POS 3703
Scope and Methods of Political Science
Spring 2017

Instructor: Andrew Boutton

Office: 302I Howard Phillips Hall

Office Hours: WF 1:30-3:30

Email: `Andrew.Boutton@ucf.edu`

Time: MWF 12:30 - 1:20

Place: HPH 310

Overview

In this course, students will learn basic research methodology and data analysis 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 "liberalism"). 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:

- explain political science phenomena
- define, quantify, and measure a concept
- summarize data using descriptive statistics
- 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/`.

Required materials

Textbook:

- Philip Pollock, The Essentials of Political Analysis, 4th Edition

Grading:

This class will consist of three different types of assignments: quizzes (6), lab/homework assignments (6), and a final project. These are explained in more detail below. The value of each assignment varies, but the total value of all assignments is 500 points. Thus, your final letter grade is based directly upon how many of the 500 points you earn throughout the semester.

Quizzes: 150 points (5 @ 30 points each)

There will be six (6) quizzes throughout the semester, each worth 30 points; these will take place in-class, usually on Wednesdays unless otherwise noted. They will consist of a variety of questions (i.e., short-answer, definitions, multiple choice, true/false). Although we will take six (6) quizzes in total, each student's lowest quiz grade will be dropped when the final grade is calculated.

Lab/homework assignments: 150 points (5 @ 30 points each)

There will be six (6) homework assignments throughout the semester, worth 30 points each. These will usually be based on our Friday lab sessions, unless otherwise noted. While we will complete six (6) assignments, each student's lowest grade will be dropped when the final grade is calculated.

Final project: 200 points (50 points for the proposal, 150 for the paper)

Each of you will complete an original research project as part of your final grade. This will be due on **Tuesday, April 25** in the political science office (302 Howard Phillips). The project as a whole will consist of a 500-750 word proposal, due **Wednesday, March 22 in class**, and the final paper itself. The proposal will describe and justify the project, the data used, and the hypotheses that will be tested. The goal of the project is to incorporate the various aspects of research design and elementary data analysis that you've learned throughout the semester, and apply them to data on your own. More specifics on the paper and proposal will be discussed as the semester progresses.

Bonus: up to 50 participation points

Participation is not part of the 500 points needed for your final grade. In other words, you will not be penalized even if you choose to sit in silence during class discussions for the entire semester. However, you will be able to earn up to 50 bonus points simply by participating regularly, consistently, and thoughtfully in class discussions. This means asking and/or answering questions, commenting on the readings or some recent news story, or responding to a classmate's comment or question. These bonus points will be added onto your final grade (in other words, it is possible to receive 550/500, or 110%, as your final grade). There are no hard and fast rules, **but as a rough point of reference, someone wishing to earn the full 50 points should participate about once per class period.** After each class, students should indicate to me on a sheet of paper how much they participated in each class. I will keep track of these throughout the semester, and add points onto final grades accordingly.

While non-participation will not be penalized *per se*, both you and your classmates will almost certainly get more out of this class if you participate actively in discussions. Some of you will find the material difficult and intimidating, and both your understanding of the material and the quality of your experience this semester will depend almost entirely on how much you engage in this class.

Grading scale	
90+	A
80-89	B
70-79	C
60-69	D
0-59	F

Late work policy

Assignments and exams are due at the beginning of class on the due date. Work that is handed in up to 24 hours late will incur a 15% penalty; an additional 24 hours adds another 15%, and and so on. I will not accept anything beyond four (4) days after the due date.
However, I will consider granting a penalty-free 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. ****If you ask for an extension on or after the due date for an exam or assignment, it will not be granted, no exceptions****

Attendance

I will not take attendance, and there is no direct penalty for being absent from class. However, the material we cover in this class will be unfamiliar to most and very challenging for many. Unlike other classes, teaching yourself this material and staying caught up without attending class is nearly impossible. As such, you will find regular attendance beneficial for your grade. **It is your responsibility to catch up on what you missed if you do not come to class on a particular day.** Furthermore, not attending class will affect your ability to 1) complete in-class assignments; and 2) participate in class (see below). Not doing any or all of these things will have a negative impact on your final grade in some way.

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.

A word about plagiarism

I realize that figuring out R code is difficult. It is unreasonable for me to impose solitude upon you while doing take-home exams or homework assignments. Working in pairs or small groups can alleviate some of the frustration involved, and generally, I encourage you to collaborate on assignments and even exams if it helps you get a better handle on things. However, there still needs to be sufficient evidence that you did your own work as well. So, fair warning: if I find that two or more assignments/exams are exactly the same or close to it, each person involved will receive a 0. There is certainly some gray area between doing the entire assignment on your own and just copying and pasting from someone else's work, and I'll be reasonable about this. But I'll leave it to your judgment to find—and stay on the right side of—the line between acceptable and unacceptable.

Course Schedule

Week 1 (January 9-13):

M: Course intro

W: Studying politics scientifically & quantitatively (read Essentials, Preface & Introduction)

F: Introduction to R

Week 2 (January January 16-20): Concepts and measurement

M: No class (Martin Luther King day)

W: Concepts and measurement (read Essentials, pp 1-23); Quiz 1

F: Working with datasets in R

Week 3 (January 23-27)

M: Measuring and describing variables (read Essentials pp 24-47)

W: Quiz 2

F: Working with variables & summary statistics (Lab assignment 1)

Week 4 (January 30-February 3)

M: Explanations, hypotheses, comparisons (read Essentials pp 48-77)

W: Explanations, hypotheses, comparisons, cont'd

F: Creating figures (Lab assignment 2)

Week 5 (February 6-10)

M: Explanations, hypotheses, comparisons II

W: Quiz 3

F: TBD

Week 6 (February 13-17)

M: Research design (read Essentials pp 78-101)

W: Research design

F: TBD

Week 7 (February 20-24)

M: Research design, cont'd (reading TBD)

W: No class (ISA conference); Quiz 4 (online)

F: No class (ISA conference)

Week 8 (February 27-March 3)

M: Controlled comparisons (read Essentials pp 102-122)

W: Controlled comparisons

F: Making comparisons in R (Lab assignment 3)

Week 9 (March 6-10)

M: Foundations of inference I (read Essentials pp 122-136)

W: Samples and sampling distributions

F: No class

Week 10 (March 13-17): Spring Break: No class

Week 11 (March 20-24)

M: Foundations of inference II (read Essentials pp 136-155)

W: **Project proposal due in class**

F: Making inferences about sample means

Week 12 (March 27-31)

M: Signficance tests & measures of association (read Essentials pp 156-182)

W: Quiz 5

F: Signficance tests, chi-square, & measures of association (Lab assignment 4)

Week 13 (April 3-7)

M: Regression: Correlation & bivariate regression (read Essentials pp 183-201)

W: Regression: Correlation & bivariate regression, cont'd

F: Correlation & bivariate regression (Lab assignment 5)

Week 14 (April 10-14)

M: Multivariate regression analysis (read Essentials pp 201-214)

W: Multivariate regression analysis, cont'd

F: Multivariate regression in R (Lab assignment 6)

Week 15 (April 17-21)

M: Estimating and interpreting regression models (read Essentials pp 244-247)

W: Quiz 6 (will cover bivariate & multivariate regression)

F: More multivariate regression in R

Week 16 (April 24-28)

M: work day

T: Final project due by 4:59 PM in political science office (302 Howard Phillips)

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.