POLI 3165 ANALYZING INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS DATA
FALL 2025
THE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG

Dr. Saera Lee
Office: JCT 9.64
Email: saeralee@hku.hk
Office Hours: Thursdays 14:00-15:50
Lecture: Thursday 16:00-17:50, CPD 3.29
Tutorial: Friday 11:00-11:50 am

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course introduces students to the basic tools and approaches used to study international relations using empirical methods. We begin by exploring how political scientists use data and evidence to ask and answer questions about the world. The course covers how we gather information, design research, and draw conclusions about international politics. Students will learn about different strategies used to make sense of complex political events and behaviors, including experiments, statistical analysis, and case studies. This course lays the groundwork for further study in research methods and prepares students to think critically about how we learn what we know in international relations.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

1. Introduce students to the use of data and evidence in the study of international relations.
2. Help students understand different types of research strategies and how they are used to answer political questions.
3. Encourage students to think critically about how political knowledge is created and tested.
Build a foundation for students to succeed in more advanced courses in research design and methods.

COURSE LEARNING OUTCOMES (CLOS)

At the end of the semester, students will be able to:

1. Identify and explain basic approaches to descriptive and causal inference in international relations and understand their challenges.
2. Critically evaluate and discuss claims based on empirical research in international relations.
3. Describe different types of research designs, including their strengths, limitations, and possible alternatives.
4. Apply what they've learned to analyze and assess real examples of international relations research.

CLO-PLO ALIGNMENTS

*Please refer to Appendix II for programme learning outcomes.

CLOs	PPA PLOs
CLO1	1, 2, 3, 6

CLO2	2, 3, 5
CLO3	1, 2, 3
CLO4	2, 3, 6

COURSE REQUIREMENTS
Midterm exam: 25%
Final exam: 25%
Short Proposal and Peer Feedback: 30%
Attendance and Participation: 20%

Attendance and Participation (20%)
Participation is a critical component of this course. Your participation grade is determined by your attendance as well as the quality of your participation. That is, you are awake, come to class prepared, paying attention, answering questions, and asking questions. *You will be given one free absence without penalty in the semester.*

Two Exams (25x2%)
The in-person midterm exam is currently set for **Thursday, Oct. 23**, and will cover all lectures and assigned readings up to that date. The final exam is TBD. It will be cumulative but will focus more on material from the second half of the course. Additional details about the exam formats and expectations will be provided.

Policy on Rescheduling Exams: Students are required to take the exam as scheduled. The only allowable exception to this policy is a documented emergency or university event. In cases of severe illness and family emergency (death in family), students need to provide sufficient proof of the absence (e.g. a doctor's note, the obituary, etc.). If an emergency arises, students will need to contact me **BEFORE** the exam or will receive zero credit.

Short proposal and Peer feedback (30%)
Over the course of the semester, you will write a data analysis paper in which you will analyze data to evaluate a policy/political science hypothesis of interest to you. There are several deadlines throughout the semester related to this final paper. The purpose of these deadlines is to break up the project and provide opportunities for feedback before the final paper is due. Each is worth 5% of the final grade for the project. Failing to meet one of these deadlines will result in a 0 for that portion of the grade. Refer to the schedule below and the associated assignment on Moodle for due dates and more details.

Extensions will only be given if discussed with the instructor **before** the deadline.

COURSE POLICIES AND OTHER INFORMATION

Prohibition of Recording of Class Session by Students
Unauthorized student recording of classroom or other academic activities (including advising sessions or office hours) is prohibited. Students requesting the use of assistive technology as an accommodation should contact university. Unauthorized use of classroom recordings – including distributing or posting them – is also prohibited. Under the University's Copyright Policy, faculty

own the copyright to instructional materials – including those resources created specifically for the purposes of instruction, such as syllabi, lectures and lecture notes, and presentations. Students cannot copy, reproduce, display, or distribute these materials. Students who engage in unauthorized recording, unauthorized use of a recording, or unauthorized distribution of instructional materials will be referred to the appropriate University office for follow-up.

Electronic Etiquette
Cellphones may not be used during class. If you anticipate an important phone call (e.g. family emergency) put your phone on vibrate and leave the classroom, should you need to answer it. Other electronic devices like laptops or tables are only allowed for classroom purposes. This policy is aimed at providing the best possible learning environment for all students.

Email Communication
All email communication with the professor should include a subject line that begins with POLI 3165 followed by more specific information regarding the purpose of the email. For example, "POLI 3165: meeting to discuss paper ideas." I check email periodically, and you can expect me to respond within 24 hours during the week and 48 hours or more over the weekend or holiday. Yet, if the answers to questions are already found in the syllabus, you may not receive an answer to your email. Always consult the syllabus before emailing a question.

Email is a useful way to ask quick questions. Replying to long questions about the readings/lectures, however, is highly inefficient for both you and me. If you want to talk about something you don't understand, come to office hours! While I respond to student emails, I prefer to talk in person. Come see me during office hours!

Late Assignment
Late assignment will be penalized by one letter grade (e.g. A to A-) for each day late. Students must contact the instructor prior to the due date to avoid the penalty.

Use of GenAI is prohibited in this course:
This course focuses on the development of independent critical thinking and the mastery of international relations. To ensure that all submitted work accurately reflects personal understanding and original thought, the use of Generative AI (GenAI) tools in completing assignments or assessments is strictly prohibited. This policy supports our commitment to academic integrity, the development of each student's learning, and direct interaction with international relations. Any work suspected to be generated by AI will be treated seriously and may face discipline.

CLASS MATERIALS
The textbook we are going to use is Empirical Methods in Political Science: An Introduction (EMPS) by Professor Jean Clipperton, et al. It is free and available here: https://nulib-oer.github.io/empirical-methods-polisci/. Any other supplemental readings or resources will be made available on Moodle.

Other than the readings assigned, *Joseph F. Healey, The Essentials of Statistics: A Tool for Social Research 4th Edition. 2015.Cengage Learning.,* could be useful.

First Exam	10/23, in-class
Second Exam	TBD
Topic & Hypothesis selected	10/1, 11:59pm
Data & analysis plan	10/15, 11:59pm
Draft of paper submitted to group	11/5, 11:59pm
Feedback submitted to group	11/12, 11:59pm
Final paper due	TBD

COURSE SCHEDULE
NOTE: Readings subject to change

- Sep 4: Introduction to the course
  - No reading

- Sep 11: Intro to the study of IR & Asking why: Research questions/Theory and Inference
  - David Lake, 2011, "Why "isms" are evil: Theory, Epistemology and academic sects as impediments to understanding and progress", International Studies Quarterly 55(2): 465-480
  - de Mesquita, Bruce Bueno. "Toward a Scientific Understanding of International Conflict: A Personal View." International Studies Quarterly 29, no. 2 (1985): 121–36.
  - EMPS Ch. 1 & 2

- Sep 18: From ideas to evidence: Data and hypothesis testing
  - Jordan and Zanna. 1999. How to Read a Journal Article in Social Psychology in R. F. Baumeister (Ed.), The Self in Social Psychology (pp. 461-470). Philadelphia: Psychology Press
  - Leeds, Ashley. 2022. Writing a Research Paper for a Graduate Seminar in Political Science
  - EMPS Ch. 3&4

- Sep 25: Ordinary linear regression: capitalistic peace
  - EMPS Ch.8
  - Gartzke and Weisiger, 2014, "Under construction: Development, democracy, and difference as determinants of systemic liberal peace". *International Studies Quarterly*, 58(1), pp.130-145

- Oct 2: Regression analysis for count data: war or no war?
  - EMPS Ch. 8
  - Saera Lee & Addison Huygens & Sara McLaughlin Mitchell. 2024." Do Birds of a Feather Deter Better? Cultural Affinity and Alliance Deterrence", International Interactions. 1–23.

- Oct 9: Network analysis: is friend of a friend a friend?

- EMPS Ch. 11
- Bomi Lee, 2023, "Triangles, Major Powers, and Rivalry Duration", *The Journal of conflict resolution* 67(6):1128-1154

- Oct 16: Reading week, No class.

- Oct 23: Exam 1, no readings.

- Oct 30: Taking time seriously
  - Green, Donald P, Soo Yeon Kim, and David H Yoon. "Dirty Pool." *International Organization* 55, no. 2 (2001): 441–68.

- Nov 6: Time is ticking: event history analysis
  - Jones, Benjamin T., and Shawna K. Metzger. 2018. "Evaluating Conflict Dynamics: A Novel Empirical Approach to Stage Conceptions." Journal of Conflict Resolution 62(4): 819–847.

- Nov 13: Smiley face diplomacy: machine learning
  - EMPS Ch.12
  - Dietrich, Bryce J. "Using Motion Detection to Measure Social Polarization in the U.S. House of Representatives." Political Analysis, vol. 29, no. 2, 2021, pp. 250–59, https://doi.org/10.1017/pan.2020.25.

- Nov 20: Copy and paste in international treaties: LLMs
  - EMPS Ch.12
  - Allee, Todd, and Manfred Elsig. "Are the Contents of International Treaties Copied and Pasted? Evidence from Preferential Trade Agreements." *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 63, no. 3, 2019, pp. 603–13, https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqz029.

- Nov 27: Why can't states cooperate? Game theory
  - EMPS Ch. 10
  - Watch movie: "A Beautiful Mind (2001)"

- Dec 4: What else can we do? Small-n analysis
  - Fearon, James D, Macartan Humphreys, and Jeremy M Weinstein. "Can Development Aid Contribute to Social Cohesion after Civil War? Evidence from a Field Experiment in Post-Conflict Liberia." The American Economic Review 99, no. 2 (2009): 287–91. https://doi.org/10.1257/aer.99.2.287.
  - Hyde, Susan D. "Experiments in International Relations: Lab, Survey, and Field." Annual Review of Political Science 18, no. 1 (2015): 403–24. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-020614-094854.

Appendix I: Guidelines on grading

Grade/ Competency	A+, A, A-	B+, B, B-	C+, C, C-	D+, D	F
Use of vocabulary and concepts	Student accurately and creatively uses concepts and key course vocabulary throughout the assignment, demonstrating a sophisticated understanding of each.	Student accurately uses concepts and key course vocabulary throughout the assignment, but does not demonstrate creativity in use or fluency.	Student uses concepts and key vocabulary from the course, but in a manner that does not demonstrate understanding or proficiency; use of concepts and vocabulary is perfunctory.	Student rehearses concepts or key course vocabulary but not in a way suggesting understanding at a university level.	Student fails to use concepts or key vocabulary correctly or at all.
Deployment of theories and argumentation	Student deploys theoretical arguments well using their own voice and substantive arguments in a sophisticated way.	Student deploys theoretical arguments well although voice, style and substantive critiques are similar to the source.	Student deploys theoretical vocabulary in a way commensurate with rules for argumentation, but does not show creativity or sophistication in substance or style.	Student rehearses theories and bits of argumentation from others and not in a way suggesting understanding at a university level.	Student fails to attempt argumentation or use of theoretical tools from the course.
Creativity	Student's choice of topic, sources, assignment completion modality, arguments, and solutions show sophistication and critical thinking at a high level.	Student's choice of topic, sources, assignment completion modality, arguments, and solutions show critical thinking skills.	Student's choice of topic, sources, assignment completion modality, arguments, and solutions are average and "modal".	Student shows no more creativity than what is required to complete the task.	Student misunderstands creativity or fails to complete the assigned task.
Persuasiveness	Student makes an argument using appropriate language and rhetorical style necessary to persuade the reader to accept or accommodate their viewpoint.	Student makes an argument using appropriate language and rhetorical style necessary to complete the assignment.	Student makes an argument using either inappropriate language and/or rhetorical style. Ranting or editorializing.	Student rants or editorializes considerably, but stays largely on message.	Student rants incoherently.
Use of fact and empirical evidence	Student brings factual evidence	Student brings factual evidence	Student brings some facts into	Students factual claims are	Factual claims, if any are incorrect,

	to bear upon the arguments and supports factual claims with adequate support from reputable sources.	to bear upon some arguments and supports factual claims with support from limited or questionable sources.	their arguments but fails to provide support consistently for factual claims and uses trite or prohibited sources as support (e.g., Wikipedia).	questionable or unsupported. Student rehearses facts from unacceptable sources (e.g., Yahoo answers).	ill supported, or incoherent within the argument.
Grammar and spelling	Student's writing is grammatically correct and there are no spelling errors.	Students writing is grammatically correct in most instances and there are few spelling errors.	Students writing is grammatically correct in many instances but spelling errors are found throughout the document, consonant with ESL students.	Grammatical infelicities and spelling errors appear frequently in the document, but these are errors common to ESL students.	Grammar and spelling are unacceptable for university level writing for any student.
Mechanics and style	Student's writing is fluid, fluent, and in an appropriate style for the task.	Student's writing is fluent but stilted and/ or is an odd style for the task.	Student's writing is halting and imbalanced and may be inappropriate for the task.	Student's writing is only marginally acceptable for university level courses.	Student's writing needs significant remediation by outside sources.
Citations	Student accurately and completely cites all sources, whether factual, argumentative, or theoretical claims according to the appropriate citation scheme.	Student accurately cites all sources, whether factual, argumentative, or theoretical claims but does not provide complete citations or uses an inappropriate citation scheme.	Student cites most expected sources, but does not provide accurate or complete citations.	Student's citations are incomplete and inconsistent throughout the paper.	Student fails to cite at all.
Sources	Student's choice of sources demonstrates sophisticated use of research resources. Sources are from reputable, academic sources.	Student's choice of sources indicates a notable level of use of research resources. Sources are from reputable, academic sources.	Student's choice of sources shows minimal use of research resources. Sources are from a mix of academic and non-academic sources, some	Students include only minimal outside sources from sophomoric or prohibited sources (e.g., Encyclopedia Britannica online).	Student fails to demonstrate appropriate outside research.

			of questionable provenance.		

Bachelor of Social Sciences – Major/minor in PPA

PLO1. Demonstrate a solid understanding of the key concepts in political science, political theory, public administration, government operations, international relations and legal systems;

PLO2. Understand critically and apply sensitively political science theories and research methods to analyze political complexities across national and international contexts;

PLO3. Reflect critically on learning of political science and public administration theories in practice to meet the standards and expectations of the public sphere profession and the community-at-large;

PLO4. Acquire specific knowledge and sensitive awareness of the formal, social and cultural aspects of political institutions and behavior;

PLO5. Develop the skills and appreciation for teamwork through participating in group activities and internships;

PLO6. Develop a comprehensive understanding of the complexities and intricacies of human society, and the ability to identify leverage points for policy and social actions.