POL 130D: Introduction to Political Inquiry
Fall 2013

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Course Description and Goals

This course introduces key concepts and skills necessary for rigorous political science research. In a general sense, students will strengthen abilities to form inferences, make arguments and test hypotheses using various forms of evidence, both qualitative and quantitative. At a more practical level, the course will specifically focus on impact evaluation. That is, we will examine a number of ways to determine the effects of policy interventions, programs, events, institutions, etc.

With an emphasis on impact evaluation, students will not only develop important skills necessary for the completion of original research, such as that in a thesis or a career in academia, but students will also develop skills directly applicable to other careers in the private, public and non-profit sectors. Positions related to consulting, policymaking and program development all require a firm understanding of impact evaluation.

The course is meant to expose students to a broad array of approaches, techniques and skills, which means we will move quickly. The course will not be able to cover many of the topics in full detail, and students are encouraged to take other research methods class in the social sciences later in their studies. The first section of the course covers the foundational terms and concepts, including a primer on statistical inference. The second section turns to approaches that use existing, observational, evidence as the means to form inferences. We will cover the strengths, weaknesses, and good practices of both qualitative (comparative case studies) and quantitative (regression) modes of testing hypotheses and doing impact evaluation. The third section then covers experimental approaches that do not suffer from the key shortcoming of observational approaches (although experimental approaches may have their own shortcomings), which is the non-random assignment of the treatments. Finally, we cover techniques for collecting data that can be used in the qualitative or quantitative evaluation of programs or hypotheses, with a special emphasis on survey techniques.

This course is a modification of the course developed in spring 2013 by Dr. Edmund Malesky, who has generously shared his materials and experiences.
Required Texts


All other texts are either available online via the library’s website or will be provided on the course’s Sakai site.

Grading

Section attendance and participation: 10%

TA’s will take attendance in sections. In addition, a short assignment will be made available on Sakai every Wednesday afternoon for completion by Thursday at 4:45pm. Students will receive one point for attending their discussion section and one point for making a good-faith effort at completing the assignment. Students will not receive attendance credit if they are more than five minutes late, and students will not receive credit for late assignments (see the absences policy below). Collaboration on these weekly assignments is allowed, although each student must submit their own work and not copy that of another student.

3 Practicum Assignments (20% each): 60%

Students will complete three take-home practicum assignments, meant to reinforce the material covered in lecture, discussion and readings. Details of each assignment will be provided when they are distributed. The distribution and due dates are listed on the schedule below. Late practicum assignments will be reduced by one full letter grade per day late, starting with the day the assignment is due (see the absences policy below). Collaboration with other students is prohibited on these practicum assignments, although students are encouraged to make use of the time allotted in discussion section and office hours to address any questions. Students may discuss with one another their understanding of the concepts and methods covered in the course, but not in how they specifically apply to these assignments.

In-Class Final Exam: 30%

The final will be a comprehensive and cumulative assessment of how well you have mastered the material in the course. The format will be a mixture of short-answer responses to questions about concepts and methodology, as well as short-essay responses in which students explain how they would develop appropriate research designs for given scenarios.

Extra Credit:

In addition to these graded assignments, students enrolled in POL 130D are strongly encouraged to participate in the political science experimental subject pool. Students will need to participate in 2 hours of Political Science Research Pool
(PSRP) studies over the course of the semester to receive a 2% extra credit toward their final grade. More information about this option is available at: http://www.duke.edu/web/psrp. If you wish to participate, you can register at: http://duke-psrp.sona-systems.com.

Grading Scale

The practicum assignments and essay elements of the final exam will be graded on a 16-point scale that is basically a 4-point scale stretched out to 16 points. These grades will not be assigned based on the docking of points, but on the comprehensive assessment of the strength of the material. Grading standards used in the assignment of these values are provided at the end of this syllabus. The attendance/participation grade and the short-answer components of the final exam will be first converted to a percentage of the possible points possible and then assigned a letter grade based on the same scale.

Absences and Accommodations

If you cannot attend a section on time for medical or personal reasons, you are expected to contact your TA via email prior to the meeting time. Doing so will excuse you from section, although you are still expected to complete the weekly assignment. In special cases, you may be able to attend one of the other discussion sections, although you must receive permission ahead of time.

If you do not email your TA ahead of time but have a legitimate medical reason for your absence, you must submit a Short-Term Illness Notification Form (STINF). Requests to be excused from a weekly assignment or to have more time on a practicum assignment for medical reasons must also be accompanied with the submission of a STINF form. Absences from a final exam must be approved by your academic dean. If you are wrestling with a chronic illness or personal emergency of any sort, we strongly encourage you to be in touch with an academic dean, and/or with the Student Disability Access Office as appropriate.
Accommodations will only be considered for those students registered with the Student Disability Access Office and who inform the instructor at least two weeks in advance of when the accommodation is needed.

**Duke Community Standard**

Students are expected to strictly adhere to the Duke Community Standard in all of their work and participation, and violations will be enforced. As covered above, student collaboration is only permissible on the 1-point weekly assignments and in general discussion of the course concepts and methods for better understanding. Collaboration specifically on the completion of the practicum assignments or during the final exam is prohibited.

**Software**

Some of the weekly assignments and practicum assignments require the analysis of data. We will use R, which is free and open-source. Some instruction on how to use R will be covered during discussion section, but students are expected to download and install R prior to their first discussion section. Using R requires essentially two components. The first is the actual R software to do the analysis, which can be accessed at http://www.ats.ucla.edu/stat/r/icu/. The second component is the development of the syntax, written by you, that R will execute. Although a simple text editor can be used to write the syntax, we recommend RStudio, which can be downloaded for free here: http://www.rstudio.com/. You may find the following sites helpful in becoming familiar with R: http://www.ats.ucla.edu/stat/r/ & http://www.statmethods.net/interface/index.html.

**Schedule**

*Part I: Foundations*

8/26: Introduction: Hypothesis testing and program evaluation.


8/28: Concepts and hypotheses.

    Pollock chs. 1-3

9/4: Inquiry with qualitative data.

    KKV chs. 1-2

9/9: Making quantitative comparisons.
Pollock chs. 4-5

9/11: Hypothesis testing using statistical significance.

Pollock chs. 6-7. VIDEO

9/16: Causal Inference and counterfactuals. Practicum assignment 1 disseminated, due 9/23 at the beginning of class.

KKV ch. 3


Part II: Observational Approaches

9/18: Comparative case studies.


9/23: OLS. Practicum assignment 1 due.

Pollock ch. 8.


Pollock ch. 9

9/30: Case selection.

KKV chs. 4 & 6


10/2: Bias and endogeneity.

KKV ch. 5
Rogeberg, Ole. 2013. “Correlations between Cannabis Use and IQ Change in the Dunedin Cohort are Consistent with Confounding from Socioeconomic Status.” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*.

10/7: Interactive/conditional effects.


10/9: Exogenous sources of variation: Instrumental Variable (IV) and Regression Discontinuity (RD) designs.


10/16: Matching. *Practicum assignment 2 disseminated, due 10/23 at the beginning of class*.


10/21 Research presentations by Shahryar Minahs and Ben Radford

*Part III: Experimental Approaches*

10/23: Randomized control trials (RCTs). *Practicum assignment 2 due*.


10/28: Field experiments.


10/30: Laboratory experiments.


11/4: Natural experiments.


Part IV: Data Collection

11/11: Survey design.


Druckman, James. 2001. ”The Implications of Framing Effects for Citizen Competence.” Political Behavior 23(3) September: 227-256
11/13: Survey experiments. *Practicum assignment 3 disseminated, due 11/20 at the beginning of class.*


11/18: Survey implementation and aggregation.


12/2: Content analysis.


12/4: Impact evaluation and hypothesis testing in practice


**Grading Standards**

The following standards will be applied to the evaluation of assignments in the class.

**A** Exceptional Performance.

Consistently outstanding work on all course-related tasks at a level that distinguishes the student from other members of the class. A comprehensive and incisive command of the issues, literature, and substantive information relevant to the course. A frequently demonstrated exceptional capacity for original, creative, critical and logical thinking. The ability to master and integrate large amounts of factual material and abstract theories. An outstanding ability to discuss effectively course subject matter using both written and oral communication skills.

**A-** Excellent Performance.

Consistently strong work on all course-related tasks. A comprehensive command of the issues, literature, and substantive information relevant to the course. A clearly demonstrated capacity for original, creative, critical and logical thinking. Understands well and can integrate the relevant factual and theoretical material central to the course. A strong ability to discuss effectively course subject matter using both written and oral communication skills.

**B+** Very Good Performance.

Consistently above average work on all course-related tasks. A very good grasp of the issues, literature, and substantive information relevant to the course. A generally demonstrated capacity for original, creative, critical, and logical thinking. A very good command of factual and theoretical material, and some capacity to integrate the two. A solid ability to discuss effectively course subject matter using both written and oral communication skills.

**B** Good Performance.

Good and generally consistent work on all course-related tasks. A general understanding of the issues, literature, and substantive information relevant to the course. Modest evidence of the capacity for original, creative, critical and logical thinking. A good understanding of factual and theoretical material, but limited evidence of the capacity to integrate the two. A basic ability to discuss effectively course subject matter using both written and oral communication skills.
B- Satisfactory Performance

Satisfactory work on course-related tasks. A reasonable understanding of the issues, literature, and substantive information relevant to the course. An infrequently demonstrated capacity for original, creative, critical and logical thinking. Understands at a basic level the facts and theories related to the course, but demonstrates weak integration skills. A limited or inconsistent ability to discuss effectively course subject matter using both written and oral communication skills.

C+/C/C- Adequate Performance

Adequate performance on course-related tasks. An understanding of the basic elements of the issues, literature, and substantive information relevant to the course. A rarely demonstrated capacity for original, creative, critical and logical thinking. An inability to go beyond a recitation of basic factual material related to the class. Demonstrated weaknesses in the ability to discuss effectively course subject matter using both written and oral communication skills.

D/D+ Minimal Passing Performance.

Barely acceptable work on course-related tasks. A generally superficial and often inconsistent familiarity with the issues, literature, and substantive information relevant to the course. A failure to demonstrate the capacity for original, creative, critical and logical thinking related to course content. An uneven understanding of basic factual material related to the course; no evidence of fact/theory integration. Demonstrates significant gaps in the ability to discuss effectively course subject matter using both written and oral communication skills.

F Unacceptable Performance

Fails to meet minimum course expectations. Unable to understand even the most basic elements of the issues, literature, and substantive information relevant to the course. Demonstrates an inability to engage in coherent written or oral discussion of course material. Does not satisfy specific course expectations with respect to attendance, deadlines, participation, etc.