POS 3703

Scope & Methods of Political Science

Spring 2018

Instructor: Jonathan Knuckey

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**, 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 scary looking mathematical formulas! Indeed, we use statistics regularly in our lives without ever fearing statistics, as any sports fan would attest! It's just the same for political scientists, except rather than using statistics to help describe the performance of a football or baseball team we are using statistics to better help us describe and explain politics.

This course will certainly help you understand the reading materials in many upper-level classes and equip you with the skills to research topics for term papers, to participate in the internship program and to design an honors thesis. Specifically the course will help you hone your skills in the following areas:

- How the scientific method is applied to the social sciences;
- How social science research is designed;
- How data are collected;
- How data are analyzed;
- How presentations of research findings are interpreted.

Thus, by the time you complete this course you will have developed critical thinking and analytic skills that you can also apply in a variety of career settings, and which are prized by many employers in both the public and private sectors.

I know this will seem like an entirely different kind of course that you are used to. In this course, we are not focused on the content knowledge of subfield in political science, but are more interested in understanding the **methods** that most political scientists use to understand and build knowledge about political phenomena. Thus, you will be learning how to "do" political science yourself, and critically how to become a producer - not just a consumer - of research on politics.

Instructor Contact Information.

Office: Political Science department, Phillips Hall 302L.

Office hours: Tuesday, 11.00am-2.00pm; Thursday, 11.00am-2.00pm. Although this is a web-based class please do make use of my face-to-face office hours, if for no other reason it is always interesting to know who students are apart from a name! Please also feel free to make an appointment to meet outside of these days/times if they are not convenient.

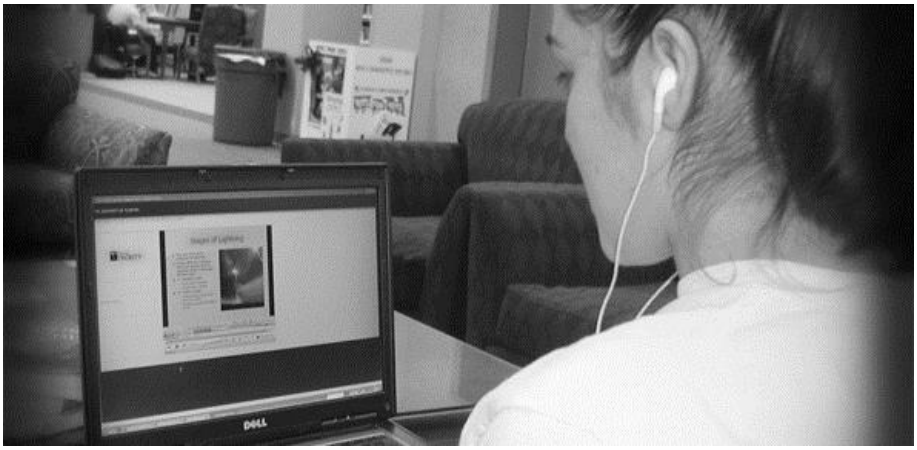
Email: Use email in Webcourses. If you write me M-F, I should get back to you within 24 hours. If I don't, please feel free to send me a reminder!

If you send a message after 5.00pm assume it may not get a reply until the following day. Do allow adequate time for a reply to a question about an assignment. If you send a question a few hours before an assignment is due, I may not see it in time to provide an adequate answer.

A note on etiquette: You are what you email, which means your instructors will often shape their opinion of you according to the quality of the email messages you are sending. To that end, be sure to please keep the tone of your emails professional, sign your emails with your name and include an appropriate salutation (Hint: you can't go wrong with "Dear Dr. Knuckey").

Skype: I am happy to talk via Skype, especially if you are not located in central Florida.. My Skype name is jonathan.knuckey70

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, we will not be meeting as a class where you are listening to lectures two or three times a week. However, you should realize that a web-based class does not mean that you will be doing less work. Indeed, as those of you who have taken web-based classes before will attest, a completely on-line 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.

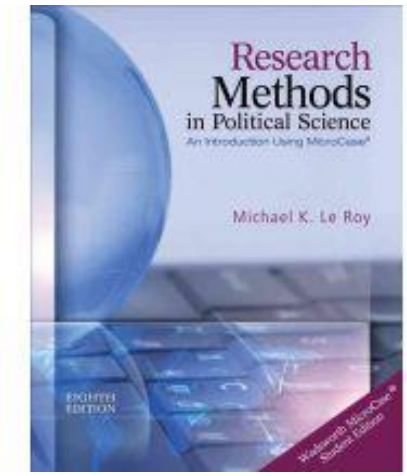
My general rule of thumb for any undergraduate college-level course is that you should devote **2 to 3 hours of study per course credit hour per week**. As this is a three credit hour class you should plan on devoting **6 to 9 hours** per week to this class. This involves reading, taking notes and taking quizzes and other writing assignments.

I know you have other commitments—other classes, jobs and life in general—and that you will not *always* be able to devote this time every week. 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 an assignment is due.

Textbooks

You should purchase the following book, no later than the end of the first week of class:



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

Make sure you buy the correct edition of the book (as shown above). **Older editions of the textbooks will be no good to you.** Please make sure it is purchased no later than the end of the first week of the semester. Take this into account if ordering from a third party vendor, such as like Amazon.

The textbook comes with an access code that you will use to download MicroCase, a data analysis program. ***If you buy a used copy of this textbook, or have an eBook the access code may not come with the book.*** In this case, you can download the program from the link I will supply in Module 1.

Note: The MicroCase program will run on Windows only. If you are a Mac user you will need to be able to run Windows applications. Yes, I know this is not optimal and have raised the issue with the publisher, but to no avail! There are two options to get around this if you are unable to get access to a PC for the semester:

(1) Boot Camp is one of the best programs for running PC applications on a Mac, and comes installed in all new Macs (although obviously you would still need to get the Windows installation disk).

(2)The Comparative Politics MicroCase program has also been installed in the Political Science Computer Lab (Phillips Hall). If you use the program here, please make sure you are using the version for **Research Methods** (*Note: There is also another version of MicroCase used for the Comparative Politics courses installed. Make sure you use the Research Methods version for assignments for this class*).

Weekly Modules

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

I do not release all the modules at once in order to provide as much feedback as possible on quizzes and assignments. If every module was released at once some students would invariably rush through several in a week, giving little time to provide feedback and hence facilitate understanding of the material. I believe this approach best captures the pace of a regular course.

Each module will provide an overview to each specific topic, direct you to the required reading, and outline specific tasks, quizzes, assignments and discussion topics. 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.

Full assignment details will be given in each Module.

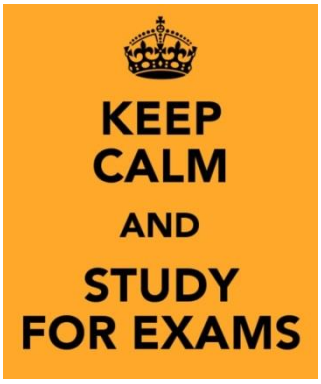
Assignment due dates: Due dates can be found in the Course Schedule below and in each module. Modules will usually have multiple due dates, so it's a good idea to note these at the beginning of each week.

The deadline for any work will always be midnight on a particular day. However, submissions will still be accepted up to 5pm on the following day. Anything submitted after 5pm will not receive credit.

All deadlines are, of course, for Eastern time, so keep that in mind if you are in a different time-zone for part, or all, of the semester!

Please remember that you will know what assignment is due, and what that assignment entails, well in advance of a due date. The single biggest source of missed points on assignments is starting an assignment too late and not making enough time to complete the assignment. So pace yourself on all assignments. If you plan ahead you can complete an assignment over multiple days, which is far more conducive to learning than opening an assignment up just a couple of hours before it is due and rushing through it.

Exams



There will be two exams given during the semester scheduled as follows:

- Midterm exam: must be completed on any day between **Wednesday, February 21st and Friday, February, 23rd** (5.00pm).
- Final exam: must be completed on any day between **Wednesday, April 25th and Friday, April 27th** (5.00pm).

Exams will be taken in Webcourses. Exams will be a mixture of multiple choice and problem/solving analytical questions.

Once you begin the exam, it must then be completed within the allotted time period of 2 hours and 30 minutes. I strongly recommend that you take the exam somewhere that you won't be distracted and that has reliable internet connection. If you know somewhere that is prone to internet connections being down then take the exam somewhere else.

Remember, while the exams are essentially like a take-home exam they are timed. Furthermore, you will need to have understood and absorbed the material ahead of the exam. So treat these exams like a regular exam that requires studying for ahead of time. Students who take the exam without studying can and do fail the exams.

Student Conduct

All students are expected to adhere to the UCF Golden Rule, which includes conducting oneself in a professional manner both in the classroom and in written and verbal communication with me and to other students. Violations of the Golden Rule -- both academic and non-academic -- can result in a referral to the Office of Student Conduct.

Grades

My philosophy of grading is decidedly against what is generally known as "competitive grading" or "grading on the curve." You are not competing against fellow students for grades in this class. You are

competing against yourself at all times, hopefully pushing yourself to excel against my objective standards of what students should reasonably get out of this class.

Average mastery of those standards is the baseline for earning an "average" grade of C. Do above-average work, you earn a B. Do excellent work, you earn an A…. and so on. In any case, please understand that the points you earn toward a final grade will not be jerked around up or down to fit some predetermined grade curve. If everyone deserves an A, they'll get it. If everyone flunks, they'll all get an F and then, in all likelihood, I will leave the jurisdiction quickly under cover of night in heavy disguise and an assumed name!

Your final grade will be weighted as follows:

- Quizzes and written assignments, 25%
- MicroCase worksheets, 25%
- Midterm exam, 25%
- Final exam, 25%

As there are ample grading opportunities in this course there will be no extra credit given. If you know you need a certain grade at the end of the semester, you know you need it at the beginning. Under no circumstances can or will a course grade be awarded on any basis other than those stated in the syllabus.

Grade boundaries are as follows:

A, 92%+

A-, 90-91.9%

B+, 86-89.9%

B, 82-85.9%

B-, 80-81.9%

C+, 76-79.9%

C, 72-75.9%

C-, 70-71.9%

D+, 66-69.9%

D, 62-65.9%

D- 60-61.9%

F, 59% and below.

Students typically obsess about grades too late, often at the end of the semester. There is little that can be done at that point. So, if you think you are struggling in this class please come and talk to me as often as you like - never think you are being a pest! I cannot recall ever failing a student who early sought this kind of help. However, students who are struggling and delay assistance do fail.

You will be able to access your grades in Webcourses. Please make sure that grades entered here are correct. While every effort is made to ensure grades are correct, from time-to-time errors can occur (incorrectly add/subtract, miss points, and even fail to understand what a student wrote).

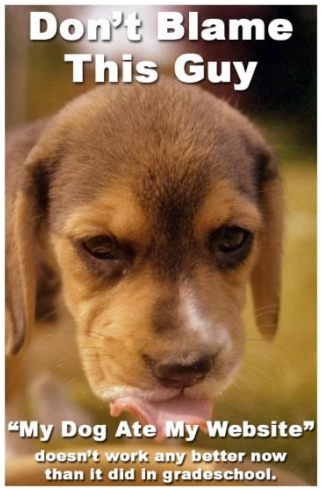
A time limit of **1 week** is imposed on all change of grade requests after the grade has posted for a completed piece or work. This is sufficient time to identify any errors. After that prior grades will not be reviewed. This is to bring the course grade to completion and to minimize "end of semester" opportunism.

When grades fall exactly on the borderline of letter grades (91.9%, 89.9%, 85.9%, 81.9, 79.9, etc, etc), I'll take the overall performance of a student throughout the semester into account when deciding whether to round up.

As there are ample grading opportunities during the semester, **no extra credit will be given.**

Grade grievance policies are outlined under the UCF Golden Rule.

Make-up Policy and Incompletes



The time and dates for all assignments and the exam are fixed in krypton-coated granite encased in a hydrogen bomb-proof vault! These dates are also known at least one week ahead of time. 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.

As general rule of thumb an extension is more likely to be granted when requested **prior to** an assignment due date. **Requests for an assignment extension after an assignment deadline will not be accepted.**

At the top of the list of unacceptable excuses for late-work are those related to computer issues, which include but are not limited to:

- My computer is broken....
- My computer was stolen....
- I accidentally deleted the file....
- The internet is broken....
- I forgot to attach the assignment....
- I did the quiz but forgot to submit it...

The above are all actual excuses I have received. They 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, check you did not submit a blank assignment, check you correctly submitted the right assignment and generally plan ahead—do whatever it takes! Completing an assignment the day before it is due is always a wise move as that provides a cushion for anything that might come up that is unexpected.

From time to time the servers hosting Webcourses at UCF have been known to go down. If this happens UCF will normally post an announcement 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. If you are going to be out of town for more than a week with no internet access during the semester, then you may want to reconsider taking this web-based course.

Any student missing an assignment, 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.

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.

Disability Statement

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 before requesting accommodations from the professor.

Disclaimer

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

Course Schedule

Note: Full details of each assignment are in each module overview. New modules will usually open on Friday of each week.

All work is due at midnight (actually 11.59pm) on the date noted. However, work submitted by 5pm the following day will still receive full credit. Any work received after this will not be graded and receive zero.

Module 1 - What Does it Mean to "Do" Political Science Research

- MicroCase Worksheet #1 (due 1/12)

Module 2 - Conceptualizing and Measuring Political Phenomena;

- Quiz "Measurement Issues: Conceptual and Operational Definitions." (due 1/17)
- MicroCase Worksheet #2 (due 1/22)
- Political Compass Assignment (due 1/23)

Module 3 - Types of Data in Political Science Research I

- Quiz "Units of Analysis." (due 1/26)
- “Daily Show Effect” Article (due 1/28)

Module 4 - Types of Data in Political Science Research II

- Quiz: "Levels of Measurement" (due 1/31)
- MicroCase Worksheet #3 (due 2/5)

Module 5: Types of Variables in Political Science Research

- Quiz "Variables, Variation & Explanation" (due 2/7)
- MicroCase Worksheet #4 (due 2/12)

Module 6: Testing Hypotheses in Political Science Research

- Quiz "Hypotheses & Hypothesis Testing" (due 2/15)
- MicroCase Worksheet #5 (due 2/19)

Midterm Exam

The exam is taken in Webcourses. The exam can be taken on any day between **Wednesday, February 21st and Friday, February, 23rd** .

You will have 2 hours 30 minutes to complete the exam once you open the exam. If taking the exam on Friday, it must be submitted by 5.00pm (which means starting the exam no later than 2.30pm).

Module 7 - Descriptive Statistics in Political Science Research

- MicroCase Worksheet #8 (due 2/28)
- Quiz "Descriptive Statistics" (due 3/4)

Module 8 - Cross-tabulations

- MicroCase Worksheet #9 (3/6)
- Explaining Attitudes on Same-Sex Marriage (3/8)

Spring Break - March 12th-March 16th

Module 9 - Significance Testing & Measures of Association

- MicroCase Worksheet #10 (3/22)
- Religion and Politics in Comparative Perspective (3/25)

Module 10 Controlling for a Third Variable

- MicroCase Worksheet #11 (3/28)
- The Gender Gap in American Voting Behavior (4/1)

Module 11: Scatterplots & Correlation Coefficients

- Application of Scatterplots and Correlations (4/5)

Module 12: Regression and Multiple Regression Analysis

- MicroCase Worksheet #12 (4/11)
- Explaining State-by-State Voting Patterns in the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election (4/18)

Final Exam

The exam is taken in Webcourses. The exam can be taken on any day between **Wednesday, April 25th and Friday, April 27th**.

You will have 2 hours 30 minutes to complete the exam once you open the exam. If taking the exam on Friday, it must be submitted by 5.00pm (which means starting the exam no later than 2.30pm).

Overall course grade will be available in myUCF on Friday, May 4th