Political Science 285 Political Science as a Social Science: Understanding Politics through Research and Data

University of Washington Winter 2022

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Office Hours: Mondays and Wednesdays, 5:00-6:00, through the Zoom link at the top of the course's Canvas page. email: masmith@uw.edu

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Overview of Class:

Most social science classes focus on the theories, concepts, and findings that have emerged from research in a particular area, rather than the research process itself. Our class will reverse that emphasis. We'll get "under the hood" of research in political science to understand how to design and interpret a research study. The topics to be covered include identifying questions to investigate, developing theories, collecting data, finding reliable and valid measures, and analyzing results. We'll also examine the tools and methods of social science research such as surveys, experiments, case studies, and statistical analysis. Students will learn basic data skills through the open-source software R, a language and platform for statistics and graphing.

Students will emerge from the class better equipped to conduct research of their own and assess the credibility of other people's research. The class does not presume any prior knowledge of or experience with research. We will spend most of our time focusing on the kinds of quantitative data commonly used in the social sciences today.

Learning Objectives:

The course has the following goals for students:

- to learn how to think like a social scientist
- to understand the research methods used by political scientists
- to see how evidence and data can yield insights into political phenomena
- to learn basic tools for data analysis

Course Requirements:

The grading is based on a midterm exam, a final exam, a paper, and a set of shorter assignments that will build your skills in data analysis. The open-book and take-home exams will consist of several questions, each of which will have a word limit. Most of the questions will involve you evaluating different aspects of hypothetical or actual research projects. Note that the final exam will be due on a different day (March 16) from what is listed on the generic UW schedule (March 18).

Grading:

Midterm exam: 25% Final exam: 25% Article review assignment: 20% Section assignments: 30%

Religious Accommodations:

Washington state law requires that UW develop a policy for accommodation of student absences or significant hardship due to reasons of faith or conscience, or for organized religious activities. The UW's policy, including more information about how to request an accommodation, is available at Religious Accommodations Policy, https://registrar.washington.edu/staffandfaculty/religious-accommodations-policy/. Accommodations must be requested within the first two weeks of this course using the Religious Accommodations Request form, available at https://registrar.washington.edu/students/religiousaccommodations-request/.

Disability Accommodations:

Disability Resources for Students (DRS) offers resources and coordinates reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. If you have not yet established services through DRS, but have a temporary or permanent disability that requires accommodations (this includes but is not limited to mental health, attention-related, learning, vision, hearing, physical or health impacts), you are welcome to contact DRS at 206-543-8924, or uwdrs@uw.edu. See the DRS website at http://depts.washington.edu/uwdrs/

Academic Honesty:

Cheating and plagiarism will not be tolerated under any circumstances. A suspected instance will be reported and disciplinary actions may ensue. For further detail about the University of Washington's academic honesty policy, please refer the Student Conduct Code at https://www.washington.edu/cssc/for-students/student-code-of-conduct/

Plagiarism and Turnitin:

The UW has a license agreement with Turnitin, an educational tool that helps prevent or identify plagiarism from Internet resources. Your instructor will use the service by requiring that assignments are submitted electronically to be checked by Turnitin. The Turnitin Report indicates the amount of original text in your work and whether all material that you quoted, paraphrased, summarized, or used from another source is appropriately referenced.

Schedule of Topics and Assignments (Readings will be posted and linked on Canvas):

- Tuesday, January 4 Introduction to the course
- Thursday, January 6 The science in political science
- Friday, January 7 An introduction to R
- Tuesday, January 11 Theories, models, and causation
- Thursday, January 13 The challenges of demonstrating causation
- Friday, January 14 Importing and cleaning datasets in R
- Tuesday, January 18 Conceptualization and measurement, part 1
- Tuesday, January 18 Section assignment #1, due at 8:00 PM
- Thursday, January 20 Conceptualization and measurement, part 2
- Friday, January 21 Merging datasets, creating variables in R
- Tuesday, January 25 Open-book, take-home midterm exam due at 8:00 PM
- Thursday, January 27 Sampling
- Friday, January 28 Graphing in R
- Tuesday, February 1 Sampling; surveys and survey research
- Thursday, February 3 Surveys and survey research
- Friday, February 4 Graphing in R
- **Tuesday, February 8** Surveys and survey research; descriptive and inferential statistics
- **Tuesday, February 8** Section assignment #2, due at 8:00 PM
- Thursday, February 10 Descriptive and inferential statistics
- Friday, February 11 Developing skills in R
- Tuesday, February 15 Hypothesis testing and inferential statistics
- Thursday, February 17 Correlation and bivariate regression

Friday, February 18 Descriptive statistics and difference of means tests in R

- Tuesday, February 22 Bivariate regression and multiple regression
- Thursday, February 24 Multiple regression
- Friday, February 25 Correlation, bivariate regression, and multiple regression in R
- Tuesday, March 1 Experiments, part 1
- **Tuesday, March 1** Section assignment #3, due at 8:00 PM
- Thursday, March 3 Experiments, part 2
- Friday, March 4 Practicing linear regression in R
- Tuesday, March 8 Natural experiments, the comparative method, and case studies
- Tuesday, March 8 Article review assignment, due at 8:00 PM
- Thursday, March 10 What can go wrong in published research
- Friday, March 11 Review; practicing linear regression in R
- Wednesday, March 16 Open-book, take-home final exam due at 8:00 PM