

Scope and Methods for Political Science Research

GVPT 100 Spring 2017

Contact Information

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

Lecture: MW

LEF 2166 1:00

LEF 2205 2:00

Office hours: By appointment

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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 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. To this end we will discuss a large number of examples from contemporary political science research done by professors in the Department of Government & Politics at the University of Maryland and other universities. 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. 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 survey and distribute it to as many people as possible. We will then analyze it as a class in the second part of the semester. Finally, students will choose questions from the survey that they have a particular interest in to focus on in their final paper. 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. To the best of my knowledge, this is the first time a massive, group-designed survey has been used in a GVPT course. The survey will unfold over several phases, which I describe in more detail below.

The Books:

Philip H. Pollock III. *The Essentials of Political Analysis*. Fifth Edition. Washington, DC: CQ Press (Required).

Philip H. Pollock III. 2010. *An R Companion to Political Analysis*. Third Edition. Washington, DC: CQ Press (Required).

You can buy the books in the bookstore or online

A number of scholarly articles used as examples in lectures will also be posted on Canvas. Some are required reading, others are recommended.

Software:

We will be using R in this class. Note that this is a change from previous semesters, which used STATA.

The R software is FREE and works with any computer. There are instructions on how to download R and the associated data files/packages for the homeworks in the workbook. I would also highly recommend you 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.

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 Homework, Midterms, and Final are designated as Major Scheduled Grading Events. If you are going to miss class (or section) on a day that homework is due or on exam day and would like your absence to be excused, 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 homework, midterms, or the final. Note the midterms are weighted differently.

The weight of each component is as follows:

Homework: 15%

Subject Pool: 5% (see last page of syllabus)

Midterm 1: 15%

Midterm 2: 20%

Section Attendance and Participation: 10%

Survey: 35% (total)

- Pilot Design: 3%
- Pilot Analysis: 3%
- Redrafting/Distribution: 3%
- Memo 1: 6%
- Memo 2: 9%
- Memo 3: 11%

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 coming to lecture. The homework in the course comes out of the companion book, *An R Companion to Political Analysis*. 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 homework assignments are in the workbook.

Each chapter ends with an assignment. Students must read the appropriate chapter and complete the assignment using the statistical package *R*. The due date of each assignment is noted in the syllabus. 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 percentage of your grade. Do not wait until the last minute to complete the homework-the exercises are involved and take time.

NOTE THAT SOMETIMES THINGS ARE DUE FOR THE SURVEY AT THE SAME TIME A HOMEWORK IS DUE. 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.

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 four main parts of the survey design: 1. Pilot drafting, 2. Pilot analysis, 3. Redrafting and distribution and 4. The final write up. Parts 1-3 will take place in lecture and discussion sections. Part 4 will be done 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 will read questions designed by other sections to form a complete draft of what they want the survey to look like. 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. In addition to the respondents' answers to the questions, the survey 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 work with me and one another to determine if any questions need to be rewritten or dropped in favor of new ones. Students will also do a preliminary set of analyses on the pilot data (e.g., sample means, etc) to get a sense of how responses are distributed.

Part 3: Redrafting and distribution: After discussing the results of their preliminary analyses in both lecture and discussion, students will determine what they want the final survey instrument to look like. Once the sections have agreed on the final question wording, *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. 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.

Final write up:

The final survey write up will be three memos 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. 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.

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 Feb. 15

Absence due to illness

As per University policy students may submit a self-signed note for a medically necessitated absence from a single lecture or section during the semester. 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 one section 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. I don't take attendance at lecture, so you don't need to let me know if you are going to miss.

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. 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.*

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.

-No talking during lectures, no reading newspapers, or listening to music.

-NO COMPUTERS (e.g., laptops, tablets, iPads, etc) MAY BE USED IN LECTURE. (I will let the TA's determine their own policies for section).

Using electronic devices in class not only undercuts your ability to learn, but also distracts others (including me), thus affecting the ability of other students to learn. Students wishing to use laptops in class must first sign a statement indicating that they will only use their laptops for legitimate course-related reasons such as taking notes, and that they will sit near the front of the class while using their laptop. Failure to comply (such as by surfing the web, checking email, etc.) will result in loss of laptop-using privileges. Using a laptop without having signed the statement will also result in a loss of this privilege. You are free to use hand-written notes, or print outs of my slides, which I will make available.

Cellphone use will not be tolerated. Please silence your cellphone and refrain from using it during class—which is distracting to me and to other students.

If I can hear you talking, it means you are too loud and are disturbing the class.

Violation of these policies will negatively affect your course participation grade.

-Please be on time for class and stay until the end, unless you have made special arrangements with me. Entering late and leaving early is distracting to the instructor and to other students. If you must enter late or leave early, please take the seat nearest an exit and enter or leave as quietly as possible. Two or more disruptions of class that require me to address you directly in any form will lead to a reduction in your participation grade.

-A discussion of current political events will likely take place in both lecture and labs. 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. 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).

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.

Date	Day	Topic/Reading	Homework	Survey
25-Jan	Wed	Intro to class		
27-Jan	Friday	NO SECTION		
30-Jan	Mon	NO LECTURE		
1-Feb	Wed	Chapter 1		
3-Feb	Friday			Talk about pilot questions in section
6-Feb	Mon	Chapter 1		
8-Feb	Wed	Chapter 2		Submit pilot questions
10-Feb	Friday		Chapter 1 due	
13-Feb	Mon	Chapter 2		
15-Feb	Wed	Chapter 3		Pilot goes in the field
17-Feb	Friday		Chapter 2 due	In field
20-Feb	Mon	Chapter 3		In field
22-Feb	Wed	Chapter 4		In field
24-Feb	Friday		Chapter 3 due	In field
27-Feb	Mon	Chapter 4		Talk about pilot in lecture
1-Mar	Wed	Chapter 5		
3-Mar	Friday		Chapter 4 due	Play with pilot data in section
6-Mar	Mon	Chapter 5		
8-Mar	Wed	Chapter 6		Pilot analysis due

10-Mar	Friday		Chapter 5 due	
13-Mar	Mon	Review		Redrafting suggestions due
15-Mar	Wed	EXAM 1		SURVEY GETS DISTRIBUTED
17-Mar	Friday			In field
20-Mar	Mon	SPRING BREAK		In field
22-Mar	Wed	SPRING BREAK		In field
24-Mar	Friday	SPRING BREAK		In field
27-Mar	Mon	Chapter 6		In field
29-Mar	Wed	Chapter 7		In field
31-Mar	Friday		Chapter 6 due	In field
3-Apr	Mon	Chapter 7		In field
5-Apr	Wed	Chapter 8		In field
7-Apr	Friday		Chapter 7 due	Talk about data in section
10-Apr	Mon	Chapter 8		
12-Apr	Wed	Chapter 8		
14-Apr	Friday		Chapter 8	Work on memos in section
17-Apr	Mon	Chapter 9		Memo 1 due
19-Apr	Wed	Chapter 9		
21-Apr	Friday			
24-Apr	Mon	Chapter 9		
26-Apr	Wed	Freakonomics		
28-Apr	Friday		Chapter 9	Work on memos in section
1-May	Mon	NO LECTURE		
3-May	Wed	TBA		Memo 2 due
5-May	Friday			
8-May	Mon	Review		
10-May	Wed	Final exam		
17-May	Wed			Memo 3 due online by 5pm

Government and Politics Department Subject Pool

Scholar 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 100) will give participation credit to students who take part in 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 (Heather Hicks) before the last day of schedule adjustment for the semester 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.

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 Heather Hicks 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 three research studies. Throughout the semester you will be sent three separate emails of studies to participate in. There will be a link in the email in which you will click on to schedule a day and time to take the study. All studies take place in **Chincoteague Hall room 4101**.

Please treat your scheduled research appointments like any professional meetings. If you sign up for an experiment and do not show up at the time you signed up for (and do not cancel properly within 24 hours because of an emergency), you will lose the research credit. We will keep a record of your participation. At the end of each study, we will inform you TA that you participated in the study.