THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

RESEARCH IN POLITICAL SCIENCE
Political Science 3500
Fall 2015
(updated August 23)

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Class Time/Location: MW 9-10:50am; F 10-10:50am/Liberal Arts 403

Catalog Description
A review of the various techniques used in the study of politics. Students will examine political situations and prepare written reports on their findings. A grade of “C” or better is required for majors and minors. Prerequisite: POLS 2310.

Course Content
This course will instruct how to write a political science research paper. In the process, students will learn what political scientists do, namely rigorous research using the scientific method. The first step is to understand this method of understanding the world around us and differentiate it from polemic or rhetorical discourse, which is often confused as political science by laypeople. The course will be broken down into various parts so that students can understand the processes of developing a research agenda from basic questions, understanding where that idea fits among the discipline’s various theoretical approaches, construction of falsifiable hypotheses, operationalization of variables, data gathering, development of a research design, assessing results, drawing conclusions, and furthering knowledge. Along the way we will learn the difference between qualitative and quantitative research including the pluses and minuses of both.
After completing this course students can:

- Evaluate the validity and reliability of information;
- Analyze modes of thought, expressive works, arguments, explanations, or theories;
- Recognize possible inadequacies or biases in the evidence given to support arguments or conclusions;
- Advance and support claims;
- Learn how to write a research paper typically assigned in upper division courses.

Course Text and Statistical Application Package


For those students who are interested in making the most of their writing in political science, I suggest the following small books:


Students will learn to use STATA in the second half of the semester. Our classroom computers have this statistical software application installed and we will have hands-on instruction during this time. Many of the take-home assignments will require students to use STATA. It is up to the students to locate computer labs on campus that have this software. A complete list of labs can be found at the following link: [http://admin.utep.edu/Default.aspx?tabid=68378](http://admin.utep.edu/Default.aspx?tabid=68378). You can also access this software off campus by going to [https://my.apps.utep.edu/vpn/index.html](https://my.apps.utep.edu/vpn/index.html). You will need to logon using your UTEP username and password. We will go through a demonstration of this before starting the statistical portion of the course.

Course Obligations

There is a mix of obligations students must meet to fulfill the requirements of the course. This includes 1) Class participation 2) Take-home assignments 3) Midterm and final exams and 4) Final paper.

All assignments that are completed outside the classroom are to be typed using the format described in:

***Late assignments will be accepted only under extraordinary circumstances.***

**Class Discussion of Reading Assignments:**
The principal reading obligation is to keep up with the assigned chapters within the course study outline contained in this syllabus. To maximize the learning experience, the readings must be done **before** the beginning of class. Questions will be frequently asked during lectures by both students and the professor. It is up to all participants to be ready to answer these questions.

Class attendance is required and participation will be evaluated on its contribution to the learning process. If you are late to class and do not have a reasonable excuse, you are required to submit a **two page summary of that day’s presentation**. Failure to hand in this summary will result in not earning participation points for the entire semester. One episode will be excused. Chronic tardiness will be dealt with on a case by case basis.

**Take-home Assignments**
There are ten take-home assignments plus an optional extra assignment that will guide your thoughts on future careers. Each assignment is unique and assesses students’ working knowledge of the course material. It would be wise for students to view many of these assignments as the important steps towards writing a research paper that is acceptable in political science. By viewing each assignment as such, students can optimize their time in completing their final paper. Assignments will be posted on Blackboard.

**Final Paper**
The final paper will be the culmination of students’ work during the course. Evaluation will be based on student competency in the following areas: central hypotheses, literature review, data description and research design, data analysis, discussion and conclusions. These parts comprise the polished efforts of some of the students’ take-home assignments. The topic of the paper will be completely up to the student (The Pollock workbook chapter 11 lists some doable ideas). I will provide the necessary guidance throughout the analytical process. The final paper is due by December 2.

**Exams**
There are two exams for the course, both of which are closed book and notes. The midterm exam will assess students’ knowledge of the topics we will review in the beginning of the course; the final exam is comprehensive; both will require you to answer a series of questions. The midterm will be given on October 5 and the final will be given on December 9.
Grade Weights
Each assignment and examination will be given a score out of a total 100 points and will be
given the following weights in determining students' final grades for the course:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Requirement</th>
<th>Due</th>
<th>Weight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10 Take-home assignments</td>
<td>Various</td>
<td>50% (5% each)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midterm Exam</td>
<td>October 5</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Paper</td>
<td>December 2</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>December 9</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Participation</td>
<td>All Meetings</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All grades (including the final) are based on the following distribution of points:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Letter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>90-100</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80-89</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70-79</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-69</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59 and below</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Additional Course Policies
The following policies are in place in order to better manage the learning environment:

1) Students may tape class lectures for personal use. However, the sale or exchange of such
tapes is not permitted unless prior permission is given.
2) Cell phones must be off during class hours. They are allowed under emergency
circumstances, but please notify the professor ahead of time.
3) Chatting, e-mailing, internet browsing, or any activity not related to official class activity
is prohibited.
4) Some communication from me will be posted on Blackboard. Please monitor our course
webpage on Blackboard regularly.
5) Academic dishonesty is prohibited and is considered a violation of the UTEP Handbook
of Operating Procedures. It includes, but is not limited to, cheating and collusion.
Cheating may involve copying from or providing information to another student,
possessing unauthorized materials during a test. Collusion involves collaborating with
another person to commit any academically dishonest act. Any act of academic
dishonesty attempted by a UTEP student is unacceptable and will not be tolerated.
Violations will be taken seriously and will be referred to the Dean of Students Office for
possible disciplinary action. Students may be suspended or expelled from UTEP for such
actions. For further information, please refer to
http://admin.utep.edu/LinkClick.aspx?link=HOOP-
Section+II.pdf&tabid=30181&mid=63285
6) Reasonable accommodations will be made for students with limitations due to
disabilities, including learning disabilities. Please see me personally within the first two
weeks to discuss any special needs you might have. If you have a documented disability
and require specific accommodations, you will need to contact the Center for
Accommodations and Support Services (CASS) (formerly known as the Disabled Student
Services Office) in 302 Union East within the first two weeks of classes. CASS can also be reached in the following ways:

- **Web:** [http://sa.utep.edu/cass/](http://sa.utep.edu/cass/)
- **E-Mail:** cass@utep.edu
- **Phone:** (915) 747-5148 voice or TTY

**Outline of Lecture Topic**

I. Orientation and Introduction
   A. Asking Questions
   B. Logic and Objectivity
   C. Ideology versus Facts
   D. Bar and Coffeehouse Talk

II. The Scientific Method
   A. The Science of Political Analysis
   B. Stages of Research
      i. Did Newton have an apple fall on his head?
      ii. Rome was not built in a day
   C. Looking at the Past

III. Research Preparation
   A. From Topics to Questions
   B. Concepts, Theories, Hypotheses, and Variables
   C. Knowing What is Known
      i. Literature Reviews
      ii. Annotated Bibliographies
   D. Constructing Falsifiable Hypotheses
   E. Research Design
   F. Operationalization of Variables

IV. Collecting Data
   A. Sources of Information
   B. Sampling
   C. Surveys
   D. Qualitative and Quantitative approaches
      i. Small N Problems
      ii. Large N Problems

V. Data Analysis
   A. Principles of Statistics
   B. Descriptive Statistics
   C. Bivariate Relationships
   D. Multivariate Relationships
   E. Statistical Significance

VI. Putting the Parts Together
   A. Communicating Results
   B. Parts of a Paper
   C. Visual Aids
      i. Tables
      ii. Graphs
   D. It’s not over
Readings and Presentations

All presentation slides and additional readings are posted on Blackboard (BB)

August 24
Orientation and Introduction (Baglione chpt. 1, Pollack\(^1\) introduction, Hoover & Donovan chpt. 1 (posted on BB))

What is science? What is meant by thinking scientifically? What is the difference between opinion and reasoned judgment? What is the difference between political science and politics? That is the difference between how we will discuss politics during this course and the way you have discussed politics with family and friends? What is the role of political science, in other words, what is the point to taking this course?

August 26 & 31, September 2
The Scientific Method (Hoover & Donovan chapter 2 (posted on BB))

Can politics be studied scientifically? How is this different from practicing politics? What is meant by the “truth” in scientific inquiry? What is the difference between objective and subjective reasoning? What value do empirical questions have? What about explanatory questions? Is deductive reasoning superior to inducting reasoning? What is a variable? What is a constant? What is hypothesis? How are hypotheses different from theories? What about models and paradigms? What is meant by the scientific method? What are the steps in the research process (aka hypothesis testing)? What laws exist in political science?

September 7 Labor Day – No Classes

September 9 & 14
Asking Questions and Formulating a Hypothesis (Baglione chpt. 2; Pollack chpts. 1 & 2)

What is and is not a reasonable research question? Why is testability (falsifiability) important? How does one go about evaluating potential research topics? What is a useful hypothesis? How do you develop such a hypothesis? What is meant by a unit of analysis?

September 16 & 21
Literature Reviews (Baglione chpt. 3 & 4)

Why is conducting a literature review important? What are the various sources one needs to examine for this step in the research process? Are internet options the only sources? What is the problem of overly relying on the internet? What other search options exist? What is an annotated bibliography? What are the different methods in evaluating prior work? How would one link various works to form a literature review?

\(^1\) All references to Pollack in the “Readings and Presentations” section refer to *The Essentials of Political Analysis* textbook. The other book authored by Pollack (*A Stata Companion to Political Analysis*), will be referred to as “the workbook.”
September 23 & 28
Research Design: Hypothesis Refinement and Testing Strategy
(Baglione chpts. 5 & 7; Pollack chpt. 4)

What value do causal linkages have? What about associational linkages? Why is operationalization important? How does one develop a research design? What is meant by a null hypothesis? What are intervening variables? What are control variables? What are the different levels of measurement? Is error problematic in measurement? When is it most problematic? How does one maximize validity and reliability in measurement?

September 30
Qualitative and Quantitative Research (Readings posted on BB)

What is the difference between qualitative and quantitative research? What are the benefits and costs of either type of research? Can qualitative research use the same hypothesis testing techniques? Does qualitative research also use the scientific method?

Midterm Exam October 5

October 7
Introduction to managing data using STATA (Workbook “Getting Started” and chpt. 1)

For this secession, bring the data CD found in the workbook. This lecture will introduce you to STATA. This includes going through the program functions and details on data inputting and labeling.

October 12
Sampling: How a little can tell you a great deal. (Carlson & Hyde chpt. 9 (posted on BB))

What are a population and a sample? How can a sample tell us about the population? What are the advantages and disadvantages between probability and nonprobability sampling? What are the differences among all the different types of sampling techniques? What is meant by sampling error? How is this error “managed.”

October 14
Secondary Data Sources (Carlson & Hyde chpts. 10 & 11 (posted on BB))

What are secondary data? Where can one find these data? What are the advantages and disadvantages of using secondary data? What is ICPSR? Why is it important to understand what the exact unit of analysis is when using secondary data? What is meant by coding data? What are some guidelines to use when examining secondary survey data? For example, why is question order and question formatting important?
October 19 & 21
Descriptive Statistics (Pollock chpts. 3 & 5)

What is a descriptive statistic and how does it differ from an inferential statistic? What is a frequency distribution? What are the measures of central tendency and dispersion among the various levels of variables? Why would a researcher wish to recode variables in a data set? What is the procedure to do this? How do you create a new variable from old ones in STATA?

October 26 & 28
Inferential Statistics (I): Comparisons of Two Variables (Pollack chpt. 6)

How does a table with two variables help us understand the strength or direction of their relationship? What is a measure of association? How do you run a crosstabs procedure using STATA? What are some of the ways to graph these relationships? What are some of the pitfalls of graphing variables?

November 2 & 4
Inferential Statistics (II): Statistical Significance (Pollock chpt. 7)

What is meant by statistical significance and how does a t-test, F-test, or chi square help us determine significance? What is the difference between two-tailed and one-tailed tests? How are these significance tests performed in STATA? What is the difference between type I and type II errors? Why is it important to know the difference?

November 9 & 11
Inferential Statistics (III): Bivariate Linear Regression (Pollock chpt. 8)

What is a correlation? What is a regression line? What are the parts of the bivariate version of such a line? How can regression analysis help us test hypotheses? Is regression analysis helpful with any type of dependent variable? How do we know if the regression line is significant? How about the significance of the regression coefficient?

November 16 & 18
Inferential Statistics (IV): Multivariate Analysis (Pollock chpt. 8 (re-read))

What is meant by a multivariate analysis? What type of multivariate analysis can be conducted using nominal and ordinal variables? What about interval and ratio variables? What effect can a control variable have on the dependent variable? What about the effect of a dummy variable?
November 23 & 25 
The Finishing Touches (Baglione chpts. 8 & 9)

What is the best way to report your findings? What elements belong to in an abstract? Why is a carefully written abstract important? What are the differences between a discussion, a summary, and conclusions? When is an appendix needed? How should tables be formatted? What about results of a regression analysis? How can you make graphs presentable? What is plagiarism? How do you avoid it? The course is over, but is your research question fully answered?

November 30 & December 2
Methodological Debate in Political Science (no readings)

What is the major debate today in political science research? What did the members of the perestroika movement want? What did they get? Are they now happy? What does this mean for the future of discipline?

Final Paper due December 2

Final Exam Wednesday, December 9, 10:00 am to 2:45 pm