POLS 5020: Research Methods

Spring 2024   Wednesdays 4:15-7:00 pm, McGannon 144
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Office Hours: Mondays 11:00-12:00 am and by appointment, McGannon 133

Course Description and Introduction
How do voters hold government accountable? Do democratic governments generate better economic growth? What can be done to reduce police violence?

These questions, like countless others about the world we live in, are best answered with data. This course presents the fundamental tools that social science researchers use to ask and answer . You will learn to use the scientific method to create evidence about the way political actors operate and interact with one another. Over the course of the semester, we will develop a basic toolkit that you can use to ask and answer questions that are important to you.

This course will cover qualitative and quantitative methods. Many of the topics we cover theory building, accuracy and precision, hypothesis testing, and field research   transcend any division between the two methods. You will learn to do evidence-based research; evidence comes in many forms.

This class is geared towards Political Science MA students. However, early-stage graduate students in any social science discipline should find it useful and are welcome to enroll. I also welcome undergraduate students who want to dig a bit deeper into the basic toolkit of social science research and are up for a small challenge (really, just a small one!).

You can succeed in this class without doing any math by hand, though you will learn how to tell a computer to do complex math on your behalf. Rather, the course explains how scientific methods of inquiry can be used for research on politics, presents a toolkit developing and answering questions you care about, and trains you to use those tools productively.

For the portions of the class that involve statistics, we will use Stata. A copy of Stata will be

to class every day. I will use examples from Stata in class, and you are expected to turn in assignments completed in Stata.

Course Goals
By the end of this course, you will:
- Produce knowledge using scientific methods and empirical evidence
- Identify the limitations of statistics presented in the media and communicate those limitations effectively to a non-specialist audience
- Understand and evaluate the claims, strengths, and weaknesses of qualitative and quantitative evidence in contemporary social science research
- Use statistical methods appropriately to draw inferences about politics
- Interpret and evaluate evidence presented in political science research

A Note on Learning Methods

Empirical (i.e. evidence-based) analysis involves a lot of judgement calls. There is very rarely a single, clear-
This can be frustrating because, as a student, you want someone to tell
at the right answer. Unfortunately, there can be more than one right answer, and varying degrees

convincingly, then you have probably arrived at **a** right answer.

Everyone learns differently. This course exposes you to four sets of voices on any given topic: your professor, the textbook author, the supplementary reading authors, and your classmates.

g anything wrong (nor does it mean   a bad teacher, though it might if the entire class thinks my explanations are useless). It just means that you need the explanation from another voice. The key is to seek out the style that works for you.

Students come to this class with widely-varied experiences. You should never, ever be afraid to
hing, even if your classmates appear to understand it. Ask questions, and keep asking until you are fully satisfied.

NOTE:
the official University-mandated language for these and other policies at the end of this syllabus.

Attendance Policy

throughout each class. It is impossible to make up these types of classes if you are absent.

Each student is allowed **one free absence**

Each additional unexcused absence will result in a 10 point deduction from your overall course grade.

In addition to these free absences, you will be **excused** for anything that prevents you from attending class if it is <u>both unforeseeable and out of your control</u>. Being sick is an excused

excused absence, please email me as soon as is feasible.

Grading and Assignments
The assignments evaluate you based on the course goals listed above, with an emphasis on the appropriate use of a wide range of tools to ask and answer questions about politics using scientific methods and empirical evidence.
- 50% Homework and Classroom Assignments
- 25% Midterm Exam

- You will need to install Stata on the laptop you plan to use in this class. A Stata license will be provided to you free of charge at the beginning of the semester. We will download and install Stata together during class. You do not need to do anything before the semester starts.

Course Outline

*Homework assignments are due the following Tuesday at 9 am (the day before the next class). For example, the assignment listed under Week 1 should be turned in via Canvas by 9 am on the Tuesday of week 2.

*Reading assignments are listed for the day on which we will discuss them.

1. January 17th: The Scientific Method
    - READING for 8/30:
        - BDM and Fowler, ch. 1 (all pages) and ch. 2 p.13-24
        - Lyall 2021, p.1-26
        - Acock p.1-18
        - https://stats.oarc.ucla.edu/stata/modules/an-overview-of-stata-syntax/
    - In class:
        - Why is it called political science?
        - What is a theory and where do I find one?
        - Developing research questions
        - Installing Stata
        - Intro to data analysis (Stata)
        - Activity: Acock p.19, exercises 1-3
    - HOMEWORK for week 2:

Making tables and presenting results (Stata)
- o HOMEWORK:

11. April 3rd: Visualizing regression results
- o READING:
  BDM and Fowler, p.306-315
  https://stats.oarc.ucla.edu/stata/modules/graph8/gen-opts/
  https://www.princeton.edu/~otorres/Outreg2.pdf
- o

15. May 1st: Research ethics; Wrap-up
- o READING:
  - Blair, Christia
    - **This chapter discusses ethical issues related to the policing experiment you read about in Haim et al for week 5. Pay attention to the ethical challenges the researchers faced and how they responded to them.*
- o In class:
  - Montana GOTV

    IRB
    Taking sides in politics

Final paper due May 11th at 9 am via Canvas