

POLS 204: Performing Research in Political Science

<https://pols204.sp26.equezadallanes.com/>

11:00 AM – 11:50 AM MoWeFr

Stein 124

Spring 2026

Instructor

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Office hours: WF 1:00-3:00 pm and by appointment

Course Overview

This course provides students with an introduction to quantitative and qualitative political science research that is necessary for original research on political and policy issues. The course focuses on three things: the development and analysis of political science research, the application of quantitative analysis, and an understanding of qualitative approaches such as interviewing and archival research. The course emphasizes hands-on training that will provide students useful skills for academic and professional setting, including an introduction to statistical software, measurement and introductory statistical analysis, the presentation of data, and strong writing. No prior data analysis or statistics background is necessary.

Learning Outcomes

- Understand and assess empirical research in political science
- Estimate and interpret the appropriate quantities of interest to answer political science questions
- Develop and test research questions as well as communicating results from data analysis
- Understand and explain fundamental concepts of statistical inference and the advantages and limitations of quantitative methods

Work and Assessment

Required Materials:

- Llaudet, Elena and Kosuke Imai. 2022. *Data Analysis for Social Science: A Friendly and Practical Introduction*. United States: Princeton University Press. 

- A computer (Mac, Windows or Linux, preferably). If you are using a Chromebook or iPad, please let me know as soon as possible.
- Dropbox folder with readings and datasets  (link on Canvas; please download)

Course Expectations

Students are expected to attend class and participate in class discussions and exercises. I expected you will have completed all readings prior to class and will come prepared with questions.

Course Workload

As a course with a course count of one, you are expected to spend 8-10 hours of work each week (not including our three 50-minute weekly course meetings).

Assignments and grades

Final course grades will be assigned as follows:

Grade	Range	Grade	Range
A	94–100%	C	74–76%
A–	90–93%	C–	70–73%
B+	87–89%	D+	67–69%
B	84–86%	D	64–66%
B–	80–83%	D–	60–63%
C+	77–79%	F	< 60%

Final grades will be calculated based on the following components:

Participation (10%): All students are expected to be active participants in the class. Our learning experience will be enhanced if you come prepared and ready to engage with the material and ask questions. If you are confused about something, you are likely not the only one.

- *Attendance policy:*

Attendance is part of your participation grade, and while there is no separate grade for attendance it is a prerequisite for in-class participation. That said, to accommodate unforeseeable circumstances, you have two *unexcused* absences that will not affect your participation grade. Any additional absences will hurt your participation grade. If you accumulate four *unexcused* absences in the semester, you will forfeit your entire participation grade. Note that students who are absent, whether excused or not, are still expected to submit the weekly summary corresponding to that class period. (Absences due to extenuating circumstances will be considered separately. Please refer to the [College's Class Attendance Policy](#) for the college-wide policy on absences and be in

communication if a situation that will keep you from attending class for an extended period of time arises.)

Problem Sets (30%): You will complete six (6) problem sets throughout the semester. These problem sets will help you practice the concepts and data analysis skills we learn in class. You will have about a week to complete each problem set. I encourage you to work together with other students, but the final product should be your own work. Problem sets are due at the beginning of the class period indicated on the schedule.

Group Research Project (30% total): In research teams of two or three, you will write an empirical research paper (6-8 pages, double-spaced) similar to the ones political scientists publish in academic journals. For this assignment, you will use data from the American National Election Studies (ANES) to develop a research question, write a literature review, test a hypothesis, and report your results. The paper will be broken down into the following parts that you will submit throughout the semester:

1. Research Question (5% of final grade)
2. Literature Review and Expectations (2-3 pages, 5% of final grade)
3. Conference-style Presentation (12-minutes, 10% of final grade)
4. Final paper (6-8 pages, 10% of final grade)

Midterm and Final Exam (15% each): The midterm and final exam will be similar in structure to the weekly problem sets. For these exams, you will be working with some popular survey data that social scientists collect with regularity, such as the General Social Survey and American National Election Study datasets. No collaboration is permitted for the exams. However, students are allowed to use a single letter-sized sheet of hand-written notes (two-sided). Both midterm and final exams will be administered via Canvas.

Extra Credit Opportunity: There is an additional problem set you can complete for extra credit. This can add a maximum of three (3) percentage points to your final grade.

Collaboration Policy

Learning how to analyze data can be challenging but it may be easier if you work together. In fact, I encourage you to talk with your peers about the course materials and assignments. That said, each student should do and submit their own work. Collaboration does not mean you end up with the exact same code or answer.

Communication Policy

If you have questions about class in general or about a specific assignment, you can email me or come by my office. You can expect a response within 24 hours (unless you email me on Friday). Students are also more than welcome to attend office hours, as this is time set aside specifically for you. In addition, if my office door is open, feel free to stop by. Please note that I will not be “pre-grading” assignments, but I am happy to answer clarifying questions about them either via email or, preferably, during office hours.

Regrading Policy

If a student wishes to appeal a grade, they must do so in writing within one week of receiving their graded assignment back. The student must indicate clearly what part of the assignment's grading they disagree with, making sure to respond to the instructor's comments in that section and making their case for why they should not have been deducted points. These requests should be done via email and the subject name should read "POLS 204 Regrading request - [Name of assignment]."

Academic Integrity and Generative AI Policy

All education is a cooperative enterprise between faculty and students. This cooperation requires trust and mutual respect, which are only possible in an environment governed by the principles of academic integrity. As an institution devoted to teaching, learning, and intellectual inquiry, Holy Cross expects all members of the College community to abide by the highest standards of academic integrity. Any violation of academic integrity undermines the student-faculty relationship, thereby wounding the whole community. Students in this class are required to read the full text of the [College's Academic Integrity Policy](#) and to abide by its standards.

Unless otherwise noted, you are expected to complete all coursework independently without the use of generative AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini). Because this course emphasizes learning basic programming skills, using AI tools at this stage runs counter to our goals. Because the assumption in this course is that all code students submit is original to them, cases where students turn in AI-generated content will be considered cheating.

Instead of relying on AI tools, I encourage you to use forums like Stack Overflow. If you are unsure about how make your code do what you want or do not know how to fix code that won't run, chances are someone has asked a similar question in Stack Overflow and you can repurpose the code people share there.

Course Accessibility and Academic Accommodations

The College of the Holy Cross is committed "[to providing students with disabilities equal access to the educational opportunities and programs available at Holy Cross in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 as amended, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and Massachusetts laws.](#)"

Any student who feels the need for accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the [Office of Accessibility Services](#) to discuss support services available. Once the office receives documentation supporting the request for accommodation, the student would meet privately with Accessibility Services to discuss reasonable and appropriate accommodations.

The office can be reached by calling 508-793-3693. If you are already registered with Accessibility Services, please be sure to get your accommodation letters and deliver them to your

instructors in a timely fashion. Instructors need at least 4-5 days advance notice to be able to facilitate the process of receiving testing accommodations.

Wellbeing and Mental Health

The wellbeing and mental health of students is important. If you are having trouble managing your coursework and are experiencing unusual amounts of stress, sadness, or anxiety, the College has resources you may find useful. Please reach out to [Student Wellness Education](#) or the office of [Counseling and Psychological Services](#).

Title IX

If you have experienced any form of sexual harassment or violence, dating or domestic violence, or stalking, please talk to any faculty or staff member with whom you feel comfortable. Faculty and staff members want to support you and have been trained to help. They will also inform the Title IX office so that you learn about options available to you. If you do not want college administrators to know what you have experienced, you may speak to a chaplain or counseling services with complete confidentiality. They will not tell anyone what you share with them unless you give your express permission. You may contact the Title IX Office directly at titleix@holycross.edu.

Chosen Names and Personal Pronouns

Everyone has the right to be addressed by the name and pronouns that correspond to their gender identity. Rosters do not list gender or pronouns, so you may indicate the pronouns you use so that I don't make assumptions based on your name and/or appearance/self-presentation. If you use a chosen name, please let me know. Chosen names and pronouns are to be respected at all times in the classroom. Mistakes in addressing one another may happen, so I encourage an environment of openness to correction and learning. I will not however, tolerate repeated comments which disrespect or antagonize students who have indicated pronouns or a chosen name.

Center for Writing and Writer's Workshop

The Center for Writing offers one-on-one appointments with trained peer consultants through their Writer's Workshop who can help you improve your communication skills. You are encouraged to use this resource when working on your class assignments to make your arguments more compelling, your sentences clearer, and persistent grammatical errors nonexistent. You can schedule an appointment at <https://holycross.mywconline.com/>.

Recording of Classes

Please note that, consistent with applicable federal and state law, this course may be video/audio recorded as an accommodation *only* with permission from the Office of Ac-

cessibility Services. Students are not permitted to record the contents of this class under any other circumstances.

Syllabus Change Policy

This syllabus is only a guide for the course and is subject to change with advanced notice.

Schedule

Week 1 - Introduction and Philosophy of Science

During the first week, we will discuss the syllabus and talk about what it means for political science (or any social science, for that matter) to be a *science*.

Wednesday, January 21

- Syllabus
- *Data Analysis for Social Science* (from now on DASS). Chapter 1: pp. 1-6. 
- Sheeh, Elay. 2026. “Science Keeps Changing. So Why Should We Trust It?” *The New York Times*, January 5. 
 - As a Holy Cross student, you have acces to *The New York Times*. If you haven’t done so, please sign up for an account via Ignite (it should appear under “Apps”)

Friday, January 23

- Russell, Bertrand. 1912 [2001]. “On Induction.” In *Philosophy of Science: Contemporary Readings*, eds. Yuri Balashov and Alex Rosenberg, 289-93. London/New York: Routledge. 
- Popper, Karl. 1963 [2001]. “Science: Conjectures and Refutations.” In *Philosophy of Science: Contemporary Readings*, eds. Yuri Balashov and Alex Rosenberg, 294-301. London/New York: Routledge. 

Week 2 - Social Scientific Inquiry

Monday, January 26

- Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba. 1994. *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Chapter 1: pp 3-23 (stop at section 1.2.3). 

Wednesday, January 28

- Kellstedt, Paul M., and Guy D. Whitten. 2018. *The Fundamentals of Political Science Research*, 3rd edition. Cambridge University Press. Chapter 3 (from now on *Kellstedt and Whitten*). 

Friday, January 30

- Musgrave, Paul, and Nick Davis. 2023. “A Good Thesis is a Feasible Thesis.” *Thesis Statement* [blog], May 4. 

Week 3 - R 101 and Data Structure

Monday, February 2

- Install R before class. Follow [this guide](#) and upload the PDF you produce at the end.
- Download the [2024 American National Election Study \(ANES\) questionnaire](#).

Wednesday, February 4

- *DASS*. Chapter 1: pp. 7-26. 

Friday, February 6

- Kellstedt and Whitten, Chapter 6. 

! Deadline

Research question for group project due Friday, February 6, at 11:59 pm on Canvas

Week 4 - How Experiments Work

Monday, February 9

- *DASS*. Chapter 2. 

Wednesday, February 11

- Kellstedt and Whitten, Chapter 4: section 4.1 and 4.2. 

Friday, February 13

- Burge, Camille D., Julian J. Wamble, and Rachel R. Cuomo. 2020. “A Certain Type of Descriptive Representative? Understanding How the Skin Tone and Gender of Candidates Influences Black Politics.” *The Journal of Politics* 82(4): 1596–1601. 

! Deadline

Problem Set 1 due Friday, February 13, at 11:59 pm on Canvas

Week 5 - Working with Survey Data

Monday, February 16

- Kellstedt and Whitten, Chapter 5. 

Wednesday, February 18

- DASS. Chapter 3, section 3.1 and 3.2. 
- Cohn, Nate. 2019. "No One Picks Up the Phone, but Which Online Polls Are the Answer?" *The New York Times*, July 2. 

Friday, February 20

- DASS. Chapter 3, section 3.3 to end. 

! Deadline

Problem Set 2 due Friday, February 20, at 11:59 pm on Canvas

Week 6 - Working with Survey Data and Midterm Exam

Monday, February 23

- TBD

Wednesday, February 25

- TBD

Friday, February 27

- Midterm Exam

Week 7 - Spring Break

NO CLASS: 3/2, 3/4, and 3/6

Week 8 - The Research Process and Qualitative Approaches

Monday, March 9

- Kellstedt and Whitten, Chapter 2. 

Wednesday, March 11

- Group project. Bring your notes/progress.

Friday, March 13

- Gerring, John. 2017. “Qualitative Methods.” *Annual Review of Political Science* 20(1): 15–36. 

! Deadline

Problem Set 3 due Friday, March 13, at 11:59 pm on Canvas

Week 9 - Qualitative Approches

Monday, March 16

- Leech, Beth. 2002. “Asking Questions: Techniques for Semistructured Interviews.” *PS: Political Science & Politics* 35(4), 665-668. 
- Malik, Aditi. 2021. “Hindu–Muslim Violence in Unexpected Places: Theory and Evidence from Rural India.” *Politics, Groups, and Identities* 9(1): 40–58. 

Wednesday, March 18

- No in-person meeting. Work on group project.

Friday, March 20

- Greenberg, Jack B. 2024. “The Case for Agency: Three Dimensions of Discretion in Presidential Agenda Construction.” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 54(3): 290–309. 

! Deadline

Group project: Literature Review and Expectations due Friday, March 20, at 11:59 pm on Canvas

Week 10 - Making Predictions with Linear Regression

Monday, March 23

- DASS. Chapter 4, sections 4.1-4.3. 

Wednesday, March 25

- DASS. Chapter 4, sections 4.4-4.5. 

Friday, March 27

- *DASS*. Chapter 4, sections 4.6-4.7. 

! Deadline

Problem Set 4 due Friday, March 27, at 11:59 pm on Canvas

Week 11 - Observational Studies

Monday, March 30

- *DASS*. Chapter 5, sections 5.1-5.4. 

Wednesday, April 1

- No assigned reading.

Friday, April 3

- NO CLASS. Easter Break.

Week 12 - Assessing Internal and External Validity; Probability

Monday, April 6

- NO CLASS. Easter Break.

Wednesday, April 8

- *DASS*. Chapter 5, sections 5.5-5.6. 

Friday, April 10

- *DASS*. Chapter 6, sections 6.1-6.4. 

! Deadline

Problem Set 5 due Friday, April 10, at 11:59 pm on Canvas

Week 13 - Probability

Monday, April 13

- *DASS*. Chapter 6, sections 6.5-6.4. 

Wednesday, April 15

- Kellstedt and Whitten, Section 8.3. 

Friday, April 17

- *DASS*. Chapter 7: section 7.3. 

Week 14 - Dealing with Uncertainty

Monday, April 20

- *DASS*. Chapter 7, sections 7.1-7.2. 

Wednesday, April 22

- NO CLASS. Academic Conference day.

Friday, April 24

No in-person meeting. Recorded lecture.

- *DASS*. Chapter 7, sections 7.4-7.5. 

! Deadline

Problem Set 6 due Friday, April 24, at 11:59 pm on Canvas

Week 15 - Research Presentations

MoWeFri, December 2,4, and 6.

- **Group project: Research Presentations**
- See Canvas for full presentation schedule.

! Deadline

Extra Credit Problem Set due Friday, December 6, at 11:59 pm on Canvas

Week 16 - Review

Monday, May 4

- No assigned reading.

! Deadline

Group project: Final Paper due Monday, May 4, at 11:59 pm on Canvas

Week 17 - Final Exam

Thursday, May 14 at 3 pm.