

Methods of Political Research

POSC 230 – Spring 2021
Carleton College
(Tuesday & Thursday 8:15-10am)
Weitz Center 235

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Office Hours: Wed. 8:15am - 10am. Thurs. 1-3pm. and by appt.

“In some cases we learn more by looking for the answer to a question and not finding it than we do from learning the answer itself.” – Lloyd Alexander.

“Statistics is the grammar of science.” – Karl Pearson.

Course Description

As students of politics, we constantly encounter causal claims being made by academics, politicians and in the media. In this course, you will explore and gain the methods needed to test and confirm whether or not these claims are actually true. Does foreign military intervention in civil war save lives? Do larger welfare states lower economic growth? How likely is China to democratize in the next 10 years? These questions are all ones that can potentially be addressed through social science research methods. In this course, you will gain the introductory tools that will prepare you to adjudicate between competing causal claims.

Second, you will become conversant in the basic language of statistics, which underlies a large portion of the methods used in political science today. As part of this, you will gain valuable computer skills using R statistical software, an increasingly prominent programming language.

Finally, you will learn to carry out and present independent research. Over the course of the term, you will complete a series of assignments that will culminate in final research paper and poster. You will present the results of your research to your peers in the last two classes of the term.

Course Requirements and Expectations

The best way to learn methods is through hands on experience. Because of this, during class time I will strive to minimize the amount of time spent in lecture and maximize the

time spent in interactive activities that will provide you with the skills necessary to become proficient in methods. In order for this to work successfully, you will NEED to come to class prepared to engage with the material covered that day – failure to do so will make it difficult, if not impossible, for you to gain the skills necessary to do well in the class.

I strongly encourage collaboration amongst students when working on assignments, however all of the work that you turn in must be your own. Copying the work of other students is considered cheating and will be referred to the Carleton Honor Board for disciplinary action.

Texts

- Pollock, Philip H. *The Essentials of Political Analysis*, 6th edition (2019). All readings from this textbook are indicated by EPA: *Chapter X*.
- Freeze, Kent and Melanie Freeze *Political Analysis with R: For the Course*. This is a simple tutorial that introduces you to the statistical software that we will be using for this course. All readings are indicated by PAR: *For the Course*.
- Other course readings will be made available via Moodle.

Grading

Your grade will be based on the following:

Quizzes (8 Total @ 2% Each)	16%
Class Participation and in-class work	15%
Final Paper (May 24)	23%
Final Paper Presentation (May 27 or June 1)	7%
Final Paper Poster (May 26)	7%
Weekly Assignment (8 Total)	32%
Research Question and Hypothesis (Apr. 5)	4%
Literature Review (Apr. 12)	4%
Research Design (Apr. 19)	4%
Graphing and Univariate Statistics (Apr. 26)	4%
Introductory Hypothesis Testing (May 4)	4%
Correlation and Regression (May 10)	4%
Logit and Regression Diagnostics (May 17)	4%
Qualitative Research Assignment (May 31)	4%
Total	100%

Quizzes - 16%

Over the course of the term, we will have 8 in class quizzes (an average of one quiz a week). These quizzes will be completed in class, and will also be fairly short (timed for no longer

than 5 minutes), and will also be open book. Quizzes will be at the start of class, and will *always* be cumulative (covering any material we have read or covered up to and including that date). Your lowest quiz score will be dropped.

I will only give out the quiz in-class, or if you have an excused absence in which you inform me *prior* to the start of class that you will not be able to attend that day. I will not allow students to make up a missed quiz for any other reason.

Class Preparation, Attendance and Participation - 5%

Class participation is mandatory. You are expected to come to class prepared and having read the assigned material for the day. The readings for the day will form a key component of our class discussions and work for the day – please come prepared!

In-Class Group Work - 10%

Research methods are best learned through hands on experience. Accordingly, in addition to the class readings, you will have a group assignment for each class which we will cover in class (these are all listed at the end of PAR: For the Course). These in-class assignments are designed to be completed within an approximately 45 minute time period. These assignments are designed to give practice doing the methods which you will then apply to your own research project in the weekly assignment that you turn in. As such, it is designed to be collaborative, and we will take advantage of the classroom to highlight and share how different people have approached and answered the in-class group assignments.

Please show your completed in-class work to me. I will give a very quick grade for this work – my concern is not so much in providing a grade, but to give you a low stakes opportunity in which I can tell you whether you are doing something wrong prior to doing it in your weekly homework assignment. These will have a very quick grading scale: 2=Generally on target; 1=Something is pretty wrong; 0=You never sent me anything, or what you did send was completely incomprehensible and terrifying. You will always be allowed to turn in a revision if you wish a higher grade with no penalty.

For the R in-class assignments, we will utilize pair programming. One of you will be the “driver”, and the other will observe and give suggestions. You will turn in the assignment for both of you. You should be able to finish these in-class, but there may occasionally be times that you are not able to do so and may need to work on them outside of class. The final due time for these will be the last day of class (ie. the Tuesday in 10th week) at 5:00pm.

Final Paper - 23%

Your work in the course will culminate in a final research paper in which you use and present quantitative data. The final paper will be between 15 and 20 double spaced pages (not including bibliography).

Final Paper Presentation - 7%

At the end of the term we will have a paper presentation session in which you present your paper to your peers.

Final Paper Poster - 7%

In addition to your final paper, you will also turn in a final poster, similar to what you would present at an academic conference (or for your Senior comps project).

Eight Weekly Assignments - 32%

Each week (with the exception of 9th week when your final paper is due) you will have an assignment due. These assignments build toward or relate to your final research paper - as a result, it is critical that you keep current in the weekly assignments. The weekly assignments are included at the end of the R manual for the course.

Course Policies

Grading Policies

I will assign grades using the following scale : A (93.33), A- (90), B+ (86.67), B (83.33), B- (80), C+ (76.67), C (73.33), C- (70), D+ (66.67), D(63.33) D- (60) F (Below 60). I do not round your final grade up or down (so if you receive a 93.327, you will receive an A- for a final grade).

Additional Grading Policies:

1. I will not receive grade complaints if more than one week has passed after the assignment has been returned to you. Before I review your grade you must first:
 - Wait 24 hours.
 - Schedule a time to meet with me to discuss your grade.
 - Submit a formal appeal in writing (email is sufficient—but be clear that it is the appeal in the subject heading) that clearly identifies content in the assignment and the reasons why you think your grade should be changed. These appeals should refer to specific things in the assignment, and not to vague reasons like “I worked really hard.”

The second grade, whether higher or lower, will become your grade on the assignment.

2. Late assignments are not tolerated. Your grade will be lowered 5 points for each 24 hour period it is late (the exception is for the reading questions/comments, which will not be accepted if late). For example, if the assignment is due on Wednesday at 5:00pm and you complete it between Wednesday at 5:01pm and Thursday at 5:00pm,

the highest grade you can make is 95. If you complete it between Thursday 5:01pm and Friday 5pm, the highest grade possible will be a 90. And so forth.

3. The **ONLY** acceptable (not penalized) excuses for not completing an assignment on time are family emergencies or illnesses. However, in these cases, I will arrange to give you extra time **ONLY** if you communicate with me **BEFORE** the assignment is due and you provide **DOCUMENTATION** of the circumstance.

Electronics in Class Policy

Given the nature of this class, all students will have access to a computer at all times. You may also feel free to bring your own laptop if you prefer to work on it (as opposed to the computers in the classroom). However, I expect you to be responsible in your use of electronic equipment: please avoid visiting social networking sites, or otherwise browsing the internet on sites unrelated to the course. I would also recommend you read through the discussion (including comments), *Computers in the Classroom*, to think about the possible pros and cons of using computers in a classroom setting. Individuals who abuse this privilege will find their participation grade reduced. Please turn off all cell phones during class.

Academic Honesty

You are expected to abide by fundamental standards of academic honesty. A discussion of plagiarism can be found at: <https://apps.carleton.edu/campus/doc/integrity/>. All work is expected to be your own. Cheating, plagiarism (using someone else's words or ideas without properly citing them), and all forms of academic misconduct will not be tolerated and will be strictly handled according to university policy. If you are uncertain, cite your sources!

Disability-Related Accomodations

It is the policy of Carleton College to provide reasonable accommodations to students with documented disabilities. Students, however, are responsible for registering with Disabilities Services, in addition to making requests known to me in a timely manner. If you require accommodations in this class, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible (during the 1st week of the semester), so that appropriate arrangements can be made. The procedures for registering with Disabilities Services can be found at <http://apps.carleton.edu/disabilityservices/>.

Course Schedule

Readings should be completed prior to class. I reserve the right to make changes to the course schedule. I will alert you to any changes made in class, via email, and I will post the updated syllabus on Moodle.

Mar. 30: Course Overview

Apr. 1: Epistemology and Research Questions

- EPA: *Chapter 3* (pgs. 72-85).

Apr. 6: Academic Sources and Literature Reviews

- Jeffrey W Knopf. Doing a literature review. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 39(01):127–132, 2006
- PAR for the Course: Chapter 1

Apr. 8: Concepts and Measurement

- EPA: *Chapter 1*. (pgs. 1-27).
- PAR for the Course: Chapter 2, (Importing Data).

Apr. 13: Research Design

- EPA: *Chapter 4*. (pgs. 105-123).
- Adam Przeworski and Frank Salomon. *The Art of Writing Proposals*. Social Science Research Council, 1995
- PAR for the Course: Chapter 3, (Data Management and Cleaning).

Apr. 15: Data Description and Measures of Central Tendency and Dispersion

- EPA: *Chapter 2*. (pgs. 34-66).
- PAR for the Course, Chapter 4 (Describing Your Data).

Apr. 20: Making Comparisons and Simple Graphing

- EPA: *Chapter 3*. (pgs. 85-98).
- EPA: *Chapter 5*. (pgs. 134-161).
- PAR for the Course, Chapter 5, Data Visualization

Apr. 22: Distributions, Confidence Intervals and Univariate Statistics

- EPA: *Chapter 6*. (pgs. 167-195).
- PAR for the Course, Chapter 6.1 (Confidence Intervals)

Apr. 27: Comparison of means: T-tests

- EPA: *Chapter 7*. (pgs. 199-215; 231-234).
- PAR for the Course, Chapter 6.2 on (T-Tests).

Apr. 29: The Correlation Coefficient and Bivariate OLS Regression

- EPA: *Chapter 8*. (pgs. 239-257).
- PAR for the Course, Chapter 7 (Continuous Bivariate Relationships and Statistics)

May the 4th be with you: Multiple Regression

- EPA: *Chapter 8*. (pgs. 257-267).
- PAR for the Course, Chapter 8 (Multiple Regression).

May 6: Regression Diagnostics

- EPA: Chapter 8. (pgs. 267-272).
- PAR for the Course, Chapter 9 (Regression Diagnostics and Dealing with Regression Problems).

May 11: Logit Models

- EPA: *Chapter 9*. (pgs. 279-306).
- PAR for the Course, Chapter 10 (Logistic Regression).

May 13: Qualitative and Quantitative Compared

- Gary King, Robert Keohane, and Sidney Verba. *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton University Press, 1994 *Chapter 1*. (pgs. 3-33).

May 18: Direct Observation and Interviewing

- Brian Christopher Rathbun. Interviewing and qualitative field methods: pragmatism and practicalities. In *The Oxford handbook of political methodology*. 2008

May 20: Case Study Methodology

- Alexander George and Andrew Bennett. *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*. Mit Press, 2005 *Chapter 1*. (pgs. 3-36).

May 25: Research Ethics

- EPA: *Chapter 4*. (pgs. 123-127).

May 27: Presentations

- No assigned readings!
- Day one of Student Presentations!

June 1: Presentations

- No Assigned Readings!
- Day two of Student Presentations!