

POLS 209: Intro to Research Methods (Or how to think like a social scientist)

Spring 2020

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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 *January 31*.
 - If cost is an issue, see me.
- **Software:** R and RStudio. These are free pieces of software. First, download and install R from cran.rproject.org, then download and install RStudio (Desktop) from rstudio.com. If you need a little help, there are helpful videos on the web for Windows and Mac or you can ask me.

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 (February 21): 10%
 - (b) Exam 2 (March 23): 10%

2. Writing:

- (a) Writing Assignment 1: 20%
 - i. Initial Submission 10% (Due February 28)
 - ii. Peer Review 5% (Due March 6)
 - iii. Final Submission 5% (Due March 18)
- (b) Writing Assignment 2: 30%
 - i. Initial Submission 10% (Due April 10)
 - ii. Peer Review 5% (Due April 17)
 - iii. Final Submission 5% (Due April 27)
 - iv. In-Class Presentation (April 22 and 24) 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

Texas A&M University is committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities for all students. If you experience barriers to your education due to a disability or think you may have a disability, please contact Disability Resources in the Student Services Building or at (979) 845-1637 or visit <http://disability.tamu.edu>. Disabilities may include, but are not limited, to attentional, learning, mental health, sensory, physical, or chronic health conditions. All students are encouraged to discuss their disability related needs with Disability Resources and their instructors as soon as possible.

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.

Title IX and Statement on Limits to Confidentiality

Texas A&M University and the College of Liberal Arts are committed to fostering a learning environment that is safe and productive for all. University policies and federal and state laws provide guidance for achieving such an environment. Although class materials are generally considered confidential pursuant to student record policies and laws, University employees including instructors cannot maintain confidentiality when it conflicts with their responsibility to report certain issues that jeopardize the health and safety

of our community. As the instructor, I must report (per Texas A&M System Regulation 08.01.01) the following information to other University offices if you share it with me, even if you do not want the disclosed information to be shared:

Allegations of sexual assault, sexual discrimination, or sexual harassment when they involve TAMU students, faculty, or staff, or third parties visiting campus.

These reports may trigger contact from a campus official who will want to talk with you about the incident that you have shared. In many cases, it will be your decision whether or not you wish to speak with that individual. If you would like to talk about these events in a more confidential setting, you are encouraged to make an appointment with the Student Counseling Service (<https://scs.tamu.edu/>).

Students and faculty can report non-emergency behavior that causes them to be concerned at <http://tellsomebody.tamu.edu>.