Methods of Political Research

POSC 230 – Spring 2014
Carleton College
(Tuesday & Thursday 8:15-10am)
Weitz Center 138

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Office Hours: Mon. 10am to 12 Noon & Thurs. 2-4pm and by appt.

“In some cases we learn more by looking for the answer to a question and not finding it than we do from learning the answer itself.” – Lloyd Alexander.

“Statistics is the grammar of science.” – Karl Pearson.

Course Description

The world we live in is one in which causal claims are thrown around all too easily – as can be observed by watching one of the “talking heads” on a cable news show for 15 minutes. In this course, you will explore and gain the methods needed to test and confirm whether or not these claims are actually true. Does foreign military intervention in civil war (such as the debate on whether or not the United States should become involved in the conflict in Syria) save lives? Do larger welfare states lower economic growth? How likely is China to democratize in the next 10 years? These questions are all ones that can potentially be addressed through social science research methods. In this course, you will gain the introductory tools that will prepare you to adjudicate between competing causal claims.

Second, you will become conversant in the basic language of statistics, which underlies a large portion of the methods used in political science today. As part of this, you will gain valuable computer skills using R statistical software, an increasingly prominent programming language.

Finally, you will learn to carry out and present independent research. Over the course of the semester, you will complete a series of assignments that will culminate in final research paper and poster. You will present the results of your research to your peers in the last two classes of the semester.
Course Requirements and Expectations

The best way to learn methods is through hands on experience. Because of this, during class time I will strive to minimize the amount of time spent in lecture and maximize the time spent in interactive activities that will provide you with the skills necessary to become proficient in methods. In order for this to work successfully, you will NEED to come to class prepared to engage with the material covered that day – failure to do so will make it difficult, if not impossible, for you to gain the skills necessary to do well in the class.

I strongly encourage collaboration amongst students when working on assignments, however all of the work that you turn in must be your own. Copying the work of other students is considered cheating and will be referred to the Carleton Honor Board for disciplinary action.

Texts

- Pollock, Philip H. *The Essentials of Political Analysis*, 4th edition (2012). All readings from this textbook are indicated by EPA: Chapter X.
- Freeze, Kent. *R, RStudio and RCommander for Beginners or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love R*. This is a simple tutorial that introduces you to the statistical software that we will be using for this course.
- Other course readings will be made available via Moodle and a shared Dropbox folder.

Grading

Your grade will be based on the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quizzes (8 Total @ 2% Each)</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Participation and Attendance</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Paper (Mar. 4)</td>
<td>23%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Paper Presentation (Mar. 6 and 11)</td>
<td>7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Paper Poster (Mar. 6)</td>
<td>7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weekly Assignment (8 Total)</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question and Hypothesis (Jan. 14)</td>
<td>4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Literature Review (Jan. 21)</td>
<td>4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research Design (Jan. 28)</td>
<td>4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Graphing and Univariate Statistics (Feb. 4)</td>
<td>4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Introductory Hypothesis Testing (Feb. 11)</td>
<td>4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Correlation and Regression (Feb. 18)</td>
<td>4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Logit and Regression Diagnostics (Feb. 25)</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualitative Research Assignment (Mar. 11)</td>
<td>4%</td>
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**Total** 100%
Quizzes - 16%

Over the course of the term, we will have 8 in class quizzes (an average of one quiz a week). These quizzes will be completed on Moodle, and will also be fairly short (timed for no longer than 5 minutes), and will also be open book. Quizzes will be at the start of class, and will always be cumulative (covering any material we have read or covered up to and including that date).

In order to complete the quiz, you will first need a 3 digit code that will be the response to the first question. I will only give out the code in-class, or if you have an excused absence in which you inform me prior to the start of class that you will not be able to attend that day. I will not allow students to make up a missed quiz for any reason.

Class Preparation, Attendance and Participation - 15%

Class participation is mandatory. You are expected to come to class prepared and having read the assigned material for the day. The readings for the day will form a key component of our class discussions and work for the day – please come prepared!

Research methods are best learned through hands on experience. Accordingly, in addition to the class readings, you will have a homework assignment for each class which we will cover in class. This homework assignment will not be graded directly, but your level of preparation will influence your participation grade. I don’t necessarily expect you to have figured out the correct answer for every problem that we cover, but you should have attempted to answer each question. In class, I will randomly call on students to present their methods and answers to the class – come to class prepared to discuss your approach to answering the questions. For example, for the quantitative classes, you should come to class with your RScript code ready to present to the class if necessary.

In addition to participation within class, we will have a class Facebook group (Request to join the group page at: https://www.facebook.com/groups/570954886321126/). I envision this as an open discussion group where anyone can feel free to ask questions related to the readings, homework or anything related to the class. You are also strongly encouraged to attempt to answer the questions of your classmates as well. If you have a question on homework or the course, please post it to the Facebook group rather than to myself (or the prefect) – this will help us to be able to answer questions and quickly communicate responses to everyone in the class. At the start of class, we may go over some of the questions/issues you may have had (if they were not resolved in the group). If you have concerns about participating in the Facebook group (or do not have a Facebook account), feel free to create a fake account using a pseudonym. While participation in the Facebook group is not mandatory, if I see that you are often participating in the group (either by asking questions or offering assistance to your peers) it will reflect positively on your participation grade.
Final Paper - 23%

Your work in the course will culminate in a final research paper in which you use and present quantitative data. The final paper will be between 15 and 20 double spaced pages (not including title page and bibliography).

Final Paper Presentation - 7%

At the end of the term we will have a poster session in which you present your paper to your peers.

Final Paper Poster - 7%

In addition to your final paper, you will also turn in a final poster, similar to what you would present at an academic conference (or for your Senior comps project).

Eight Weekly Assignments - 32%

On the Tuesday of each week (with the exception of Mar. 4, when you will be completing your final papers) you will have an assignment due. These assignments build toward your final research paper - as a result, it is critical that you keep current in the weekly assignments. The weekly assignments are included at the end of the R manual for the course.

Course Policies

Grading Policies

I will assign grades using the following scale: A (93.33), A- (90), B+ (86.67), B (83.33), B- (80), C+ (76.67), C (73.33), C- (70), D+ (66.67), D (63.33) D- (60) F (Below 60). I do not round your final grade up or down (so if you receive a 93.327, you will receive an A- for a final grade).

Additional Grading Policies:

1. I will not receive grade complaints if more than one week has passed after the assignment has been returned to you. Before I review your grade you must first:

   • Wait 24 hours.
   • Schedule a time to meet with me to discuss your grade.
   • Submit a formal appeal in writing (email is sufficient–but be clear that it is the appeal in the subject heading) that clearly identifies content in the assignment and the reasons why you think your grade should be changed. These appeals should refer to specific things in the assignment, and not to vague reasons like “I worked really hard.”
The second grade, whether higher or lower, will become your grade on the assignment.

2. Late assignments are not tolerated. Your grade will be lowered 5 points for each day it is late. That is if the assignment is due on Tuesday at 8:20 am and you turn it in sometime between 8:20 am and Wednesday 8:20 am, the highest grade you can achieve is 95.

3. The ONLY acceptable (not penalized) excuses for not completing an assignment on time are family emergencies or illnesses. However, in these cases, I will arrange to give you extra time ONLY if you communicate with me BEFORE the assignment is due and you provide DOCUMENTATION of the circumstance.

Electronics in Class Policy

Given the nature of this class, all students will have access to a computer at all times. You may also feel free to bring your own laptop if you prefer to work on it (as opposed to the computers in the classroom). However, I expect you to be responsible in your use of electronic equipment: please avoid visiting social networking sites, or otherwise browsing the internet on sites unrelated to the course. I would also recommend you read through the discussion (including comments), Computers in the Classroom, to think about the possible pros and cons of using computers in a classroom setting. Individuals who abuse this privilege will find their participation grade reduced. Please turn off all cell phones during class.

Academic Honesty

You are expected to abide by fundamental standards of academic honesty. A discussion of plagiarism can be found at: [https://apps.carleton.edu/campus/doc/integrity/](https://apps.carleton.edu/campus/doc/integrity/). All work is expected to be your own. Cheating, plagiarism (using someone else’s words or ideas without properly citing them), and all forms of academic misconduct will not be tolerated and will be strictly handled according to university policy. If you are uncertain, cite your sources!

Disability-Related Accomodations

It is the policy of Carleton College to provide reasonable accommodations to students with documented disabilities. Students, however, are responsible for registering with Disabilities Services, in addition to making requests known to me in a timely manner. If you require accommodations in this class, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible (during the 1st week of the semester), so that appropriate arrangements can be made. The procedures for registering with Disabilities Services can be found at [http://apps.carleton.edu/disabilityservices/](http://apps.carleton.edu/disabilityservices/).
Course Schedule

Readings should be completed prior to class. I reserve the right to make changes to the course schedule. I will alert you to any changes made in class, via email, and I will post the updated syllabus on Moodle.

Week 1

Jan. 7: What is Social Science?

Jan. 9: Epistemology and Research Questions
  • EPA: Chapter 3 (pgs. 48-58).

Week 2

Jan. 14: Academic Sources and Literature Reviews
  • Research Question and Hypothesis Assignment Due!
  • Iain McMenamin. Process and text: Teaching students to review the literature. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 39(1):133–135, 2006 → This piece is primarily directed towards students writing a dissertation, but the general advice on literature reviews is still valid.
  • RManual: Chapter 1 (pgs. 5-14).

Jan. 16: Concepts and Measurement
  • EPA: Chapter 1. (pgs. 6-27).
  • RManual: Chapter 2, pgs. 15-20 (Creating and Importing Data).

Week 3

Jan. 21: Research Design
  • EPA: Chapter 4. (pgs. 78-101).
  • Adam Przeworski and Frank Salomon. The Art of Writing Proposals. Social Science Research Council, 1995
  • RManual: Chapter 2, pgs. 20-32 (Merging, Cleaning and Managing Data).
  • Literature Review Assignment Due!
Jan. 23: Data Description and Measures of Central Tendency and Dispersion

- RManual, Chapter 2, pgs. 32-35.

Week 4

Jan. 28: Making Comparisons and Simple Graphing

- EPA: *Chapter 3*. (pgs. 58-77).
- EPA: *Chapter 5*. (pgs. 102-121).
- Research Design Assignment Due!

Jan. 30: Distributions, Confidence Intervals and Univariate Statistics


Week 5

Feb. 4: Comparison of means: T-tests

- EPA: *Chapter 7*. (pgs. 155-164).
- Graphing and Univariate Statistics Assignment Due!
- RManual, Chapter 4, pgs. 55-60 (T-Tests).

Feb. 6: Nominal and Ordinal Bivariate Relationships

- EPA: *Chapter 7*. (pgs. 165-181).
- RManual, Chapter 4, pgs. 60-62 (Tabular Statistics)

Week 6

Feb. 11: The Correlation Coefficient and Bivariate OLS Regression

- EPA: *Chapter 8*. (pgs. 182-196).
- RManual, Chapter 5, pgs. 63-68 (Correlations and Bivariate OLS Regression).
- Introductory Hypothesis Testing Assignment Due!
Feb. 13: Multivariate Regression

- RManual, Chapter 5, pgs. 68-70 (Multivariate Regression).

Week 7

Feb. 18: Regression Diagnostics

- RManual, Chapter 5, pgs. 70-84. (Regression Diagnostics and Dealing with Regression Problems).
- Correlation and Regression Assignment Due!

Feb. 20: Logit Models

- RManual, Chapter 5, pgs. 84-87 (Logistic Regression).

Week 8

Feb. 25: Qualitative and Quantitative Compared

- Logit and Regression Diagnostics Assignment Due!

Feb. 27: Case Study Methodology


Week 9

Mar. 4: Direct Observation and Research Ethics

- Final Paper Due!
Mar. 6: Elite Interviewing

- Day one of Student Presentations!
- Research Poster Due!

Week 10

Mar. 11: Presentations

- No Assigned Readings!
- Day two of Student Presentations!
- Qualitative Research Assignment Due!