POLS 209: Intro to Research Methods (Or How to think like a Social Scientist)

Fall 2019

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Office hours:	Mon., 3:30 pm - 5:00 pm;
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Course Description

This course provides an introduction to the political science research process. We will address questions, models/arguments, and how to evaluate different arguments. The course will cover both abstract concepts and practical applications.

Course Objectives

By taking this course seriously, you will learn how to:

1. Formulate different kinds of political questions.

2. Build and evaluate empirical arguments.

3. Think probabilistically about evidence for against a proposition.

4. Use R to do basic statistical analysis.

5. Communicate data and analysis in a clear and compelling way.

Course Materials

You'll need a few things to succeed in this course.

- **Textbook**: Freedman, David, Robert Pisani, and Roger Purves. 2007. Statistics. 4th Edition. W. W. Norton and Company. New York. ISBN: 0393929728.

    - It is important to get the fourth edition. I recommend a hard copy, but be sure look online for cheaper versions than what the bookstore sells.

    - You should have the book by *September 9.*

    - If cost is an issue, see me.

- **Software**: R and RStudio.

Course Schedule and Website

I have created a website for our class, which has the schedule as well as links to notes and other materials, including this syllabus. I suggest you bookmark this page (https://joshuaalley.github.io/pols-209/)— I will update the schedule there as the semester progresses.

The course is divided into three units. Unit 1 deals with questions, models and challenges in testing models. Unit 2 addresses how we examine our models by learning from data. Unit 3 combines the first two, as we'll integrate questions, models and evidence.

Grading

1. Exams:

    (a) Exam 1 (October 2): 10%

    (b) Exam 2 (October 27): 10%

2. Writing:

    (a) Writing Assignment 1: 20%

        i. Initial Submission 10% (Due October 9)

      ii. Peer Review 5% (Due October 16)

      iii. Final Submission 5% (Due October 21)

  (b) Writing Assignment 2: 30%

      i. Initial Submission 10% (Due November 13)

      ii. Peer Review 5% (Due November 20)

      iii. Final Submission 5% (Due December 2)

      iv. In-Class Presentation (December 2 and 4th) 10%

3. Preparation:

  (a) Course Attendance: 10%

  (b) Participation: 5%

  (c) Computing Exercises: 8%

  (d) Unannounced Reading Quizzes: 7%

The following grading scale will be used in this course:

- **A** [90-100]

- **B** [80-90]

- **C** [70-80]

- **D** [60-70]

- **F** [0-60]

Assignments

Above is a summary of the graded assignments in the course, their due dates, and their weights. What should you expect from these assignments?

- By university rule, if you do not pass the writing portion of the class, then you do not get credit for a W course. This means you must earn at least 35 of the 50 possible points from the two writing assignments to receive credit for a W course.

- **Exams**: There are two exams throughout the semester. The exams are cumulative and focus on all of the material covered up to the exam, including the readings, lectures, and computing exercises. The format is flexible, but you should expect the exam to include multiple choice and short answer questions.

- **Writing Assignments**: The writing process has three stages: initial submission, peer review, and final submission. Do not think of the initial submission as a "first draft." The initial submission should be a carefully-written, polished paper. After the initial submission, you will receive written comments from two of your peers. (You will also offer comments on two of your classmates' papers.) You will improve the paper in light of the comments and respond to these comments in a short memo to me.

- **Presentation of Writing Assignment 2**: Presentation is part of effective communication. Therefore, each of you will present their second writing assignment to the whole class. Presentations will be 5 minutes maximum, and summarize your question, argument, and evidence. We will discuss strategies for crafting an effective presentation in class before the presentations.

- **Class Preparation**: See below for the attendance policy. As for class participation, there are two crucial components— engaging with the lecture materials and group work. I will lecture often, but there will also be ample opportunities to apply or discuss lecture material.

- **Computing Exercises**: We will regularly spend time in the lab learning how to use R. These exercises are meant to reinforce skills from these sessions. All these assignments will be given separately from assigned exercises in textbook and lecture notes.

  Assigned exercises in the textbook and notes will not be graded. These problems meant to help your comprehension— they may be discussed in class or quizzes.

- **Reading Quizzes**: To ensure you read and engage with the textbook, there will be 3 or 4 unannounced reading quizzes in class. These short quizzes will only take a few minutes.

Course Policies

Honor Code

"An Aggie does not lie, cheat or steal, or tolerate those who do." I expect that all work represented as your own throughout the semester be your own. Any work done with the help of others should clearly indicate such. The Aggie Honor Code is available at `https://aggiehonor.tamu.edu`.

Class Attendance

I will take attendance at the beginning of each class. You have two free absences. After two absences, I will deduct one point from the 10 possible attendance points for each absence. Excused absences do not deduct from your free absences: see Student Rule 7 for a summary of excused absences. If you have more than 15 unexcused absences, then you will receive an F in the course.

Also, laptops will not be allowed in the classroom. A large body of research suggests that laptops are a distraction, including for students who are not using them. If you believe you require an exception, please contact me within the first week of class.

Please make sure your cell phones are on silent mode and refrain from using them during class time. If you are repeatedly on your phone, I may deduct points from your participation/attendance grade.

Late Assignments

I will accept assignments turned in late, but only for a one-week period following the date that they were due. During the one-week period, assignments will be penalized by the loss of five points per day for each day they are late. After the one-week period, missing assignments will receive a grade of 0. Note that this policy does not apply to the quizzes, which may not be turned in late nor made up.

ADA Policy Statement

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with

disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact Disability Services, in Cain Hall, Room B118, or call 845-1637. For additional information visit `http://disability.tamu.edu`.

Extra Credit

Unless I decide that the whole class merits an opportunity for extra credit, I will not offer extra credit.

Communication

The best place to ask questions is in the classroom. The course material is challenging, so I expect questions and confusion. If your question is not related to class material or relevant to other students, we can discuss it after class. I encourage you to visit my office hours to discuss any difficulties with the readings or homework. You should at least attempt to solve the problem on your own first.

You can expect me to reply to emails in 24–48 hours during the work week. I will not reply to emails on the weekend. As with all business related correspondence, please include an appropriate salutation, identify yourself, and write in complete sentences.