POS 3703

Scope & Methods of Political Science

Summer 2016 (Session D)

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.

About Me and How to Contact Me.

I joined UCF in 1999. I received my BA in Political Theory and Institutions from the **University of Liverpool**, my MA in U.S. History and Politics from the and my Ph.D. in Political Science from the **University of New Orleans**.

My main areas of research and teaching are voting behavior, political parties, southern politics, and comparative politics.

Outside of my day job I am a huge football (soccer!) fan and an avid supporter of **Liverpool** and, of course, **Orlando City F.C.**!

Office: Political Science department, Phillips Hall 302L

Office hours: *By appointment.*

Email: Use email in Webcourses.

Skype: I am happy to talk via Skype. 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. 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 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, thinking about the material, asking me questions if needed and doing 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, and especially one that takes place in a shorter summer session. 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.

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 MicroCase program (for free!) from 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:

(1) Boot Camp is one of the best programs for running PC applications on a Mac, and comes installed in all new Macs (although 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 **Scope & Methods of Political Science** (*Note: There is also another version of MicroCase used for Comparative Politics, make sure you are using the correct version).*

Weekly Modules

Requirements for each week of class will be detailed in modules that are accessed in Canvas. 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 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 can be found in each module. Modules will have multiple due dates, so it's a good idea to note these at the beginning of each week. The time that any assignment, quiz or exam should be submitted on a particular day will always be **5.00pm.**

Exams

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

- Midterm exam: must be completed on any day between **Monday, June 13th and Tuesday, June 14th** (5.00pm)

- Final exam: must be completed on any day between **Thursday, July 14th and Monday, July 18th** (5.00pm)

Exams will be taken in Webcourses. Once you begin the exam, it must then be completed within the allotted time period of 3 hours. 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.

Exams will be a mixture of multiple choice and problem/solving analytical questions. Guidelines on studying for each exam and sample questions are posted in Webcourses. 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.**

Academic Honesty

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 Student Rule Handbook**

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

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 an "average" grade of C. Do above-average work, get a B. Do excellent work, get 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:

- **Modules, 40%**
- **Midterm Exam 30%**
- **Final Exam 30%**

There will be no extra credit or grading opportunities. If you know you need a certain grade at the end of the semester, you know you need it at the beginning -- go to work to earn it! 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 Canvas. 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 quiz or assignment grade has posted. 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 on the borderline of letter grades I'll take the overall performance of a student into account when deciding whether to round up.

Grade grievance policies are outlined under the UCF Golden Rule.

Make-up Exams and Incompletes

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 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.

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.

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 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 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.

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. Modules will open on Monday of each week.

All work is due at 5.00pm on the date noted.

May 16th-20th: Module 1 - Getting Started; What Does it Mean to "Do" Political Science Research

- Formulating Political Science Research Questions (5/20)

May 23rd-May 27th: Module 2 - Conceptualizing and Measuring Political Phenomena; Module 3 - Types of Data in Political Science Research I

- MicroCase Worksheet #1 (5/23)
- Quiz "Measurement Issues: Conceptual and Operational Definitions." (5/25)
- MicroCase Worksheet #2 (5/27)
- Political Compass Assignment (5/27)

May 30th 1st-June 3rd: Module 4 - Types of Data in Political Science Research II; Module 5: Types of Variables in Political Science Research

- Quiz "Units of Analysis." (5/31)
- "Daily Show Effect" Article (5/31)
- Quiz: "Levels of Measurement" (6/1)
- MicroCase Worksheet #3 (6/3)

June 6th-June 10th: Module 6 - Testing Hypotheses in Political Science Research

- Quiz "Variables, Variation & Explanation" (6/6)
- MicroCase Worksheet #4 (6/6)
- Quiz "Hypotheses & Hypothesis Testing" (6/8)
- MicroCase Worksheet #5 (6/10)

June 13th-June 17th: *Midterm Exam*; Module 7 - Descriptive Statistics in Political Science Research

- ***Midterm Exam.*** The exam is taken in Webcourses. The exam can be taken on any day between **Monday, June 13th and Tuesday, July 14th** (5.00pm). You will have 3 hours to

complete the exam once you open the exam. Click **here** for guidelines on the format and sample questions for the exam.

- MicroCase Worksheet #8 (6/17)

June 20th-June 24th: Module 8 - Cross-tabulations; Module 9 - Significance Testing & Measures of Association

- Quiz (6/20)
- MicroCase Worksheet #9 (6/22)
- Explaining Attitudes on Same-Sex Marriage (6/24)

June 27th-July 1st: Module 10 - Controlling for a Third Variable; Module 11 - Scatterplots and Correlation Coefficients

- MicroCase Worksheet #10 (6/27)
- Religion and Politics in Comparative Perspective (6/27)
- MicroCase Worksheet #11 (6/30)
- The Gender Gap in American Voting Behavior (7/1)

July 4th-July 8th: Module 12: Regression and Multiple Regression Analysis; Module 13 - The Overall Research Process

- Application of Scatterplots and Correlations (7/5)
- MicroCase Worksheet #12 (7/7)

July 11th-July 15th: *Final Exam*

- MicroCase Worksheet #13 (7/12)
- ***Final Exam.*** The exam is taken in Webcourses. The exam can be taken on any day between **Thursday, July 14th and Monday, July 18th** (5.00pm). You will have 3 hours to

complete the exam once you open the exam. Click **here** for guidelines on the format and sample questions for the exam.

Overall course grade will be available in myUCF on Friday, July 22nd