

# POS 3713: Understanding Political Science Research

## **DETAILS**

Classroom: BEL 0180

Fall 2019, MW 3:35 PM – 4:50 PM

Course website on Canvas

## **INSTRUCTOR**

Mr. William Schultz

Office: Bellamy 557-B (near the political science graduate computer lab)

Office hours: TUES from 1:00-2:00; THURS from 1:00-2:00.

Email: [wschultz@fsu.edu](mailto:wschultz@fsu.edu)

*“Nothing in life is to be feared, it is only to be understood. Now is the time to understand more, so that we may fear less.” — Marie Curie*

## **ON COURSE TIMING AND OFFICE HOURS**

We will be meeting Mondays and Wednesdays during the Fall 2019 semester. I’ve set aside office hours on Tuesdays and Thursdays for meeting with students of this class. Please come see me with any questions, concerns, things you’d like to learn more about, etc. If you cannot make office hours, please send an email and we’ll work something out.

## **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

It’s easy to come up with plausible stories that explain the political phenomena we see around the world. But how do we determine whether these explanations we come up with are useful, or possibly true? The answer: science. The primary goal of this class is to help you understand the scientific research process, and furthermore understand how we can use it to help make sense of the complicated, conflictual social world in which we find ourselves. To that end, we’ll spend most of our time covering some basic statistical research tools that are useful in the process of doing social science. You may not find statistics inherently interesting, but during this class you’ll hopefully come to understand how it’s useful to anyone interested in coming up with rigorous explanations of why politics works the way it does. Even if you don’t choose to go on to conduct quantitative research yourself, the same logic of science applies to empirical qualitative research as well (case studies, histories, ethnography, etc.).

## **COURSE MATERIALS**

The Fundamentals of Political Science Research, Second Edition, by Paul M. Kellstedt and Guy D. Whitten, Cambridge University Press (ISBN 9781107621664), 2<sup>nd</sup> edition

This textbook is available as a free e-book on the library website, although that means you need an internet connection to access it. You can also find relatively cheap used copies of the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition online at different retailers, if you prefer a physical copy. There should also be copies at the FSU bookstore.

## **GRADING PHILOSOPHY AND EXPECTATIONS**

Grades in college have several purposes: assessment; signaling *knowledge*; and signaling *effort* to master the course material. In my personal view, the last purpose is most important. That is my priority when designing and grading assignments.

## **GRADING SCALE**

The scale used in this course is standard to many at FSU. Final grades ending in .5 or higher will be rounded up (92.5 earns an A), and final grades below .5 will be rounded down (92.4 earns an A-). Note that the numbers listed below are percentages.

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

## **EARNING YOUR GRADE**

Your overall grade will be out of 500 points.

**Four homeworks:** 160 points = 32%

- Each is worth 40 points
- Five total will be assigned. Your worst grade out of these five will be dropped!
- These homeworks will be a mix of short answer questions, multiple choice questions, and statistical / mathematical problems. They will focus on your understanding of what I see as the few most important concepts we covered in the previous several lectures.
- They will become available on Canvas five days before they are due.
- See the course schedule below for due dates

**Two midterms:** 200 points = 40%

- Each is worth 100 points
- Three total will be assigned. Your worst grade out of these three will be dropped!
- These tests will be a mix of true/false and multiple-choice questions. These will be closed book tests.
- See the course schedule below for test dates

**One final:** 140 points = 28%

- This exam will be cumulative, but also open book and open notes (as opposed to the midterms, which are not). It will mostly be questions you've seen before from the midterms, with some new questions mixed in (mostly from the final few classes).
- See the course schedule below for the exam date

## **CLASS PARTICIPATION AND ATTENDANCE**

I will not take attendance for this class. It is the responsibility of students to make sure you are putting in the work necessary to understand course material and prepare for tests. Though I'm not taking attendance, I assure you that the best way to keep up with class material is attend lectures and ask me questions in person anytime you are confused. Everything on your tests will be material we have covered in class. Moreover, developing good scheduling habits now will pay dividends in the future.

### **EXTRA CREDIT**

I will not offer extra credit. It is up to you to plan time to complete your assignments and prepare for tests. That said, I understand that life can get messy, and that sometimes people need wiggle room. This is the reason I drop the lowest grade out of all the homeworks, and out of all the midterms. I will also consider grading midterms and the final exam on a curve.

### **ACADEMIC HONOR POLICY**

The Florida State University Academic Honor Policy outlines the University's expectations for the integrity of students' academic work, the procedures for resolving alleged violations of those expectations, and the rights and responsibilities of students and faculty members throughout the process. Students are responsible for reading the Academic Honor Policy and for living up to their pledge to "...be honest and truthful and... [to] strive for personal and institutional integrity at Florida State University." (Florida State University Academic Honor Policy, found at <http://dof.fsu.edu/honorpolicy.htm>.)

### **AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT**

Students with disabilities needing academic accommodation should: (1) register with and provide documentation to the Student Disability Resource Center; and (2) bring a letter to the instructor indicating the need for accommodation and what type. This should be done during the first week of class. 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 the:

Student Disability Resource Center  
874 Traditions Way  
108 Student Services Building  
Florida State University  
Tallahassee, FL 32306-4167  
(850) 644-9566 (voice)  
(850) 644-8504 (TDD)  
[sdrc@admin.fsu.edu](mailto:sdrc@admin.fsu.edu)  
<http://www.disabilitycenter.fsu.edu/>

### **UNIVERSITY ATTENDANCE POLICY**

Excused absences include documented illness, deaths in the family and other documented crises, call to active military duty or jury duty, religious holy days, and official University activities. These absences will be accommodated in a way that does not arbitrarily penalize students who have a valid excuse. Consideration will also be given to students whose dependent children experience serious illness.

### **MISSED/LATE ASSIGNMENTS**

It is University policy to accept missed exams and tests for documented medical reasons, family crises, call to active military duty or jury duty, religious holy days, and official University activities. I follow these guidelines gladly. I also give deference to parents with dependent children who are sick.

Late homework assignments drop 10% of their full worth for each day they are late (the homeworks in this class are worth 40 points each; one day late means 10 points off, two days late means 20 points off, and so forth). I will still accept late homeworks by email.

### **PETITIONS FOR A GRADE CHANGE**

I consider written petitions for a change of grade on assignments. However, I require students to wait two business days after receiving a grade before submitting their petition.

### **TECHNOLOGY POLICY, and CLASSROOM COURTESY**

I require cell phones to be silenced and put away during lecture. I have no issue with students taking notes on laptops. But if it seems like use of your laptop is distracting other students, I reserve the right to ask you to put it away. On a similar note, do not engage in private conversations during class, as it is disrespectful to other students who are trying to pay attention.

Please arrive on time, and let me know if you have a compelling reason to leave early. When entering late or leaving early, please do so quietly and with minimal interruption. I reserve the right to dismiss disruptive individuals from the classroom and report them to the Dean of Students.

### **EMAIL POLICY**

Please include your first and last name and course information in the subject line of your email. When I receive your email, I will make effort to respond in a timely manner, usually within 48 hours. You may receive a reply sooner than that, but you should not expect an immediate response. Please treat all email correspondences with your instructor as you would treat any other professional exchange. I expect emails to be respectful and polite, to use correct grammar and complete sentences.

### **SYLLABUS CHANGE POLICY**

Except for changes that substantially affect parameters of evaluation, including grading, this syllabus is subject to change at discretion of the instructor. I will provide you with advance notice in class and via your university registered email contact.

### **TENTATIVE SCHEDULE**

The tentative course schedule is below. Topics covered and dates are subject to change with advance notice. Due dates of assignments will not change.

## Schedule

**Class 1, Aug 26** — First day attendance and reviewing the syllabus.

### Science, theory, and causation

**No class Aug 28 (departmental conference), or Sep 2 (holiday)**

**Class 2, Sep 4** — A political science?

**Read for today:** K&W chap 1, Overview – Section 1.3

**Class 3, Sep 9** — Models, and “the rules”

**Read for today:** K&W chap 1, Sections 1.4 – 1.6

**Class 4, Sep 11** — Developing good theories, 1

**Read for today:** K&W chap 2, Overview – Section 2.4

**Class 5, Sep 16** — Developing good theories, 2

**Read for today:** K&W chap 2, Sections 2.5 – 2.9

**Class 6, Sep 18** — Correlation vs causation

**Read for today:** K&W chap 3, all

**Class 7, Sep 23** — Homework 1 due, reviewing answers

**Class 8, Sep 25** — Midterm 1

### Measurement and descriptive statistics

**Class 9, Sep 30** — Experimental research designs

**Read for today:** K&W chap 4, Overview – Section 4.2

**Class 10, Oct 2** — Observational research designs

**Read for today:** K&W chap 4, selection

**Class 11, Oct 7** — Evaluating measurements

**Read for today:** K&W chap 5, all

**Class 12, Oct 9** — Probability and statistical inference

**Read for today:** K&W chap 6, all

**Class 13, Oct 14** — Homework 2 due, reviewing answers

**Class 14, Oct 16** — Midterm 2

## **Hypothesis testing**

**Class 15, Oct 21** — Hypothesis tests and p-values, the basics

**Read for today:** K&W chap 7, Overview – Section 7.3

**Class 16, Oct 23** — Hypothesis tests and p-values, examples

**Read for today:** K&W chap 7, Section 7.4

**Class 17, Oct 28** — Introducing bivariate regression

**Read for today:** K&W chap 8, Overview – Section 8.4.3

**Class 18, Oct 30** — Estimating uncertainty in regression

**Read for today:** K&W chap 8, Section 8.4.4

**Class 19, Nov 4** — The assumptions underlying regression

**Read for today:** K&W chap 8, Section 8.4.5

**Class 20, Nov 6** — Homework 3 due, reviewing answers

**No class Nov 11, holiday**

**Class 21, Nov 13** — Midterm 3

## **Multiple regression**

**Class 22, Nov 18** — The basics of multiple regression, 1

**Read for today:** K&W chap 9, Overview – Section 9.4.5

**Class 23, Nov 20** — The basics of multiple regression, 2

**Read for today:** K&W chap 9, Sections 9.4.6 –9.5

Homework 4 due

**Class 24, Nov 25** — Developing and specifying a regression model

**Read for today:** K&W chap 10, Overview to Section 10.3

**Class 25, Dec 2** — Outliers and special cases; begin final review

**Read for today:** K&W chap 10, rest

**Class 26, Dec 4** — More review for the final

Homework 5 due

**FINAL EXAM: Thursday December 12, 10AM – 12PM**

