

POS 4734 | Research Methods in Political Science

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA
SPRING 2024

Instructor: David Macdonald, Ph.D.

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Time & Location:

- MWF 10:40 AM - 11:30 AM (MAT 0051)

Office Hours:

- Anderson Hall 207
- Tuesdays 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM & 2:00 PM - 4:00 PM
- Also by email appointment if necessary

Course Description & Objectives

Research Methods in Political Science (POS 4734) is an upper-level undergraduate course that introduces students to the logic and execution of quantitative research in political science. This course is fundamentally about how to formulate research questions and how to think about the best scientific approach for answering them. In short, we will spend time thinking about how best to explore and test whether “X causes Y,” with a focus on political phenomena. In doing so, my hope is that you will become more familiar with the scientific method and gain experience reading and critiquing high-quality political science research articles. You will also ideally become more statistically literate and “less afraid” of numbers than you were coming into this course. My hope is that by the end of this course, you will move from being a passive receiver to a more critical consumer and producer of research.

Required Texts & Readings

There are 2 required texts for this class. They are listed below. You can purchase these books individually or as a bundle. I hope that these books will be a resource throughout your academic career. I will also incorporate other academic readings beyond the required texts. I will make these electronically available as a PDF on the course website. All readings are listed in the “Course Schedule” section of this syllabus.

- Pollock, Philip H., and Barry C. Edwards. 2019. *The Essentials of Political Analysis*. 6th Edition.
- Pollock, Philip H., and Barry C. Edwards. 2024. *A Stata Companion to Political Analysis*. 5th Edition.

Stata (required)

You will need a working version of Stata for this class. Stata is a statistical program that is widely used in academia, government, and private industry. Unfortunately Stata is not free, but you can purchase or rent it for download on your own computer at a discounted student rate at the following link (<https://www.stata.com/order/new/edu/profplus/student-pricing/>). You can also access it at various library computers on campus or access it off campus for free from UF at the following link (<https://info.apps.ufl.edu/>). You will need access to Stata in order to successfully complete this course. Beyond this course, having access to and knowing how to use statistical programs such as Stata will also serve you well in your academic career and aid in conducting scientific research.

LaTeX (optional)

LaTeX (pronounced “lay-tech”) is a word processing software program. It is specifically geared toward scientific research and is excellent at writing mathematical notation, outputting statistical results, and making documents with high-quality tables and figures. You can read more about this program at the following link (<https://www.latex-project.org/>). LaTeX is becoming increasingly popular in political science. I used it to create this syllabus and also use it to write papers. LaTeX has a steep learning curve, but programs such as TeXstudio (<https://www.texstudio.org/>) make it relatively easy to download and use on your personal computers. You are not required nor under any obligation to use LaTeX in this course, but I would recommend eventually becoming familiar with LaTeX as it will serve you well in your academic and professional careers.

Course Policies

Canvas

The course website will be on Canvas (<https://elearning.ufl.edu/>). It is here that you will be able to access all of the assignments, readings, and study guides. All readings, study guides, and assignment instructions are available under the “Files” tab on Canvas.

Grades

Your overall course grade will be comprised of the following weighted components. Further detailed instructions about these assignments will be given in class and posted on the course website.

- **Reading Responses** (25%)
 - Graded for completion but an “A” response = approx 200 words (1-2 paragraphs)
 - Summarize the argument/design/main conclusions & give your personal thoughts
 - Total of 10; submit responses on Canvas BEFORE our first weekly class meeting
- **Homeworks** (25%)
 - Total of 6 homeworks; 5 highest grades will count
 - Detailed instructions posted on Canvas

- **Exam (25%)**
 - Closed-book exam in class on Wednesday 03/06
 - Study guide posted on Canvas
- **Research Design Paper (25%)**
 - Email to the instructor (as a PDF) by 11:59 PM on Sunday 04/14
 - Detailed instructions posted on Canvas

Letter grades will be assigned as follows.

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

Extra Credit

I DO NOT give out extra credit, but I am willing to round up borderline grades in certain cases. Student participation, preparation, and effort may be taken into consideration in deciding whether to round up borderline grades.

Lecture Notes & Study Guides

I DO NOT make my lecture slides available on Canvas. You need to come to class in order to truly learn and absorb the material. I will, however, give out a study guide before each exam.

Late Work

Late work will not be accepted except as a result of unusual/extenuating circumstances that have been discussed with the instructor.

Email

All email correspondence in this course must be through your UF student email. Please keep it professional when writing and responding to emails.

Electronics

I expect you to keep your phones away and to only use laptops for the purpose of note-taking. If I notice that you are frequently using such devices for other purposes and thus not paying attention nor participating in class, then I will NOT round up your borderline grades.

Decorum

Students in this course are expected to follow the “Golden Rule” of treating others as you wish to be treated. Everyone in this class has the right to speak and to be heard, but this right is not unlimited. Ultimately, we are all responsible for the things we say and do. There will also be ZERO tolerance regarding any threats of violence toward the instructor(s) and/or students, be they verbal or written. Such threats will be reported to University Police.

Reasonable Accommodations

As evidenced by the Covid-19 pandemic, sometimes difficult and unfortunate things happen in our lives that can make attending class and thus being academically successful very difficult. As such, I am willing, if possible, to help you overcome such difficulties. If you are experiencing challenging life circumstances and need help to succeed in the course, please speak to me ASAP. Do not wait until the end of the semester to as it will often be too late for me to do anything. Please see the following link (<https://umatter.ufl.edu/helping-students/your-well-being/>) and/or reach out to a medical professional for any physical or mental health problems.

Changes to the Syllabus

I reserve the right to make minor changes to the syllabus and course schedule during the semester as necessary. That being said, if there are any changes, every effort will be made to alert you in writing as far in advance as possible.

University Policies

Academic Honor Code

UF students are bound by the University's Honor Pledge which states: "We the members of the University Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code." On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: "On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment." The Honor Code specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor and see the following link (<https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/policies/student-honor-code-student-conduct-code/>). In short, don't cheat! The costs FAR outweigh the benefits!

Disability Services

Students with disabilities who are requesting special accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/ or **352-392-8565**) by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter which must be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodation. Students with disabilities should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester.

Recordings

Students are allowed to record video or audio of class lectures. However, the purposes for which these recordings may be used are strictly controlled. The only allowable purposes are (1) for personal educational use, (2) in connection with a complaint to the university, or (3) as evidence in, or in preparation for, a criminal or civil proceeding. All other purposes are prohibited. Specifically, students may not publish recorded lectures without the written consent of the instructor. A "class lecture" is an educational presentation intended to inform or teach enrolled students about a particular subject, including any instructor-led discussions that form part of the presentation, and delivered by any instructor hired or appointed by the University, or by a guest instructor,

as part of a University of Florida course. A class lecture does not include lab sessions, student presentations, clinical presentations such as patient history, academic exercises involving solely student participation, assessments (quizzes, tests, exams), field trips, private conversations between students in the class or between a student and the faculty or lecturer during a class session. Publication without permission of the instructor is prohibited. To “publish” means to share, transmit, circulate, distribute, or provide access to a recording, regardless of format or medium, to another person (or persons), including but not limited to another student within the same class section. Additionally, a recording, or transcript of a recording, is considered published if it is posted on or uploaded to, in whole or in part, any media platform, including but not limited to social media, book, magazine, newspaper, leaflet, or third party note/tutoring services. A student who publishes a recording without written consent may be subject to a civil cause of action instituted by a person injured by the publication and/or discipline under UF Regulation 4.040 Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code. Additional information is available at the following link (<https://aa.ufl.edu/policies/in-class-recording/>).

Online Course Evaluations

Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations (<https://evaluations.ufl.edu>). Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester, but students will be given specific times when they are open. Summary results are available to students (<https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results/>).

Course Schedule

The first half of the course will focus primarily on the basics of research design. The second half of the course will focus primarily on using a statistical program (Stata) to execute basic quantitative research. The reading responses are intended to supplement our lectures, expose you to potential ideas for your research design proposals, and to model high-quality social science research. Homeworks are to be submitted in class as a hard copy; reading responses are to be submitted online on Canvas BEFORE our first weekly class meeting.

Week 1 - Course Introduction

- Class Meetings
 - Monday (01/08) only (instructor at SPSA conference)
- Agenda
 - Review course syllabus

Week 2 - Research Ethics

- Class Meetings
 - Wednesday & Friday (01/17 & 01/19) only (MLK holiday)
- Reading Response (pick one; I encourage you to read all three)
 - Franco, Malhotra, and Simonovits (2014) *Science*
 - Phillips (2021) *Annual Review of Political Science*
 - Resnick (2018) *Vox*

Week 3 - Research Questions & Literature Reviews

- Class Meetings
 - MWF (01/22; 01/24; 01/26)
- Reading Response (pick one; I encourage you to read both)
 - Carsey (2020, Chapter 3) *Tom's Comments*
 - Knopf (2006) *PS: Political Science and Politics*

Week 4 - Concepts & Measurement

- Class Meetings
 - MWF (01/29; 01/31; 02/02)
- Reading Response
 - Grumbach (2023) *American Political Science Review*
- Homework 1 due in class on Friday 02/02 (bring hard copy)
 - Based on Chapters 1 & 2 in *Essentials of Political Analysis*
 - Detailed instructions on Canvas

Week 5 - Theory Building

- Class Meetings
 - MWF (02/05; 02/07; 02/09)
- Reading Response
 - Paglayan (2021) *American Political Science Review*
- Homework 2 due in class on Friday 02/09 (bring hard copy)
 - Based on Chapter 3 in *Essentials of Political Analysis*
 - Detailed instructions on Canvas

Week 6 - Sampling & Case Selection

- Class Meetings
 - MWF (02/12; 02/14; 02/16)
- Reading Response
 - Ross (2001) *World Politics*
- Homework 3 due in class on Friday 02/16 (bring hard copy)
 - Based on Chapter 4 in *Essentials of Political Analysis*
 - Detailed instructions on Canvas

Week 7 - Choosing an Appropriate Research Design

- Class Meetings
 - MWF (02/19; 02/21; 02/23)
- Reading Response
 - Gerring (2011) *Political Research Quarterly*

Week 8 - Present Research Paper Proposals

- Class Meetings
 - MWF (02/26; 02/28; 03/01)
- Email me your slides (I assume PPT) by Sunday 02/25 at 11:59 PM
 - Limit presentation to approximately 5 minutes
 - All students expected to attend all days
 - Detailed instructions on Canvas

Week 9 - Midterm Exam

- Class Meetings
 - Monday & Wednesday (03/04 & 03/06) only
- Agenda
 - Review in class on Monday 03/04
 - Exam on Wednesday 03/06
 - No class on Friday 03/08!
- Exam Format
 - Consists of 40 multiple choice questions
 - Study guide available on Canvas

Week 10 - SPRING BREAK (03/09 - 03/16)

- Class Meetings = NONE!
- Enjoy your time off!

Week 11 - Making Sense of Data

- Class Meetings
 - MWF (03/18; 03/20; 03/22)
- Reading Response
 - Sides, Vavreck, and Warshaw (2022) *American Political Science Review*
- Homework 4 due in class on Friday 03/22 (bring hard copy)
 - Based on Chapters 2 & 3 in *A Stata Companion*
 - Detailed instructions on Canvas

Week 12 - Testing Hypotheses

- Class Meetings
 - MWF (03/25; 03/27; 03/29)
- Reading Response
 - Baldassarri and Park (2020) *Journal of Politics*
- Homework 5 due in class on Friday 03/29 (bring hard copy)
 - Based on Chapters 4 & 5 in *A Stata Companion*
 - Detailed instructions on Canvas

Week 13 - Linear Regression

- Class Meetings
 - Monday & Wednesday (04/01 & 04/03) only (instructor at MPSA conference)
- Reading Response
 - Macdonald (2021) *Political Behavior*

Week 14 - Non-Linear Regression & Interaction Terms

- Class Meetings
 - MWF (04/08; 04/10; 04/12)
- Reading Response
 - Solt (2008) *American Journal of Political Science*
- Homework 6 due in class on Friday 04/12 (bring hard copy)
 - Based on Chapters 12 & 14 in *A Stata Companion*
 - Detailed instructions on Canvas

Week 15 - Present Final Research Design Proposals

- Class Meetings
 - MWF (04/15; 04/17; 04/19)
- Email me your final paper & slides by Sunday 04/14 at 11:59 PM
 - Limit presentation to approximately 5 minutes
 - All students expected to attend all days
 - Detailed instructions on Canvas