POS 3703 - Scope and Methods of Political Science

Section: BW61

College of Sciences

School of Politics, Security, and Intl Affairs

Course Information

Term: Summer 2025
Class Meeting Days: ASC
Class Meeting Location: Online
Modality: WW
Credit Hours: 3

Instructor Information

Dr. Jonathan Knuckey
Office Hours
By appointment via Zoom
Office Location: HPH 302L
Email: Message in Webcourses

Course Description

POS 3703 COS-POLS 3(3,0)Scope and Methods of Political Science: PR: POS 2041 or C.I. The scope and methodology of political analysis. Extensive examination of the discipline, research design and methodology. Fall, Spring.

Welcome to the real world of political science research!

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 empirical data to test hypotheses, and statistical tests to determine which explanations are best supported by the data.

Although you will be introduced to how political scientists use data and statistics in their research, this course 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 or undertake your own independent research, for example an Honors Undergraduate Thesis

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 in addition to law school and graduate school.

So, I know this will seem like an entirely different kind of political science course than that you are used to. This is because we are not focused on the content knowledge of subfield in political science, but are more interested in understanding the **approaches and methods** that most political scientists use to understand and build knowledge about questions and puzzles about politics that interest them. However, I hope you will find that learning how to "do" political science yourself, and how to become a **producer** --- not just a consumer -- of research is both empowering and fun!

Student Learning Outcomes

1. Understanding the Application of the Scientific Method in Political Science: Students will be able to explain how the scientific method is applied to the

study of political phenomena, differentiating it from the approaches used by journalists, historians, and political commentators.

2. Designing Social Science Research: Students will develop the ability to design social science research, including formulating research questions, hypotheses, and selecting appropriate research methods.

3. Analyzing Empirical Data: Students will acquire skills in analyzing empirical data, using statistical tools to test hypotheses and draw conclusions about political phenomena.

4. Interpreting Research Findings: Students will learn to interpret and critically evaluate research findings, understanding how data presentations support or refute political explanations.

5. Developing Critical Thinking and Analytic Skills: Students will enhance their critical thinking and analytic skills, applying them to various career settings and preparing for advanced studies or research projects such as an Honors Undergraduate Thesis.

About me

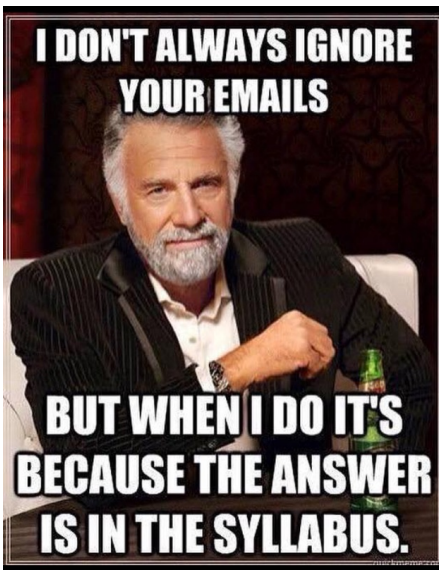
I joined UCF in 1999. I received my BA in Political Theory and Institutions from the **University of Liverpool,** my MA in U.S. History and Politics from the **University of Keele** and my Ph.D. in Political Science from the **University of New Orleans**.

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

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

How to Contact Me

You can contact me via email (use the Inbox in Canvas to message me). I should usually get back to you within 24 hours. If I have not done so, don't hesitate to follow up with me.



Ok...I won't ever ignore your message, however do please see if a general question you might have about our course is answered in the syllabus before contacting me.

Do allow adequate time for a reply to a question about course material. 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.

Please don't use the comments box on assignments to message me. I receive no notification of messages sent here. So always use the email in Canvas if you wish to follow up on any assignment.

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").

Required Course Materials and Resources

No textbook is required for this course. Instead there will be narrated lectures

provided.

SPSS Program for Data Analysis

Our course will introduce you to SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Scientists), a widely used program that political scientists use to analyze data. It is straightforward to use and requires no high-octane computer skills!

Using a series of data sets, which are among the best data available to professional researchers, you will learn the types of data analytic skills that are common-place in contemporary political science research. Even after our class is over. You might even want to use SPSS to further analyze these data files and conduct your own research in an independent study or Honors Undergraduate Thesis.

I'll have detailed instructions on how to access SPSS once we get to it in the second half of the course. You will be able to download SPSS to your own computer as a 30-day trial or you will be able top access it via UCF Apps. Please be aware that if you download SPSS you will need access to a computer that will allow you to download the program. If you use a work computer or are renting a laptop from UCF it might block downloads. Just be aware of this, and ensure you have access to a computer that will allow you to download programs.

Course Assessment and Grading Procedure

You assessment of course learning outcomes will be based on the following that will appear in modules (see Course Schedule below for a complete list of these assignments)

Quizzes

Quizzes will be given on the material covered in the first part of the course (Modules 1 to 5). They will be based on the material covered in the narrated lectures and consist a mixture of T/F and multiple choice questions.

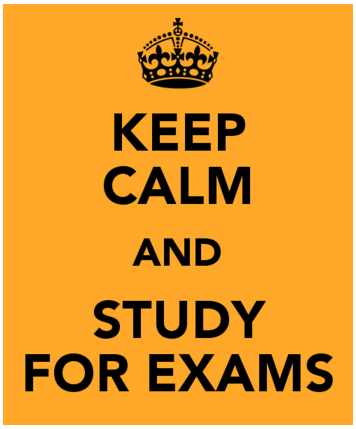
These quizzes will usually contain 10 to 15 questions, and you will have 1 hour to complete each quiz.

SPSS Exercises

These exercises will give you hand-on practice in analyzing and interpreting real data once we begin using SPSS.

These exercises will **not** be timed.

Final Exam



The final exam must be submitted by **Sunday, August 3rd (midnight)**

You will have 2 hours and 50 minutes to complete it.

The exam will consist of questions where you analyze and interpret data, although you will **not** actually be using SPSS for the exam.

More information can be found on the Final Exam study guide along with sample questions from prior exams.

Grades

Your final grade will be weighted as follows:

- *Quizzes: 35%*
- *SPSS data analysis exercises: 45%*
- *Final exam: 20%*

These are the only criteria for which a grade can earned for our class.

There is no extra credit offered.

Grading Scale

Your overall course grade earned corresponds to the following grade boundaries.

A, 92%+

A-, 90-91.9%

B, 80-89.9%

C, 70-79.9%

D, 60-69.9%

F, Below 60%.

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 requests to review a grade 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.

I sometimes get requests to "bump" overall grades up. **Only when grades fall exactly on the borderline of letter grades (91.9%, 89.9%, 79.9%, 69.9%) will a grade be eligible for the next letter grade.** This is not automatic, and I'll take the overall performance of a student throughout the semester into account when deciding whether to round up.

All work in this course will be graded by me, not a Graduate Teaching Assistant. If you have any questions about grades please don't hesitate to contact me directly.

Grade grievance policies are outlined under the UCF Golden Rule.

Policies for Course Grade

Make-up Exams

A make-up exam may be given for the following reasons:

- Students representing the university in an authorized event or activity (for example, student-athletes), original documentation required
- Attending a professional conference, original documentation required
- Attending a job interview, original documentation required
- Personal illness or emergency (you can inform me of this using discreet language without going into specifics), original documentation required
- Serious illness or death within the *immediate* family

Generally, notification should be given to me at least 24 hours before the exam, or as soon as possible if it is not possible to communicate that to me. Usually, original and verifiable documentation will be requested and required to be eligible to make-up an exam.

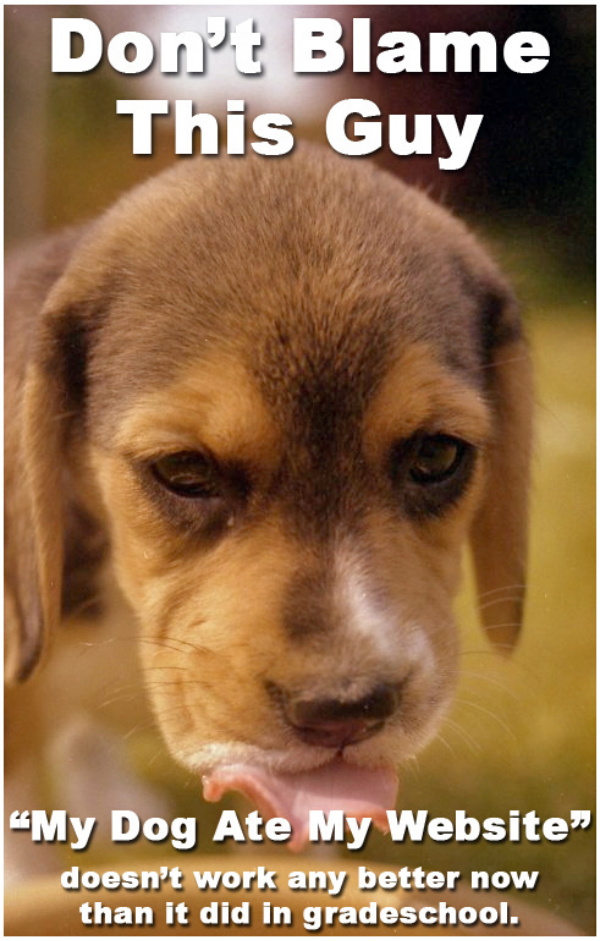
Vacations and other non-emergency reasons for being out of town for missing an exam are **not** eligible reasons for a make-up exam being granted.

"After Hours" Policy for Submission of Work

Please note the following policy for late submission of Quizzes and SPSS exercises and the Overall Research Process assignment:

- Work submitted ***after the midnight deadline up to 9.00am the following day*** is considered late, but will fall in the automatic grace period for submission of work and still receive full credit.
- Work submitted ***after 9.00am the following day after a deadline up to midnight*** is considered late but can still be submitted but will only receive half credit.
- *No late work will be accepted for credit after this.*

- *This policy does **<u>not</u>** apply to the final exam.*



Even with an after hours submission policy, some students occasionally still want longer to complete an assignment. **Such extensions will not be granted unless they genuinely are unexpected or extenuating circumstances beyond the control of the students**. Basically, it is an extremely high bar!

Here are some *unacceptable* excuses for late-work, and it is by no means an exhaustive list:

- *"My computer is broken...."*
- *"My computer was stolen...."*
- *"My computer magically deleted my homework from the hard drive. I do not understand it myself...."*

- *"I did the assignment but Canvas somehow deleted all the answers..."*
- *"The internet is broken...."*
- *"I forgot to attach the assignment...."*
- *"I could not find the assignment...."*
- *"I did the quiz but forgot to submit it..."*
- *"I was on holiday..."*
- *"It was my birthday so I thought you would give me an extension..."*
- *"I didn't understand the assignment..."*
- *"I forgot what time zone I lived in..."*

The above are all **actual excuses** I have received! Many, as you can see, are computer-related, which are the “dog ate my homework” excuses of the technology age and will not fly! It's your responsibility to plan ahead and avoid procrastination.

Incomplete Grades

Grades of “Incomplete” are only given when the student has completed the vast majority of work for the semester and emergency circumstances prevent submission of assignments in the final weeks of class.

Since degrees will not be certified with an incomplete on the degree audit, "I" grades will be changed to "F" if not resolved by the stipulated deadlines. "I" grades are considered "unsatisfactory" grades until resolved for program of study purposes.

Please also note that incomplete grades are not counted as completed courses or recognized as such by Financial Aid. Therefore, students on financial assistance must check with the Financial Aid office to see if the receipt of an incomplete grade will affect their financial award.

Course Accessibility

The University of Central Florida is committed to providing access and inclusion for all persons with disabilities. Students with disabilities who need access to course content due to course design limitations should contact the professor as soon as possible. Students should also connect

with Student Accessibility Services (SAS) (Ferrell Commons 185, sas@ucf.edu, phone 407-823-2371). For students connected with SAS, a Course Accessibility Letter may be created and sent to professors, which informs faculty of potential course access and accommodations that might be necessary and reasonable. Determining reasonable access and accommodations requires consideration of the course design, course learning objectives and the individual academic and course barriers experienced by the student. Further conversation with SAS, faculty and the student may be warranted to ensure an accessible course experience.

Academic Integrity

Students should familiarize themselves with UCF's Code of Conduct at Student Conduct and Integrity Office. According to Section 1, "Academic Misconduct," students are prohibited from engaging in:

a. Academic misconduct is defined as any submitted work or behavior that obstructs the instructor of record's ability to accurately assess the student's understanding or completion of the course materials or degree requirements (e.g., assignment, quiz, and/or exam). Examples of academic misconduct include but are not limited to: plagiarism, unauthorized assistance to complete an academic exercise; unauthorized communication with others during an examination, course assignment, or project; falsifying or misrepresenting academic work; providing misleading information to create a personal advantage to complete course/degree requirements; or multiple submission(s) of academic work without permission of the instructor of record.
b. Any student who knowingly helps another violate academic behavior standards is also in violation of the standards.
c. Commercial Use of Academic Material. Selling of course material to another person and/or uploading course material to a third-party vendor without authorization or without the express written permission of the University and the instructor of record. Course materials include but are not limited to class notes, the instructor of record's slide deck, tests, quizzes, labs, instruction sheets, homework, study guides, and handouts.
d. Soliciting assistance with academic coursework and/or degree requirements. The solicitation of assistance with an assignment, lab, quiz, test, paper, etc., without authorization of the instructor of record or designee is prohibited. This includes but is not limited to asking for answers to a quiz, trading answers, or offering to pay another to complete an assignment. It is considered Academic Misconduct to solicit assistance with academic coursework and/or degree requirements, even if the solicitation did not yield actual assistance (for example, if there was no response to the solicitation).

Responses to Academic Dishonesty, Plagiarism, or Cheating

Students should also familiarize themselves with the procedures for academic misconduct in UCF's student handbook, *The Golden Rule*. UCF faculty members have a responsibility for students'

education and the value of a UCF degree, and so seek to prevent unethical behavior and respond to academic misconduct when necessary. Penalties for violating rules, policies, and instructions within this course can range from a zero on the exercise to an “F” letter grade in the course. In addition, an Academic Misconduct report could be filed with the Office of Student Conduct and Academic Integrity, which could lead to disciplinary warning, disciplinary probation, or deferred suspension or separation from the University through suspension, dismissal, or expulsion with the addition of a “Z” designation on one’s transcript.

Being found in violation of academic conduct standards could result in a student having to disclose such behavior on a graduate school application, being removed from a leadership position within a student organization, the recipient of scholarships, participation in University activities such as study abroad, internships, etc.

Let’s avoid all of this by demonstrating values of honesty, trust, and integrity. No grade is worth compromising your integrity and moving your moral compass. Stay true to doing the right thing: take the zero, not a shortcut.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) & Group Chats

Use of AI

When you submit any work for our class my assumption is that it involves your own words, thoughts, ideas and reflections. Therefore, content produced or inspired by generative AI is not permitted for any assignment in this course and will be treated as a form of academic misconduct (see "Academic Integrity" above).

Developing strong competencies in writing and critical thinking will prepare you for a competitive workplace. Part of why you learn to write is learning how to think and how to be a smarter, more articulate, better functioning version of yourself. **You lose that if you hand it off to a machine.**

Group Chats

Group chats are increasingly common and can be used positively for collaboration and connection with your peers. That is a good thing. However, they can also be used for nefarious purposes such as sharing answers and other forms of cheating.

Recently I've had to unfortunately deal with instances where students are reporting other students for sharing information and answers via the class group chat. **All students on a group chat where there are violations of academic integrity will all be included in any disciplinary action that results from content shared on the chat.**

How can this be avoided, you ask? Just do you own work, ask me if you want help or clarification on any of the material, and don't cut corners. It's pretty easy to avoid.

Title IX

Title IX prohibits sex discrimination, including sexual misconduct, sexual violence, sexual harassment, and retaliation. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, you can find resources available to support the victim, including confidential resources and information concerning reporting options at Let's Be Clear and UCF Cares.

For more information on access and community engagement, Title IX, accessibility, or UCF's complaint processes contact:

- Title IX – ONAC – Office of Nondiscrimination & Accommodations Compliance & askanadvocate@ucf.edu
- Disability Accommodation – Student Accessibility Services – Student Accessibility Services & sas@ucf.edu
- Access and Community Engagement (including the Ginsberg Center for Inclusion and Community Engagement, Military and Veteran Student Success, and HSI Initiatives)
- UCF Compliance and Ethics Office – Compliance, Ethics, and Risk Office & complianceandethics@ucf.edu
- The Ombuds Office is a safe place to discuss concerns.

Deployed Active-Duty Military Students

Students who are deployed active duty military and/or National Guard personnel and require accommodation should contact their instructors as soon as possible after the semester begins and/or after they receive notification of deployment to make related arrangements.

Campus Safety

At UCF Public Safety and Police, safety is the top priority. Emergencies on campus are rare, but if one should arise, it's important to be familiar with some basic safety and security concepts.

- In an emergency, always dial 911.
- Every UCF classroom has an **Emergency Procedure Guide** posted on a wall near the door, which will show you how to respond to a variety of situations. This guide can also be found online here.
- In the event of an active threat, remember **AVOID, DENY, DEFEND**. Choose the best course of action and act immediately. Watch the video here to learn more.
    - **AVOID**. Pay attention to your surroundings and have an exit plan. Get as much distance and as many barriers between you and the threat as quickly as possible.
    - **DENY.** When avoiding is difficult or impossible, deny the threat access to you and your space. Lockdown by creating barriers, turning the lights off and remaining quiet and out of sight. Make sure your cell phone is silenced, but do not turn it off.
    - **DEFEND.** When you are unable to put distance between yourself and the threat, be prepared to protect yourself. Commit to your actions, be aggressive and do not fight fairly. Do whatever it takes to survive.
- For emergencies on campus, UCF will utilize the UCF Alert system. All UCF students, faculty and staff are automatically enrolled to receive these email and text alerts, however, it's a good idea to frequently ensure your contact information is up to date.

Reporting an Incident or Issue

If you believe you have experienced abusive or discriminatory behavior by any faculty or staff member, contact the Office of Institutional Equity online or at 407-823-1336. You can also choose to report using the UCF Integrity Line and can report anonymously or as yourself at 1-855-877-6049 or using the online form. UCF cares about you and takes every report seriously. For more information see the Reporting an Incident or Issue Webpage.

Financial Aid Accountability

All instructors/faculty are required to document students' academic activity at the beginning of each course. In order to document that you began this course, please complete this activity by the end of the first week of classes or as soon as possible after adding the course. Failure to do so may result in a delay in the disbursement of your financial aid.

Disclaimer

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

Class Schedule

Module 1: The Scientific Method & the Study of Politics

Assignments:

June 24th: Why is Political Science a Science?

June 26th: A Brief History of Political Science/Characteristics of the Scientific Method

Module 2: Conceptualizing and Measuring Political Phenomena

Assignments:

June 29th: Conceptualization, Operationalization & Measurement

Module 3: Approaches to Data Collection and Types of Data in Political Science Research

Assignments:

July 1st: Levels of Measurement

July 3rd: Units of Analysis and Approaches to Data Collection

Module 4: Types of Variables & Causality in Political Science Research

Assignment:

July 6th: Variables, Variation & Explanation

Module 5: Hypotheses in Political Science Research

Assignment:

July 9th: Hypotheses & Hypothesis Testing

Module 6: Introduction to SPSS

Assignments:

July 11th: Introduction to SPSS

Module 7: Descriptive Statistics

Assignment:

July 16th: SPSS Assignment - Descriptive Statistics

Module 8: Bivariate Analysis

Assignment:

July 20th: SPSS Assignment - Bivariate Analysis

Module 9: Statistical Significance & Measures of Association

Assignment:

July 23rd: SPSS Assignment - Statistical Significance & Measures of Association

Module 10: Controlling for a Third Variable

Assignment:

July 27th: SPSS Assignment - Controlling for a Third Variable

Module 11: Scatterplots, Correlation and Regression Analysis

Assignment:

July 30th SPSS Assignment - Scatterplots, Correlation & Regression Analysis

Final Exam

The exam must be submitted by **Sunday, August 3rd (midnight)**

You will have 2 hours and 50 minutes to complete the exam.

Refer to final exam guidelines for details on format, topics and sample questions.