

Methods of Political Research

POSC 230 – Spring 2018
Carleton College
(Tuesday & Thursday 8:15-10:00)

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Course Description

Political scientists are driven by solving puzzles. Why are some countries rich while others poor? Under what conditions do regime transitions take place? What explains the onset of war, or what explains its relative rarity? Why do voters sometimes (some, might say oftentimes) vote against their economic interests? Why do voters hold political institutions in low regard, yet incumbents have little to fear in elections? But when they solve puzzles political scientists have as their goal to provide answers that move beyond understanding a single event to providing general statements about politics. The ultimate goal is to develop theories and to possibly test hypotheses or to demonstrate the logic of causal relationships.

Without exaggeration, political scientists are a fractious bunch. There are sharp disagreements over the ontological and epistemological foundations of the discipline. Some perceive these disputes as warring clans, while others see it as the openness of the discipline to diverse perspectives.

This course will not settle any of the disputes that have divided the discipline. Instead, it will expose students to those disputes, encourage them to take them head on, and to give students the tools to develop their own explanation, write a research paper, and make a presentation of a political phenomenon using basic quantitative techniques (OLS or Binary Logit).

The course will first confront the difficult question of whether it is possible for empirical social science research to discover actual truths of the political world, to identify causal mechanisms to explain political phenomenon, and whether it is possible or even desirable to make generalizable statements.

For the second part of the course, students will learn quantitative techniques of data analysis, which will be used in their research paper and which they will present to the class in a format similar to what would be presented at an academic conference. The second part of the course is where we get our hands dirty using data, specifying and fitting, interpreting and testing the significance of statistical models.

Finally, we will briefly examine qualitative techniques that are widely used in political science.

This course will utilize three approaches to learning: lectures, group activity and discussion, and individual work.

Course Requirements

The best way to learn methods is through hands on experience. We will be engaging in interactive work, with me introducing concepts and procedures, students being divided into groups to discuss readings, and working collaboratively on in class assignments. This requires that students come to class having read literature assigned, or completed tasks in preparation for class. If students do not come prepared, then it will be very difficult to acquire the skills required to complete any of the graded assignments.

Students should resist falling behind. The term moves very quickly, and once behind, it is almost impossible to catch up. Also, since much of what you will learn is cumulative, falling behind makes it difficult to learn new material.

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 Academic Standards Committee for disciplinary action.

Required Readings

- Pollock, Phillip H. *Essentials of Political Analysis*, 4th Edition (2012), All readings referred to as 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, websites, and videos will be made available via Moodle.

Grading

Your grade will be based on the following:

Quizzes	10%
Class Participation and Group Work	15%
Final Paper	25%
Final Paper Presentation	10%
Weekly Assignment (8 Total)	40%

Quizzes

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, Group Work, Attendance, and Participation

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!

There are in class discussions of examples of literature, as well as individual and group exercises where each student will be evaluated on their preparedness to discuss articles assigned, as well as to complete exercises.

Final Paper

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

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 will be posted on Moodle.

Eight Weekly Assignments

Each week 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 assignments will be posted on Moodle.

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 to arrange a confidential discussion regarding equitable access and reasonable accommodations.

Class Prefect

This course has a prefect, Grant Ackerman, whose email address is ackermang@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 and Greg Marfleet as the primary authors/architects of the structure used for this syllabus and thank them 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

Mar 27: Introduction and Syllabus

Mar 29: Ontology and Epistemology

- Gary Marsh and Gary Stoker *Theory and Methods in Political Science* (Chapter 9).

Weekly Assignment 1 Distributed

Week 2

April 3: Can there be a Science of Social Phenomena? Can we make Causal arguments?

- *EPA* Chapter 1
- Burnham, Peter, et. al. *Research Methods in Political Science, Chapter 1*

April 5: Concepts, Variables, Measurement, Reliability, Validity, and Causal Explanations

- *EPA* Chapters 2, 3

Weekly Assignment 2 Distributed

Week 3

April 10: Univariate and Bivariate Analysis (Review)

- *EPA* Chapters 4, 5

April 12 Univariate and Bivariate Analysis, and intro to Bivariate Regression (Review, cont'd)

- *EPA* Chapters 6, 7

Weekly Assignment 3 Distributed

Week 4

April 17 Bivariate Regression (cont'd)

- EPA Chapters 7, 8
- Real Stats, Michael Bailey, Chapters 3

April 19: Regression with Dummy Variables

- Real Stats, Michael Bailey, Chapter 6 (pp 167-181)

Weekly Assignment 4 Distributed

Week 5

April 24: Multiple Regression, and diagnostics

- Real Stats, Michael Bailey, Chapter 4

April 26 Post-estimation diagnostics cont'd

- Quick R Regression Diagnostics

Weekly Assignment 5 Distributed

Week 6

May 1: Regression with Dummy Variables

- EPA Chapter 8
- Real Stats Chapter 6 (pp 178-199)

May 3: Logistic Regression

- EPA Chapter 9
- Real Stats Chapter 12

Weekly Assignment 6 Distributed

Week 7

May 8: Logistic Regression cont'd : Interpreting Coefficients

- EPA Chapter 9
- Real Stats Chapter 12

May 10: Qualitative Case Comparisons

- Juliet Kaarbo and Ryan K. Beasley "A Practical Guide to the Comparative Case Study Method in Political Psychology," *Political Psychology* Vol. 20, No. 2 (Jun., 1999), pp. 369-391

Weekly Assignment 7 Distributed

Week 8

May 15: Process Tracing

- David Collier, "Understanding Process Tracing" *PS: Political Science and Politics*, pgs 823-30 vol. 44 no. 4 2011

May 17: Qualitative Comparative Analysis

Weekly Assignment 8 Distributed

- Reading TBA

Week 9

May 22 Research Ethics

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

May 24 Importance of Replicability

- Koninkova, Maria "How A Gay Marriage Study Went Wrong" *The New Yorker* May 22 2015
- Brockman, David "Irregularities in LaCouer (2014)", May 2015

Week 10

May 29: Student Presentations