

POS 3713:007 | Understanding Political Research

Meeting Place: MON-0104 | **Meeting ☉:** MWF 11:15am-12:05pm

Instructor: Matthew J. Uttermark, PhD | ✉: mju14@my.fsu.edu

Office: Bellamy 550 | **Office Hours ☉:** M 3:30pm-4:30pm

Introduction

There are three kinds of lies: lies, damned lies, and statistics – Benjamin Disraeli (popularized by Mark Twain)

Political discourse is filled with references to data and statistics. This course will help students understand how those data are produced and how to evaluate their validity. Specifically, students will learn to develop research questions, generate hypotheses, construct experiments and observational studies, measure variables, and perform statistical tests. In so doing, students will see how political scientists develop and test theories to explain political phenomena. With these newly acquired skills, students will be better able to evaluate research they encounter in their day-to-day lives. The goal is to prepare students for the in-depth research and critical thinking of upper division courses.

Please be aware that this course relies on a different background than most other courses that our department offers. You do not need to be a math or computer-wiz to do well in this course—*I was not when I took this course in undergrad*. However, the material in this course may not come as easily to you compared to other courses. I encourage you to set some time aside to reread the textbook, study/work with your classmates, and visit during office hours if concepts are unclear.

Required Text

Kellstedt, Paul, M. and Guy D. Whitten. 2013. *The Fundamentals of Political Science Research* 2nd Edition. Boston: Cambridge University Press.

Electronic copies of the textbook are available, and can be used in this class.

This book should be available for purchase in the campus bookstore, Amazon.com and Chegg.com, among other sites. In the reading schedule, this book is referred to as **FoPSR**.

Other readings (book chapters, journal articles) will be made available on Canvas.

Evaluation and Grading[†]

A*	93-100	B	83-86	C	73-76	D	63-66
A-	90-92	B-	80-82	C-	70-72	D-	60-62
B+	87-89	C+	77-79	D+	67-69	F	0-59

[†]Note: Grades within less than 0.5% of a higher letter grade will be rounded up.

Ex: If you have an 89.5% (B+), I will round your grade up to a 90% (A-).

* An A is the highest grade you can receive in the course.

Class Engagement (15%): This is a small class. Habitual absences will be noticed and detrimental to your final grade. Please make an effort to come to class, ask questions, and be prepared to engage with the material. I encourage you to ask questions in class—especially when material is unclear. In this particular course, if you have a question on the material many of your classmates likely have the same question.

Problem Sets (30%) There will be five problem sets. These are homework assignments that give you practice on the conceptual and technical skills for the course. The assignments will be made available on Canvas at least a week prior to their due date. A hard-copy of the completed problem set is due at the start of class. Late problem sets will automatically lose points. Please note that there are no make-up problem sets. You are allowed to work in small groups (e.g. no more than 4-5 students) to complete problem sets. However, each student must turn in their own assignment and substantive responses must be in each student's own words.

Midterm (25%): The midterm exam will count for or 25% of your overall course grade. The midterm exam will have multiple choice and true/false questions, and you will mark your name and answers on a scantron (bubble) sheet. You must bring a pencil to the exam. The midterm exam will be given in class on Monday, October 14.

Final Exam (30% total): The final exam is an open-note exam (e.g. hand-written or printed notes with concepts and statistical equations are allowed). However, it will be a short answer fill-in-the-blank form. It will include 20% material from the first exam, and the rest will be taken from the second part of class. Equations will be included in that exam, to ensure that each student is familiar with all essential material. All work must be your own—communication with classmates or anyone else is forbidden. The final exam will be held in class on Tuesday, December 10 5:30pm-7:30pm. There will be no early final: you are responsible for making yourself available to take the exam on that date and during the scheduled time

Class Policies

Makeup Work No make-up work will be accepted in this course; unless the student has a university approved absence. University approved absences include:

- A documented illness (or serious illness of a dependent child).
- A death in the family.
- Call to active military duty.
- Jury duty.
- A religious or work-restricted holy days.
- Official university activities (i.e. student athlete competing in a meet).

It is your responsibility to inform me and get documentation **before** the absence occurs. For example, if you are ill the day of an assignment, I require a signed note from a medical doctor dated the day of the exam. I will then work to determine how to make-up the assignment. Unless otherwise noted in the Evaluation and Grading section, late work receives a zero.

Incomplete Grades I do not expect to hand out a grade of “Incomplete” to any student in this course. However, a grade of “Incomplete” will only be given if there is an agreement between the instructor and the student prior to the end of the semester. The instructor reserves the right to determine a legitimate reason for assigning an incomplete grade.

Email Policy Please avoid emailing the instructor with questions that can be answered by reading the syllabus. The instructor will not reply to such emails. This document contains information on how your grade is

calculated and what is covered each day in class. Additionally, if you wish to set up an appointment with the instructor outside of office hours, please provide a list of times to meet in the first email sent to the instructor.

Technology in the Classroom While technology has made our lives easier, the classroom is not the place to attempt to update Instagram. To facilitate learning, and to be respectful to other classmate's learning, please refrain from using cell phones and media devices in the classroom. Keep phones on silent and go into the hallway if you must take a phone call.

I strongly encourage you to take notes the traditional way (pen and paper), however I do allow students to use laptops to take notes in the classroom. The first two rows of desks in the classroom are a laptop-free zone so that students who wish not to be distracted have a space to learn efficiently. Stay off social media sites (Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, etc.) while in class.

If your behavior is a distraction to the class, I reserve the right to tell a student to put their electronic devices away for the remainder of the class. If the problem is habitual I reserve the right to reflect the student's lack of decorum in their final grade.

Maintaining a Respectful Classroom Environment Florida State University is committed to providing and maintaining a respectful environment that is conducive to safe working, learning, and living for all members of the institutional community. It is expected that all students will respect each other in their personal interactions, inside and outside of the classroom. Acts of violence, threats of violence, derogatory comments, and behavior meant to intimidate others is prohibited.

I reserve the right to have a student escorted from the classroom for persistent violations of this policy and the students final grade will reflect their lack of decorum.

Plagiarism Any form of cheating will NOT be tolerated. If you are caught plagiarizing any written work you will receive an automatic zero on the assignment and will be reported to the university in accordance with FSU policy. The FSU History department defines plagiarism as "handing in a paper you did not write, attempting to pass of someone else's work as your own, or using your own ideas, information, or phraseology of other writers without giving proper credit in your text." Self-plagiarism, handing the same written assignment for multiple courses, is also prohibited. See the university honor code details below for more information.

FSU's Academic Honor Code "The academic honor system of The Florida State University is based on the premise that each student has the responsibility: (1) To uphold the highest standards of academic integrity in the student's own work. (2) To refuse to tolerate violations of academic integrity in the University community, and (3) To foster a high sense of integrity and social responsibility on the part of the University community."

I expect students to bring possible violations of the honor code to my attention as soon as possible, so that the violation may be resolved. Violations included, but are not limited to, plagiarism of work, assisting a student in obtaining unauthorized information for an assignment, project or test. A complete list of violations can be found in FSU Student Handbook. Violation of the Academic honor code lead, but is not limited to, a lower/failing grade on the assignment or a lower/failing grade in the course. The university may take additional measures including, formal reprimand, academic probation, suspension, or expulsion from the university.

For more information on FSU's Honor Code, visit:

<http://www.fsu.edu/~dof/honorpolicy.htm>

Americans with Disabilities Act Students with disabilities needing academic accommodation must (1) register with and provide documentation to the Student Disability Resource Center (SDRC), and (2) bring a letter to the instructor from the SDRC indicating that you need academic accommodations. This must be done within the first week of class. Please note that instructors are not allowed to provide classroom accommodation to a student until appropriate verification from the Student Disability Resource Center has been provided. 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.

Student Disability Resource Center
847 Traditions Way
108 Student Services Building
Florida State University
Tallahassee, FL 32306-4167
(850) 644-9566 (voice)
(850) 644-6504 (TDD)
sdr@admin.fsu.edu
<http://www.disabilitycenter.fsu.edu/>

Course Schedule

This syllabus is subject to change as necessary over the course of the semester. Regularly check Canvas and your e-mail for updates on any changes.

Aug 26th

Syllabus Day

Aug 28th

Instructor at conference – No Class

Aug 30th

Instructor at conference – No Class

Sept 2nd

Labor Day – No Class

Sept 4th

FoPSR, Chapter 1: Theories I

Sept 6th

Theories I

Sept 9th

Theories I

Sept 11th

FoPSR, Chapter 2: Theories II

Sept 13th

Theories II

Sept 16th

Theories II

Sept 18th

Work Day – Problem Set 1

Sept 20th

FoPSR Chapter 3: Causality

Sept 23rd

Causality

Sept 25th

FoPSR Chapter 4: Observational Studies

Sept 27th

Observational Studies

Sept 30th

Problem Set 1 Due

Observational Studies

Oct 2nd

Work Day – Problem Set 2

Oct 4th

FoPSR, Chapter 5: Descriptive Statistics

Oct 7th

Descriptive Statistics

Oct 9th

Descriptive Statistics

Oct 11th

Problem Set 2 Due
Review Day

Oct 14th

Midterm Exam

Oct 16th

FoPSR Chapter 6: Statistical Inference

Oct 18th

Statistical Inference

Oct 21st

Work Day – Problem Set 3

Oct 23rd

TBD

Oct 25th

TBD

Oct 28th

FoPSR Chapter 7: Hypothesis Testing

Oct 30th

Hypothesis Testing

Nov 1st

Problem Set 3 Due
Hypothesis Testing

Nov 4th

FoPSR, Chapter 8: Bivariate Regression

Nov 6th

Bivariate Regression

Nov 8th

Work Day – Problem Set 4

Nov 11th

Veterans Day – No Class

Nov 13th

Bivariate Regression

Nov 15th

Problem Set 4 Due
FoPSR Chapter 9: Multiple Regression 1

Nov 18th

Multiple Regression I

Nov 20th

Multiple Regression I

Nov 22nd

Work Day – Problem Set 5

Nov 25th

FoPSR Chapter 10: Multiple Regression II

Nov 27th

Multiple Regression II

Nov 29th

Thanksgiving Break – No Class

Dec 2nd

FoPSR Chapter 11: Multiple Regression III

Dec 4th

Problem Set 5 Due

Multiple Regression III

Dec 6th

Review

Dec. 9th – Dec. 13th

FINALS WEEK

Final Tuesday Dec. 10th 5:30pm-7:30pm

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.