

GVPT 420 – The Logic and Practice of Measuring Political Behavior
Dr. Lilliana Mason

Prerequisites: GVPT 100 (future 200)

Dr. Lilliana Mason
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Class Meets
Wednesday
2:00pm – 4:45pm
Tydings 0101

Office Hours
Tydings 1143
Tuesday 12:00am-2:00pm
and by appointment

Description:

This course will familiarize students with the concepts and practices behind measuring political behavior. As political analysis is an increasingly quantitative field, it becomes crucial for students of political behavior to understand how to turn a concept into a number. Though it may sound simple, this is a skill that is often overlooked, and can mean the difference between useful data and useless data. Through the semester, students will learn how to define concepts in concrete ways, examine different methods of measuring concepts, learn how to test the quality of chosen measures, learn how to construct richer measures out of multiple questions, and finally how to examine the relationship between multiple measures of similar concepts. Common pitfalls, errors, bias, and ethics will be examined along the way. Students will finish the course with the ability to understand and critique the measurement choices in academic and other publications. The skills acquired in this course will be useful in any occupation that requires working with data. As they say in data analysis, “garbage in, garbage out.” Students will finish this course with a firm understanding of how to generate quality data that will assure fair and innovative statistical analysis.

Learning Objectives:

- Students will learn how to translate basic political science concepts into quantitative, reliable, and valid variables, effectively *thinking like* social scientists.
- Students will develop proficiency in fine-tuning their analytical and conceptual skills.
- Students will acquire proficiency in critically evaluating quantitative academic political analysis.

- Students will develop effective oral and written communication skills to clearly and coherently present information in the discipline of political science.

Textbook: Neil Salkind. Tests and Measurement for People Who (Think They) Hate Tests and Measurement. Edition 3.

Additional readings will be posted regularly on ELMS.

BRING TEXTBOOK/ PRINTOUTS OF ALL READINGS TO CLASS

No computers, phones or tablet devices are permitted during our class meetings. I understand and have considered arguments for permitting laptop and tablet computers in the classroom. However, in my experience (and based on the research evidence) the reality is that they present an irresistible distraction and detract from the cooperative learning environment. Researchers have found that these distractions do in fact interfere with learning and active participation. For that reason, the use of computers and phones will not be permitted during class meetings (except when required for DSS accommodations). If a computer is needed to accomplish a class objective for the day I will provide it or give you advanced notice to bring one with you.

I expect you to make the responsible and respectful decision to refrain from using your cellphone in class. If you have critical communication to attend to, please excuse yourself and return when you are ready. For more information about the science behind the policy watch: <http://youtu.be/WwPaw3Fx5Hk> and read https://www.brookings.edu/research/for-better-learning-in-college-lectures-lay-down-the-laptop-and-pick-up-a-pen/?utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter&utm_campaign=es

Trust But Verify:

For this course, some of your assignments will be collected via Turnitin on our course ELMS page. I have chosen to use this tool because it can help you improve your scholarly writing and help me verify the integrity of student work. For information about Turnitin, how it works, and the feedback reports you may have access to, visit [Turnitin Originality Checker for Students](#)

Civility Policy:

In accordance with the philosophy of an institution for higher learning, the classroom should be a place where diverse ideas can be explored with respect in order to promote learning and growth.

We each come from a variety of backgrounds and bring with us different experiences to the classroom. Regardless of whether or not we share similar opinions and beliefs, I expect us to remain respectful of each other as we explore ideas. I encourage you to express yourself with reason, clarity, courtesy, and

compassion. This ensures that we may be comfortable learning and growing without fear of judgment, ridicule, or intimidation. I welcome each of you as worthy contributors in the classroom. Student conduct that disrupts the learning process will not be tolerated and may lead to disciplinary action and/or removal from class. This includes any language that attacks any individual on the basis of gender, race, class, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, or other personal characteristics.

Other course policies:

Groupwork policies: The class will be divided into several small groups for work in class. All members of that group will receive the same grade for in-class work. If any member of a group is not fully participating the other members of that group are free to contact me (I will notice if one member of a group is consistently not present for activities). I will conduct my own investigation into that group member's commitment, and reduce that single individual grade if I deem it necessary.

For individual assessments (e.g., quizzes, exams, papers) the expectation is that you will schedule a makeup with an equivalent (but different) assessment.

For minor assessments (e.g., a weekly assignment) I simply drop the assignment from consideration. However, this is independent of any policy in which all students have some number of assessments dropped.

For assessments and activities that are more challenging to schedule a make-up for (e.g., presentations, group projects) I will develop a reasonable plan to accommodate excused absences and consult with the Office of Undergraduate Studies if there are questions as to what is appropriate.

Get Some Help!

You are expected to take personal responsibility for you own learning. This includes acknowledging when your performance does not match your goals and doing something about it. Everyone can benefit from some expert guidance on time management, note taking, and exam preparation, so I encourage you to consider visiting <http://ter.ps/learn> and schedule an appointment with an academic coach. Sharpen your communication skills (and improve your grade) by visiting <http://ter.ps/writing> and schedule an appointment with the campus Writing Center. Finally, if you just need someone to talk to, visit <http://www.counseling.umd.edu>.



Everything is free because you have already paid for it, and **everyone needs help...** all you have to do is ask for it.

Course Communication

Time-sensitive information will be sent to you via ELMS and you may contact me either via email or via ELMS to discuss questions, absences, or accommodations. I will respond to all emails within 48 hours. Do not email me 8 hours before a deadline with a question. I have a family and am not available at all hours. You might also wish to read this helpful guidance on writing professional emails ([ter.ps/email](#)). At this stage in your academic career, it is important to practice professional writing, and I will expect this of you.

Campus Policies

It is our shared responsibility to know and abide by the University of Maryland's policies that relate to all courses, which include topics like:

- Academic integrity
- Student and instructor conduct
- Accessibility and accommodations
- Attendance and excused absences
- Grades and appeals
- Copyright and intellectual property

Please visit www.ugst.umd.edu/courserelatedpolicies.html for the Office of Undergraduate Studies' full list of campus-wide policies and follow up with me if you have questions.

Grades are not given, but earned. Your grade is determined by your performance on the learning assessments in the course and is assigned individually (not curved). If earning a particular grade is important to you, please speak with me at the beginning of the semester so that I can offer some helpful suggestions for achieving your goal.

All assessment scores will be posted on the course ELMS page. If you would like to review any of your grades (including the exams), or have questions about how something was scored, please email me to schedule a time for us to meet in my office.

Late work will not be accepted for course credit unless previously arranged so please plan to have it submitted well before the scheduled deadline. I am happy to discuss any of your grades with you, and if I have made a mistake I will immediately correct it. Any formal grade disputes must be submitted in writing and within one week of receiving the grade.

Grades will be based on:

- ❖ Pre-class reading quizzes and weekly measurement assignments (20%)
 - Students will complete a short reading quiz on ELMS by 10am on the day of class, every week.

- Students will be assigned a particular concept to measure each week, and to bring a written description of that measure to class.
- ❖ In-class activity participation (10%)
 - Classes will consist of lecture and small group activities. All students are expected to participate in small group activities.
- ❖ One midterm exam (20%)
 - In-class exam covering all information from the textbook and lectures up to the date of the midterm.
 - Includes multiple choice, short answer, and one essay.
- ❖ TWO analytical papers (5-10 pages) describing and critiquing measurement strategies of academic work (30%)
 - Students will use concepts and methods from the course to evaluate and critique an existing work of quantitative political science, particularly focusing on the choice of measurement techniques.
- ❖ Final exam (20%)
 - In-class exam covering all information from the textbook and lectures for the entire course.
 - Includes multiple choice, short answer, and one essay.

Final letter grades are assigned based on the percentage of total assessment points earned. To be fair to everyone I have to establish clear standards and apply them consistently, so please understand that being close to a cutoff is not the same this as making the cut (89.99 \neq 90.00). It would be unethical to make exceptions for some and not others.

Final Grade Cutoffs									
+	97.00%	+	87.00%	+	77.00%	+	67.00%		
A	94.00%	B	84.00%	C	74.00%	D	64.00%	F	<60.0%
-	90.00%	-	80.00%	-	70.00%	-	60.00%		

RQ=Reading Quiz (Must be completed by 10am) MD=Measurement description AP=Analytical Paper

Course Schedule

DUE BEFORE CLASS		SUBJECT OF CLASS MEETING		WORK IN CLASS
Wed	8/30	First Class Postponed for Political Science Conference – 9/6 will be first class		
Wed	9/6	Course overview and getting started Salkind Ch. 1 “Why Measurement?” Monkey Cage “How do you measure democracy?”		Group meetings; Brainstorm democracy
Wed	9/13	RQ1	Measurement Levels: What are the units of analysis? Why do we care? Salkind Ch. 2 Jacoby (1999) pg. 271-281 – ELMS Ruel, Wagner, Gillespie Ch. 4 - ELMS	Measuring Race: http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/interactives/multiracial-timeline/

Wed	9/20	RQ2 MD1	Measuring Partisanship: Operationalization Salkind Ch. 4 Abramson and Ostrom (1991) - ELMS	Brainstorm Partisanship; Reading academic articles
Wed	9/27	RQ3 MD2	Measuring Ideology: Reliability Salkind Ch. 3 Sullivan Pierson and Marcus (1978)	Multi- Dimensional Concepts
Wed	10/4	RQ4 MD3	Measuring Sense of Humor: Validity Martin and Lefcourt (1984) - ELMS	Tests of Validity SAT study on ELMS
Wed	10/11	RQ5 MD4	Measuring Political Knowledge: Multi- Item Scales Salkind Ch. 6 Mondak (2001) - ELMS	Item Response Theory in Practice
Wed	10/18	RQ6 MD5 AP1	Measuring Prejudice: Biases in Answers Kinder and Ryan (2017) - ELMS	Socially- Desirable Answering
Wed	10/25	RQ7 MD6	Question Wording and Order Qualtrics 10 Commandments - ELMS Schwarz (1999) - ELMS	Writing a Survey Instrument Ruel, Wagner, Gillespie Ch. 3 - ELMS
Wed	11/1		MIDTERM	
Wed	11/8	RQ9 MD7	Comparing Scores Salkind Ch. 5 KKV, Designing Social Inquiry 150-168 - ELMS	Let's Do Math – Bring Calculators Salkind Appendix A
Wed	11/15	RQ10 MD8	Partisanship and Gender: Concept Salience Bittner and Goodyear-Grant (2017) - ELMS Huddy, Mason, and Aaroe (2015) - ELMS	Understanding Salience
Wed	11/22		THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY	
Wed	11/29	RQ11 MD9 AP2	Survey Design and Variable Coding Berinsky, Margolis and Sances (2014)-ELMS	Coding Variables in Practice (marital status, race, income)
Wed	<u>12/6</u>	RQ12	Ethics Salkind Ch.7 (pg. 343-348)	Constitution Test CITI certification
Wed	<u>tbd</u>		Final Exam	

Note: This is a tentative schedule, and subject to change as necessary – monitor the course ELMS page for current deadlines. In the unlikely event of a prolonged university closing, or an extended

absence from the university, adjustments to the course schedule, deadlines, and assignments will be made based on the duration of the closing and the specific dates missed.