Scope and Methods of Political Science

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

POS 3703

Dr. Jonathan Knuckey

Course Overview

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 you.
E-Mail	Use the 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 Description

Why do we call our discipline "political science"? What does it mean to study politics "scientifically"? What kinds of research do political scientists do, and how do they communicate that knowledge to one another? How do we measure political phenomena? How would we know if a new public policy "worked"? How do we analyze data, and what are good data to analyze?

During the course of the semester, we will discuss these issues and others. Our discussions, the readings, various assignments and exams, will facilitate your becoming intelligent consumers of political science research, as well as help you become producers of your own research about political phenomena. The skills that you develop in the course will help you understand the literature that you read in substantive courses, help you distinguish between real research and meaningless rubbish, enable you to better understand the assumptions behind each research design, introduce you to data management using a popular statistical package, and familiarize you with some techniques used in individual and aggregate level analysis.

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. Moreover, you will learn how to formulate your own

questions, conduct your own research, and find your own answers to important research topics in politics.

Syllabus

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. If you don't think you can devote this time to class you are going to struggle to make a passing grade.

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.*** 7th Edition (Wadsworth, 2008).

Make sure you buy the 7th edition (cover shown above) 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 - a midterm and a final exam - 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 14th (11.00pm)
- Final exam, must be completed by Friday, July 15th (11.00pm)

Note: Both exams will be available a few 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 http://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:

Midterm Exam	25%
Final Exam	30%
Internet 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

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 know to go down. If this happens UCF will normally post an annoucement and if this conincides with the time when an assignment or exam is due, I will make alternative arrangments.

  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 last day of llate registration 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. Such documentation must be on a letterhead, and contain a contact name and telephone number. 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 exam for a legitimate reason but are otherwise passing the class. Incompletes are not given because you have achieved a low grade. You can read the UCF policy on incompletes here if you need further clarification.

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.

Students with disabilities who need accommodations in this course must contact me at the beginning of the semester to discuss needed accommodations

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.

Course Schedule

To access each module click on "Learning Modules" where you will find details of the requirements and assignment due dates for each module.

Modules will normally be released at the beginning of and the middle of each week.

Week 1: May 16-20

Module 1: Getting Started
Module 2: The Research Process in Political Science

Week 2: May 23-27

Module 3: Measurement - Conceptual and Operational Definitions

Week 3: May 30-June 3

Module 4: Measurement - Types of Data

Module 5: Variables, Variation and Explanation

Week 4: June 6-10

Module 6: Hypotheses and Hypothesis Testing

Week 5: June 13-17

Midterm Exam - to be completed in Webcourses by Tuesday, June 14 (11.00pm)

Module 7: Using and Interpreting Descriptive Statistics

Week 6: June 20-24

Module 8: Using and Interpreting Cross-tabulations

Module 9: Statistical Significance, Significance Tests and Measures of Association

Week 7: June 27-July 1

Module 10: Bivariate Analysis - Analysis of Variance

Module 11: Controlling for a Third Variable Using Cross-tabulations

Week 8: July 4-8

Module 12: Correlation and Multiple Regression Analysis

Week 9: July 11-15

Module 13: The Overall Research Process

Final Exam - To be completed in Webcourses by Friday, July 15th (11.00pm)

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.