

POL 51: The Scientific Study of Politics

FALL 2008

Lecture: MW 8:00–9:20, 2016 Haring

Recitation: MW: 9:30–9:50, 2016 Haring

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Course Description

Why are you here? Apart from the answer, “this is a required class,” many of you probably do not have a much better response than this. Nevertheless, it is almost surely the case that all of you have, from time to time, thought about politics. Perhaps you voted in the most recent election. Many millions of Americans did vote; an even greater proportion, however, *did not* vote. Perhaps you intend to vote in the November 4th election? Why? What leads some to vote, others not to vote? Maybe you’ve thought a lot about the war in Iraq. Why, despite low approval ratings, has the President for the most part “stayed the course” with respect to his Iraq policy? Or perhaps you have thought about some social issue, for example illegal immigration, abortion, or global warming. What are the socio-political implications of the Wall Street bailout program? Each of these issues are divisive, characterized by demonstrative support and opposition. Given the nature of these kinds of issues, how do policy changes take place (or not take place)? If you came from another country, one characterized by having multiple political parties and a different kind of electoral system (the U.S., by the way, effectively only has two political parties), you might spend some time thinking about how governments actually form. You may also be concerned, as a citizen, with how long these governments last. These questions, these concerns, are precisely the kinds of issues political scientists grapple with. Understanding politics—really understanding politics—requires more than a simple cursory examination of the local newspaper, your favorite blog, or a preferred cable news outlet. In this class, we are going to think about analyzing politics, about how political scientists think about the world. To that end, we are going to concern ourselves with the theory and method of contemporary political analysis.

The course will look at different kinds of analytical frameworks and ask how these frameworks help us understand important political problems. Additionally, we will concern ourselves with measurement of theoretical concepts and hypothesis testing. To that end, it will be necessary to think about working with data. How do we collect data, display it in a useful way? How do we test for associations (or relationships) between two or more political variables? How do we evaluate causal claims and how might we *make* causal claims? These are the precise questions this class is concerned with. To successfully complete this

class, you will be asked to complete several reading assignments as well as finish several short writing assignments and problem sets. Be warned, the topics in this class will demand careful attention to the reading and to lectures. Further, later in the quarter, you will be asked to work with political data and to perform some basic statistical analyses on these data.

Course Requirements

The intent of this course is to give you some exposure to the systematic study of politics and political data. To that end, you will be asked to complete a number of reading assignments from the principal text as well as a number of outside readings drawn either from the popular press or from scholarly political science journals. Most of the articles I will ask you to read are available for download from JStor (www.jstor.org). UC-Davis is a subscribing member to this site and if you are using a UC computer (i.e. one having a UC IP address), you can utilize this site. Note also, you can make use of JStor on your home computer, but you will need to set up a proxy server. If you go to the UC-Davis library's website, you can obtain information on how to do this. Apart from readings, I'm going to insist you be prepared to discuss some of the assigned readings, both in the main lecture and in your break-out discussion groups. Discussion and participation are one of the main ways we can gauge whether or not you are "getting" the material. Of course reading is not the only task you will need to do. I'm going to assign you several problem sets over the course of the quarter. By "problem set," I simply mean assignments that will involve writing and/or analysis of political data and political puzzles. Sometimes these problem sets will be open-ended, insofar as the answer will be dependent on the issues *you* choose to examine; other times, the problem sets will be closed-ended: there will be known right and wrong answers! The content and structure of the problem sets will be discussed in detail in class and in a separate document. Finally, there will be two exams, a midterm and final exam. The breakdown of your grade goes as follows:

- Participation/Discussion: 5 percent
- Problem Sets: 45 percent
- Midterm Exam: 25 percent
- Final Exam: 25 percent

To successfully complete this course (as with any course), you will need to take it seriously. Despite the fact this is a "required" course and hence interest (among some of you) will not be as high as electives, I can assure you *I* take this class seriously. I will expect high quality work, regular attendance to class, meaningful participation in lectures and discussions, and courteousness and decorum in both lecture and discussion. If your performance is subpar, if you miss deadlines, or if you miss class, your grade will suffer.

Course Policies

All exams must be taken at the time prescribed in the syllabus. Homework and problem sets are due on the date given to you in class. Late problem sets *will not be accepted*. Problem sets that are e-mailed to me or to the teaching assistants will *not be accepted*, unless otherwise noted and authorized by me. In saying problem sets will not be accepted, this means you will receive a grade of 0 on that particular problem set. You are also required to become familiar with the UC Davis Code of Academic Conduct (<http://sja.ucdavis.edu/cac.html>). Cheating, plagiarism, and harassment in any form will

not be tolerated. Do not do these things. Also, in lecture and in discussions, cell phones must be turned off. Usage of cell phones (or any other personal communication devices) in class may affect your participation grade. Usage of cell phones (or any other personal communication devices) during exams will be viewed as cheating.

With respect to students with disabilities, students requesting classroom accommodation must first register with the Dean of Students Office. The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the Instructor when requesting accommodation.

Readings

Two books are required. They are Johnson et. al. (2008) *Political Science Research Methods* published by CQ Press and Verzani's *Using R for Introductory Statistics* published by Chapman and Hall. A third book is optional. It is Fox's *A Mathematical Primer for Social Statistics* published by Sage. Several articles are assigned. Clickable links can be found in the itinerary below.

Course Itinerary

Sept. 29: Introduction

Oct. 1: The Vocabulary of Political Analysis

Readings:

- Johnson and Reynolds, Chapters 1 and 2.
- Verzani, Chapter 1, Appendix A.

Oct. 6–8: Theory, Hypotheses, and Data

Readings:

- Johnson and Reynolds, Chapter 3.

Oct. 13–15: Measurement

Readings:

- Johnson and Reynolds, Chapter 4.
- “Levels of Measurement and Political Research: An Optimistic View.” Author(s): William G. Jacoby
Source: *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 43, No. 1 (Jan., 1999), pp. 271-301.
<http://psfaculty.ucdavis.edu/bsjjones/jacoby.pdf>

Oct. 20–22: Sampling and Survey Research

Readings:

- Johnson and Reynolds, Chapters 7, 10.
- Verzani, Chapter 5–6.
- “Sample Matching: Representative Sampling from Internet Panels.” Author: Douglas Rivers.
<http://psfaculty.ucdavis.edu/bsjjones/rivers.pdf>

Oct. 27: Exam 1: Midterm

Oct. 29–Nov. 3: Fun with Numbers I: Describing Distributions and Political Science

Readings:

- Verzani, Chapter 5–6 (redux).

Nov. 5, 10: Fun with Numbers II: Univariate Statistics and Political Science

Readings:

- Johnson and Reynolds, Chapter 11.
- Verzani, Chapter 2 (review Chapter 1)

Nov. 12, 17: Fun with Numbers III: Bivariate Statistics and Political Science

Readings:

- Johnson and Reynolds, Chapter 12.
- Verzani, Chapters 3, 7–8.

Nov. 19–26: Fun with Numbers IV: Using Statistics to Try and Understand Politics

Readings:

- Johnson and Reynolds, Chapter 12 continued.
- Verzani, Chapter 10.
- “How Not to Lie with Statistics: Avoiding Common Mistakes in Quantitative Political Science.” Author(s): Gary King Source: *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 30, No. 3 (Aug., 1986), pp. 666-687.

<http://psfaculty.ucdavis.edu/bsjjones/king.pdf>

Dec. 2–4: Experimental Design and Other Approaches for Inference.

Readings:

- Johnson and Reynolds, Chapter 5.
- “Counterfactuals and Hypothesis Testing in Political Science.” Author(s): James D. Fearon Source: *World Politics*, Vol. 43, No. 2 (Jan., 1991), pp. 169-195.

<http://psfaculty.ucdavis.edu/bsjjones/fearon.pdf>

- *Science* 312, 1898 (2006); William P. Butz, et al. “Some Frontiers in Social Science.”

<http://psfaculty.ucdavis.edu/bsjjones/butz.pdf>

Dec. 13: Exam 2: Thursday, December 11 at 3:30 pm