POL 51: The Scientific Study of Politics

Winter 2016
Lecture: TR 10:30 –11:50
Room: Everson 176
Sections: See Smartsite

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All Sections will be held in Kerr Hall 451

Course Description

Why are you here? Apart from the answer, "this is a required class," many of you probably do not have a much better response than this. Nevertheless, it is almost surely the case that all of you have, from time to time, thought about politics. Perhaps you will vote in the 2016 Elections. Many millions of Americans will vote; an even greater proportion, however, *will not* vote. Or perhaps you have thought about some social issue, for example illegal immigration, abortion, or global warming. Given the nature of these kinds of issues, how do policy changes take place (or not take place)? If you came from another country, one characterized by having multiple political parties and a different kind of electoral system, you might spend some time thinking about how governments actually form. You may also be concerned, as a citizen, with how long these governments last. These questions, these concerns, are precisely the kinds of issues political scientists grapple with. Understanding politics–really understanding politics–requires more than a simple cursory examination of the local newspaper, your favorite blog, or a preferred cable news outlet. In this class, we are going to think about analyzing politics, about how political scientists think about the world. To that end, we are going to concern ourselves with the theory and method of contemporary political analysis.

The course will look at different kinds of analytical frameworks and ask how these frameworks help us understand important political problems. Additionally, we will concern ourselves with measurement of theoretical concepts and hypothesis testing. To that end, it will be necessary to think about working with data. How do we collect data, display it in a useful way? How do test for associations (or relationships) between two or more political variables? How do we evaluate causal claims and how might we *make* causal claims? These are the precise questions this class is concerned with. To successfully complete this class, you will be asked to complete several reading assignments as well as finish several short writing assignments and problem sets. Be warned, the topics in this class will demand careful attention to the

reading and to lectures. Further, in the quarter, you will be asked to work with political data and to perform statistical analyses on these data. In short, this course is partially a statistics course. If you are averse to statistical analysis/reasoning, this version of POL 51 may not be for you.

Course Requirements

The intent of this course is to give you some exposure to the systematic study of politics and political data. To that end, you will be asked to complete a number of reading assignments from the principal text as well as some outside readings. Apart from readings, I'm going to insist you be prepared to discuss some of the assigned readings, both in the main lecture and in your break-out discussion groups. Discussion and participation are one of the main ways we can gauge whether or not you are "getting" the material. Of course reading is not the only task you will need to do. I'm going to assign you several problem sets over the course of the quarter. By "problem set," I simply mean assignments that will involve writing and/or analysis of political data and political puzzles. Sometimes these problem sets will be open-ended, insofar as the answer will be dependent on the issues *you* choose to examine; other times, the problem sets will be closed-ended: there will be known right and wrong answers! The content and structure of the problem sets will be discussed in detail in class. There will be two exams, a midterm and final exam. Finally because attendance to discussion sections are vital for success, I'm leaving a portion of your grade to be determined by the teaching assistants. The breakdown of your grade goes as follows:

- Teaching Assistant Evaluation: 10 percent.
- Problem Sets: 40 percent
- Midterm Exam: 25 percent
- Final Exam: 25 percent

To successfully complete this course (as with any course), you will need to take it seriously. Despite the fact this is a "required" course and hence interest (among some of you) will not be as high as electives, I can assure you *I* take this class seriously. I will expect high quality work, regular attendance to class, meaningful participation in lectures and discussions, and courteousness and decorum in both lecture and discussion. If your performance is subpar, if you miss deadlines, or if you miss class, your grade will suffer.

Course Policies

All exams must be taken at the time prescribed in the syllabus. Homework and problem sets are due on the date given to you in class. Late problem sets will be docked 10 percent for every day turned in late. Problem sets that are e-mailed to me or to the teaching assistants will *not be accepted*, unless otherwise noted and authorized by me. In saying problem sets will not be accepted, this means you will receive a grade of 0 on that particular problem set. You are also required to become familiar with the UC Davis Code of Academic Conduct (http://sja.ucdavis.edu/cac.html). Cheating, plagiarism, and harassment in any form will not be tolerated. Do not do these things. **Also, in lecture and in discussions, cell phones, notebook computers and iPads must be turned off. Usage of cell phones (or any other personal communication devices, including notebook computers and iPads) in class may affect your participation grade. Usage of cell phones (or any other personal communication devices, include notebook computers and iPads) during exams will be viewed as possible evidence of cheating. Use of personal computers or other similar devices (iPads, etc.) are not permitted in**

class (during lectures) unless I receive written permission from a UC-Davis authority granting permission to use such devices. On exams, *if* the use of a calculator is deemed necessary, you *must use* a simple, cheap, non-programmable calculator. Use of cell phones or other devices permitting data storage will not be permitted and you will be asked to cease using such devices during the exam. All exams will require a blue book that you must provide. All assignments, unless otherwise stated, must be word-processed.

With respect to students with disabilities, students requesting classroom accommodation must first register with the Dean of Students Office. The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the Instructor when requesting accommodation.

Readings

There are two books for this class, both of which are available on-line. The main text we will use is:
C. Diez, C. Barr, and M. Cetinkaya-Rundel's *OpenIntroStatistics*, 3rd ed.

The URL for this book is:
http://www.openintro.org/stat/

I strongly encourage you to ensure you can access this book. The second book will be intermittently used and should be viewed as a useful resource for the R environment. This book is available online by way of Springer Press. To access this, you need to make sure you are signed in to UCD's VPN. This link will provide information about VPN: https://www.lib.ucdavis.edu/ul/services/connect/vpn/. Once you sign in by way of VPN, click on the link for "Electronic Databases" and then access "Springer eBooks Package." Once accessed, search for the text by typing "Monogan" into the search box. You will find this book, which you may then download:

J. Monogan. *Political Analysis Using R*. Springer Press.

Finally, although not assigned, for three lectures, I will draw heavily from the following book:

K. Shepsle. *Analyzing Politics: Rationality, Behavior,and Institutions*. 2 ed. W.W. Norton.

The lectures based on material from this book will not be digitized and so you may want to seek this book out if you need coverage beyond the class lectures. These lectures will be Feb. 2-9. I did not assign the text because I am only drawing from a small part of the book; however, this is a fantastic book to own if you are a Political Science or IR major.

Statistical Software

This course is *not* a statistics course; however, we cover an extensive amount statistical material in this class. As such, you will need to learn to use a software package. The package you will learn is the package known as R. R is an open-source programming language and is the most powerful statistical computing environment on the planet. If you are unfamiliar with statistics and object-oriented languages, *you will be intimidated at the start*. To succeed in this class, you *will* have to master the basics of R. You can access R here: http://cran.us.r-project.org/. You will need to determine what is the proper file

to download, but this should be straightforward. Also, see Chapter 1 of Monogan for assistance. Almost all homework assignments will require the use of R. To interface with R you may find it useful to install an Integrated Development Environment (IDE). There are a number of IDEs available for R, perhaps the best being RStudio. You can install RStudio by accessing: http://www.rstudio.com/. If your computer's OS does not support RStudio, there are other IDE options available; however, and IDE is not necessary to program in R.

Course Itinerary

"Professor Jones, I took your class my first quarter after I transferred and it was a class of maybe 300! But in your class we used R programming and you recommended that after using R, we could put it on our resumes. And I did. I just graduated last week and the first job I applied to said one of the reasons my resume stood out, was because I was familiar with R programming." –Quoted from a former student's e-mail to me.

Jan 5: Course Introduction and Course Policies

Jan 7-12: The Idea of Causality and Social Science Data
Readings:
• DCC, Chapter 1, Sections 1.1–1.5.

Jan 14-28: What are data, where do they come from and how do we describe them?
Readings:
• DCC, Chapter 1, Sections 1.6.1–1.6.7, and Section 1.7
• Monogan, Chapters 3-4.

Feb 2: Thinking about Politics Formally: Group Choice and Majority Rule
Suggested Reading:
• Shepsle, Chapter 4

Feb 4: Thinking about Politics Formally: Spatial Models of Political Behavior
Suggested Reading:
• Shepsle, Chapter 5

Feb 9: Thinking about Politics Formally: Voting Methods
Suggested Reading:
• Shepsle, Chapter 7

MIDTERM EXAM: Feb 11

Feb 16: Research Design and Measurement
Readings:
• "Levels of Measurement and Political Research: An Optimistic View." Author(s): William G. Jacoby Source: *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 43, No. 1 (Jan., 1999), pp. 271-301.
• Geddes. 1990. "How the Cases You Choose Affect the Answers You Get: Selection Bias in Comparative Politics." *Political Analysis.* 2: 131–150.

Feb 18: The Normal and t-distributions
Readings:
• DCC, Chapter 3.1 and 3.2

Feb 23-25: Probability, the p-value, and bivariate hypothesis testing
Readings:
• DCC, Chapter 4.1-4.5 and Chapter 5.1-5.3
• Monogan, Chapter 5

Mar 1-10: Regression and Correlation
Readings:
• DCC, Chapter 7
• Monogan, Chapter 6

Mar 19: FINAL EXAM to be held from 10:30-12:30