

# PLSC 10: The Scientific Study of Politics

Spring 2018

Tuesday/Thursday 1:35- 2:50 PM

Willard 262

Prof. Harris

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Teaching Assistant

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Office Hours: Thurs. 3- 4:30PM

## Course Description and Course Goals

This course provides an introduction to the scientific study of politics and its role in advancing our understanding of politics. The course covers essential elements of scientific reasoning, introduces systematic approaches to research in political science through the use of major puzzles in the field, and introduces data sources and interpretation of graphical and tabular data.

The course consists of three parts. The first part covers the elements of scientific reasoning, including: characteristics of scientific knowledge, theory and hypotheses, the concepts of dependent and independent variables, and causal explanations. The second part of the course examines dominant approaches to political research, including: experiments, surveys, elite interviewing, archival research, the analysis of “big data”, and formal models. This course introduces the essential features and concepts underlying each approach, identifies exemplary data sources and puzzles that have been addressed with each approach, and the strengths and weaknesses of each approach. Along the way we will interpret basic tabular and graphical analysis. The final part of the course, during the last week of classes, pulls together the course material, emphasizing some of the benefits of scientific approaches to researching politics.

At the end of the course you should be able to:

- Describe the steps in the scientific process.
- Identify the theory, central hypothesis, and independent and dependent variables in a research project.
- Explain the essential features of and concepts in the main approaches to the scientific study of politics and provide an example of each: experiments, survey analysis, elite interviews, archival research, analysis of Big Data, and formal models.
- Interpret tabular displays of data and graphical presentations of data.

Students will not learn how to do statistical analysis in this class.

## Course Format

This course will be a mixture of lectures, discussions, and exercises.

## Laptops

We will be doing regular in-class exercises to demonstrate and experiment with the different scientific approaches to studying politics. You will need to have a laptop in class during these working sessions. For this reason, I ask that you bring a laptop to class. However, **laptops are to remain closed when we are not using them for in-class exercises.**

For information on borrowing a laptop from the library visit the following website:

<https://libraries.psu.edu/services/computers-and-technology/borrow-computers-and-technology-equipment/borrow-laptop>

## Readings

There is no required text that must be purchased. All readings are available for download on Canvas or on links provided on the syllabus, and when you do not see them in either of those places, it means the reading is available for download or as an e-book through the Penn State Libraries website (so always make sure to search for readings there).

## Course Evaluation

### 1. Exercises (25%)

Over the course of the semester we will be doing a number of exercises (sometimes in-class and other times at home). I will drop the assignment with the lowest grade.

Assignment grades will be docked 10 points for each day late. There will be no make-up opportunities for missed in-class assignments. (There will be no penalties for missed assignment due to *documented* university excused absences.)

### 2. Midterm (20%)

The midterm will include definitions and short answer question as well as a longer essay question structured similarly to the exercises that you will complete as homework assignments. The midterm will be held in the testing center on February 22.

### 3. Final Paper (20%)

You will write a final paper (5-6 pages) in which you pick a question about politics that interests you and describe how two of the approaches that we learn about during the course of the class could be used to address it. A detailed description of the paper will be available within the first few weeks of class. There are 3 due dates associated with the final paper. Part 1 of the paper project is due by Friday, March 2<sup>nd</sup> at 6PM on Canvas. Part 2 of the paper project is due by Friday, March 23<sup>rd</sup> at 6PM on Canvas. The final version of the paper project is due by Friday, April 20<sup>th</sup> at 6PM on Canvas. Details about the final paper assignment will be available on Canvas within a few weeks of the beginning of the semester.

#### **4. Final Exam (25%)**

There will be a cumulative final exam during finals week in the testing center.

#### **5. Participation (10%)**

I will not be taking attendance during class. Your participation grades will be based on your completion of unannounced in-class assignments and quizzes. There will be no make-up opportunities for these in-class assignments and quizzes. However, I will drop your two lowest scores throughout the semester. (There will be no penalties for missed assignment due to *documented* university excused absences.)

### **Academic Integrity**

Academic integrity is the pursuit of scholarly activity in an open, honest and responsible manner. Academic integrity is a basic guiding principle for all academic activity at The Pennsylvania State University, and all members of the University community are expected to act in accordance with this principle. Consistent with this expectation, the University's Code of Conduct states that all students should act with personal integrity, respect other students' dignity, rights and property, and help create and maintain an environment in which all can succeed through the fruits of their efforts.

Academic integrity includes a commitment by all members of the University community not to engage in or tolerate acts of falsification, misrepresentation or deception. Such acts of dishonesty violate the fundamental ethical principles of the University community and compromise the worth of work completed by others.

### **Accommodations**

Penn State welcomes students with disabilities into the University's educational programs. Every Penn State campus has an office for students with disabilities. Student Disability Resources (SDR) website provides contact information for every Penn State campus (<http://equity.psu.edu/sdr/disability-coordinator>). For further information, please visit the Student Disability Resources website (<http://equity.psu.edu/sdr/>).

In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, you must contact the appropriate disability services office at the campus where you are officially enrolled, participate in an intake interview, and provide documentation: See documentation guidelines at (<http://equity.psu.edu/sdr/guidelines>). If the documentation supports your request for reasonable accommodations, your campus disability services office will provide you with an accommodation letter. Please share this letter with your instructors and discuss the accommodations with them as early as possible. You must follow this process for every semester that you request accommodations.

### **Counseling and Psychological Services**

Many students at Penn State face personal challenges or have psychological needs that may interfere with their academic progress, social development, or emotional wellbeing. The university offers a variety of confidential services to help you through difficult times, including individual and group counseling, crisis intervention, consultations, online chats, and mental

health screenings. These services are provided by staff who welcome all students and embrace a philosophy respectful of clients' cultural and religious backgrounds, and sensitive to differences in race, ability, gender identity and sexual orientation.

Counseling and Psychological Services at University Park (CAPS)  
(<http://studentaffairs.psu.edu/counseling/>): 814-863-0395

Counseling and Psychological Services at Commonwealth Campuses  
(<http://senate.psu.edu/faculty/counseling-services-at-commonwealth-campuses/>)

Penn State Crisis Line (24 hours/7 days/week): 877-229-6400  
Crisis Text Line (24 hours/7 days/week): Text LIONS to 741741

## **Educational Equity**

Penn State takes great pride to foster a diverse and inclusive environment for students, faculty, and staff. Consistent with University Policy AD29, students who believe they have experienced or observed a hate crime, an act of intolerance, discrimination, or harassment that occurs at Penn State are urged to report these incidents as outlined on the University's Report Bias webpage (<http://equity.psu.edu/reportbias/>)

## **Course Calendar (subject to change)**

\*All readings and assignments on the course schedules should be read prior to the class periods for which they are listed.

\*All readings will be available from the library website or on this course's Canvas site.

\*As with any class, our schedule may change over the course of the semester. It is **your** responsibility to check Canvas regularly for announcements, changes, and updated versions of the syllabus.

## **Part I: The Scientific Study of Politics**

### **Week 1- January 9 & 11: Introduction. What is Science?**

- Clark, William, Matt Golder, and Sona Golder. 2012. Principles of Comparative Politics, 2nd. edition, "What is Science?" (chapter 2). Thousand Oaks, CA: CQ Press, pages 19-23.

### **Week 2- January 16 & 18: Studying Politics Scientifically**

- Clark, William, Matt Golder, and Sona Golder. 2012. Principles of Comparative Politics, 2nd. edition, "What is Science?" (chapter 2). CQ Press, pages 23-30 and 43.
- Exercise: The Scientific Method.

### **Week 3- January 23 & 25: Causality**

- Kellstedt, Paul M. and Guy Whitten. The Fundamentals of Political Science Research, 2nd edition, "Evaluating Causal Relationships." (chapter 3). Cambridge University Press, pages 51-66.

- Exercise: Assessing Causality.

## **Part I: Tools for the Scientific Study of Politics**

### **Week 4- January 30 & February 1: Experiments**

- Druckman, James N. 2005. "Experiments," In Samuel J. Best and Benjamin Radcliff, eds., *Polling America: An Encyclopedia of Public*
- Kellstedt, Paul M. and Guy Whitten. *The Fundamentals of Political Science Research*, 2nd edition, "Research Design." (chapter 4). Cambridge University Press, pages 69-82.

### **Week 5- February 6 & 8: Experiments (cont.)**

- Gerber, Alan S. and Donald P. Green. "Does Canvassing Increase Voter Turnout? A Field Experiment." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, Vol. 96, No. 19 (Sep. 14, 1999), pages 10939-10942.
- Michelson, Melissa. October 25, 2014. "Messing with Montana: Get-out-the-Vote Experiment Raises Ethics Questions"  
<https://thewpsa.wordpress.com/2014/10/25/messing-with-montana-get-out-the-vote-experiment-raises-ethics-questions/>.
- Exercise: Design an Experimental Study.

### **Week 6- February 13 & 15: Survey Analysis**

- Roper's "PollingFundamentals"<http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/support/polling-fundamentals/>. Read the sections on Introduction, Sampling, Total Survey Error, and Understanding Tables.
- Exercise: Exploring Roper

### **Week 7- February 20 & 22: Survey Analysis (cont.)**

*Midterm in-class exercise on February 22<sup>nd</sup>.*

- Background information on the 2012 presidential election:  
<http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/instructors/setups2012/2012.jsp> (read the links if they are of interest to you).
- Theoretical discussion of voting behavior:  
<http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/instructors/setups2012/voting.jsp> (read the main page and first 6 links).
- Details about the American National Election Study (ANES) 2012 codebook  
<http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/instructors/setups2012/dataset/codebook.jsp> (read all three links on this page).
- **Midterm: 2/22/18 in the testing center**

### **Week 8- February 27 & March 1: Elite Interviews**

*Part 1 of final paper due Friday, March 2<sup>nd</sup> by 6PM on Canvas.*

- Leech, Beth L., Frank R. Baumgartner, Jeffrey M. Berry, Marie Hojnacki, and David C. Kimball. 2013. "Lessons from the 'Lobbying and Policy Change' Project," in Layna Mosley, ed. *Interview Research in Political Science*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Exercise: Working with Elite Interview Notes.

**Week 9- March 6 & 8: Spring Break!**

**Week 10- March 13 & 15: Archival Research**

- No readings.

**Week 11- March 20 & 22: Archival Research (cont.)**

*Part 2 of final paper due Friday, March 23<sup>rd</sup> by 6PM on Canvas.*

- Baumgartner and Jones. 1993. *Agendas and Instability in American Politics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, Appendix A, Data Sources.
- Wilkerson, John D., T. Jens Feeley, Nicole S. Schiereck, and Christina Sue. 2002. "Using Bills and Hearings to Trace Attention in Congress: Policy Windows in Health Care Legislating." In *Policy Dynamics*, eds. Frank R. Baumgartner and Bryan D. Jones. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (You can skip the section on the Bill Introductions Project, pages 265-268, and pick up with the summary.)
- Exercise: Working with the Policy Agenda Project Data.

**Week 12- March 27 & 29: Big Data**

- Robert M. Bond, Christopher J. Fariss, Jason J. Jones, Adam D. I. Kramer, Cameron Marlow, Jaime E. Settle and James H. Fowler. 2012. "A 61-Million Person Experiment in Social Influence and Political Mobilization." *Nature* 489: 295-298.

**Week 13- April 3 & 5: Big Data (cont.)**

*No class on April 5<sup>th</sup>.*

- Sections from the Congressional Record. TBA.
- "Police Program Aims to Pinpoint Those Most Likely to Commit Crimes." September 24, 2015. NY Times. <http://nyti.ms/1VdTcIO>.
- "Tracking Boston's Progress with Just One Number." October 8 2015. NY Times. <http://nyti.ms/1L8mbZN>.
- Exercise: Analysis of Big Data

**Week 14- April 10 & 12: Formal (Game) Theory**

- Dixit, Avinash, Susan Skeath, and David Reiley. *Games of Strategy*, 4th edition, "Some Terminology and Background Discussion." (chapter 1 and chapter 2). W. W. Norton & Company, pages 3-16, and 27-34.
- Kenneth, Shepsle. 2010. *Analyzing Politics: Rationality, Behavior, and Institutions*, 2nd edition, "Cooperation." (chapter 8). New York: Harvard University, pages 231-259.

- Dixit, Avinash, Susan Skeath, and David Reiley. Games of Strategy, 4th edition, “Brinkmanship: The Cuban Missile Crisis.” (chapter 14). W. W. Norton & Company, pages 559-575.

**Week 15- April 17 & 19: Formal (Game) Theory (cont.)**

*Final paper due Friday, April 20<sup>th</sup> by 6PM on Canvas.*

- Clark, William, Matt Golder, and Sona Golder. 2012. Principles of Comparative Politics, 2nd. edition, “Problems with Group Decision Making” (chapter 11). Thousand Oaks, CA: CQ Press, pages 427-439.

**Part I: The Scientific Study of Politics**

**Week 17- April 24 & 26: Scientific Study of Politics Revisited and Wrap Up**

**Finals Week: Final Exam**