is intended to provide an overview of the course. In particular, some topic order and dates may change.

Other: Nametags
Please place a name tag on your desk at each lecture so I can call on you and learn your names. I recommend folding an 8.5 X 11 piece of paper lengthwise.

Communications
We will use the university’s online classroom system, at https://tritoned.ucsd.edu. Assignments, updates, and other information will be posted there during the quarter. Please login regularly for updates. Please also post general questions there so that all students can see your question and the teaching staff’s response. Any issues or questions that you wish to raise privately should be sent to a member of the teaching staff via email or raised in office hours as appropriate. Per university policy, limit your use of online class resources to appropriate academic activities.

Textbooks
The following are required and may be purchased online or at the bookstore:

- Galderisi, Peter. Understanding Political Science Statistics.
- Galderisi, Peter. Understanding Political Science Statistics Using SPSS

There will be some supplemental readings, available via the library’s reserves system. To access these, you may need to establish a campus connection first, see ACS for details on virtual private networks.
**Computer Labs and Software**  We will have instructions regarding the options to get the SPSS software in class on Wednesday.

You may use SPSS in an on-campus computer laboratory or you may acquire it for a compatible computer of your own using a campus license.

**Section and Lectures**

Attendance at weekly discussion sections is critical for your success. Attendance will be recorded and will included in grade calculations, as discussed above.

Lectures will be enrolled in the university’s podcast system, so that you may be able to watch and listen to lectures whenever you wish. You are strongly encouraged to attend, but should you ever be unable to make it to class, you can listen to the podcast and review the lecture slides. A link to the podcast will be on the course website. Lecture notes will also be posted on the course website. While the podcast and lecture notes are intended to help you study and make up for any class you may miss, they are not an obligation or commitment of the university or the instructor and students should always plan on attending class. Any problems caused by a failure of the podcast system will not be considered grounds to waive any requirements or due dates.

A list of weekly topics and readings, and exam dates is below.
1. September 26: Introduction
   
   - Reading: None

2. September 28: Political Science? Theories and Hypotheses
   
   - Galderisi, Chapter 1.

3. October 3: Concepts, Variables, and Measurement
   

4. October 5: Collecting Data / Surveys and Sampling
   

5. October 10: Describing Variables Numerically
   
   - Galderisi, Chapter 3.
   - Galderisi, Chapter 4.

6. October 12: Describing Variables Graphically
   

7. October 17: Causality and Challenges
   
8. **October 19: Experimental Studies**

9. **October 24: Observational Studies**

10. **October 26: Crosstabs**
    - Wolfinger and Rosenstone, Chapter 2 of *Who Votes?* Yale University Press, 1980, especially Tables 2.4, 2.5, and 2.6.

11. **October 31: Regression 1**
    - Galderisi, Chapter 11.

12. **November 2: Regression 2**
    - Galderisi, Chapter 12, pages 272-281.

13. **November 7: Introduction to Inference**

14. **November 9: The Normal Curve**
    - Galderisi, Chapter 5.

15. **November 14: Confidence Intervals and Significance Tests 1**
    - Galderisi, Chapter 6.

16. **November 16: Confidence Intervals and Significance Tests 2**
    - Galderisi, Chapter 7.

17. **November 21: Chi Square**
    - Chapter 9, P185-196.

18. **November 23: Regression 3**
    - Galderisi, Chapter 12 (282-285).

19. **November 28: Qualitative 1**


20. **November 30: Review for Final Examination**