

Scope & Methods in Political Science (PSC 2101)

Instructor: Jared Heern

Summer 2021

June 29th - August 5th

Tuesdays & Thursdays, 2:20 pm - 4:40 pm (EDT)

Location: Remote Virtual Instruction (Links to be shared)

Contact Information

Email: jcheern@gwu.edu

Phone: (618)534-9556

Office Hours: Thurs 2 - 4 pm & Fri 11 am - 12 pm (EDT), or other times by appointment

Office Hours Link: <https://gwstudent.webex.com/meet/jcheern>

Description

When many people think about the discipline of political science they may imagine a group of people who want to work in government or run for office, or just really enjoy thinking about and discussing politics and current events—and many political scientists do. However, just like any other scientific discipline, political scholars rigorously apply the scientific method and sophisticated statistical analyses to learn about political phenomena. This course works through the political science research process, detailing the ways political scientists ask questions, theorize about possible answers, and then design and carry out empirical tests to systematically acquire knowledge about the areas of politics, government, and international relations.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course students will have learned:

- The types of questions political scientists ask
- How to synthesize previous research on a topic
- How to formulate theories and derive testable hypotheses from them
- How to translate concepts into measurable variables
- The trade-offs of different research designs for finding causal relationships
- The basic descriptive and inferential statistics political scientists use to analyze data
- How to assemble a political science research article

Asynchronous Lectures

Because this is a virtual course, to accommodate students taking the course remotely from time zones around the world, as well as to allow all students more flexibility in how they engage with the

course materials, lectures will not be held during the regularly scheduled class periods. Instead, I will pre-record and post the roughly four hours of weekly lecture material broken up into smaller topics. The lecture videos will be made available by the start of the scheduled class week. Students can access the lecture material at any point during the week as long as it is completed (along with weekly reading materials) in time to complete the weekly quiz.

Because students will not be able to ask questions live during lectures, I will hold additional office hours (see above for times). I will also happily schedule virtual meetings or exchange emails at any time during the week. There will be one required meeting with each student halfway through the course to ensure you are staying on track and making progress on your final paper.

Books for Purchase/Rental

Brians, Craig Leonard, Lars Willnat, Jarol B. Manheim, and Richard C. Rich. 2011. *Empirical Political Analysis*. 8th Edition (Yellow). Pearson Education, Inc. ISBN-10 0205791212.

Berry, William D, and Mitchell S. Sanders. 2000. *Understanding Multivariate Research: A Primer for Beginning Social Scientists*. Westview Press. ISBN-10 0813399718.

Requirements

This is a compressed and accelerated course. Students will be responsible for a larger volume of reading and lecture material every week, as well as shorter deadlines between papers and problem set assignments. Plan to devote significant time to this course each of the six weeks.

- **Quizzes**
 - There will be 6 open book/open note timed quizzes (one every week) on Blackboard consisting of 15 multiple choice and true/false questions drawn from both the assigned readings and lecture materials. Quizzes should be completed by 11:59pm the Sunday night at the end of every week—except for the optional Week 6 quiz which will only be 10 points of possible extra credit to anyone who needs it, and will be due Thursday, August 5th.
- **Problem Sets**
 - There will be 2 problem sets covering the research and statistics skills you will be learning in the class. There will be detailed instructions posted to Blackboard closer to the time of the assignments. You will need to be able to access the statistical analysis software SPSS to complete these assignments (see section on SPSS below).
- **Final Research Paper**
 - Each student will complete a full-length research design for an empirical research article on any political science research topic of their choice (in consultation with instructor). The final paper will likely be between 12 and 18 double-spaced pages. However, you will not have to write it all at once. The complete project will be broken up into three smaller papers throughout the six weeks, which I'll give a grade and feedback. You'll then edit them, put them together, and add one final section to turn in as the full final paper. The three component papers are:

- Paper 1 - Research Topic (~1-2 pages): This paper will explicitly state your research question, explain why it is an important topic, and what the research would contribute to political science knowledge.
- Paper 2 - Literature Review (~4-6 pages): In this paper you will conduct research on the previous articles/books that have examined your research question or similar questions, and synthesize and evaluate their findings.
- Paper 3 - Theory/Hypotheses (~3-5 pages): This paper will describe the expected answer of your research question, justify that prediction, explicitly state the hypotheses you will be testing, and note any alternative/rival theories.
- The finished research design will include an introduction (derived from Paper 1), literature review (from Paper 2), theory section (from Paper 3), a *new* research methods section (~3-5 pages) where you describe the design of the empirical tests for your project and how you would present and interpret them, and then a short conclusion section discussing what the implications of your potential findings would be. More detailed prompts for each of the papers and final paper will be available on Blackboard closer to their deadlines.
- **Final Exam**
 - The class will conclude with a final exam composed of a mixture of multiple choice, true/false, fill-in-the-blank, and short answers covering all of the course materials. It will draw heavily on the kinds of questions (and even some exact questions) from the weekly quizzes. It will be open book and open note, but will have a time limit.

Grades

Your final grade will be based on a total of 500 available points:

- Quizzes (5) - 75 points - 15%
 - Optional Week 6 Bonus Quiz - 10 points (2% possible extra credit)
- Problem Sets (2) - 60 points - 12%
- Paper 1: Topic - 10 points - 2%
- Paper 2: Literature Review - 40 points - 8%
- Paper 3: Theory/Hypotheses - 40 points - 8%
- Final Paper - 100 points - 20%
- Final Exam - 150 points - 30%
- Participation - 25 points - 5%

Late assignments will be deducted 5% per every 12 hours they are late (starting at the time they are due). Consideration will be given for extensions **only** if students make arrangements with the instructor preferably the week before a due date, with exceptions made on a case-by-case basis.

SPSS & Columbian Cloud

To complete some of the course requirements students will need access to the statistical analysis software SPSS. Students should be able to access this free and remotely from their own computers through the Columbian Cloud Portal and the SPSS virtual application. Ensure that you can access these resources prior to the second week of class so that university IT staff can assist with any

issues. More information on accessing the Columbian Cloud and necessary software to access SPSS can be found at <https://ots.columbian.gwu.edu/columbian-college-private-cloud> specifically under the “Virtual Applications” tab.

Academic Integrity

In the context of this course academic dishonesty is defined as passing off the work of someone else without proper citation or fabricating information. Self-plagiarism (presenting one’s own previous work as novel work) will also be considered academic dishonesty unless previously cleared with me. Assignments will be screened through SafeAssign plagiarism checker upon submission. Per GW’s updated Code of Academic Integrity (July 1, 2021) violations will be handled on a case-by-case basis with serious infractions reported to the university. The minimum penalty will be receiving a 0 on the plagiarized assignment. The full updated code can be found at <https://studentconduct.gwu.edu/code-academic-integrity>.

Support for Students with Disabilities

Students who may need remote learning accommodations based on a disability can receive support from GW’s Disabilities Services. They will work with the student and the instructor to determine how to create a more effective and equitable learning environment. To learn more about Disability Service’s registration process, call (202)994-8250, email them at dss@gwu.edu, or review their registration webpage at <https://disabilitysupport.gwu.edu/register>.

Support for Students with Mental Health Issues

Students struggling with or concerned about mental health issues should reach out to GW’s Counseling and Psychological Services which can provide mental health assessments, individual and group counseling sessions, referrals to outside counseling, and crisis and emergency assistance. More information can be found at <https://healthcenter.gwu.edu/counseling-and-psychological-services>.

If you are having suicidal thoughts please contact mental health services at 202-994-5300 (press option 2) for 24/7 assistance or the National Suicide Prevention Hotline at 800-273-TALK (8255).

Religious Observances

If any students feel religious observances will affect their ability to meet course requirements and deadlines they should notify me during the first week of the course. Additional information on GW’s policy regarding religious observances can be found at <https://registrar.gwu.edu/university-policies#holidays>.

Schedule *Schedule and Readings subject to slight modifications

Week 1 (June 29 - July 4)

June 29 - **Live class 2:20 pm (EDT)**

- Reading:
 - Syllabus
- Lecture:
 - Introduction and Syllabus

The Research Process

- Reading:
 - Briens Chs 1, 22 (pp 377-380), & 23 (pp 392-395), Political Science Research Areas Slides
 - Lecture 1:
 - The Research Process, Parts of a Research Project/Paper
 - Lecture 2:
 - Building Off of Previous Research, Writing a Lit Review
 - **Quiz 1**
 - Due before 11:59 pm Sunday, July 4
 - **Paper 1 - Research Topic (Prompt on BB)**
 - Due before 11:59 pm Sunday, July 4
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Week 2 (July 5 - 11)

Hypothesis Testing and Causal Inference

- Reading:
 - Briens Chs 2, 3 (pp 36-39 & pp 66-70, skim the rest), Berry pp 1-2
- Lecture 1:
 - X -> Y, Laws/Theories/Hypotheses
- Lecture 2:
 - Causal Inference, Spurious Relationships and Endogeneity

Variables

- Reading:
 - Briens Ch 5
 - Lecture 1:
 - Dependent vs. Independent vs. Control Variables, Operationalization
 - Lecture 2:
 - Levels of Measurement, Dichotomous Variables, Reliability and Validity
 - **Quiz 2**
 - Due before 11:59 pm Sunday, July 11
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Week 3 (July 12 - 18)

Research Designs

- Reading:
 - Brians Chs 4, 6, & 8 (151-168). Skim Sample Articles
- Lecture 1:
 - Experimental vs. Observational, Cross-Sectional vs. Longitudinal
- Lecture 2:
 - Survey Instruments

Data

- Reading:
 - Brians Chs 7 & 14
 - Lecture 1:
 - Observations and Variables, Populations and Sampling
 - Lecture 2:
 - Codebooks, Sources of Political Science Data
 - **Quiz 3**
 - Due before 11:59 pm Sunday, July 18
 - **Paper 2 - Literature Review (Prompt on BB)**
 - Due before 11:59 pm Sunday, July 18
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Week 4 (July 19 - 25)

Using SPSS

- Reading:
 - SPSS Tutorial Notes 1. Also make sure you can access Columbian Cloud and run SPSS before this week
- Lecture:
 - Loading and Cleaning Data in SPSS, Identifying Data Structure, Transforming Variables, Sampling

Descriptive Statistics

- Reading:
 - Brians Chs 16 & 15 , Berry pp 7-11
- Lecture:
 - Central Tendency, Dispersion, Distributions
- **Quiz 4**
 - Due before 11:59 pm Sunday, July 25
- **Problem Set 1: Data sets, Variables, Measurement**
 - Due before 11:59pm Sunday, July 25

- **Paper 3 - Theory/Hypothesis Section (Prompt on BB)**
 - Due before 11:59 pm Sunday, July 25
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Week 5 (July 26 - Aug 1)

- **Final Project Check-In Meetings**
 - Will send out sign-up list with meeting times

Inferential Statistics I

- Reading:
 - Brians Ch 17 (290-303)
- Lecture 1:
 - Inferential Statistics: Statistical Significance, Inferential Error
- Lecture 2:
 - Correlation, Scatterplots, Crosstabs, Chi-Squared & t-tests

Inferential Statistics II: Bivariate Regression Models

- Reading:
 - Brians Ch 17 (303-310), Berry Ch 2 (15-18, 24-28), SPSS Tutorial Notes 2.
 - Lecture 1:
 - Bivariate OLS Regression
 - Lecture 2:
 - Using SPSS for Inferential Statistics
 - **Quiz 5**
 - Due before 11:59 pm Sunday, August 1
 - **Problem Set 2 **Note Time Extension****
 - Due by 11:59pm, **Tuesday, August 3rd** by 11:59pm (EDT)
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Week 6 (August 2 - 7)

Multivariate Regression & Qualitative Research

- Reading:
 - Brians Chs 18 with Berry Chs 3 & 4, Skim Fenno's "Homestyle" (on Blackboard)
- Lecture 1:
 - Multivariate OLS Regression, Limitations and Extensions
- Lecture 2:
 - Survey of Qualitative Methods

August 5 - **Live Class 2:20pm (EDT)**

- Reading:
 - None—Review for final exam and finish final paper

- Wrap up semester, answer final questions, give instructions for final exam and submitting final paper
 - **Quiz 6 - OPTIONAL Extra Credit Quiz**
 - Due before 11:59 pm ****THURSDAY****, August 5th
 - **FINAL EXAM** (details subject to change)
 - Will be available on Blackboard for 24 hours starting 12:01 am Friday, August 6th.
 - Open book/open note. 3 hour time limit, completed in one sitting
 - Likely 50 x 2pt (100pts) multiple choice & True/False, then 50pts worth of short answer
 - **FINAL RESEARCH PAPER**
 - Prompt will be on Blackboard
 - Due Date to be announced
 - Will have Intro (adapted from Paper 1), Lit Review (Revised from Paper 2), Theory Section (Revised from Paper 3), Research Methods Section (new - about 3-5 pages), and short Conclusion section
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And that's it! After the crazy last week of class, enjoy your last few weeks of summer before we're back in person this fall! To those of you graduating at the end of the summer, congratulations and best of luck in the future!

Elements of syllabus adapted from Chris Warshaw template
Updated June 13, 2021