



Political Analysis

GOVT 650

Instructor Info



Andrew R. Flores



T 5-7pm or by appointment



Kerwin Hall 217



american.edu/spa/faculty/



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Course Info



Th 5:30pm-8pm



TBD



Kerwin Hall 201

Description

Methods of scientific analysis, including research formulation, hypothesis generation and testing, quantitative analysis, and computer techniques.



Overview

This course is designed to get graduate students systematically trained and well equipped to tackle the central question of political and social science: how do we know what causes what? Though we can rarely be completely sure about the truth of our “stories,” i.e., proposed explanations, we can design research projects, following some fundamental methodological rules and principles, that allows us to evaluate different explanations effectively and efficiently. Then, at least, we can come to the true story underlying a political or social phenomenon.

People usually differentiate between qualitative and quantitative methods and regard them essentially different animals living in separated worlds. However, they both follow the same logic in drawing inferences based on empirical evidence. An effective and appropriate research design, rather than complicated statistical models, is what really distinguishes a superb research project from a mediocre one. Before polishing our methodological skills to that desirable level, it is critical to learn some fundamental methodological rules and principles that enable us to do valid and effective research. After discussing the essence of scientific research, we will learn both qualitative and quantitative methods using empirical cases. In this course, you will begin the transition from knowledge consumers to knowledge producers. This will be an exciting if sometimes daunting journey—but with commitment, hard work, and intellectual engagement, you will be thrilled by how much you learn and grow this semester. And you may even be motivated to seek out great stories that you can tell and effectively convince an audience.

Materials

Required Text

Chambliss, Daniel F. and Russell K. Schutt. 2020. *Making Sense of the Social World: Methods of Investigation* 6th ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. (“MSSW”)

Imai, Kosuke. 2017. *Quantitative Social Science: An Introduction*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. (“QSS”)

Recommended Texts

Kellstedt, Paul and Guy Whitten. 2018. *The Fundamentals of Political Science Research*, 3rd ed. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press. (“FPSR”)

Other

Any additional assignments or readings will be provided on Canvas.

Statistical Software

R <http://www.r-project.org/>

RStudio <http://www.rstudio.com/>

Grading Scheme

25% Midterm Exam

25% Final Exam

20% Homework

20% Research Prospectus 5% Class Participation 5% R Programming

“A” >93%; “A-” 90–93%; “B+” 87–89%; “B” 84–86%; “B-” 80–83%; “C+” 77–79%; “C” 74–76%; “C-” 70–73%; “D+” 60–69%; “D” 55–59%; “F” <55%.

Learning Objectives

- **Demonstrate** familiarity with some major concepts and methodological issues in scientific inquiry.
- **Implement** preliminary quantitative analysis like correlation analysis and significance tests.
- **Perform** qualitative research using methods like process tracing, comparative case studies, in-depth interviews, and participant observation.
- **Evaluate** the pros and cons of different research methods in light of specific research topics.
- **Craft** a research design tailored to a specific research topic that you are interested in.

Acknowledgments: Portions of this syllabus were drawn from Andy Ballard’s GOVT 650 syllabus.

Examinations

Two exams will be fielded during the semester, consisting of multiple choice, short-answer questions, longer (essay) questions, and statistical problems to be solved in R (in the second exam). On the quantitative section of both exams, you will be expected to show all your work. If you do not show sufficient work to indicate how you arrive at your answer, you will not receive any credit for that question, even if your answer is mathematically “correct.” Similarly, if you show your work but do not arrive at the right answer, you will receive partial credit.

Homework

There will be six homework assignments throughout the semester, each of which has been designed to improve your understanding of the materials presented in class. The assignment posting date and due dates are in the Course Schedule. Any variations in this schedule will be announced in class and on Canvas. Homework assignments, unlike exams, will primarily be graded based on whether a reasonable effort has been made to answer the problems (correctness is a secondary consideration). Homework assignments in the second-half should be written up in RMarkdown and submitted via Canvas. Each homework assignment counts as 4% of your final grade, with the lowest homework assignment dropped.

Research Prospectus

You will develop a research design that addresses a significant question in political science and write a research prospectus describing it. The prospectus will define a testable hypothesis (based on existing relevant research), identify appropriate data, and propose a method of analysis. You will not be required to do the empirical analysis. I encourage you use this research design in your second semester methods course (if it is quantitative or can be made quantitative), though it is not required. Throughout the course of the semester, you may write parts of the prospectus in homework assignments. For example, when we discuss generating hypotheses, you can begin the work for your final research prospectus. You will receive feedback from me on those smaller pieces of the final work, so that when it comes to completing the prospectus, you will be well on your way to a strong research design.

The research prospectus should be typed, double-spaced on standard-size paper with 1” margins on all sides. You should use a serif font that is highly readable (e.g., 12 pt. Times New Roman). The research prospectus should NOT be more than fifteen (15) pages (excluding any cover page or references list). Manuscripts should follow the [American Political Science Association](#) citation style, [American Psychological Association](#) style, or [Chicago Manuscript](#) style (author-date). They will be due at the beginning of the final exam (December 13).

Papers should:

1. Identify a research question clearly
2. Provide a comprehensive literature review
3. Develop a theory & hypothesis or hypotheses
4. Describe the proposed data for analysis
5. Describe the analyses to be performed
6. Discuss the merits and limitations of the design and how the design effectively tests empirical expectations from the theory

To help develop your prospectus, you will prepare an annotated bibliography of at least five references by October 4. These references should come primarily from peer reviewed articles or books published by university presses. This will be 12.5% of your final grade on the Research Prospectus.

A rough draft of your prospectus, even if not final, is due on November 15. This will be 12.5% of your final grade on the Research Prospectus.

You are expected to revise your Research Prospectus based on verbal and written feedback throughout the semester.

Class Participation

In addition to the readings, you will be responsible for reacting to the course materials. We will generally devote the first portion of our synchronous sessions to a Q&A session on the material to clarify your understanding of the topics for each week. To facilitate, you will each submit *at least* two discussion questions on Canvas. Your participation in class and in the Canvas discussion board will be evaluated for your participation.

R Programming

I have setup a group on [DataCamp Learn](#). You will need to create an account with your american.edu email address. We will cover this during the semester. There are 10 assigned credit-hours worth 5% of your grade, and they should be completed *before* coming to lecture on the current topic. Here is the assignment schedule:

Course Title	Points	Due date:
Introduction to R	2	Oct. 10
Intermediate R	3	Oct. 17

Students may collaborate on these assignments. These will not be graded for accuracy but for successful completion. Students complete the assignments through the DataCamp website, and your completion will be automatically documented. Students should successfully complete all the programming assignments by Oct 18, 2023.

Note: DataCamp Learn has several lessons that you can access for free for a 6-month window because you are enrolled in this course. I can individually assign additional lessons to students who want to learn specific programming/analytics skills with R or other programming languages.

Quantitative Academic Support

You have additional support from American University when it comes to data and research software questions. Quantitative Academic Support is available: <https://www.american.edu/provost/academic-access/mathstat.cfm>. While priority is given to Mathematics & Statistics students, this free support is available for you as well.

Statistical Consulting

You have additional support from the Library at American University for research design, statistical methods, and interpreting statistical output, among other services. Further information is available here: <https://www.american.edu/cas/mathstat/statistical-consulting.cfm>.

Academic Integrity Code

All students are required to follow the University's Academic Integrity Code. If you have not already done so, please familiarize yourself with the standards & requirements of the University's Academic Code of Conduct. Violations of the Code of Conduct will not be tolerated & will be reported appropriately. You can find more information about the University's Academic Integrity Code here: <http://www.american.edu/academics/integrity/code.cfm>

Accommodations

All effort will be offered to make this class accessible to all students. Though "reasonable accommodation" is the legal right of people with disabilities, this course is designed to be universally accessible for students regardless of disability or other individual categorization.

The Academic Support & Access Center supports the academic development & educational goals of all American University Students & is committed to providing access for individuals with disabilities within the university's diverse community.

Location: Mary Gradyon Center (MGC-243), x3360, Fax: x1042, M–Th: 9am–7pm & F: 9am–5pm,
<https://www.american.edu/provost/academic-access/index.cfm>

Emergency Preparedness

In an emergency, AU will implement a plan for meeting the needs of all members of the university community. Should the university be required to close for a period of time, we are committed to ensuring that all aspects of our educational programs will be delivered to our students. These may include altering & extending the duration of the traditional term schedule to complete essential instruction in the traditional format &/or use of distance instructional methods. Specific strategies will vary from class to class, depending on the format of the course & timing of the emergency. Faculty will communicate class-specific information to students via AU e-mail & Canvas, while students must inform their faculty immediately of any absence due to illness. Students are responsible for checking their AU e-mail regularly & keeping themselves informed of emergencies. In the event of a declared pandemic or other emergency, students should refer to the AU website (<http://www.american.edu/emergency>) & the AU information line x1100 for general university-wide information, as well as contact their faculty &/or respective dean's office for course & school/college-specific information.

COVID-19 Precautions

We will be following all the requirements that American University has established to have a safe semester. This includes vaccination, regular testing, face masks while indoors, and quarantining if anyone shows COVID-19 symptoms. Students should take care of their physical and mental health throughout the semester. There are resources on campus, and I am happy to share further details as necessary. It is understandable that unexpected events may introduce additional burdens on students during this time. Please feel free to communicate with me if something does arise, and I will be as flexible as possible.

Sharing of Course Content

To supplement the classroom experience, lectures may be audio or video recorded by faculty and made available to students registered for this class. Faculty may record classroom lectures or discussions for pedagogical use, future student reference, or to meet the accommodation needs of students with a documented disability. These recordings are limited to personal use and may not be distributed, sold, or posted on social media outlets without written permission of the instructor.

Unauthorized downloading, file sharing, or distribution of any part of course materials, or using information for purposes other than student's own learning, may be deemed a violation of American University's Student Conduct Code and subject to disciplinary action (see [Student Conduct Code](#) VI. Prohibited Conduct).

The Use of Artificial Intelligence

We will discuss the ethical and practical use and dangers of Artificial Intelligence (AI) for social science research during the semester. However, students should not use generative AI (e.g., Chat GPT) to originally generate any of their work. Just as it is considered plagiarism to copy/paste someone else's words without appropriate attribution, copy/pasting output from Chat GPT without acknowledgment or attribution would similarly be considered plagiarism. The same rules apply for paraphrasing. If you ever have a question about whether to cite, please err on the side that citing your sources is generally a better/best practice.

You can use tools like Grammarly that revise your original writing to make your writing clearer. This is similar to going to the Writing Center to get feedback on your written work.

While I have heard some beneficial aspects of help with writing code from AI, please use these tools with care. Hackers have already developed fake "packages" that get prompted onto AI machines, and these fake packages if installed on your computer can expose your device. Please use your due diligence before blindly following ChatGPT, and if you use such tools, please provide a reference as such, the prompt you provided, and the original output you received. This way, we can see how/whether you revised such output for coding questions.

Updates to Syllabus

Changes to the syllabus may occur throughout the semester. If changes are substantive (e.g., a change in an assignment), then I will post the revised syllabus with an announcement to Canvas. If changes are about due dates, I will not change the syllabus, but I will post the updated due dates as an Announcement in Canvas. If a change in a due date occurs, it will be to make the assignment due later than its original submissions deadline.

Late Assignment Policies

Please strive to submit your work on time. If a work is not complete by the deadline, please submit what you have by the deadline. And, you can upload a more complete version the following day without penalty. However, egregious delays in submitting work can result in an "F" for the assignment. This is particularly true for homework assignments, where answer keys are posted following submission.

Schedule

All readings and other assignments should be performed prior to coming the lecture. Any additional readings will be posted to Canvas.

MODULE 1: Social Science Theory, Hypotheses, & Research Ethics

Week 1

- **Aug. 29** Introduction, Social Science Theory, Hypotheses, & Empirical Models
- Syllabus
- MSSW Ch. 1–2
- Bueno de Mesquita, Ethan, and Anthony Fowler. *Thinking Clearly with Data*.
- Pre-class survey
- **Recommended:** FPSR Ch. 1–2
- **Homework #1 posted to Canvas**

Week 2

- **Sep. 5** Research Ethics and the Process of Research
- MSSW Ch. 3, 13, Appendix A
- van Evra, Stephen. 1997. *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, Ch. 5, Appendix.
- McClendon, Gwyneth H. 2012. “Ethics of Using Public Officials as Field Experiment Subjects.” *Newsletter of the APSA Experimental Section* 3(1): 13–20.
- Broockman, David E. 2013. “Black Politicians Are More Intrinsically Motivated to Advance Blacks’ Interests: A Field Experiment Manipulating Political Incentives.” *American Journal of Political Science* 57(3): 521–536.
- **Due:** Complete [CITI Human Subjects Research Training](#) and upload your certificate of completion to Canvas; this is Homework #2

MODULE 2: Causality, Controlled Comparison, and Measurement

Week 3

- **Sep. 12** Measurement, association, causality, and causal mechanisms
- MSSW Ch. 4, 6
- QSS Ch. 2
- Bueno de Mesquita, Ethan, and Anthony Fowler. *Thinking Clearly with Data*.
- King, Gary, Robert Koehane, and Sidney Verba. 1994. *Designing Social Inquiry*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, Ch. 3.
- Butler, Daniel M., and Eleanor Neff Powell. 2014. “Understanding the Party Brand: Experimental Evidence on the Role of Valence.” *Journal of Politics* 76(2): 492–505.
- **Recommended:** FPSR 3–5
- **Due:** Homework #1
- **Homework #3 posted to Canvas**

Week 4

- **Sep. 19** Experiment, quasi-experiment, and observational studies
- Dunning, Thad. *Natural Experiments in the Social Sciences: A Design-Based Approach*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, Ch. 1–2.
- Gerring, John. 2012. *Social Science Methodology: A Unified Framework*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, Ch. 5.
- Pollock, Philip III. *Essentials of Political Analysis*, Ch. 4.
- Lyall, Jason. 2009. “Does Indiscriminate Violence Incite Insurgent Attacks?: Evidence from Chechnya.” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 53(3): 331–362.

MODULE 3: Qualitative Methods

Week 5

- [Sep. 26](#) In-Depth Interviews, Participant Observation, Ethnography, & Focus Groups

- MSSW Ch. 9–10
- Connell, Catherine. 2020. “Thank You for Coming Out Today: The Queer Discomforts of In-Depth Interviewing.” In *Other, Please Specify: Queer Methods in Sociology*, D’Lane Compton, Tey Meadow, and Kristen Schilt (eds.). Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Cramer, Kathrine J. 2012. “Putting Inequality in Its Place: Rural Consciousness and the Power of Perspective.” *American Political Science Review* 106(3): 5117–532.
- Small, Mario Luis. 2006. “Neighborhood Institutions as Resource Brokers: Childcare Centers, Interorganizational Ties, and Resource Access among the Poor.” *Social Problems* 53(2): 274–292.
- **Due:** Homework #3

Week 6

- [Oct. 3](#) Comparative methods, case studies, process tracing & unobtrusive qualitative methods

- MSSW Ch. 11
- Przeworski, Adam, and Henry Teune. 1970. *The Logic of Comparative Social Inquiry*. New York, NY: Wiley, Ch. 2.
- Mahoney, James. 2012. “The Logic of Process Tracing Tests in the Social Sciences.” *Sociological Methods & Research* 41(4): 570–597.
- Tannenwald, Nina. 1999. “The Nuclear Taboo: The United States and the Normative Basis of Nuclear Non-Use.” *International Organization* 53(3): 433–468.
- **Due:** Annotated bibliography
- **Midterm Exam posted to Canvas**

MODULE 4: Fundamental Applications & Concepts of Quantitative Methods

Week 7

- [Oct. 10](#) Introduction to R and RMarkdown

- QSS Ch. 1
- Healy, Kieran. 2020. *Data Visualization: A Practical Introduction*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, Ch. 2.
- Machlis, Sharon. 2017. [Beginner's Guide to R](#).
- **Due:** Introduction to R via DataCamp
- **Due:** Midterm Exam (by Friday, Oct. 13)
- **Homework #4 posted to Canvas**

Week 8

- [Oct. 17](#) Describing variables, probability theory, sampling

- MSSW Ch. 5, 7–8.
- QSS Ch. 6.
- Pollock, Philip III. *Essentials of Political Analysis*. Ch. 6.
- Flores, Andrew R., Donald P. Haider-Markel, Daniel C. Lewis, Patrick R. Miller, Barry L. Tadlock, and Jami K. Taylor. 2020. “Public Attitudes about Transgender Participation in Sports: The Roles of Gender, Gender Identity Conformity, and Sports Fandom.” *Sex Roles* 83(5): 382–398.
- **Due:** Intermediate R via DataCamp
- **Recommended:** FPSR Ch. 6–7.

Week 9

- [Oct. 24](#) Working with & presenting data

- Healy, Kieran. 2020. *Data Visualization: A Practical Introduction*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, Ch. 3–5.
 - LaCour, Michael J. and Donald P. Green. 2014. “When Contact Changes Minds: An Experiment on Transmission of Support for Gay Equality.” *Science* 346(6215): 1366–1369.
 - Broockman, David, Joshua Kalla, and Peter Aronow. 2015. “Irregularities in LaCour (2014).”
 - **Due:** Homework #4
 - **Homework #5 posted to Canvas**
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Week 10

- Oct. 31 Significance tests & cross-tabulation
- Pollock, Philip III. *Essentials of Political Analysis*, Ch. 7.
- Flores, Andrew R., Donald P. Haider-Markel, Daniel C. Lewis, Patrick R. Miller, and Jami K. Taylor. 2021. "Antidiscrimination Interventions, Political Ads on Transgender Rights and Public Opinion." *Frontiers in Psychology* doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2021.72922.
- Recommended: FPSR Ch. 8.

MODULE 5: Correlation & Regression

Week 11

- Nov. 7 Introduction to OLS
- QSS Ch. 4.
- Bueno de Mesquita, Ethan, and Anthony Fowler. *Thinking Clearly with Data*, Ch. 5.
- Pollock, Philip III. *Essentials of Political Analysis*, Ch. 8.
- Identify an article that relies on regression (likely related to your prospectus) and bring to class. Be prepared to summarize the study and we'll interpret the results.
- Due: Homework #5
- Recommended: FPSR Ch. 9.
- Homework #6 posted to Canvas

Week 12

- Nov. 14 OLS (Day 2)
- QSS Ch. 7.
- Pollock, Philip III. *The Essentials of Political Analysis*, Ch. 8.
- Bring back the same article you identified last week.
- Recommended: FPSR Ch. 10.

Week 13

- Nov. 21 Workshop: Lightning round presentations
- Due: Rough draft of prospectus

Week 14

- Nov. 28 No Class: Thanksgiving Holiday

MODULE 6: Multi-Method & Mixed Methods

Week 15

- Dec. 5 Multi-method vs. mixed methods & triangulation
- Olsen, Wendy. 2004. "Triangulation in Social Research: Qualitative and Quantitative Methods Can Really Be Mixed." In *Developments in Sociology*, ed. M. Holborn. Ormskirk: Causeway Press.
- Anguera, M. Teresa et al. 2018. "Revisiting the Difference between Mixed Methods and Multimethods: Is It All in the Name?" *Quality & Quantity* 52: 2757–2770.
- Terriquez, Veronica. 2015. "Intersectional Mobilization, Social Movement Spillover, and Queer Youth Leadership in the Immigrant Rights Movement." *Social Problems* 62: 343–362.
- Due: Homework #6

Examinations Week

- Dec. 13 Final Exam
 - Due: Prospectus Papers
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