

Winter Institute in Data Science and Big Data
Center for Data Science
SPA 020/420/620

Ryan T. Moore*

5 January 2025 at 11:31

Course Information

School of Public Affairs SPA 020/420/620
Winter Institute in Data Science and Big Data
3-11 January 2025
Kerwin 203 and via Zoom

Instructor Information

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Course Description

This Institute covers the essential basics for doing data science as practiced in the 21st century. Data scientists are expected to know how to obtain relevant data for a substantive problem, clean and explore data, create and evaluate models using data, state inferences, make reliable predictions, and communicate findings to multiple, possibly non-technical, audiences. We will cover each of these steps in 10 intense working days. The course consists of a dynamic mixture of theoretical

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lectures, guest speakers, and group assignments. The guest lectures include data science leaders from Washington, DC's unparalleled mixture of government, academia, and business. Statistical topics include exploratory methods, graphics, regression, machine learning, ensembles, network analysis, cluster analysis, text analysis, and Bayesian approaches. Specific technical skills include R, Python, Quarto, SQL, GitHub, and more.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the course, you should be able to

- Use common computing tools for political data science – applied and scholarly
- Visualize, transform, read, wrangle, tidy, analyze data
- Refresh mathematical foundations for modeling
- Learn modern scientific communication tools
- Learn modern version control
- Describe applications of machine learning and other modern statistical data science methods and computing tools
- Do original research using data science methods

Learning Strategies

Computers and Notes in Class

For most class meetings, we will focus our attention on computational implementations of social scientific techniques. There will often be time in class to pose your specific questions about code. As such, you should bring a laptop to class to try out new code, to update your code files, etc.

Requirements and Evaluation

The course is worth 4 university course credits. For students taking the course for credits, the final grade will be based on attendance, participation, and performance on the group project.

In the opening days, participants will be assigned to groups to begin work on a real data project using a large dataset. The size of the groups will be 3-6 people depending on the the total number participating in the Institute. The purpose is to get experience working in teams solving a real problem in data science and big data. Each group will present their results on the last day of the course.

A summary of the course assessments is in Table 1.

Academic integrity is a core value of institutions of higher learning. It is your responsibility to avoid and report plagiarism, cheating, and dishonesty. Please (re-)read the University policy on academic integrity at <http://www.american.edu/academics/integrity/code.cfm>, particularly Sections I and II.

Assignment	Weight	Due date
Final presentation	20%	11 January
Final project	50%	11 January
Final peer evaluation	10%	11 January
Participation	10%	daily
Attendance	10%	daily

Table 1: Course Assessment Summary

Final Project

For the final project, you will conduct original research, present your work, and submit the core components of your work (data, code, and description of the analysis). You may select your own topic.¹

With the data you select, you will pose an appropriate political research question that the data can answer with quantitative methods and analyze the data. As appropriate, you will write a data analysis report, and bundle your analysis, data, and original functions for submission. You will present your research to the class in the last meeting.

Your project should represent original data analysis and code development. It should represent quantitative social science at the highest level you can muster. You will work in a team on the final project. Working collaboratively is typical in political data science research.

Software, Statistics, Data, and Literature Support

The primary software for the course is R, but we will spend time with a variety of other software. We will use the RStudio IDE to help us manage our work in R. See <http://j.mp/2swvN0p> for help getting started with R and RStudio. A brief overview is also available at <http://j.mp/2ELPqFO>. We will introduce L^AT_EX and Quarto for scientific communication. See <http://j.mp/2LWQfQF> for an introduction to using L^AT_EX through R (via `tinytex`). For an introduction to the fuller version of L^AT_EX, see <http://j.mp/2EO0TEM>. We will utilize GitHub for version control. See <http://j.mp/2ELRKfV> for a brief overview.

Support for statistical software is available through CTRL. See <http://j.mp/ZrBr2Z> for CTRL's workshop schedule.

The Department of Mathematics and Statistics offers statistical consulting services, with extensive hours. For the schedule and contact information, see <http://j.mp/1EmVqkY>.

The library itself offers support for various software. Our librarian is [Olivia Ivey](#), whom I recommend reaching out to as you formulate a question, search for data, and try to put your question in a larger intellectual or policy context. You can schedule time with her at oliviaivey.youcanbook.me.

Intellectual Property

Course content is the intellectual property of the instructor or student who created it, and may not be recorded or distributed without consent.

¹One possibility is that you may use real data that policymakers want to learn about. Topics may include campaign finance and expenditures, ANC budgeting, public goods and the 311 request system, transit, and affordable housing. These data are available at <http://opendata.dc.gov>.

Course Evaluation

The course evaluation will take place in class towards the end of the course. Please take a few minutes to provide this valuable feedback.

Further Information for American University Students

For further detailed information on the important issues of academic integrity, emergency preparedness, academic support, discrimination, and use of social media, please see [here](#).

Calendar

- Day 1: Friday, 3 January

9:00 - 9:30 Introduction to Data Science, Statement of Objectives, Map of Skills

9:30 - 10:00 Installing R, RStudio, Anaconda, Python

10:00 - 12:00 Introducing R and the tidyverse

12:15 - 13:45 Lunch

13:45 - 14:30 Introducing literate programming with T_EX and Quarto

14:45 - 16:15 Exploratory Data Analysis. Data Wrangling. Cleaning and coarsening data.

16:30 - 17:00 Final project teams. Orientation, posing questions, finding data. Office hours.

- Day 2: Saturday, 4 January

9:00 - 9:30 Breakfast, Questions, Discussion, Troubleshooting

9:30-11:30 Math/Statistics Refresher

11:30 - 12:00 Good Programming Practices

12:15 - 13:45 Lunch

13:45 - 16:00 Linear Regression Model Theory and Applications (*Dr. Jeff Gill*, American University)

16:00 - 17:00 Final project teams. Orientation, posing questions, finding data.

- Sunday, 5 January

– Final project team workday

- Day 3: Monday, 6 January

9:00 - 9:30 Breakfast, Questions, Discussion, Troubleshooting

9:30 - 12:00 Generalized Linear Models, Bayesian Models, Artificial Intelligence (*Dr. Jeff Gill*, American University)

12:15 - 13:45 Lunch

13:45 - 14:30 Generalized Additive Models (*Ali Amini*, American University)

14:30 - 16:00 Data Management (*Dr. Megan Finn*, American University)

- Day 4: Tuesday, 7 January

9:00 - 9:15 Breakfast, Questions, Discussion, Troubleshooting
 9:15 - 10:15 AI Applications in Political Science (*Ali Amini*, American University)
 10:30 - 12:00 Social Network Analysis (*Dr. Hans Noel*, Georgetown University)
 12:15 - 13:45 Lunch
 13:45 - 14:15 Defining and Producing Reproducible Research
 14:30 - 16:30 Version Control with `git` and GitHub
 16:30 - 17:00 Final project team work

- Day 6: Wednesday, 8 January

9:00 - 9:15 Breakfast, Questions, Discussion, Troubleshooting
 9:30 - 10:45 Introduction to Machine Learning: Supervised Learning, Unsupervised Learning
 11:00 - 12:30 *E pluribus, veritum*: An Introduction to Ensemble Models via Random Forests, (*Dr. Ren Massari*, The Lab @ DC)
 12:45 - 13:45 Lunch
 13:45 - 15:15 Scraping Twitter Text with R and NLP Predictions with Python (*Abdullah Yasir Atalan*, American University)
 15:30 - 17:00 Data Visualization Using `ggplot2` in R (*Dr. Donna Dietz*, American University)

Reading:

Leo Breiman. Statistical modeling: The two cultures. *Statistical Science*, 16(3):199–215, 2001

- Day 7: Thursday, 9 January

9:00 - 9:15 Breakfast, Questions, Discussion, Troubleshooting
 9:15 - 10:45 Cluster Analysis: Hierarchical Clustering, Divisive and Agglomerative Clustering, DB-SCAN, K-means Clustering
 11:00 - 12:30 Deploying R-Based Data Solutions on AWS (*Tyler Sanders*, Red Oak Strategic)
 12:30 - 13:15 Lunch
 13:15 - 14:00 Intermediate Bash: `make` files (*Dr. David Gerard*, American University)
 14:15 - 15:45 Web scraping with `rvest`: Case Studies from Journalism, (*Aarushi Sahejpal*, American University)
 15:45 - 17:00 Final project team work

- Day 8: Friday, 10 January

9:00 - 9:15 Breakfast, Questions, Discussion, Troubleshooting
 9:15 - 10:45 Important Issues in Data Science: privacy, security, ethics, (*Dr. Richard Ressler*, American University)
 11:00 - 12:30 Images as Data, Convolutional Neural Networks, Autotaggers, Transfer Learning, Computer Vision (*Dr. Em Bello-Pardo*, Senior Director of Research and Data Science, YouGov Blue)
 12:30 - 13:45 Lunch
 14:00 - 17:00 Team work session

Reading:

Brian d'Alessandro, Cathy O'Neil, and Tom LaGatta. Conscientious classification: A data scientist's guide to discrimination-aware classification. *Big Data*, 5(2):120–134, 2017. PMID: 28632437

- Day 9: Saturday, 11 January

9:00 - 9:30 Breakfast, Discussion

9:30 - noon Presentation of Group Projects

noon - 15:00 Final project team work

15:00 Final Report Submission Deadline