

POLS 3220: HOW TO PREDICT THE FUTURE

Spring 2025

Professor:	Joe Ornstein	Times:	MWF 12:40–1:30pm
Email:	jornstein@uga.edu		MWF 1:50-2:40pm
Website:	joeornstein.github.io/how-to-predict-the-future/	Place:	Baldwin 101D

In this class, we learn how to make good predictions, exploring the art and science of forecasting from fields like political science, economics, statistics, and cognitive psychology. Why predict the future? Partly because good forecasts are valuable. Partly because it's fun. But mostly because predictions are how we test whether we truly understand how the world works. During the semester, students will participate in a series of forecasting challenges, testing their ability to make accurate predictions about sociopolitical events.

Course Objectives

Upon successful completion of the course, students will be able to:

- Summarize key concepts from the research on forecasting in psychology, political science, economics, and related fields. See **Readings** for details on how this competency will be assessed.
- Make accurate predictions about sociopolitical events over a medium-term time horizon (1-3 months). See **Forecasting Challenge** for details on how this competency will be assessed.
- Clearly explain the reasoning behind their forecasts, incorporating multiple theoretical perspectives and citing reliable sources. See **Briefings** for details on how this competency will be assessed.

Readings

Every week we will read a chapter from the book *Superforecasting: The Art and Science of Prediction* (Tetlock & Gardner, 2016). On Wednesdays, students will take a short reading quiz, in which they will be asked to summarize one or more key concepts from that week's chapter. These quizzes will be graded pass/fail.

Forecasting Challenge

There is no better way to learn forecasting than through practice. Throughout the semester, students will be asked to make predictions about 38 sociopolitical events that will occur on or before April 28. Most of these questions will be chosen from student suggestions. Before each class period, I will ask you to submit predictions for one of these questions (in the form of a probability between 0 and 100) plus a brief explanation for how you came up with your prediction.

To meet expectations, your forecasts must be submitted before the deadline (10am before each class session unless otherwise noted) and include a brief, sensible explanation for why you chose your probability estimate (50-100 words). Because I will be publicly posting predictions to our class website, I cannot accept late or incomplete work. At the end of the semester, I will measure each participant's prediction accuracy (including my own) using **Brier Scores**. See the **Grading Rubric** for how prediction accuracy will be translated into a final letter grade.

Briefings

We will devote each class session to discussing one of the semester's forecasting challenge questions. To facilitate this discussion, 3-7 students will serve as Discussion Leaders. Before class, these students will each write a short paper describing the relevant background and reasoning behind their forecast (750-1,000 words, approximately 3 double-spaced pages). Submit this paper to eLC by the same deadline as the Forecasting Challenge. To receive credit, these briefings must be clearly written, cite credible sources, and provide a useful explanation of at least two different perspectives on the topic.

If your briefing does not meet expectations, or you are unable to attend the class session for which you signed up to serve as Discussion Leader, you cannot receive credit for that day's assignment, but may sign up for another day as long as there are open slots. Note that even if you are serving as Discussion Leader for that day's question, you must still complete the **Forecasting Challenge** assignment as described in the previous section to receive credit.

Grading Rubric

The final letter grade you earn for the semester will be determined based on the number of assignments you complete that meet expectations, as well as your overall prediction accuracy in the forecasting challenge. Consult the table below for the minimum requirements to earn each letter grade. (Students must at least meet the requirements for a C to pass the course.)

Letter Grade	Forecasts	Brier Score	Briefings	Reading Quizzes
A	35	< 0.175	5	11
A-	33	< 0.2	4	10
B+	30	< 0.225	3	9
B	30	< 0.25	3	8
B-	28	-	2	7
C+	25	-	1	6
C	25	-	-	5

Office Hours and Email Policy

I will be available to meet with students before and after each class session, or by appointment in Baldwin 304C. If you send me an email, please allow me 24 hours to respond. Like many professors, my inbox is pretty overloaded. Also, I have small children, so it's my policy to not check email after 5pm or on weekends.

Academic Honesty

When you joined the University of Georgia community, you agreed to abide by a code of conduct outlined in our academic honesty policy, *A Culture of Honesty*. Because of the unique nature of the assignments in this course, I want to make a few notes here about what I consider to be honest conduct.

You are permitted—encouraged, even—to discuss the forecasting challenges with classmates, friends, family, pets, experts, social media, your professors, and language models like ChatGPT. For reasons we will discuss throughout the semester, consulting a wide range of perspectives is an excellent habit for improving your forecasting skills. You may not, however, ask any of these resources to do your work for you. You must complete all writing assignments yourself, and any ideas that are not your own must be cited so that readers can trace them to their source.

Mental Health and Wellness Resources

- If you or someone you know needs assistance, you are encouraged to contact Student Care and Outreach in the Division of Student Affairs at 706-542-7774 or visit <https://sco.uga.edu>. They will help you navigate any difficult circumstances you may be facing by connecting you with the appropriate resources or services.
- UGA has several resources for a student seeking [mental health services](#) or [crisis support](#).
- If you need help managing stress anxiety, relationships, etc., please visit [BeWellUGA](#) for a list of FREE workshops, classes, mentoring, and health coaching led by licensed clinicians and health educators in the University Health Center.
- Additional resources can be accessed through the UGA App.