

GVPT 100
Scope and Methods for Political Science Research

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Office Hours: Wednesday 1:00-2:30

Introduction

This course teaches you how to think scientifically about politics. It will provide an introduction to **research design** and the use of **quantitative methods** in political science. In other words, you will learn how to formulate questions and theories about politics and then test them in a rigorous manner. ***A central element to this is statistics.*** This course will combine teaching the principles of statistics as used in political science with hands-on data analysis—that is, it will involve both theory and practice.

The class has two principal aims. The first is preparation for other political science classes. To this end we will discuss a large number of examples from contemporary political science research done by professors in the Department of Government & Politics at the University of Maryland and other universities. The second, and larger, purpose is preparation for life. In virtually every domain of professional life, the ability to evaluate causal arguments and use statistics to analyze data is helpful for doing a good job. The research methods you learn in this course will help you understand the world (political and otherwise) and become a more informed participant in political debate and discussion.

The Books:

Philip H. Pollock III. 2012. *The Essentials of Political Analysis*. Fourth Edition. Washington, DC: CQ Press (Required).

Philip H. Pollock III. 2012. *An SPSS Companion to Political Analysis*. Fourth Edition. Washington, DC: CQ Press (Required).

Student version of SPSS (Highly recommended).

You can buy the books in the bookstore. You can use University labs to conduct your analyses using SPSS, but you can also purchase the software through OIT to use on your own computer.

Recommended: A number of scholarly articles used as examples in lectures will also be posted on Blackboard.

Requirements and Grading:

Your course grade will be determined by homework assignments, two midterm exams, a final paper, and participation in discussion sections. Note that the Homework, Midterms, and Final are designated as Major Scheduled Grading Events. If you are going to miss class (or section) on a day that homework is due or on exam day and would like your absence to be excused, you are required to email me regarding your absence in advance of the class and to bring documentation to support your excused absence on the day you return. The new absence policy (one sick absence without a health center note) does not apply to days where we have scheduled homework, midterms, or the final.

The weight of each component is as follows:

Homework: 20%

Midterm 1: 25%

Midterm 2: 25%

Final Paper: 20%

Section Attendance and Participation: 10%

Homework:

The textbook *The Essentials of Political Analysis* is divided into chapters by topic. Lectures roughly follow the topical outline of the book as indicated on the syllabus and students are expected to read before coming to lecture. The homework in the course comes out of the companion book, *An SPSS Companion to Political Analysis*. The topics of the workbook assignments correspond to the topics covered in the textbook and lecture but allow for some lag so that students have time to master the material. The due date of each homework assignment from the workbook is noted in the syllabus. All homework assignments are in the workbook.

The SPSS Companion book comes with a CD-rom that contains all the data students will use in the class. Each chapter ends with an assignment. Students must read the appropriate chapter and complete the assignment at home using the statistical package SPSS (or in one of the computer labs on campus that have an SPSS license, contact OIT for information regarding which labs have an SPSS license). Students should tear the appropriate pages out of the workshop and print 1 sample output page when requested. Copies will not be accepted. These assignments will be collected in section and graded. Staple the pages together and write your name and student ID number at the top of the first page. The due date of each assignment is noted in the syllabus. Late homework will not be accepted—no exceptions. After each session students should save their work because the workbook assignments build cumulative skills.

Note that the homework chapters are not equal in length. For example, chapter 4 homework is 16 pages while chapter 6 homework is 4 pages long. Do not wait until the last minute to complete the homework—the exercises are involved and take time. Because of variance in length homework 4 weights 2 times as much in your grade as each of the other homeworks.

Midterms:

The midterms will be based on material covered in the books, lectures, and sections. Note that regular attendance at lectures is required. Lectures often do not overlap directly with the readings and many key concepts and cases will be discussed in lectures only. Strictly speaking the midterms are not cumulative (that is, the first midterm emphasizes material covered from the beginning of the class up to the first midterm and the second midterm covers material covered after the first midterm but before the second). However, the nature of the material is cumulative. Therefore, there may be some overlap between the two tests.

Final paper:

The final paper will be a 10 page, double spaced (including tables) analytical paper on a dataset provided with the workbook. Final papers should be submitted in hard copy to the appropriate teaching assistant on the day of the final. Students may send their TA an electronic copy of the paper only if they have first received approval from their TA. In the weeks prior to submission the professor and teaching assistants will be available for students who have questions about the research paper, but we will not review drafts. Students are expected to keep the papers within assigned lengths. Grades will be based on consistency of the analytical argument, demonstration of cumulative mastery of the material from the course, and clarity of writing.

Section Attendance and Participation

Students are expected to have completed all of the assigned readings and homework for each section and be prepared to discuss them. Teaching assistants take attendance in section and section grades will be based on a demonstrated ability to discuss topics covered in lectures and section.

Blackboard:

Important communication regarding the class is conducted via Blackboard. This includes posting of the syllabus, announcements, and grades. Students are required to be proficient users of Blackboard and to ensure that their emails registered with Blackboard are up to date and checked regularly.

Religious Observance

By the end of February students must provide in writing a request for a make up of exams and other required assignments if the syllabus indicates a date when you are unable to attend due to specific religious observance.

Students with disabilities

We will make every effort to accommodate students who are registered with the Disability Support Services (DSS) Office. We are not able to accommodate students who are not registered with DSS or who do not provide us with documentation or have not had that documentation reviewed by DSS before October 1.

Absence due to illness

As per University policy students may submit a self-signed note for a medically necessitated absence from a single lecture or section during the semester. Such documentation is sufficient unless it coincides with a Major Scheduled Grading Event. For a definition of such events see above Requirements section. Any student missing more than one section or a Major Scheduled Grading Event is required to provide documentation from the Health Center or from an outside health care provider that verifies the dates of treatment and time frame during which the student was unable to meet academic responsibilities.

Code of Conduct

It is assumed that all students are familiar with and adhere to the code of academic integrity. See <http://www.studenthonorcouncil.umd.edu/index.html>

Extra Credit and Incompletes

Graded assignments in the class provide students with ample opportunity to demonstrate mastery of the materials. Therefore, **no extra credit assignments** will be assigned in the class. The assigned material is also appropriate in scope for completion within a single semester. Therefore, no incompletes will be given-*no exceptions*.

Course Schedule**Week 1**

January 25th: Introduction

January 27th: No Section

Week 2**Reading: Essentials Chapter 1**

January 30th: Concepts and Operationalization

February 1st: No class

February 3rd Section: Introduction

Week 3**Reading: Essentials Chapter 2**

February 6th: Variables

February 8th: No class

February 10th Section: SPSS

Week 4

Reading: Essentials Chapter 3

February 13th: Descriptive Statistics

February 15th: Hypotheses

February 17th Section: 1st homework (Chapter 1 Introduction to SPSS) due

Week 5

Reading: Essentials Chapter 4

February 20th: Experiments

February 22nd: Controlled Comparison

February 24th Section: 2nd homework (Chapter 2 Descriptive Statistics) due

Week 6

Reading: Essentials Chapter 5

February 27th: Alternative Explanations

February 29th: Inference

March 2nd Section: 3rd homework (Chapter 3 Transforming Variables) due

Week 7

March 5th: Sample Size

March 7th: Standard Deviations

March 9th Section: 4th homework (Chapter 4 Making Comparisons) due

Remember that this homework is much longer and is worth twice as much as other homeworks

Week 8

March 12th: Wrapping up and Review of Chapters 1-5

March 14th: Midterm 1 (Including material from lectures and section week 1-7, chapters 1-5, homeworks 1-4)

March 16th: No section.

Week 9**Reading: Essentials Chapter 6**

March 26th: Confidence Intervals

March 28th: Statistical Significance: The T Stat

March 30th Section: 5th homework (Chapter 5 Making Controlled Comparison) due

Week 10**Reading: Essentials Chapter 7**

April 2nd: Statistical Significance: Chi Square

April 4th: Measures of Association

April 6th Section: 6th homework (Chapter 6 Making Inferences about Sample Means) due

Week 11**Reading: Essentials Chapter 8**

April 9th: Regression 1

April 11th: Regression 2

April 13th Section: 7th homework (Chi-square and Measures of Association) due

Week 12**Reading: Essentials Chapter 9**

April 16th: Regression 3

April 18th: Logit

April 20th Section: 8th homework (Correlation and Linear Regression) due

Week 13

April 23rd: Wrapping Up and Review of Chapters 6-9

April 25th: Midterm 2 (Including material from lectures and section week 8-12, readings chapters 6-9, homework 5-8)

April 27th: No section.

Week 14**Reading: Essentials Chapter 10**

April 30th: Applications

May 2nd: Applications

May 4th Section: 9th homework (Dummy Variables and Interaction Effects) due in section. Also read 11th homework (Doing your Own Political Analysis)

Week 15

May 7th: Conclusions

May 9th: Conclusions