

# Methods of Political Research

POSC 230 – Winter 2017  
Carleton College  
(Tuesday & Thursday 8:15-10am)  
Weitz Center 235

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**Office Hours:** T/Th 10am - 11:45am in Weitz Atrium. Wed. 1:00-3:00pm in Willis 415.

“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

As students of politics, we constantly encounter causal claims being made by academics, politicians, and journalists. How do we know which claims are valid, and which are not? In this course, you will explore and gain the methods needed to test and confirm whether or not these claims are actually true. Did American authoritarians rise to Donald Trump’s authoritarian siren call? Does democracy dampen clientelism? Does racial priming explain attitudes toward immigration? Have Chinese internal politics shaped trade policy toward the U.S.? Did the Paris attacks influence American public opinion? These questions are all ones that can be addressed through social science research methods.<sup>1</sup> 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.

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<sup>1</sup>These specific questions are some of the most recently asked and explored questions of the political science discipline. Each question was selected from titles of working papers produced at the 2016 American Political Science Association (APSA) Annual Meeting ([click here for 2016 APSA Program](#)).

## 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.

## Required Readings

- Pollock, Philip H. *The Essentials of Political Analysis*, 4th edition (2012). All readings from this textbook are indicated by EPA: *Chapter X*.
- Freeze, Kent (with Melanie Freeze). *R and RStudio 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.

## Grading

Your grade will be based on the following:

Quizzes (8 Total @ 2% Each)	16%
Class Participation and Group Work	15%
Final Paper (Mar 2)	23%
Final Paper Presentation (Mar 7 or Mar 9)	7%
Final Paper Poster (Mar 7)	7%
Weekly Assignment (8 Total)	32%
Research Question and Hypothesis (Jan. 12)	4%
Literature Review (Jan. 19)	4%
Research Design (Jan. 26)	4%
Graphing and Univariate Statistics (Feb. 2)	4%
Introductory Hypothesis Testing (Feb. 9)	4%
Correlation and Regression (Feb. 16)	4%
Logit and Regression Diagnostics (Feb. 23)	4%
Qualitative Research Assignment (Mar. 9)	4%
<hr/> <b>Total</b>	<hr/> <b>100%</b>

## **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 in class, 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).

I will only give out the quiz 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. Your TWO lowest quiz scores will be dropped (this gives you some flexibility).

## **Class Preparation, Attendance and Participation - 5%**

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!

## **In-Class Group Work - 10%**

Research methods are best learned through hands on experience. Accordingly, in addition to the class readings, you will have a group assignment for each class which we will cover in class (these are all listed at the end of the R Manual). These in-class assignments are designed to be completed within an approximately 45 minute time period. These assignments are designed to give practice doing the methods which you will then apply to your own research project in the weekly assignment that you turn in. As such, it is designed to be collaborative, and we will take advantage of the classroom to highlight and share how different people have approached and answered the in-class group assignments.

You will submit your in-class work at the end of each class via Moodle. I will give a very quick grade for this work – my concern is not so much in providing a grade, but to give you a low stakes opportunity in which I can tell you whether you are doing something wrong prior to doing it in your weekly homework assignment. Don't stress if it isn't "perfect", just turn in what you have so I can give you feedback. These will have a very quick grading scale: 2=Generally on target; 1=Something is pretty wrong; 0=You never sent me anything, you could not run your code to create a Compiled Notebook, or what you did send was completely incomprehensible and terrifying.

For the R in-class assignments, we will use pair programming. One of you will be the "driver", and the other will observe and give suggestions. You should be able to finish these in-class, but there may occasionally be times that you are not able to do so and may need to work on them outside of class. Both team members must individually submit the assignment on Moodle (to ensure you both have a copy of the assignment). If you miss class, you are responsible for completing the in-class assignment by yourself (you will not

have a team member to help you). In-class assignments must be turned in before the next class is held (8:00 a.m.).

## **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). Detailed instructions and a grading rubric for this assignment can be found on Moodle.

## **Final Paper Presentation - 7%**

At the end of the term we will have a paper presentation session in which you present your paper to your peers. Detailed instructions and a grading rubric for this assignment can be found on Moodle.

## **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). Detailed instructions and a grading rubric for this assignment can be found on Moodle.

## **Eight Weekly Assignments - 32%**

On the Thursday of each week (with the exception of the first week and March 2, when you will be turning in your final papers) you will have an assignment due. These assignments build toward or relate to 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 percentage 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, I require you to bring your own laptop to class to complete in-class activities. 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/>. 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 Accommodations

Carleton College is committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities for all students. The Disability Services office (Burton Hall 03) is the campus office that collaborates with students who have disabilities to provide and/or arrange reasonable accommodations.

If you have, or think you may have, a disability (e.g., mental health, attentional, learning, autism spectrum disorders, chronic health, traumatic brain injury and concussions, sensory, or physical), please contact Chris Dallager, Director of Disability Services, by calling 507-222-5250 or sending an email to [cdallager@carleton.edu](mailto:cdallager@carleton.edu) to arrange a confidential discussion regarding equitable access and reasonable accommodations.

## **Class Prefect**

This course has a prefect, Shaun Spinney, whose email address is [spinneys@carleton.edu](mailto:spinneys@carleton.edu). The Prefect Program offers optional collaborative learning sessions for participating classes. Prefect sessions review course concepts and often focus on critical thinking and problem-solving exercises centered on the course material. Scheduled outside of class time, they are led by trained student leaders who have received the department's or professor's stamp of approval. All the sessions are free and open to all students enrolled in the class. Our course prefect will use email or Moodle to inform everyone in the class about upcoming sessions (where, when, topics, etc.).

Carleton also provides a wide range of other support resources for class presentations and public speaking, library research; math; assistive technology; time management/test-preparation strategies, and study skills; and writing. See [here](#) for more details regarding these resources.

## **Acknowledgements and Thanks**

I would like to acknowledge Kent Freeze as the primary author/architect of the structure used for this syllabi and thank him for allowing me to use it for my course.

# 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. 5: What is Social Science?

Before class, browse final paper examples (posted on Moodle) from last term.

## Week 2

### Jan. 10: Epistemology and Research Questions

- EPA: *Chapter 3* (pgs. 48-58).

*In-class Assignment:* 12.1 in RManual

### Jan. 12: Academic Sources and Literature Reviews

- Research Question and Hypothesis Assignment Due!
- Johnson, J. B. and Reynolds, H. T. (2008). *Political Science Research Methods*. CQ Press, Washington, D.C
- RManual: Chapter 1.

*In-class Assignment:* 12.2 in RManual

## Week 3

### Jan. 17: Concepts and Measurement

- EPA: *Chapter 1*. (pgs. 6-27).
- RManual: Chapter 2, (Creating and Importing Data).

*In-class Assignment:* 12.3 in RManual

## **Jan. 19: Research Design**

- EPA: *Chapter 4*. (pgs. 78-101).
- Zuckerman, E. W. (2008). Tips to article-writers
- RManual: Chapter 3, (Merging, Cleaning and Managing Data).
- Literature Review Assignment Due!

*In-class Assignment:* 12.4 in RManual

## **Week 4**

### **Jan. 24: Data Description and Measures of Central Tendency and Dispersion**

- EPA: *Chapter 2*. (pgs. 28-47).
- RManual, Chapter 4 (Describing Your Data).

*In-class Assignment:* 12.5 in RManual

### **Jan. 26: Making Comparisons and Simple Graphing**

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

*In-class Assignment:* 12.6 in RManual

## **Week 5**

### **Jan. 31: Distributions, Confidence Intervals and Univariate Statistics**

- EPA: *Chapter 6*. (pgs. 122-154).

*In-class Assignment:* 12.7 in RManual

### **Feb. 2: Comparison of means: T-tests**

- EPA: *Chapter 7*. (pgs. 155-164).
- Graphing and Univariate Statistics Assignment Due!
- RManual, Chapter 6 (T-Tests).

*In-class Assignment:* 12.8 in RManual

## Week 6

### Feb. 7: Nominal and Ordinal Bivariate Relationships

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

*In-class Assignment:* 12.9 in RManual

### Feb. 9: The Correlation Coefficient and Bivariate OLS Regression

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

*In-class Assignment:* 12.10 in RManual

## Week 7

### Feb. 14: Multiple Regression

- EPA: *Chapter 8*. (pgs. 196-210).
- RManual, Chapter 9 (Multiple Regression).

*In-class Assignment:* 12.11 in RManual

### Feb. 16: Regression Diagnostics

- RManual, Chapter 10 (Regression Diagnostics and Dealing with Regression Problems).
- Correlation and Regression Assignment Due!

*In-class Assignment:* 12.12 in RManual

## Week 8

### Feb. 21: Logit Models

- EPA: *Chapter 9*. (pgs. 212-239).
- RManual, Chapter 11 (Logistic Regression).

*In-class Assignment:* 12.13 in RManual

## **Feb. 23: Qualitative and Quantitative Compared**

- King, G., Keohane, R., and Verba, S. (1994). *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton University Press *Chapter 1*. (pgs. 3-33).
- Logit and Regression Diagnostics Assignment Due!

## **Week 9**

### **Feb. 28: Case Study Methodology**

- George, A. and Bennett, A. (2005). *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*. Mit Press *Chapter 1*. (pgs. 3-36).

### **Mar. 2: Direct Observation and Research Ethics**

- Brians, Willnat, Manheim and Rich. *Empirical Political Analysis*, 8th ed. Chapter 19. (pgs. 324-346).
- Final Paper Due!

## **Week 10**

### **Mar. 7: Elite Interviewing**

- Brians, Willnat, Manheim and Rich. *Empirical Political Analysis*, 8th ed. Chapter 21. (pgs. 365-376)
- Day one of Student Presentations!
- Research Poster Due!

### **Mar. 9: Presentations**

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