

POLS 3220: HOW TO PREDICT THE FUTURE

Fall 2024

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

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 40 sociopolitical events that will occur on or before December 2. 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 (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 (midnight before each class session unless otherwise noted) and include a brief, sensible explanation for why you chose your probability estimate (50-100 words). 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

Each student will choose a handful of Forecasting Challenge questions to explore in greater depth. For these questions, students will submit a short paper describing the relevant background and reasoning behind their forecast (500-1,000 words, approximately 2-3 double-spaced pages). To receive credit, these papers must be clearly written, cite credible sources, and describe at least two perspectives on the topic. Papers must be submitted before our in-class discussion of the topic, and authors must attend class prepared to lead discussion that day.

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	< 0.2	5	9
A-	33	< 0.225	4	8
B+	30	< 0.25	3	7
B	30	-	3	7
B-	28	-	2	6
C+	25	-	1	5
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 the academic honesty policy called [A Culture of Honesty](#). If you have any questions about what constitutes dishonest conduct, I am happy to answer.

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.