

Scope and Methods for Political Science Research
or
“How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Statistics”
or
“Preparing for Life in a World of Lying Graphs and Fake News”
or just...
GVPT 201
Spring 2022

Contact Information

Professor Sarah E. Croco (scroco@umd.edu)

Lecture: MW, 10:00 & 1:00pm

Office hours: by appointment

On [zoom](#)

ID: 724 360 3781

PW: drcroco

TAs:

Cindy Sung csung123@terpmail.umd.edu (204, 206)

Erin Ellington eellingt@terpmail.umd.edu (202, 203)

Emily Dohler Rodas edohlerr@terpmail.umd.edu (201, 205)

Julia Caspero jcaspero@terpmail.umd.edu (202, 203)

Rae (Rachel) Hoffman rhoff4@umd.edu (201, 205)

Shoshanna Singer sjsinger@umd.edu (204, 206)

Kung-Chen Chen kc2710@terpmail.umd.edu (101, 102, 103)

Introduction

This course teaches you how to think scientifically about politics. It will provide an introduction to **research design** and the use of **quantitative methods** in political science. In other words, you will learn how to formulate questions and theories about politics and then test them in a rigorous manner. *A central element to this is statistics.* (This is a good thing!! I promise!) This course will combine teaching the principles of statistics as used in political science with hands-on data analysis—that is, it will involve both theory and practice.

The class has three principal aims. The first is preparation for other political science classes. The second, and larger, purpose is preparation for life. In virtually every domain of professional life, the ability to evaluate causal arguments and use statistics to analyze data is helpful for doing a good job. The research methods you learn in this course will help you understand the world (political and otherwise) and become a more informed participant in political debate and discussion. This is increasingly relevant in the fast-paced, social-media-laden world we live in, where accusations of fake news and things going “viral” are rampant. The third is to have fun. No, I’m serious! Statistics **CAN** be fun if you have the right attitude.

The centerpiece of this class will be a survey project. Students will work with the professor (and each other) to design the online survey and distribute it to as many people as possible. We will then analyze it as a class. Finally, students will write a policy memo using the survey data. This survey will not only give students “hands on” experience in the art of crafting a survey instrument, but will also allow them to explore public opinion in “real time” on issues of their choosing. The survey will unfold over several phases, which I describe in more detail below.

BS Lectures

In an effort to further increase your numerical literacy and prepare you for a world that is allegedly teeming with “fake news”, I am including several lectures based on material from the following website. We will also be using their recent book of the same name:

<http://callingbull.org/>

Created by two University of Washington professors (Carl T. Bergstrom and Jevin West), this is an absolutely fantastic resource. I am really excited about this portion to the class!! Please note that, at the request of the authors of the website, the complete slides for these four lectures will not be available electronically. You can, however, watch their lectures (which will be similar to mine) at the following website.

<http://callingbull.org/videos.html>

The Books:

Philip H. Pollock III and Barry Edwards. *The Essentials of Political Analysis*. Sixth Edition. Washington, DC: CQ Press (Required). **NOTE: GET THE SIXTH EDITION.**

Philip H. Pollock III. and Barry Edwards 2010. *An R Companion to Political Analysis*. Second Edition. Washington, DC: CQ Press (Required). **NOTE: if you get the books at the bookstore, this will be bundled with the textbook.**

Carl T. Bergstrom and Jevin D. West. 2020 *Calling Bullshit: The Art of Skepticism in a Data-Driven World* (Required).

Patricia Roberts-Miller. 2017. *Demagoguery and Democracy*. Note: This was the “First Year Book” for the 2019-20 academic year. There will be a limited number of free copies in a box outside of my office at the start of the term. First come, first served. (Required).

You can buy the books in the bookstore or online. Used copies are fine, if you can find them. E-copies of the books are also fine.

Software:

We will be using R and R-Studio in this class. These pieces of software are FREE and work with any computer.

There are instructions on how to download R and the associated data files/packages for the homework in the workbook. You also need to download R-Studio. I’ll be talking about this in class. You can get the free version (R-Studio Desktop). It’s the first option on this page.

<https://www.rstudio.com/products/rstudio/download/>

Your TA and I are not tech support. While we can provide assistance with how to *use* R, we cannot help you figure out why R may have a problem on your machine. We don't anticipate any problems, but if you can't get it to install correctly (or some similar problem), that needs to be directed to R tech support. Or just ask a classmate. Chances are, they've figured it out.

Requirements and Grading:

Your course grade will be determined by homework assignments, two midterm exams, participation in discussion sections and, most importantly, contributing to the class survey project. Note that the exams are designated as Major Scheduled Grading Events. If you are going to miss lecture on a day with an exam, you are required to email me regarding your absence in advance of the class and to bring documentation to support your excused absence on the day you return. The new absence policy (one sick absence without a health center note) does not apply to days where we have scheduled exams. **If you are sick on an exam day, EMAIL YOUR TA AND ME AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. Note the midterms are weighted differently.**

Policy on Excused Absences related to COVID-19

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, self-certified notes will serve as documentation for COVID-19 related absences or missed course expectations. This means that students do not need a note signed by a doctor or other health professional for COVID-19 related absences.

In the event that students cannot complete the regular course assessments due to COVID-19 related absences, faculty can suggest alternative assignments for students to make up missing work and complete the course. According to university policy, these alternative assignments are permitted and cannot be the basis for an Arbitrary and Capricious grading claim.

The point total for each component is as follows:

Homework: 176 pts. (~15%)

Subject Pool: 55 pts. (~5%; see page 8 of syllabus)

Midterm 1: 164 pts. (~14%)

Midterm 2: 219 pts. (~19%)

Demagoguery Assignment 50 pts (~4%)

Section Attendance and Participation: 109 pts. (~9%)

Survey:

- Pilot Design: 33 pts. (~3%)
- Pilot Analysis: 33 pts. (~3%)
- Redrafting: 25 pts. (~2%)
- Distribution: 25 pts. (~2%)
- Memo Practice 1: 55 pts. (~5%)
- Memo Practice 2: 58 pts. (~5%)
- Final Memo: 166 pts. (~14%)

Homework:

The textbook *The Essentials of Political Analysis* is divided into chapters by topic. Lectures roughly follow the topical outline of the book as indicated on the syllabus and students are expected to read **before** the lecture. The homework in the course comes out of the companion

workbook, *An R Companion to Political Analysis*. **YOU NEED THE WORKBOOK TO DO THE HOMEWORK EVEN THOUGH IT IS SUBMITTED ONLINE.** The online “quiz” where you will submit the homework basically just has the blanks for you to enter your answers. It doesn’t have the full questions written out. The topics of the workbook assignments correspond to the topics covered in the textbook and lecture but allow for some lag so that students have time to master the material. The due date of each homework assignment from the workbook is noted in the syllabus (all are due on Wednesdays by 11:59pm EST). All homework assignments are in the workbook.

Late homework will be docked 5% points off the top if it is turned in after the assigned time on the day it is due, and 5% for each additional day it is late. After each session students should save their work because the workbook assignments build cumulative skills.

Note that the homework chapters are not equal in length, so they do not all count for the same portion of your homework grade (ones that take longer/have more questions will count for more). Do not wait until the last minute to complete the homework-the exercises are involved and take time.

NOTE: There are two columns that have due dates listed. You need to look in both the “survey” and “homework” columns in the table below.

Midterms:

The midterms will be based on material covered in the books, lectures, and sections. Lectures often do not overlap directly with the readings and many key concepts and cases will be discussed in lectures only. Strictly speaking the midterms are not cumulative (that is, the first midterm emphasizes material covered from the beginning of the class up to the first midterm and the second midterm covers material covered after the first midterm but before the second). However, the nature of the material is cumulative. Therefore, there may be some overlap between the two tests. The second midterm is weighted more. The BS lectures/book are fair game for the midterm as is the demagoguery stuff.

Lecture Attendance: I do not take attendance during lecture, nor do we keep track of who watches them. There is no need to tell me you will miss lecture.

Class Survey

As noted above, the survey serves as the centerpiece of the course. By working through all the steps required to design a survey instrument, students will gain a detailed understanding of how political scientists approach questions related to public opinion. There are five main parts of the survey: 1. Pilot drafting, 2. Pilot analysis, 3. Redrafting, 4. Distribution 5. Memos. All parts will be discussed in lecture and discussion sections and turned in online by students individually. The dates of each are noted in the table below.

Part 1: Pilot drafting: During lecture and discussion sections, students will work with me and the TA’s to design a battery of questions. Students will workshop these questions with each other and individually submit questions they would like to see on the survey. I will choose the finals

set of questions and program the survey. Once this is complete, I will distribute this draft as the “pilot” survey.

Part 2: Pilot analysis: After the pilot survey has been in the field for about a week, I will release the data to the students. Students will have to complete a very basic analysis of the pilot data.

Part 3: In addition to the respondents’ answers to the questions, the pilot data will also include their feedback on the instrument itself. Did they find any questions confusing? Offensive? Needlessly complicated? Etc. Based on this feedback, students will determine if any questions need to be rewritten or dropped in favor of new ones.

Part 4: Distribution: Once the final question wording has been determined, *students* will be responsible for distributing the survey to as wide a range of people as possible via social networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, and other means of communication. You can also post it on websites like Reddit. Students will have to provide proof of distribution. The survey will be in the field for approximately two weeks. Students are expected to promote and distribute the survey during this time.

Part 5: The final survey write up will be three memos (two “practice” that will take the form of “quizzes” online, and one final one, which will be submitted as a paper) on the data gathered via the class survey. We will provide more detailed guidelines closer to the due dates. The memos are not weighted equally; the last one is weighted most heavily. Grades will be based on consistency of the analytical argument, demonstration of cumulative mastery of the material from the course, and clarity of writing.

Grade Challenges

Any challenges to an exam grade must be submitted *in writing no sooner* than one week after the exams have been handed back. All challenges must be submitted to the section TA *first*.

Section Attendance and Participation

Students are expected to have completed all of the assigned readings and homework for each section and be prepared to discuss them. Teaching assistants take attendance in section and section grades will be based on a demonstrated ability to discuss topics covered in lectures and section.

Canvas (ELMS):

Important communication regarding the class is conducted via Canvas. This includes posting of the syllabus, announcements, and grades. **NOTE THAT GRADES MAY NOT BE WEIGHTED ON ELMS. DO NOT TREAT THE “FINAL” GRADE ELMS CALCULATES FOR YOU AS ACCURATE. YOUR ASSIGNMENT GRADES ARE ACCURATE, BUT THOSE CALCULATED BY ELMS INTERNALLY MAY NOT BE.** Students are required to be proficient users of Canvas and to ensure that their emails registered with Canvas are up to date and checked regularly.

DO NOT USE CANVAS TO EMAIL ME. I won't respond after the first week of class. Use my email provided above. I am for real about this. In fact, I'm gonna go with some crazy big font right now to make my point.

DO NOT EMAIL ME THROUGH CANVAS. Use regular email like you do for contacting literally every other person you know. It's scroco@umd.edu

Religious Observance

In accordance with the University's policy on the observance of religious holidays, it is the student's responsibility to inform their section TA of any absences due to these holidays well in advance and **in writing** within the first two weeks of the semester. I am serious about the "in writing" part.

Students with disabilities

We will make every effort to accommodate students who are registered with the Disability Support Services (DSS) Office. We are not able to accommodate students who are not registered with DSS or who do not provide us with documentation or have not had that documentation reviewed by DSS before the third week of class.

Absence due to illness

As per University policy students may submit a self-signed note for a medically necessitated absence from a single section during the semester (you **DO NOT** need to submit one for lecture). Such documentation is sufficient unless it coincides with a Major Scheduled Grading Event. For a definition of such events see above Requirements section. Any student missing more than two sections or a Major Scheduled Grading Event is required to provide documentation from the Health Center or from an outside health care provider that verifies the dates of treatment and time frame during which the student was unable to meet academic responsibilities.

All this being said, as you are well aware, this semester is (still) not normal. All of us are dealing with additional stress and anxiety. I'm writing this to let you know that I am **very open** to being flexible should life events arise that make it hard for you to keep up with the class. Such events might include things happening to you personally or things happening to family members. Please know that I want to do everything I can to support you. To do this, though, I need to know about a problem when it starts, not after it has already derailed your ability to keep up with class. I don't need to know details. Whatever you are comfortable telling me is fine. Letting me know sooner rather than later, though, is key. I'm in a much better position to help you and make accommodations. It is MUCH harder to do this if you wait until the end of the term. You can email me or come to office hours.

Upshot: I am here to help. If you are having life issues that are making it hard for you to keep up with class, PLEASE let me know so I can help.

Code of Conduct

It is assumed that all students are familiar with and adhere to the code of academic integrity. See <http://www.studenthonorcouncil.umd.edu/index.html>

Extra Credit and Incompletes

Graded assignments in the class provide students with ample opportunity to demonstrate mastery of the materials. Therefore, **no extra credit assignments** will be assigned in the class, unless I feel like it. I'll let you know if I do. Do not ask if you can make up your own assignment for extra credit. *The answer is no.* The assigned material is also appropriate in scope for completion within a single semester. Therefore, no incompletes will be given-*no exceptions unless truly extreme circumstances warrant it.*

Other Policies

Be courteous in the classroom. Classroom courtesy is necessary to ensure that all students have the opportunity to learn without distractions. If you are not interested in learning, do not come to class.

A discussion of current political events may take place in section. These discussions can often stimulate strong feelings and heated debate. Students are expected to be respectful of the opinions of others, regardless of whether they share similar opinions or beliefs. Debates will be cut short that do not enhance understanding of course concepts. We (myself and the TA's) expect students to offer substantive comments and questions when appropriate. We also expect students to not dominate a conversation, but to allow a free discussion and exchange of ideas.

Important Note about Class Communication

The first avenue of communication for this course is with your designated teaching assistant(s).

All issues, problems, questions, concerns should first be addressed with him or her, unless the issue is of a sensitive nature. Please provide written documentation or notice of absence to your TA. If issues cannot be resolved or questions cannot be answered by the TA, then contact me.

Please allow TA's and/or the professor 24 hours to respond to emails (48 to 72 hours on weekends).

Government and Politics Department Subject Pool

Scholarly discovery depends, in large part, on research methods. Exposure to research methods is a valuable learning tool for students trying to understand research in political science. Some of the most exciting and cutting-edge research is being conducted right here at Maryland, so there's no better opportunity to learn about research in political science than by participating in research studies. The Government and Politics department encourages students to gain hands on research experience and knowledge. To support students in gaining this knowledge, our **Scope and Methods for Political Science Research** undergraduate course (GVPT 201) will give participation credit to students who take part in 3-4 studies conducted by GVPT faculty and graduate students.

Each study will take about 20-30 minutes to complete. If you prefer not to serve as a participant, you may elect to satisfy the requirement by writing a 3-5 page review of a quantitative research article. (If you are under 18 years old, you must have parental assent on file for you to participate in a research study or you may choose to write the paper instead.) However, you must notify the research administrator (Jordan Spencer jspeck13@umd.edu) **before Feb 11 if you wish to register for the research alternative**. You will have to either participate in **all of the studies** or write the review paper. **IF YOU MISS ONE OF THE SURVEYS, YOU GET A ZERO FOR THIS PART OF YOUR GRADE.**

Papers cannot be used to make up for a study at the end of the semester.

Students who are under 18 years of age must obtain parental permission to participate in research. If you are under 18, please contact the research administrator and she will provide you with instructions on how to participate in the research studies.

If you choose to participate in research, you will sign-up for four research studies. Throughout the semester you will be sent separate emails of studies to participate in. There will be a link in the email in which you will click on to participate in the study. All studies take place online.

Please treat this like any professional obligation. We will keep a record of your participation. At the end of each study, we will inform your professor and TA that you participated in the study.

Class Schedule and Readings

I reserve the right to change the dates of homework/survey components. If a change is made, the due date will always be LATER than stated here.

PE = textbook

BW = Calling Bullshit

Homeworks are always due by 11:59pm unless otherwise indicated

Day	Week	Date		Reading	What's going on in section?	What's Due?	Survey
M	1	24-Jan	<i>Lecture online</i>	None			
W	1	26-Jan	<i>Lecture online</i>	C1 PE			
F	1	28-Jan	Section	Workbook Ch 1	HW 1 Explained		
M	2	31-Jan	<i>Lecture online</i>	C2 PE		Syllabus quiz online	
W	2	2-Feb	<i>Lecture online</i>	C2 PE and Preface/C1 BW		HW1 Due	
F	2	4-Feb	Section	Workbook Ch 2	HW 2 Explained		
M	3	7-Feb		C3 PE		Questions for Survey Due	Questions for Survey Due
W	3	9-Feb		C3 PE/C2 BW		HW2 Due	
F	3	11-Feb	Section	Workbook Ch 3	HW 3 Explained		
M	4	14-Feb		C4 PE			<i>Pilot in field</i>
W	4	16-Feb		C4 PE/C3 BW		HW3 Due	<i>Pilot in field</i>
F	4	18-Feb	Section	Workbook Ch 4	HW 4 Explained		<i>Pilot in field</i>
M	5	21-Feb		C5 PE			<i>Pilot in field</i>

W	5	23-Feb		C5 PE		HW4 Due	<i>Pilot in field</i>
F	5	25-Feb	Section	Workbook Ch 5	HW 5 Explained		<i>Pilot in field</i>
M	6	28-Feb		C4 & 5 BW			<i>Pilot in field</i>
W	6	2-Mar		Demagoguery and Democracy book (all)		HW5 Due	
F	6	4-Mar	Section	Codebook	Play with pilot data		
M	7	7-Mar		C6 PE		Pilot analysis and revisions due	Pilot analysis and revisions due
W	7	9-Mar		C6 PE		Demagoguery paper due	
F	7	11-Mar	Section	none	Review for midterm	Distribution link goes out	Distribution link goes out
M	8	14-Mar	Midterm review	none			<i>Survey in field</i>
W	8	16-Mar	MIDTERM IN LECTURE	none		MIDTERM IN LECTURE	<i>Survey in field</i>
F	8	18-Mar	No Section	none	No Section	Proof of survey distribution due	<i>Survey in field</i>
M	9	21-Mar	Spring Break	Spring Break	Spring Break		<i>Survey in field</i>
W	9	23-Mar	Spring Break	Spring Break	Spring Break		<i>Survey in field</i>

F	9	25-Mar	Spring Break	Spring Break	Spring Break		Survey in field
M	10	28-Mar		C6 BW			Survey in field
W	10	30-Mar		C7 BW			
F	10	1-Apr	Section	Workbook Ch 6	HW6/Memo 1 Explained		
M	11	4-Apr		C7 PE		Memo 1 due	Memo 1 due
W	11	6-Apr		C7 PE		HW6 Due	
F	11	8-Apr	Section	Workbook Ch7	HW 7 Explained		
M	12	11-Apr	Lecture online	C8 PE			
W	12	13-Apr	Lecture online	C8 PE		HW7Due	
F	12	15-Apr	Section	Workbook Ch8	HW8 Explained		
M	13	18-Apr		C8 PE			
W	13	20-Apr		Ch 10 BW		Memo 2 Due	Memo 2 Due
F	13	22-Apr	Section	Workbook Ch8	HW8 Explained (attend optional)		
M	14	25-Apr		C9 PE			
W	14	27-Apr		C9 PE		HW8 Due	
F	14	29-Apr	Section	Workbook C10	HW10 (not 9) explained		
M	15	2-May		Freakonomics			
W	15	4-May	Review	none		HW10 due	
F	15	6-May	Section	none	Midterm review		
M	16	9-May	2 nd MIDTERM IN LECTURE	none		2 nd MIDTERM IN LECTURE	
W		18-May	FINAL MEMO DUE ONLINE	FINAL MEMO DUE ONLINE	FINAL MEMO DUE ONLINE by 5pm	FINAL MEMO DUE ONLINE	FINAL MEMO DUE

			by 5pm	by 5pm		by 5pm	ONLINE by 5pm
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