

PSC 301-01
Research Methods
Spring 2016
MWF, 1:00-1:50
309 Curry

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Syllabus

This course is concerned with the basic methods and techniques used in the empirical analysis of political and social data. We will cover the various aspects of research in political science, including definition of the project, design of the research, collection of the data, and analysis of the data.

The focus of this course is on the logic behind the application of various methods, with the aim of improving your understanding of the principles of quantitative research. This course should increase your ability to interpret and evaluate such research, including both proposed research and completed studies. It also should improve your ability to conduct empirical research in political science.

This is not primarily a statistics course. It is a course in research methods. A substantial portion of this course is devoted to data analysis in political science. In covering this topic, we will cover applications of statistics to data analysis, but this course is not a substitute for a course in statistical theory. No statistical background is required for this course, but those with some exposure to statistics (e.g., STA 108) should benefit from that experience.

Student Learning Objectives

As a result of taking this course, students should improve their ability to:

1. Develop researchable questions and hypotheses.
2. Evaluate research questions and hypotheses put forth by others.
3. Construct good measures of political and social data.
4. Conduct and assess data analyses that would be used in political science.

Books

The following book is at the bookstore:

Janet Johnson, H. T. Reynolds, and Jason Mycoff, *Political Science Research Methods*, 8th ed. (CQ Press, 2016).

If you are buying a used copy of the book, be sure that you buy the most recent edition, which is identified above. The Johnson, Reynolds, and Mycoff book has earlier editions, which you should not purchase. Most of the reading for this course is in the textbook. For a few topics, there is inadequate coverage from the text, so there is a small amount of reserve reading in those cases. These reserve reading items are identified in the syllabus as “(ER)” and are available as e-reserves through Canvas.

Course Requirements

My philosophy is that students learn research methods best by active engagement, not by taking tests. Therefore, I have planned a set of four papers, each of which is intended to improve your research skills in some way. The first two papers have to do with the development of research questions and research designs. The final two papers deal with the analysis of data to answer research questions. In addition to the four papers, performance in computer lab sessions and general class participation will count toward the final course grade. Further details on each of these items are below:

1. A paper on hypothesis construction is tentatively scheduled to be assigned on January 15 and due on February 3. This paper will count 15% toward the final course grade.
2. A paper on measurement is tentatively scheduled to be assigned on February 3 and due on February 29. This paper will count 20% toward the final course grade.
3. A paper on the analysis of survey data is tentatively scheduled to be assigned on March 18 and due on April 11. This paper will count 20% toward the final course grade.
4. A paper on the analysis of aggregate data is tentatively scheduled to be assigned on April 13 and due on the final exam day (May 2). This paper will count 20% toward the final course grade.
5. There will be ten quizzes throughout the semester. Each will be given at the start of the class and will a brief quiz on the assigned readings. The quizzes are designed to test your comprehension of the readings, and they will count 10% toward the final course grade.
5. There are four computer lab sessions scheduled for this course. The tentative dates are: March 16, March 21, April 8, and April 15. Performance in the lab sessions will count 5% toward the final course grade.
6. Class participation will count 10% toward the course grade. This includes class attendance, participation in class discussions, and involvement in group work.

Course Policies and Expectations

1. Class attendance and participation are extremely important in this course. You cannot expect to do well in this course if you do not attend class. Attendance will be taken, and your participation in class discussions and group activities will be noted. These factors will be count toward determining your final grade, as explained above. **Asking good questions is an important aspect of good class participation.** This is especially true in this course, where you may find much of the material difficult to understand. Unless you understand all of the material perfectly, you should ask questions in class.

2. Students are expected to come to class having read the assigned material and prepared to discuss the material in class. Many class sessions will involve group work or other exercises that involve applying the assigned readings to problems. If you are not prepared for these class sessions, you will not be able to participate effectively. Also, if you have not read the assigned material, you will not be able to ask intelligent questions about it in class.

3. Students are expected to follow appropriate classroom etiquette. Among other things, this means that you should arrive on time (the class starts at 1:00, not 1:05 or 1:10), should turn off your cell phone, and should not bring your lunch to eat during the class session (a drink is fine).

4. Students are expected to follow the UNCG Academic Integrity Policy for all work. Further information on the academic integrity policy, including information on plagiarism, can be found at: <http://sa.uncg.edu/dean/academic-integrity/>.

5. Students are encouraged to discuss the course material with others and to otherwise work together to better understand the material. Of course, all written work that is submitted by a student must be that person's own work.

6. Late papers will be marked down unless you receive permission to submit your paper late. Such permission must be requested prior to the due date and will be granted only for legitimate reasons.

Course Schedule and Reading Assignments

TOPIC	DATES	READING ASSIGNMENT
A. Formulating researchable questions		
1. The aims of quantitative research	Jan. 13-15	Johnson and Reynolds, chpt. 1-2
2. Variables and hypotheses	Jan. 20-29	Johnson and Reynolds, chpt. 4 Janda, Berry, and Goldman, chpt. 1 (ER)
B. Measurement and data collection		
1. Principles of measurement	Feb. 1-10	Johnson and Reynolds, chpt. 5
2. Data collection	Feb. 12-17	Johnson and Reynolds, chpts. 8-10
C. Research design		
1. Types of research designs	Feb. 19	Johnson and Reynolds, chpt. 6
2. Inference from non-experimental designs	Feb. 22-24	Putnam, <i>Bowling Alone</i> , chpts. 10, 13 (ER)
3. Sampling	Feb. 29	Johnson and Reynolds, chpt. 7
D. Describing and presenting data		
	March 14-18	Johnson and Reynolds, chpt. 11
E. Analyzing survey data		
1. Elementary survey analysis	March 21-23	Johnson and Reynolds, chpt. 13 (pp. 420-430)
2. Advanced survey analysis	March 28- April 4	Johnson and Reynolds, chpt. 14 (pp. 516-528) Kay, <i>Analysis of Political Data</i> , chpt. 17 (ER)
3. Statistics for survey analysis	April 6	Johnson and Reynolds, chpt. 13 (pp. 431-449)
F. Inferential statistics		
	April 8-11	Johnson and Reynolds, chpt. 12, 13 (pp. 449-467)
G. Analyzing aggregate data		
1. Bivariate regression analysis	April 13-18	Johnson and Reynolds, chpt. 13 (pp. 478-513) Moore, <i>Statistics</i> , chpts. 14-15 (ER) Pollock, chpt. 8 (pp. 159-173) (ER)
2. Multiple regression analysis	April 20-26	Johnson and Reynolds, chpt. 14 (pp. 528-538)