

GOV 2080

Quantitative Analysis in Political Science

Spring 2015
VAC North 304 Computer Lab
Tuesday and Thursday: 2:30-3:55pm

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Office Hours:
Monday, 1:30pm-2:30pm
Wednesday, 3:30pm-4:30pm
And by appointment

This course examines the use of empirical methods to study political phenomena. It is designed to help you think like a social scientist and to give you the tools to investigate interesting and important social/political phenomena. Research begins with a puzzle and a question. What makes a puzzle worth investigating? What makes a particular research project worth pursuing? Ask first, who cares? After surmounting this hurdle (a hard enough challenge), it is imperative that we think first about process. How is my puzzle generated? For example, what process generates turnout rates on Election Day? Do voters make rational decisions about the costs and benefits of voting? Or do they care more about civic and democratic responsibilities? Once we hypothesize a process, we must then consider its implications—what should we observe if I'm right? This should motivate us to collect data and leverage it against our expectations. Does the evidence support my claims? How might I be wrong? Finally, we must write it all down, and in a way that is digestible to our readers.

We begin the semester with one major goal of social science, descriptive inference. This is not description as in the collection and discussion of facts. Descriptive inference is the use of a sample of data to explain a larger social or political phenomenon. Polls are the most common example of a descriptive inference. We will discuss and review the use of polls in American politics, with a specific emphasis on good and bad practices in the polling profession. We follow this with a consideration of causal inference. That is, how do we identify relationships between variables? How are we sure that one variable has a causal effect on another? When are those relationships significant? This raises important questions about how to collect and code our data.

The goal of this course is to provide an introductory survey of all of these topics. Ultimately, the best way to think like a social scientist is to act like one. As such, your assignments will push you to practice the tools we will read about and discuss in class.

Course Requirements

There are four major components to your grade:

1. **Six reading reactions** (15 points; the first three are each worth 2 points; the last three are each worth 3 points)—these are short reactions of about 2 pages (double-spaced). I will evaluate these on the basis of how well you react to the readings (namely, originality of thought and conciseness).

***For the first three:** There are no right or wrong answers, but I will challenge you to think logically. These papers are due **in class** on Tuesday or Thursday, and they should focus on the readings for that day. You must hand in reaction papers in class; late papers or emailed papers will NOT be accepted. All three of these must be completed before spring break

****For the last three:** The specific due dates are indicated on the syllabus and they must focus on the statistical analyses in the assigned readings. I will say more about these as the due dates approach.

2. **Three longer assignments** (39 points; each worth 13 points)—these are 4-5 page papers (double-spaced). Paper topics and instructions will be provided well in advance of the papers' due dates.
3. **Class participation** (10 points)—this includes attendance and class participation (especially in the design and implementation of our course-sponsored poll—more on that later). Attendance is required, and I will take regular note of who is and who is not in class. I understand that people get sick, have doctor's appointments, and so on, but I will only grant excused absences in rare circumstances.
4. **Final paper** (36 points)— This paper sets out a research design for a major research project. You will state what your question is; what your theory and hypotheses are; and what data you would use to test your empirical expectations. You should also consider how you would collect the data and what challenges that might pose for the project. You will also provide a brief literature review of prior work in your issue area. You **may** write this paper with another student. Groups of no more than 2 are allowed, however. If working alone, the paper should be about 10-pages (double-spaced). If you write with another student, the paper must be about 15 pages (double-spaced) and should provide a more expansive literature review and data collection section.

Readings

There are two books for this course, and a number of outside articles. The books are available through the campus bookstore, and all of the outside readings can be accessed through Blackboard.

1. *The Essentials of Political Analysis*, 4th edition, by Philip Pollock III. Sage.
2. *Polling and the Public: What Every Citizen Should Know*, by Herb Asher. CQ Press.

Other Issues

1. I expect all students to abide by the Bowdoin Academic Honor Code, which can be accessed online at <http://www.bowdoin.edu/studentaffairs/forms/>. If you have any concerns or questions about how to cite work appropriately, please consult me or a reference librarian.
2. If you have chosen to take the class as Credit/D/F, I will only grant a Credit grade if the student has completed all of the work for the class.

January 20—Introductions and Expectations

January 22—Understanding Process

- Lave and March, Chapter 2, *An Introduction to Models in the Social Sciences*

January 27—Understanding Concepts

- Pollock, Chapters 1-2
- Zachary Elkins. 2000. "Gradations of Democracy? Empirical Tests of Alternative Conceptualizations," *American Journal of Political Science*, 44(2): 287-294.

January 29— Descriptive Inference

- John Gerring. 2012. "Mere Description," *British Journal of Political Science*. 42(4): 721-746.

February 3— Understanding Polls

- Asher, Chapters 1-2

February 5— Understanding Polls, cont.

- Asher, Chapter 3

February 10—Understanding Polls, cont.

- Asher, Chapter 4

February 12— Understanding Polls, cont.

- Asher, Chapters 5-6

February 17— Understanding Polls, cont.

- Asher, Chapter 7

February 19— Conducting a Poll

- No Readings
- **Paper 1 due**

February 24— Conducting a Poll, cont.

- Reading TBA

Class Exercise: Designing our Questionnaire, Mode, and Sample. Poll will be in the field between March 2 and March 5.

February 26— Analyzing Our Poll

- Asher, Chapters 8-9

March 3— Analyzing Our Poll, cont.

- Pollock, Chapter 6

March 5—Analyzing Our Poll, cont.

- Pollock, Chapter 7

March 9-20—Spring Break!

March 24— Analyzing Our Poll, cont.

- Pollock, Chapter 7

March 26— Introducing Causal Inference

- Gary King, Robert Keohane, and Sidney Verba. 1994. *Designing Social Inquiry*, Chapter 3
- **Paper 2 due**

March 31— Framing Hypotheses

- Pollock, Chapter 3

April 2— Experiments and Controlled Comparisons

- Pollock, Chapter 4-5

April 7— Experiments and Controlled Comparisons, cont.

- Reading TBA
- ***Reaction Paper due***

April 9— Bivariate Regression

- Pollock, Chapter 8, pp.182-192

April 14— Bivariate Regression, cont.

- Pollock, Chapter 8, pp.192-199

April 16— no class

April 21— Bivariate and Multivariate Regression

- Pollock, Chapter 8, pp.199-211

Lab session today

April 23— Bivariate and Multivariate Regression, cont.

- Reading TBA
- ***Reaction Paper due***

April 28— Bivariate and Multivariate Regression, cont.

- Reading TBA
- ***Reaction Paper due***

April 30— Logistic regression

- Pollock, Chapter 9
- ***Paper 3 due***

May 5— Discussion of Final Papers

- Harvey Mansfield. 2013. "Science and Non-Science in Liberal Education," *The New Atlantis*.

Final Paper, due Tuesday May 12, 5pm