

# UNDERSTANDING POLITICAL SCIENCE RESEARCH

David A. Siegel, Fall 2012

## Course information:

Course Number: POS3713-01  
Time: TR 3:35 - 4:50 pm  
Place: WJB 2004  
Course website: Blackboard (BB)

## Contact Information:

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Office: 541 Bellamy Building  
OH: Thu 1:30-3:00 pm

## Course Description

This course will introduce you to the scientific method as applied by political scientists in their investigation of political phenomena in a variety of contexts. We will begin by briefly considering the development of the study of politics as a science, and then move through the social scientific method, applying what we learn to everyday political events. The bulk of the course will be spent in consideration of various descriptive, inferential, and associational statistics that help political scientists answer the questions that they pursue in their research.

## Course Materials

The required reading for class comes from a textbook available for purchase at the campus bookstore and Bill's Books:

Paul M. Kellstedt & Guy D. Whitten. 2009. *The Fundamentals of Political Science Research*, Cambridge University Press.

I expect you to read the material *before* class and come with questions. You will get much more out of your education if you actively engage the material. This is particularly important as I will focus my lectures on the material I feel most benefits from further discussion, sometimes moving quickly over other material. It is your responsibility to make sure you understand it all.

You are also strongly encouraged to take advantage of the plethora of opportunities election season provides to explore a scientific approach to politics. Several blogs provide a good place to start, and we'll sometimes talk about the information on them. Here are a few to get you going:

- <http://fivethirtyeight.blogs.nytimes.com/>
- <http://themonkeycage.org/>
- Pretty much anything from the Blogroll listed at <http://themonkeycage.org/>

# Course Requirements & Evaluation

There will be three mechanisms for evaluation and the assignment of grades in the course:

- Problem sets (20%; 5% each for the best four scores on the five problem sets)
- Unit exams (60%; 20% each for the best three scores on the four unit exams)
- Cumulative final exam (20%)

## Five Problem Sets

There will be five problem sets. These are homework assignments that give you practice doing some of the technical work in the course. **Each assignment will become available on the course BB site (under Assignments) five days before it is due. Each must be submitted to BB by 6 pm on the date it is due. No late problem sets will be accepted and there are no make-up problem sets. The course schedule below provides *rough* dates these are due, but these dates are subject to change. It is your responsibility to ensure your problem sets are turned in before the date due; missing an assignment because the date due did not match the *rough* date given in the syllabus is not a valid excuse.** I will drop the lowest problem set score, so your best *four* scores on the five problem sets will count for 20% of your course grade.

## Four Exams

There will be four ‘midterm’ exams. Your best three scores on these exams will count (20% each) toward your course grade. The exams will have multiple choice and true/false questions, and you will mark your answers on a scantron (bubble) sheet. ***You must bring a pencil to the exam.*** Exams will be given on the following dates:

1. Tuesday, Sep 25
2. Thursday, Oct 11
3. Thursday, Nov 1
4. Tuesday, Dec 4

The make-up exam policy can be found at the end of the syllabus. The questions on the exam will cover the material in the reading, but many questions will be inspired by the classroom meetings. I will post on the BB site the lecture slides I have presented in class at least 48 hours prior to each exam.

## Cumulative Final Exam

The final exam will cover the material on the four unit exams. The exam will have multiple choice and true false questions, and you will mark your answers on a scantron (bubble) sheet. ***You must bring a pencil to the exam.*** The final exam is open notes and open book. However, you may not use any other electronic device beyond a dedicated calculator; this includes cell phones. All work must be your own—communication with classmates or anyone else is forbidden.

The final exam will be given from 7:30-9:30 a.m. on Thursday, December 13th ([http://registrar.fsu.edu/dir\\_class/fall/exam\\_schedule.htm](http://registrar.fsu.edu/dir_class/fall/exam_schedule.htm)). There will be no early or late exams: you are responsible for making yourself available to take the exam on that date and during the scheduled time.

## Class Meeting & Reading Schedule

### **Tue Aug 28:**

No assigned reading.

Take roll (note: per university policy, you will be dropped from the course if you do not attend this day).

### **Thu Aug 30: No Class**

## Unit 1: Science, Theory and Causation

### **Tue Sep 4: Science and Politics**

K&W chap 1, pp. 1-19.

### **Thu Sep 6: Theory Building 1**

K&W chap 2, pp. 22-31.

### **Tue Sep 11: Theory Building 2**

K&W chap 2, pp. 31-43.

### **Thu Sep 13: Cause and Effect**

K&W chap 3, pp. 45-65.

### **Tue Sep 18: No Class**

### **Thu Sep 20: Review**

**Tue Sep 25: Unit Exam 1**

## **Measurement & Descriptive Statistics**

**Thu Sep 27: Research Design**

K&W chap 4, pp. 67-84.

**Tue Oct 2: Measurement**

K&W chap 5, pp. 85-102.

**Thu Oct 4: Descriptive Statistics**

K&W chap 6, pp. 104-118.

**Tue Oct 9: Review**

Problem Set #1 due: means, medians, etc.

**Thu Oct 11: Unit Exam 2**

## **Statistical Inference & Hypothesis Testing**

**Tue Oct 16: Statistical Inference**

K&W chap 7, pp. 120-132.

**Thu Oct 18:  $\chi^2$  Tests**

K&W chap 7, pp. 134-145.

**Tue Oct 23: Correlation**

K&W chap 8, pp. 150-156.

Problem Set #2 due:  $\chi^2$

**Thu Oct 25: Difference of Means Tests**

K&W chap 8, pp. 145-150.

**Tue Oct 30: Review**

Problem Set #3 due: correlation coefficient, etc.

**Thu Nov 1: Unit Exam 3**

# Regression

## **Tue Nov 6: Bivariate Regression 1**

K&W chap 9, pp. 159-172.

## **Thu Nov 8: Bivariate Regression 2**

K&W chap 9, pp. 172-182.

## **Tue Nov 13: Multiple Regression 1**

K&W chap 10, pp. 183-188.

## **Thu Nov 15: Multiple Regression 2**

K&W chap 10, pp. 188-200.

**Problem set #4 due: bivariate regression.**

## **Tue Nov 20: Dummy Variables**

K&W chap 11, pp. 202-211.

## **Thu Nov 22: Thanksgiving; No Class**

## **Tue Nov 27: Logit Models**

K&W chap 11, pp. 212-20.

## **Thu Nov 29: Review**

**Problem set #5 due: multiple regression.**

## **Tue Dec 4: Unit Exam 4**

## **Thu Dec 6: Full Course Review**

## **Thu Dec 13:**

Final Exam, 7:30-9:30 am

# Course Policies

**Late Work:** I will not accept late problem sets. Unit exams may be taken on days other than those given on the syllabus **only** under **prior agreement** with the instructor. It is your responsibility to secure this agreement **immediately** upon learning of any reason you may not be able to take the exam on the date scheduled. The final exam may not be moved; a missed exam due to a documented emergency must be made up as soon as possible.

**Courtesy:** Please do not leave class early or arrive late; it is disruptive to your fellow students.

Please silence all electronic devices in class. I will endeavor to answer e-mails promptly, but with a large and technical class understand that my response may not be immediate. The use of BB's discussion forums, particularly for technical questions about the stats programs you will use on the problem sets, is greatly encouraged. You will find that you will often learn as much helping others as you do working on your own.

**Grading:** I will use the following grading scale: 100-93 (A), 92-90 (A-), 89-87 (B+), 86-83 (B), 82-80 (B-), 79-77 (C+), 76-73 (C), 72-70 (C-), 69-67 (D+), 66-63 (D), 62-60 (D-), 59-0 (F).

**University Attendance Policy:** Excused absences include documented illness, deaths in the family and other documented crises, call to active military duty or jury duty, religious holy days, and official University activities. These absences will be accommodated in a way that does not arbitrarily penalize students who have a valid excuse. Consideration will also be given to students whose dependent children experience serious illness.

**Academic Honor Policy:** The Florida State University Academic Honor Policy outlines the University's expectations for the integrity of students' academic work, the procedures for resolving alleged violations of those expectations, and the rights and responsibilities of students and faculty members throughout the process. Students are responsible for reading the Academic Honor Policy and for living up to their pledge to "...be honest and truthful and... [to] strive for personal and institutional integrity at Florida State University." (Florida State University Academic Honor Policy, found at <http://dof.fsu.edu/honorpolicy.htm>.)

**Americans With Disabilities Act:** Students with disabilities needing academic accommodation should: (1) register with and provide documentation to the Student Disability Resource Center; and (2) bring a letter to the instructor indicating the need for accommodation and what type. This should be done during the first week of class. This syllabus and other class materials are available in alternative format upon request. For more information about services available to FSU students with disabilities, contact the: Student Disability Resource Center

874 Traditions Way  
108 Student Services Building  
Florida State University  
Tallahassee, FL 32306-4167  
(850) 644-9566 (voice)  
(850) 644-8504 (TDD)  
sdr@admin.fsu.edu  
<http://www.disabilitycenter.fsu.edu/>

**Syllabus Change Policy:** Except for changes that substantially affect implementation of the evaluation (grading) statement, this syllabus is a guide for the course and is subject to change with advance notice. This includes problem set and exam dates, though every effort will be made to keep to the schedule.