

Introduction to Political Research

Government 310

SPRING 2019

Instructor: Prof. Elizabeth Suhay, PhD

Time and Location: Mon, Thurs 2:30-3:45, Kerwin 3

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Office Hours: Mon, Thurs 4:00-5:00, Kerwin 217

Course Description

How do political scientists know what they know? This course will help you answer that question by not only teaching you about how professional researchers go about conducting empirical research but also by guiding you through the completion of an original research project. You will learn the basics of theory building, research design, and statistical analysis and interpretation. You will also become conversant in the statistical software program R. The knowledge you will gain in this course has numerous practical applications: you will better understand social science research studies discussed in other courses; you will be an intelligent consumer of media reports on scientific studies; and, finally, you will have the tools to carry out your own empirical research and analyze data in the future.

Intended Student Learning Outcomes

At the conclusion of the course, it is expected that students will be able to:

1. Understand key statistical concepts, such as probability and causal inference.
2. Define an original research project dealing with a contemporary political problem, using an appropriate methodology.
3. Produce a literature review on the subject that summarizes and analyzes the state of knowledge in political science on a research question.
4. Perform tests appropriate to different types of data with statistical software.
5. Analyze and interpret the results of the tests.
6. Produce a well-written and thorough final research paper that includes a statement of the research question, literature review, study design, and analysis and conclusions.

Academic Integrity

Academic dishonesty, such as plagiarism or cheating, is a violation of University policy and may result in a failing grade in the course and/or other disciplinary measures. It is important that you familiarize yourself with AU's Academic Integrity Code, located here:

<https://www.american.edu/academics/integrity/code.cfm>.

Policies for a Digital Age

No computers or cell phones unless instructed. Enjoy 75 minutes without email, Twitter/ Facebook/ Instagram or texting. No recording of lectures or discussions without permission.

Required Texts (available at campus bookstore website and on reserve at library)

- *The Fundamentals of Political Science Research, Third Edition* (2018). Paul M. Kellstedt and Guy D. Whitten. Cambridge.
- *An R Companion to Political Analysis, Second Edition* (2018). Philip H. Pollock III and Barry C. Edwards. Sage.

IF YOU OBTAIN TEXTS ELSEWHERE, BE SURE TO GET CORRECT EDITIONS!

Course Expectations and Assignments

Exams — 40% of grade

- *Exam 1* (15% of grade). February 7
- *Exam 2* (15% of grade). March 7
- *Exam 3* (10% of grade). April 8

Final Project — 30% of grade

- *Annotated bibliography* (5%) April 18
- *Research design* (5%) April 22
- *Methods & data analysis* (5%) April 29
- *Final paper* (15%) May 6

Homework — 20% of grade

Students will be assigned homework (as indicated on syllabus). Upload to Blackboard prior to the class for which it is due, unless otherwise instructed. Homework is graded pass/fail.

Participation — 10% of grade

This grade is made up of two parts: Students' contribution to classroom discussions and activities, and class attendance. Students are first graded in terms of the quantity and quality of their in-class participation. At that point, the participation grade stands unless the student has more than one unexcused absence. With each additional unexcused absence (beyond one), the participation grade falls by one letter-grade unit (e.g., B to B-).

Course Schedule

UNIT 1: FOUNDATIONS OF EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

Week 1

Monday, January 14

Introduction to course
 What are data?
 Activity: make a dataset

Thursday, January 17

Reading: *Fundamentals* Ch. 1 – The Scientific Study of Politics (pp. 1-24)

Week 2

Monday, January 21

MLK Day – no class

Thursday, January 24

Reading: *Fundamentals* Ch. 3 – Evaluating Causal Relationships (pp. 56-76)
 Reading: Diana Mutz and Jahnvi Rao, 2018, “The Real Reason Liberals Drink Lattes,” *PS: Political Science & Politics* (pp. 762-767)

Week 3

Monday, January 28

Reading: *Fundamentals* Ch. 4 – Research Design (pp. 77-103)
 Reading: Salil Benegal and Lyle A. Scruggs, 2018, “Correcting Misinformation about Climate Change: The Impact of Partisanship in an Experimental Setting,” *Climatic Change*
 Activity: What is the difference between an observational and an experimental study?

Thursday, January 31

Fundamentals Ch. 5 – Measuring Concepts of Interest (pp. 104-124)
 Activity: Build a measure

Week 4

Monday, February 4

Reading: *Fundamentals* Ch. 6 – Getting to Know Your Data (pp. 125-142)
 Homework due

Thursday, February 7

EXAM 1

UNIT 2: STATISTICS

Week 5

Monday, February 11

Reading: *Fundamentals* Ch. 7 – Probability and Statistical Inference (pp. 143-160)

Thursday, February 14 - no class

Week 6

Monday, February 18

Reading: *Fundamentals* Ch. 8 – Bivariate Hypothesis Testing (pp. 161-187)

Thursday, February 21

Reading: *Fundamentals* Ch. 9 – Two-Variable Regression Models (p. 188-214)

Optional reading: Stephen Ansolabehere, Jonathan Rodden, and James M. Snyder, 2006, “Purple America,” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* (pp. 97-118)

Friday, February 22

Homework due

Week 7

Monday, February 25

Reading: *Fundamentals* Ch. 10 – Multiple Regression: The Basics (pp. 215-245)

Thursday, February 28

Reading: *Fundamentals* Ch. 11 – Multiple Regression Model Specification (pp. 246-272)

Week 8

Monday, March 4

Reading: Tasha S. Philpot, 2018, “Race, Gender, and the 2016 Presidential Election,” *PS: Political Science & Politics* (pp. 755-761)

Homework due

Thursday, March 7

EXAM 2

SPRING BREAK

UNIT 3: LEARNING R

Week 9

Monday, March 18

Reading: *R Companion* Introduction, Ch. 1
Download R and RStudio
Homework due

Thursday, March 21

Reading: *R Companion* Ch. 2, 3
Homework due

Week 10

Monday, March 25

Reading: *R Companion* Ch. 4, 5
Homework due

Thursday, March 28

Reading: *R Companion* Ch. 6
Homework due

Week 11

Monday, April 1

Reading: *R Companion* Ch. 8
Homework due

Thursday, April 4

Reading: *R Companion* Ch. 9
Homework due

Week 12

Monday, April 8

EXAM 3

UNIT 4: APPLYING WHAT WE'VE LEARNED

Thursday, April 11 - no class

Reading: *R Companion* Ch. 11
Explore datasets

Week 13

Monday, April 15

What do you want to learn about?
Writing a research paper
Creating an annotated bibliography

Thursday, April 18

Annotated bibliography due
Creating a research design

Week 14

Monday, April 22

Research design due

Thursday, April 25

Data analysis workshop

Week 15

Monday, April 29

Methods & data analysis due
Celebrate our accomplishments

Support for Students at AU

If you experience difficulty in this course for any reason, please do not hesitate to consult with me or the advisers in the Department of Government/School of Public Affairs. In addition, a wide range of AU services is available to support you:

- Academic Support & Access Center (MGC 243, 202-885-3360). All students may take advantage of the Academic Support and Access Center (ASAC) for individual academic skills, counseling, workshops, tutoring and writing assistance, as well as Supplemental Instruction. All services are free. The services include the Writing Center (first floor of Bender Library), which assists students with academic writing and assignments, and the Math/Stat Lab (Myers Building, 202-885-3154), which provides mathematics and statistics tutoring. Additional content tutoring is also available in the ASAC's Tutoring Lab.
 - Students with Disabilities: American University is committed to making learning and programming as accessible as possible. Students who wish to request accommodations for a disability must notify me with a letter of approved accommodations from the ASAC. As the process for registering and requesting accommodations can take some time, and as accommodations, if approved, are not retroactive, I strongly encourage students to contact the ASAC as early as possible. For more information about the process for registering and requesting disability-related accommodations, contact ASAC.
- Counseling Center (MGC 214, 202-885-3500) helps students make the most of their university experience, both personally and academically. They offer individual and group counseling, urgent care, self-help resources, referrals to private care, as well as programming to help students gain the skills and insights needed to overcome adversity and thrive in college. Contact the Counseling Center to make an appointment in person or by telephone, or visit the Counseling Center page on the AU website for additional information.
- Center for Diversity & Inclusion (MGC 201/202, 202-885-3651) is dedicated to enhancing LGBTQ, Multicultural, First Generation, and Women's experiences on campus and to advance AU's commitment to respecting & valuing diversity by serving as a resource and liaison to students, staff, and faculty on issues of equity through education, outreach, and advocacy.
- OASIS: The Office of Advocacy Services for Interpersonal and Sexual Violence (McCabe Hall 123, 202-885-7070, oasis@american.edu) provides free and confidential advocacy services for students who experience sexual assault, dating or domestic violence, sexual harassment, and/or stalking. Please email or call to schedule an appointment with one of the two victim advocates in OASIS.

American University expressly prohibits any form of discriminatory harassment including sexual harassment, dating and domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking. The university is an equal opportunity, affirmative action institution that operates in compliance with applicable laws and regulations, and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex (including pregnancy), age, sexual orientation, disability, marital status, personal appearance, gender identity and expression, family responsibilities, political affiliation, source of income, veteran status, an individual's genetic information or any other bases under federal or local laws in its programs and activities.

If you experience any of the above, you have the option of filing a report with the AU Department of Public Safety (202-885-2527) or the Office of the Dean of Students (202-885-3300, dos@american.edu). To file a Title IX complaint, contact the Title IX Program

Officer (202-885-3373, TitleIX@american.edu). Please keep in mind that all faculty and staff - with exception of counselors in the Counseling Center, victim advocates in OASIS, medical providers in the Student Health Center, and ordained clergy in the Kay Spiritual Life Center - who are aware of or witness this conduct are required to report this information to the university, regardless of the location of the incident.

- International Student & Scholar Services (Butler Pavilion, Rm. 410, 202-885-3350, iss@american.edu). Resources to support academic success and participation in campus life including academic counseling, support for second language learners response to questions about visas, immigration status and employment and intercultural programs, clubs and resources.

Emergency Preparedness

In the event of a declared pandemic (influenza or other communicable disease), American University will implement a plan for meeting the needs of all members of the university community. Should the university be required to close for a period of time, we are committed to ensuring that all aspects of our educational programs will be delivered to our students. These may include altering and extending the duration of the traditional term schedule to complete essential instruction in the traditional format and/or use of distance instructional methods. Specific strategies will vary from class to class, depending on the format of the course and the timing of the emergency. Faculty will communicate class-specific information to students via AU e-mail and Blackboard, while students must inform their faculty immediately of any absence due to illness. Students are responsible for checking their AU e-mail regularly and keeping themselves informed of emergencies. In the event of a declared pandemic or other emergency, students should refer to the AU Web site (american.edu/emergency) and the AU information line at (202) 885-1100 for general university-wide information, as well as contact their faculty and/or respective deans office for course and school/college-specific information.