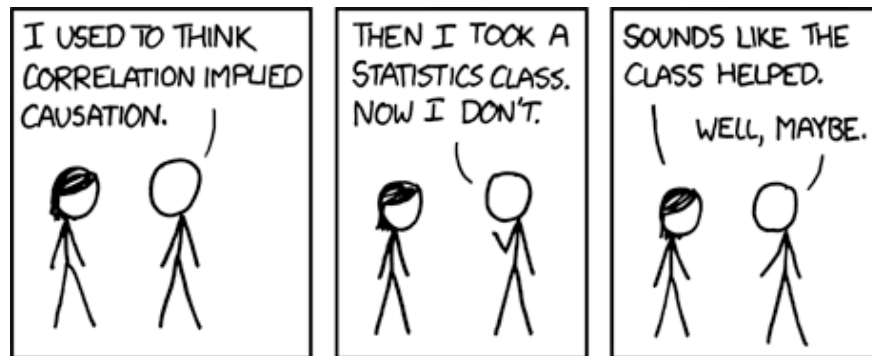# POLITICAL SCIENCE RESEARCH METHODS

POS 3713 | Fall 2022
Mode of delivery: fully online

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course provides an introduction to political science research methods. Essentially, it is an introduction to the scientific method with a focus on the application of statistics to political phenomena. Students will be introduced to fundamental concepts in research design and data analysis. We will discuss how to develop research questions, construct theories, generate hypotheses, design experiments and observational studies, measure political variables, and conduct statistical analysis. In sum, the course provides an overview of how political scientists develop and test explanations of the political world. While the course involves a good deal of math, relatively little mathematical background is assumed. We assume only that students have command of high school-level algebra. More advanced mathematical constructs will be introduced as we progress through the material.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

After completing this course, students will be able to:

- understand how political scientists (a) develop causal theories and (b) observe the world to test these theories;

- calculate and interpret statistics commonly used by political scientists;

- understand and critically evaluate causal claims and empirical evidence about political phenomena.

A NOTE ON THE MODE OF INSTRUCTION

The course will be delivered entirely online and asynchronously, with all lectures, assignments, exams, and feedback provided through Canvas. This gives students considerable flexibility in managing how they progress through the course. But with great flexibility comes great responsibility. While we will do our best to facilitate learning over the entire span of the course, it is ultimately the student's responsibility to keep up with lectures and assignments and to actively seek out help from the course instructor and online mentors. Even though this is an online class, it is every bit as challenging as its face-to-face equivalent and requires the same effort and time commitment from students.

REQUIRED TEXT

The following textbook is required:

- Paul M. Kellstedt and Guy D. Whitten. *The Fundamentals of Political Science Research*. Cambridge University Press, New York, NY, 2nd edition, 2013.

The textbook is available in digital format (PDF) from the FSU library, free of charge for students. You can access an online copy by following these steps: (1) visit https://www.lib.fsu.edu; (2) enter 'kellstedt whitten' in the search box; (3) choose the textbook from the search results; (4) click "FSU: Connect to online content" to access the publisher's website. If off-campus, you will need your FSU login and password to access the online copy. We will use the 2nd edition of the textbook in this course, as it is available through the library. The 3rd edition of the textbook is available for purchase from major book retailers in print and digital formats, with only minor differences from the 2nd edition. If you wish to own a copy, the 3rd edition is also acceptable, but not required.

REQUIREMENTS

- **READING**: Students are expected to read *all* readings assigned in the Course Outline presented below. *Note that some questions on quizzes and the final exam may cover topics discussed in the readings, but not in lectures.*

- **LECTURES**: Each week in the course, recorded lectures will be made available for students on Canvas. Students are expected to watch all lectures. *Note that some questions on quizzes and the final exam will cover topics discussed in the lectures, but not in the assigned readings.*

- **SYLLABUS QUIZ**: Students must complete a quiz about the syllabus in the first week of the course. **The syllabus quiz will serve as first-day attendance. Therefore, students who do not take the syllabus quiz in the first week will be considered absent on the first day of classes.**

  Moreover, students must obtain a perfect score on the syllabus quiz before they can complete any other assignments in the course. Students who do not obtain a perfect score on the syllabus quiz will not have their reading quiz scores counted toward their final grade until they can get a perfect score. Until the quiz closes, students can retake the quiz as many times as they wish to improve their score. The syllabus quiz score will not count toward the final grade.

- **READING QUIZZES**: There will be a total of thirteen multiple-choice reading quizzes, available online through Canvas. The three lowest quiz scores will be dropped. Therefore, students' grade will be based on the average of their ten best quizzes. Students can take each quiz up to three times if they wish to improve their score.

  Quizzes will always be due Friday by 5:00 p.m.

- **EXAMS**: There will be three multiple-choice exams (two midterms and a final). Students will have 90 minutes to complete each exam. The exams will be available from noon-5PM on the following dates:

  - Exam 1: Friday, September 23 2022
  - Exam 2: Friday, October 28, 2022
  - Exam 3: Tuesday, December 6, 2022

- **PROBLEM SETS**: There will be three problem sets throughout the course with applied questions related to the concepts discussed in the course materials.

In my experience, students who keep up with the readings, follow lectures regularly, and ask questions when they are confused or unsure about the material tend to do well in classes like this one. Students who do not do these things often struggle.

GRADES

The final course grade will be determined based on the following breakdown:

- **Reading Quizzes (25%)**: 2.5% each for the best ten scores out of thirteen total quizzes;

- **Exams (60%)**: three exams worth 20% each;

- **Problem Sets (15%)**: three assignments worth 5% each.

Students can calculate their numeric grade using the following formula, expressing their scores in percentage points:

$$\text{Numeric Grade} = (.25 \times \text{Average of ten best Reading Quiz scores in percentage}) +$$
$$(.60 \times \text{Average of Exam scores in percentage}) +$$
$$(.15 \times \text{Average of Problem Set scores in percentage})$$

The numeric grade will map to the final letter grade according to FSU's standard number-to-letter grade conversion scheme (shown below). Final grades ending in .5 or higher are automatically rounded up to the nearest whole percentage point.

93% and above: A	86-83%: B	76-73%: C	66-63%: D
92-90%: A−	82-80%: B−	72-70%: C−	62-60%: D−
89-87%: B+	79-77%: C+	69-67%: D+	59% and below: F

COMMUNICATION POLICY (DISCUSSION BOARD AND EMAIL)

The instructor highly encourages student questions and comments. **The primary method of communication for this course will be through the discussion board on the course Canvas page**. Any non-personal questions or comments related to the course material and assignments should be posted to the discussion board. Please adhere to basic classroom etiquette and the student code of conduct when posting on the discussion board. Also, please make sure to check whether your question has already been asked (and answered!) by someone else. The instructor will respond to student inquiries within 24 hours, excepting weekends and holidays. To receive a response, the message must contain a descriptive subject title (e.g., "Question about [topic]").

Students should not post personal inquiries to public discussion boards. For personal matters, the instructor is available via email. The email must be sent from your FSU email address and the subject line of all emails must include the course number (POS 3713), followed by a descriptive subject title (e.g., "POS 3713: Question about [topic]"). The instructor will not respond via email to the following:

1. Emails that fail to include the course number and a descriptive title in the subject line;

2. Questions that students can answer themselves by reading the syllabus.

MISSED ASSIGNMENTS

Make-up exams, activities, and participation will be considered for *excused absences only*. As per the Florida State University Attendance Policy, excused absences include documented illness, deaths in the family and other documented crises, call to active military duty or

jury duty, religious holy days, and official University activities. These absences will be accommodated in a way that does not arbitrarily penalize students who have a valid excuse. Consideration will also be given to students whose dependent children experience serious illness.

Consideration will only be given when I am contacted *prior to or within two days after a missed assignment with appropriate documentation*.

GRADE APPEALS

Grade appeals must be made in writing, with an explanation of why additional points are deserved, no sooner than one week after a graded assignment is returned—to allow for appropriate reflection—and no later than two weeks after an assignment is returned.

TECHNOLOGY POLICY

I strongly encourage you to take notes by hand and discourage the use of laptops and tablets. The evidence suggests that taking notes by hand, as opposed to typing them, is more conducive to effective learning. However, the use of laptops and tablets is left to your own discretion and allowed exclusively for class-related activities (note-taking only). Cellphones are not allowed. The use of electronic devices for any other purposes is not permitted, as it distracts your colleagues and disrupts the class.

UNIVERSITY ATTENDANCE POLICY

Excused absences include documented illness, deaths in the family and other documented crises, call to active military duty or jury duty, religious holidays, and official University activities. These absences will be accommodated in a way that does not arbitrarily penalize students who have a valid excuse. Consideration will also be given to students whose dependent children experience serious illness.

ACADEMIC HONOR POLICY

The Florida State University Academic Honor Policy outlines the University's expectations for the integrity of students' academic work, the procedures for resolving alleged violations of those expectations, and the rights and responsibilities of students and faculty members throughout the process. Students are responsible for reading the Academic Honor Policy and for living up to their pledge to "...be honest and truthful and...[to] strive for personal and institutional integrity at Florida State University." (Florida State University Academic Honor Policy, found at http://fda.fsu.edu/ Academics/Academic-Honor-Policy)

AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT

Students with disabilities needing academic accommodation should: (1) register with and provide documentation to the Student Disability Resource Center; and (2) bring a letter to the instructor indicating the need for accommodation and what type. Please note that instructors are not allowed to provide classroom accommodation to a student until appropriate verification from the Student Disability Resource Center has been provided. This syllabus and other class materials are available in alternative format upon request. For more information about services available to FSU students with disabilities, contact the:

Student Disability Resource Center
874 Traditions Way
108 Student Services Building
Florida State University
Tallahassee, FL 32306-4167
(850) 644-9566 (voice)
(850) 644-8504 (TDD)
sdrc@admin.fsu.edu
www.disabilitycenter.fsu.edu

FREE TUTORING FROM FSU

On-campus tutoring and writing assistance is available for many courses at Florida State University. For more information, visit the Academic Center for Excellence (ACE) Tutoring Services' comprehensive list of on-campus tutoring options—see
http://ace.fsu.edu/tutoring or contact tutor@fsu.edu. High-quality tutoring is available by appointment and on a walk-in basis. These services are offered by tutors trained to encourage the highest level of individual academic success while upholding personal academic integrity.

SYLLABUS CHANGE POLICY

Except for changes that substantially affect implementation of the evaluation (grading) statement, this syllabus is a guide for the course and is subject to change with advance notice.

COURSE OUTLINE

Note: Schedule is tentative and may change as semester progresses.

Week #	Topic	Reading
Week 1	Course Preview	
Week 2	Intro to Political Science Research	K&W Ch. 1
Week 3	Theory Building	K&W Ch. 2
Week 4	Explanation and Causality	K&W Ch. 3
Week 5	Research Design	K&W Ch. 4
Week 6	Measurement	K&W Ch. 5 (5.1–5.8)
Week 7	Descriptive Statistics	K&W Ch. 5 (5.9–5.12)
Week 8	Probability & Statistical Inference	K&W Ch. 6
Week 9	Bivariate Hypothesis Testing I	K&W Ch. 7
Week 10	Bivariate Hypothesis Testing II	K&W Ch. 7
Week 11	Bivariate Regression	K&W Ch. 8
Week 12	Multiple Regression I	K&W Ch. 9
Week 13	Multiple Regression II	K&W Ch. 10
Week 14	*No Assignments (Thanksgiving)*	
Week 15	Binary DVs/Logit	K&W Ch. 11