Scope and Methods of Political Science

Department of Political Science
College of Sciences at the **University of Central Florida**

POS 3703

Dr. Jonathan Knuckey

Summer D 2012

Instructor Contact:

Instructor	Dr. Jonathan Knuckey
Office	Phillips Hall 302L
Office Hours	By appointment. Generally, I will be happy to meet with students at a day/time that is most convenient with your schedule.
E-Mail	Use email in Webcourses. I will respond to all emails within 24 hours. I will not usually check email after 5.00pm, so plan accordingly if you have questions.

Course Overview

The majority of political scientists have adopted a method for studying political questions that differs from the approach taken by journalists, historians, and political commentators. They have adopted the

scientific method, used in other disciplines such as biology, physics, chemistry and medical research. This means that political scientists, as well as other social scientists, use data -- quantifiable facts and figures -- to systematically test explanations of political phenomena. Much of the research in political science uses statistical tests to determine which explanations are best supported by the data. This course, however, is not a statistics course and you will not be expected to learn and memorize hellatious looking mathematical formulas!

In order to assist political science majors in understanding and evaluating social science research, this course acquaints students with the scientific method; how the scientific method is applied to the social sciences; how social science research is designed; how data is collected; and how presentations of research findings are interpreted. This course seeks to develop basic analytic skills that students can also apply in a variety of career settings, and which are prized by many employers in both the public and private sectors.

This course should be taken as early as possible since it helps students understand the reading materials in their upper-level classes; to research topics for term papers; to participate in the internship program; and to design an honors thesis.

For many students, this will be an entirely different kind of course. Many good undergraduate courses require you to become knowledgeable about a field, such as Comparative Politics, Political Behavior, Public Policy, or International Relations. In this course, we are not focused on a particular field, but are more interested in understanding the methods that political scientists in all fields use to understand and build knowledge. Of course, new things can be both exciting and frightening. Any trepidation that you may have is best overcome by "feeling the fear, and doing it anyway." The excitement will come with the realization that this knowledge is empowering, in that rather than simply accepting the answers of "experts" to fundamental questions of politics you will learn how to critically evaluate previous answers offered by others, and most importantly will become a producer - not just a consumer - of research on politics.

Course Requirements

Requirements for a Web-Based Class

This is a completely web-based class, and, consequently, requires a different approach in terms of requirements than a regular class. Most obviously, there will be no face-to-face meetings and no lectures.

However, you should realize that a web-based class does not mean that you will be doing less work. Indeed, a web-based class will require that you take a much more active role in your education as compared to a regular face-to-face class.

Generally I have found that students who do well in a web-based class are self-motivated and have usually received good grades (B or higher) in regular face-to-face classes. A web-based class does, however, provide you with some flexibility in that you are not required to be in a classroom two or three times a week at a specific time.

My general rule of thumb is that you should devote 2 to 3 hours of study per course credit hour per week. As this is a three credit hour class you should plan on devoting 6 to 9 hours per week to this class. This involves reading, taking notes and doing assignments. I know you have other commitments—other classes, jobs and life—but managing your time is essential to doing well in any class, especially a web-based class. You will also find that much of the material in this class is about applying the material learned, rather than memorizing or looking things up. Thus, to do well in the class you need to make an investment in it throughout the semester—not just the night before exams.

Textbook:

This course will use a single text, which is available from the university bookstore. You will need to have purchased the book by the end of the first week of classes.

Michael K. LeRoy, ***Research Methods in Political Science: An Introduction Using Microcase.*** 8th Edition (Wadsworth, 2012).

Make sure you buy the 8th edition as older editions of the book will not be of any use to you for this class.

I would strongly recommend that you **do not** buy a used copy of this textbook, as the access code to download MicroCase will be useless. Also used copies of the textbook may have missing worksheets for the MicroCase exercises.

Please note: I reserve the right to add, delete or change readings. I will, of course, give you advance notice of any such changes.

Weekly Modules

Requirements for each week of class will be detailed in modules that are accessed in Webcourses (Click on "Learning Modules"). I strongly recommend printing out the requirements for each module and making sure you note due dates for assignments.

Each module will provide an overview to each specific topic, direct you to the required reading, and outline specific tasks, quizzes and assignments. These activities are designed to make sure that you have thought about the material covered in the module, and to provide practical applications of material you will have read in the textbook.

As well as including assignment instructions, the module overview will often contain some suggestions and tips for the assignments.

Module assignment due dates:

Due dates for each part of a module can be found in each module. Modules will often have multiple due dates. The time that any assignment should be submitted on a particular day will always be 11.00pm.

Exams

There will be two exams given during the semester. All exams will be taken on-line in Webcourses.

The exams are non-cumulative. Each exams will consist of objective-style questions, that may include multiple-choice, true-false and identification questions. There will also be analytical style question where you will be apply your knowledge about the course material.

The Exams are scheduled as follows:

- Midterm exam: must be completed by Tuesday, June 12th (11.00pm)
- Final exam: must be completed by Friday, July 13th (11.00pm)

Note: Exams will be available a couple of days prior to the dates noted above, so you will have some flexibility when you take the exam. However, once you begin the exam, it must then be completed within the allotted time period.

I strongly recommend that you take the exam somewhere that has a reliable internet connection. If you know somewhere that is prone to internet connections being down then take the exam somewhere else.

Important: You must take each exam. Failure to take any exam will mean you automatically receive a failing grade.

Academic Dishonesty

UCF faculty support the UCF creed. Integrity – practicing and defending academic and personal honesty – is the first tenet of the UCF Creed. This is in part a reflection of the second tenet, Scholarship: "I will cherish and honor learning as a fundamental purpose of membership in the UCF community." Course assignments and tests are designed to have educational value; the process of preparing for and completing these exercises will help improve your skills and knowledge. Material presented to satisfy course requirements is therefore expected to be the result of your own original scholarly efforts.

Violations of student academic behavior standards are outlined in The Golden Rule, the University of Central Florida's Student Handbook. See https://www.goldenrule.sdes.ucf.edu for further details.

Academic Dishonesty is defined as follows:

1. Cheating, whereby non-permissible written, visual or oral assistance including that obtained from another student is utilized on examinations, course assignments or projects, is prohibited. The unauthorized possession or use of examination or course related material shall also constitute cheating.

2. Plagiarism, whereby another's work is deliberately used or appropriated without any indication of the source, thereby attempting to convey the impression that such work is the student's own, is prohibited. Any student failing to properly credit ideas or materials taken from another has plagiarized.

Please note that any student who has assisted another in any of the aforementioned breach of standards shall be considered equally culpable.

Students who attempt to obtain unearned academic credentials that do not reflect their skills and knowledge can also undermine the value of the UCF degrees earned by their more honest peers. Any form of academic dishonesty will result in you automatically failing the class and referred to the University authorities. Also, please remember that those caught cheating will have a notation made in their

University records that they have been found guilty of academic misconduct. This can and will keep you out of law school so do not be tempted to cheat in any way.

Grades

Please feel free to ask questions about assignments you receive back. Understanding the material is far more important than the grade itself, so please do read any comments I provide for assignments and exams.

If you think you are struggling in class PLEASE come and talk to me as often as you like - never think you are being a pest!

You will be able to access your grades in Webcourses (click on "My Grades"). Please make sure that grades entered here are correct. You should bring any discrepancies to my attention within a week of the grades being posted.

Your final grade will be weighted as follows:

Exams	**55% (Midterm Exam 25%, Final Exam 30%)**
Weekly Modules	**45%**

Grade boundaries are as follows:

Grade	**Percentage**
A (Excellent)	**90-100**
B (Good)	**80-89**

C (Average)	70-79
D (Marginal pass)	60-69
F	Below 60

At my discretion, I will uses a plus or minus to "tweak" grades that fall on the borderline between grades. I will take your overall performance in the class into consideration when doing so.

If you believe that you have been unfairly graded, you must follow this procedure:

1. Wait 24 hours after receiving the grade before contacting me.
2. Provide a brief explanation in writing for why the grade you received was unfair. You will need to reference the specific questions on any quiz, assignment or exam. A general "I didn't like my grade" comment will not receive any review.

Grade grievance procedures are outlined under the UCF Golden Rule

For information purposes, when I taught this class last summer, the grade distribution was as follows: 7 As, 7 Bs, 7 Cs, 1 D, 4 Fs (Note: all but one failing grade was as a result of students missing grading opportunities from on-line modules or not taking one or more exam!)

Make-up Policy & Incompletes

- **Extensions and Make-up exams:** The time and dates for all assignments and exams are fixed in krypton-coated granite encased in a hydrogen bomb-proof vault! In other words, an extension on an assignment, or make-up exam will only be given in the most exceptional circumstances that are beyond the control of a student.

  At the top of the list of unacceptable excuses for late-work are those related to computer problems. I will generally not accept “My hard-drive crashed.... I accidentally deleted the file.... My internet connection is down....Etc....” These are the “dog ate my homework” excuses of the “Technology

Age" and will not fly! It is your responsibility to secure ample time at a computer, make backups of your work, and generally plan ahead—do whatever it takes!

From time to time the servers hosting Webcourses at UCF have been known to go down. If this happens UCF will normally post an annoncement and if this coincides with the time when an assignment or exam is due, I will make alternative arrangements.

I do not consider vacations or other trips out of town (other than when the student is away from campus representing an official university function) to be exceptional circumstances. Of course, this is an on-line class, so as long as you have reliable internet access being out of town does not really present a problem.

Any student missing an assignments, exam or any other work because of observance of religious holidays shall be given an opportunity during that semester to make up missed work. The make-up will apply to the religious holiday absence only. It shall be the responsibility of the student to notify the instructor no later than the end of the first week of class of his or her intention to participate in religious holidays which do not fall on state holidays or periods of class recess. This policy shall not apply in the event that administering the test or examination at an alternate time would impose an unavoidable hardship on the instructor or the university.

- **Incompletes:** An incomplete standing will only be granted if requested in writing to me (an email or phone call is not acceptable). You must explain why you are requesting an incomplete standing and include, where appropriate, documentation that must be original and verifiable. An incomplete will only be granted if you have a passing grade in the class.

  Remember an incomplete grade is only reserved for when you have missed an assignment or exam for a legitimate reason but are otherwise passing the class. Incompletes are not given because you have achieved a low grade.

Disability Statement

The University of Central Florida is committed to providing reasonable accommodations for all persons with disabilities.

This syllabus is available in alternative formats upon request.

No accommodations will be provided until the student has met with the professor to request accommodations. Students who need accommodations must be registered with Student Disability Services, Student Resource center Room 132, phone (407) 823-2371, TTY/TDD only phone (407) 823-2116, before requesting accommodations from me.

Disclaimer

I reserve the right to change, add or modify any part of the syllabus and course requirements. Of course, advance notice will be given of any such changes.