POS 3703
Scope and Methods of Political Science
Spring 2016

Instructor: Andrew Boutton

Office: 302I Howard Phillips Hall

Office Hours: T 1:45-5:00; F 2:00-3:30

Email: `Andrew.Boutton@ucf.edu`

Time: TR 12:00 - 1:15

Place: HPH 310

Overview

In this course, students will learn basic data analysis and research methodology used in empirical political science research. Social scientists in academia, the private sector, and the policy community use data to answer questions about topics as diverse as voting behavior, democratization, public finance, and terrorism. The goal is to familiarize students with how this research is conducted, and how these questions are answered. We will begin by learning how to describe data and use it to measure concepts or events of interest relevant to political science research (such as "democracy" or "terrorism"). By the end, students will know how to conduct basic regression analyses and to construct measures of association between variables.
Specifically, students will learn how to:

- summarize data using descriptive statistics
- quantify and measure concepts of interest
- evaluate relationships between variables and quantities of interest
- make inferences based on these relationships
- perform basic functions and statistical analyses in a highly versatile computing package

We will use the `R` computing package for statistical analyses. While the learning curve is a bit steeper with `R` than with other software programs, it is open-source and free, while others are proprietary (and quite expensive). Furthermore, `R` is much more widely used in the private sector than are other programs such as Stata or SPSS. Thus, even a basic knowledge of `R` is a hugely marketable skill that will serve you well in the future. It is free and can be downloaded here: `https://www.r-project.org/`.

Requirements & Grading

Required textbooks:

- Philip Pollock, The Essentials of Political Analysis, 4th Edition
- Philip Pollock, An R Companion to Political Analysis

Late work policy

Generally, late work will not be accepted. However, I will consider granting an extension to students who submit a reasonable request to me in writing at least 48 hours in advance of the due date. Last minute requests will not be granted unless the student can provide documentation of a legitimate emergency. The same rule applies to make-up exam requests: they must be made no later than 48 hours before the exam date, or they will not be allowed.

Communication

The best way to contact me will be through my UCF email, although I will respond to messages sent through Webcourses. In addition, I will rely heavily on the Announcement feature in Webcourses to communicate with the class outside of regular class meetings. A good rule of thumb is to check your email and/or log-in to Webcourses at least once daily.

Attendance (5%)

Students are expected to arrive on time, sign an attendance sheet, and remain through the duration of the class. Arriving late and/or leaving early are extremely disruptive and will negatively impact both the attendance and participation portions of the final grade. Students should arrive to class having finished each of the materials listed on the syllabus for that day, including problem sets or other assignments.

Article critiques (10%)

During the semester, we will read three different pieces of political science research that coincide with a theme or method being discussed in class. Students are required to write a 2-3 page critique of one of these articles. The three articles will be drawn from each of the three main subfields of political science (American politics, international relations, and comparative politics). The articles will be made available via Webcourses well in advance, and due dates will be announced soon.

In-class exercises & participation (15%)

Success in this class will be largely dependent on participation from the students. Though this is not a seminar, instructor-student interaction will be instrumental in illustrating aspects of the class that deserve additional attention in class. I do not expect students to be familiar with any of the material covered in this class. Thus, it is absolutely essential that you ask me, the instructor, about anything that is unclear to you after reading the book.
Students will also participate in exercises during class on a semi-regular basis.

Problem sets (30%)

The best way to learn the subject matter in this course is to practice. Thus, students will complete a number of problem sets throughout the semester.

Exams (40%)

There will be three non-cumulative exams throughout the semester.

Grading scale	
94-100	A
90-93.9	A-
87-89.9	B+
84-86.9	B
80-83.9	B-
77-79.9	C+
74-76.9	C
70-73.9	C-
67-69.9	D+
64-66.9	D
60-63.9	D-
0-59.9	F

Course Schedule

Week 1 (January 12-14): Course intro; Concepts and measurement I

Essentials Ch 1

R Companion Ch 1

Week 2 (January 19-21): Concepts and measurement II

Essentials Ch 1

R Companion Ch 1

Week 3 (January 26-28): Measuring and describing variables

Essentials Ch 2

R Companion Ch 1-3

Week 4 (February 2-4): Explanations, hypotheses, comparisons I

Essentials Ch 3

R Companion Ch 3-4

Week 5 (February 9-11): Explanations, hypotheses, comparisons II

Essentials Ch 3

R Companion Ch 3-4

Week 6 (February 16-18): Review & Exam I

Review

Week 7 (February 23-25): Research design I

Essentials Ch 4

Other reading TBA

Week 8 (March 1-3): Research design II

Essentials Ch 4

Other reading TBA

Week 9 (March 8-10): Controlled comparisons I

Essentials Ch 5

R Companion Ch 5

Week 10 (March 15-17): Controlled comparisons II & Inference and Measures of Association I

Essentials Ch 5-6

R Companion Ch 6

Week 11 (March 22-24): Inference and measures of association II

Essentials Ch 6-7

R Companion Ch 6-7

Week 12 (March 29-31): Inference and measures of association III

Essentials Ch 6-7

R Companion Ch 7

Week 13 (April 5-7): Inference and measures of association IV/ Review & Exam II

Reading & assignment TBA

Week 14 (April 12-14): Regression analysis I

Essentials Ch 8

R Companion Ch 8

Week 15 (April 19-21): Regression analysis II & Logistic regression

Essentials Ch 9

R Companion Ch 9

Week 16

Final exam

University Writing Center

The University Writing Center (UWC) is a free resource for UCF undergraduates and graduates. At the UWC, a trained writing consultant will work individually with you on anything you are writing (in or out of class), at any point in the writing process from brainstorming to editing. Appointments are recommended, but not required. For more information or to make an appointment, visit the UWC website at `http://www.uwc.ucf.edu`, stop by MOD 608, or call 407.823.2197.

University Policies

Academic Conduct Policy
Academic dishonesty in any form will not be tolerated. If you are uncertain as to what constitutes academic dishonesty, please consult The Golden Rule, the University of Central Florida's Student Handbook (`http://www.goldenrule.sdes.ucf.edu/`) for further details. As in all University courses, The Golden Rule Rules of Conduct will be applied. Violations of these rules will result in a record of the infraction being placed in your file and receiving a zero on the work in question AT A MINIMUM. At the instructors discretion, you may also receive a failing grade for the course. Confirmation of such incidents can also result in expulsion from the University

Note to students with disabilities:
The University of Central Florida is committed to providing reasonable accommodations for all persons with disabilities. This syllabus is available in alternate formats upon request. Students who need accommodations must be registered with Student Disability Services, Ferrell Commons Room 185, Phone: (407) 823-2371, TTY/TDD only phone (407) 823-2116, before requesting accommodations from the professor.