PolS 235: POLITICAL RESEARCH METHODS AND APPROACHES

Fall 2015

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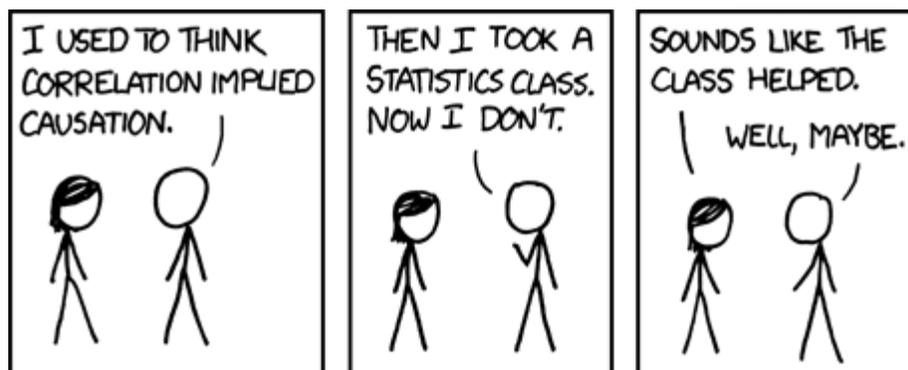
Instructor: Florian Justwan, Ph.D.
Class: Tuesday, Thursday; 12:30 pm - 01:45 pm (JEB 328)
Office Hours: Wednesday 2:00-5:00 & By Appointment (Administration 323)
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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course has three main goals. *First*, students should become familiar with the scientific study of politics (including but not limited to: hypothesis formulation, variable measurement, and bivariate hypothesis tests). *Second*, course participants are expected to gain a high degree of "statistical literacy" that allows them to identify misuses of statistics in everyday life. *Third*, students should become proficient with the statistical software package SPSS.

The course is organized as follows: after a short introduction which covers the essentials of scientific inquiry, the first part of the course is devoted to the issue of causal inference in the social sciences. We will explore the problems that researchers face when they attempt to identify causes of phenomena in the social world. In the second part of the class, we will take a closer look at the building blocks of quantitative research methods. We will spend a lot of time on matters related to measurement and operationalization and cover the uses and misuses of descriptive statistics. Finally, in the last part of the course, we will begin to turn our attention to the tools that enable researchers to test their hypotheses about the social world and to make causal inferences about political phenomena.

COURSE MATERIALS
You will need to buy three books for this class:
- Kellstedt, Paul, and Guy Whitten (2013). The Fundamentals of Political Science Research. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Pollock, Philip H. (2012). An SPSS Companion to Political Analysis. Washington, DC: CQ Press (*do NOT buy a used version. You will need the data CD*).
- Best, Joel (2008). Stat-Spotting: A Field Guide to Identifying Dubious Data. Berkeley: University of California Press.

The majority our weekly readings will come from these books (mostly: the Kellstedt and Whitten textbook). All other readings will be provided to you online. It is absolutely essential that you carefully read all of the required material prior to each class session. I expect that you take your responsibilities seriously. Failing to do so will both significantly impact your grade and the quality of our in-class activities.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADES
10%   Attendance & Participation
20%   Four Homework Assignments
20%   Midterm Exam (October 13)
25%   Take-home Final Exam (Due Date: December 18).
25%   Research Paper (Due Date: December 14).
    Part I: Research Question and Literature Review (5%)
    Part II: Theory and Hypothesis (5%)
    Part III: Descriptive Statistics (5%)
    Final Version: polished parts I – III **+** bivariate data analysis & conclusion (10%)

Attendance
Each unexcused absence will lower your final participation grade (calculated on a scale from 0 – 100) by 5 percent. I will take attendance every day. Therefore, it is essential that you show up on time. If you do come in late, it is your responsibility to approach me *directly after class* (as long as I am still in the classroom) and make sure that I checked your name on the class roll.

Participation (10 percent)
Your participation grade will be based on the quality and quantity of your oral contributions during class. As stated above, I expect you to read and think about the assigned material prior to our meetings. In class, you should be able to discuss the main ideas and demonstrate that you are able to apply them to political research. Please note that your participation grade is only affected by *active* participation. If you don't talk, your final participation grade will be a 60 (minus 5 x *number of unexcused absences*). If you have any concerns about your participation grade, contact me as soon as possible.

<u>Homework Assignments</u> (20 percent)

There will be 4 homework assignments over the course of the term. Each assignment is graded on a scale from 0 to 100 and counts towards 5 percent of your final grade. The due dates can be found in the course schedule below. Late assignments receive an automatic 50 percent grade penalty.

<u>Exams</u>

There are 2 exams in this class – 1 midterm (20 percent) and 1 final exam (25 percent). Exam material will be drawn from the following: lecture notes, assigned required readings, class discussion, lab meetings, and any other supplementary materials. **All exams are cumulative.** One piece of advice: Do the required readings, attend class, and participate and you will be well prepared for both exams.

<u>Paper</u> (25 percent)

As part of your final grade you will also have to write a research paper in which you apply the tools introduced in this class. The paper will be divided into 4 parts. More information will be provided in class. You may write this research paper with a classmate of your choosing. In fact, I encourage you to do so. After all, social science research is collaborative. The expectations and requirements are exactly the same for working with a coauthor as not.

GRADE SCALE

Note: final grades will NOT be rounded

    A = 90.00-100.00
    B = 80.00-89.99
    C = 70.00-79.99
    D = 60.00-69.99
    F = 00.00-59.99

COURSE POLICIES

Absences & Make-Up Exams

As stated above, attendance is absolutely essential if you want to succeed in this class. You are permitted TWO unexcused absences. Every other absence will lower your participation grade by 5 percent, unless you have a valid excuse (medical, academic, etc.) AND proper documentation. Make-up exams are ONLY offered for documented absences. If you know in advance that you have a conflict preventing you from taking one of the exams at the scheduled date, please contact me as soon as possible.

Academic Honesty

All students are responsible for maintaining the highest standards of honesty and integrity in every phase of their academic careers. The penalties for academic dishonesty are severe, and ignorance of the academic honesty policy is not an acceptable defense. Each student must meet the standards laid down in the University of Idaho's "Student Code of Conduct"

(http://www.uidaho.edu/DOS/judicialaffairs/studentcodeofconduct). I will report all instances of academic dishonesty.

<u>Disabilities</u>
Students who need note-takers or are supposed to take their tests at Disability Services should let me know as soon as possible so we can make accommodations for you.

<u>Classroom Etiquette</u>
The use of cell phones, iPods, iPads, or any other electronic device will not be permitted during class meetings. I will permit you a laptop ONLY to take notes and review online readings. Please note that I reserve the right to reverse this policy at any time.

<u>Grade Appeals</u>
If you believe your exams or assignments have been graded unfairly, you can appeal your grade in written form. You have to hand in your appeal on the day after the assignment or exam was returned. Comparisons to other students' graded assignments will not be accepted for a complaint. Hand in the original copy of the graded assignment/exam together with the written appeal. I will reevaluate your grade in light of the argument that you made. However, the new grade may be the same, higher, or lower than the original grade and it will be final.

COURSE SCHEDULE (This is only a tentative schedule for this course. Content may change)

		PART I: Introduction – Theories in Political Science
Week 1		**Introduction**
	August 25 (T)	No Class
	August 27 (R)	This Syllabus. Kellstedt and Whitten Chapter 1
Week 2		**Research Questions, Theories and Hypotheses**
	Sept. 1 (T)	Kellstedt and Whitten Chapter 2
	Sept. 3 (R)	M. Fuhrmann (2009). "Spreading Temptation: Proliferation and Peaceful Nuclear Cooperation Agreements." In: International Security 34 (1), pp. 7-41 (**read 7 – 23 only;** *focus on the questions handed out to you*).
Week 3		**Philosophy of Science**
	Sept. 8 (T)	• S. Okasha (2002). Philosophy of Science. A Very Short Introduction. Oxford, Oxford University Press. Chapters 1 and 5. • G. Taubes (2007). "Do We Really Know What Makes Us Healthy?" In: New York Times Magazine. Available at: www.nytimes.com/2007/09/16/magazine/16epidemiology-t.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0
	Sept. 10 (R)	Paper Writing Workshop Homework 1 Due Today!
		PART II: Causality and the Logic of Control
Week 4		**Causality and the Variety of Research Designs in the Social Sciences**
	Sept. 15 (T)	Kellstedt and Whitten Chapter 3.
LAB A	Sept. 17 (R)	Pollock Chapter 1 and 11.
Week 5		**The Logic of Control in Qualitative Research Methods**
	Sept. 22 (T)	• K. He (2013). "Case Study and the Comparative Method." • D. Posner (2004). "The Political Salience of Cultural Difference: Why Chewas and Tumbukas Are Allies in Zambia and Adversaries in Malawi." In: American Political Science Review 98 (4), pp. 529-545 (**read 529 – 540 only;** *focus on the questions handed out to you*).

	Sept. 24 (R)	D. Acemoglu and J. Robinson (2012). Why Nations Fail. Crown Publishers: New York, Chapter 1 ("So Close and Yet So Different").
		PART III: Building Blocks of Quantitative Methods
Week 6		**Measurement and Operationalization I**
	Sept. 29 (T)	Kellstedt and Whitten Chapter 5 (pp. 92 – 114 only).
	Oct. 1 (R)	Wheelan Chapter 3. Part I of Term Paper ("Research Question and Literature Review") Due Today!
Week 7		**Measurement and Operationalization II**
	Oct. 6 (T)	J. B. Johnson & H.T. Reynolds (2012). Political Science Research Methods. Sage: Los Angeles, Chapter 9.
	Oct. 8 (R)	No assigned readings. Start preparing for Midterm Exam!
Week 8		**Midterm Exam Week**
	Oct. 13 (T)	*MIDTERM EXAM*
LAB B	Oct. 15 (R)	Application: Content Analysis with SPSS
Week 9		**Descriptive Statistics I**
	Oct. 20 (T)	Kellstedt and Whitten Chapter 5 (pp. 114 – 126). Part II of Term Paper (Theory and Hypothesis) Due Today!
LAB C	Oct. 22 (R)	Pollock Chapters 2 and 3.
Week 10		**Descriptive Statistics II**
	Oct. 27 (T)	Best, Chapters A - E. Homework 2 Due Today!
	Oct. 29 (R)	• Best, Chapters F-L. • N. Silver (2012). The Signal and the Noise. Why so many predictions fail – but some don't. New York, Penguin Books. Chapter 7.

		PART IV: Hypothesis Testing in Political Science
Week 11		**Experiments**
	Nov. 3 (T)	• Homework 3 due today! • Kellstedt and Whitten Chapter 4 (pp. 69 – 82).
	Nov. 5 (R)	• M. Tomz and J. L. Weeks (2013). "Public Opinion and the Democratic Peace." In: American Political Science Review 107 (4), 849-865 (**pp. 849 – 858 only!).** • S. Iyengar (2011). "Laboratory Experiments." In: James Druckman, Donald Green et al. (eds). Cambridge Handbook of Experimental Political Science, Chapter 6.
Week 12		**Probability and Statistical Inference**
	Nov. 10 (T)	• Kellstedt and Whitten Chapter 6. • Wheelan Chapter 10.
	Nov. 12 (R)	Paper Peer-Review Workshop. Part III of Term Paper (Descriptive Statistics) Due Today!
Week 13		**Bivariate Hypothesis Testing I (Crosstabs)**
	Nov. 17 (T)	Kellstedt and Whitten Chapter 7 (**pages 145 – 156 only**). Pollock Chapter 4.
LAB D	Nov. 19 (R)	Pollock Chapter 5. Homework 4 due today.
Week 14		**Thanksgiving Break**
	Nov. 24 (T)	No class.
	Nov. 26 (R)	No class.
Week 15		**Bivariate Hypothesis Testing II (Difference of means and Correlation Coefficients)**
	Dec. 1 (T)	Kellstedt and Whitten Chapter 7 (**pages 156 – 170**).
LAB E	Dec. 3 (R)	Pollock Chapter 6 and 7.

Week 16		**Outlook: Regression Analysis**
	Dec. 8 (T)	• Kellstedt and Whitten Chapter 8. • Wheelan Chapter 11.
LAB F	Dec. 10 (R)	Pollock Chapter 8.
Week 17		**Final Exam Week**
	Dec. 14 (M) at 11:59 pm	Due date for Final Version of Term Paper (polished versions of sections I – III **plus** bivariate data analysis and conclusion)
	Dec. 15 (T) at 8:00 am	Take-home final exam emailed to all course participants.
	Dec. 18 (F) at 11:59 pm	Due date for take-home Final Exam (email: fjustwan@uidaho.edu)