

PLSC 502: “Statistical Methods for Political Research”

Fall 2016

Course Project Guidelines

A requirement of this course is the completion of a course project paper. This paper is worth 50 percent of your grade in the course (500 points). The purposes of the paper, in rough rank order of their importance, are:

- To illustrate your understanding of the statistical techniques covered in the class, including such things as data description, graphics, univariate and bivariate statistics, and statistical inference;
- To demonstrate the application of those techniques to a problem of substantive interest in the social sciences; and
- To address a political phenomenon in a quantitative fashion.

Several approaches to the project are possible. The paper may be a replication and extension of previously published work, a retesting of previously examined hypotheses on new or different data, or a piece of completely original research. In any event, the primary goal of the paper is methodological, not substantive. This means that emphasis should be placed on the technical aspects of the analysis. Traditional components of a research paper, including a literature review, theoretical context, and derivation of expectations and hypotheses should be included only to the extent that they are necessary to understand and evaluate the analysis' empirical/statistical merits. Conversely, technical details, including detailed descriptives, diagnostics, and so forth, which would normally be omitted from a final paper, should be included here. In all cases, the emphasis should be on demonstrating technical mastery of the practical aspects of the technique you use, by describing the details of the process by which the analysis was conducted.

The general form of the paper should be akin to that of a research note, as are commonly published in some social science journals (e.g., the *Journal of Politics*, *Social Psychology Quarterly*, etc.). Total length should not exceed 5000 words of text (that's about 15 pages), but feel free to include as many references, tables and figures as you deem necessary. While you are welcome to collect your own data for the project, time and effort constraints will very likely make doing so infeasible, and you are encouraged to coopt others' data to your own ends; on that point, be aware that many researchers make their data available on their personal homepages. **The paper is due at 11:59 p.m. EST on Wednesday, December 14, 2016;** please plan accordingly. Finally, if you have questions about the project, I would strongly encourage you to talk to the instructor, either in person or via phone, e-mail, etc.