



Introduction to Political Research

POLS 3800-004 (CRN: 88804)
Fall 2023



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Class Location: Aderhold 232
Class Meeting: TR 12:45-2:00pm
Office Hours: TR 10:30-11:30am
or by appointment

Please Note: You are responsible for being aware of all policies, information, and assignments listed on this syllabus. You are also responsible for all materials covered in class, regardless of your attendance, including assignment handouts provided throughout the semester. By remaining in this class, you are accepting this responsibility and agreeing to follow the course guidelines. Read each section carefully and contact me immediately with any questions you may have.

Course Description & Goals

Course Description

Welcome to Introduction to Political Research. This course will provide you with an understanding of the social scientific method as applied to Political Science. Politics determine the rules that govern our lives. Understanding these political processes requires both an understanding of politics generally and the causal mechanisms that determine observable outcomes. This course will provide you with the requisite skills for the latter, while other Political Science courses provide you with the former. No math skills are assumed or required beyond algebra and arithmetic. This is not a course in mathematics and will not be taught as such.

For those of you not planning to attend graduate school or conduct your own research, my hope is that this course will help you become a better “consumer” of political information. We routinely encounter “claims” in the political world that something caused something else to happen. This course will teach you how to think about politics and evaluate causal claims through the social scientific lens. By reviewing previous research, carefully considering alternative explanations and counterfactuals, and forming your own theoretical model to explain an observable outcome, you will learn the skills required to critically assess causal claims encountered in both politics and the media. My goal is that the writing assignments and critical feedback will help you refine and improve crucial communication skills.

This course will move very quickly compared to your previous Political Science courses. If you fall behind on the readings, homework, or research paper assignments it will be very difficult to catch up. You will need to attend class regularly and stay up to date with all assignments to do well in this course.

Learning Objectives

- i. Learn to think in a more nuanced and scientific way about politics and government.
- ii. Become familiar with the process of political science research.
- iii. Demonstrate proficiency in evaluating scholarly political science resources and literature as well using them responsibly to formulate effective arguments.
- iv. Understand the different ways in which hypotheses can be tested in the social sciences.
- v. Develop improved critical thinking and writing skills.

Required Text

You are required to purchase the following text. You will not be able to proceed in the course without this book. This text is available through the university bookstore and many alternative vendors. I recommend purchasing a used copy via Amazon or similar vendor to save money. Due to the speed of the course, the first chapter is posted on iCollege. No other chapters or excerpts will be posted. You need to purchase this textbook immediately as to not fall behind.

The Fundamentals of Political Science Research, (Third Edition). 2018. Paul M. Kellstedt & Guy D. Whitten. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Course Requirements and Graded Evaluations

Your final grade will consist of the following components:

Participation (10% of final grade)

A crucial component of this course is in-class participation. You will be graded on your participation through responsiveness to questions, in-class and group exercises, and thoughtful questions. While attendance is not mandatory, it is impossible to earn credit for participation without being physically present in the classroom.

Textbook Chapters and Exercises (25% of final grade)

Each class you will be responsible for reading a portion of the Kellstedt & Whitten (K&W) textbook. Along with these readings, you will also be responsible for completing three or four of the exercises found at the end of each K&W chapter. The specific exercises are located in the detailed course schedule below and will be noted at the end of each class. These exercises are due in iCollege Sunday night (11:59pm) for their respective due dates. There are 9 textbook exercise assignments.

Midterm Exam (25% of final grade)

The midterm exam will cover K&W chapters 1 through 6. You will be responsible for all topics, definitions, and concepts included in these chapters. The exam will consist of 30 multiple choice questions, and a single 'essay' question. You will be given a choice between three potential 'essay' questions and will choose one to answer. This exam is closed book and closed note. The written portion of this exam should be answerable in several paragraphs. You will be provided with space to write your answer within the exam – there is no reason to purchase a 'Blue Book' or bring extra paper.

Research Paper (40% of final grade)

You will complete a research paper by the end of the course worth 40% of your overall course grade. This consists of a statement of topic, annotated bibliography, literature review, theory section, methods section, and final draft. These components are detailed below. All written assignments must be uploaded to iCollege. All components will be discussed in greater detail in class as these deadlines approach.

Statement of Topic (5% of final grade): Due Sunday, September 10th at 11:59pm on iCollege

You will submit several paragraphs outlining the general topic you wish to write your research paper on. This should detail the general topic, research question, and outline of your theory. The purpose of this assignment is to ensure that you have a workable topic for the final project. Feel free to discuss and/or schedule a meeting with me if you'd like to go over your topic with me in detail prior to submission.

- Suggested length: 500 words

Annotated Bibliography (5% of final grade): Due Sunday, October 8th at 11:59pm on iCollege

You will research the scholarly literature relating to your chosen topic and produce an annotated bibliography of the current state of knowledge. Annotated means that you need to write a paragraph or two detailing the research questions, proposed theory, data, methods, and findings. No part of the annotation may be copied from the article itself. Instead, you are to paraphrase the words of the author(s). You are required to use at least 20 academic journal articles or peer reviewed books for this purpose. News or magazine articles, websites, and other non-scholarly sources will not count towards this requirement. This will require a correctly formatted bibliography in APSA format. See the [APSA Style Manual](#) for the required format. We will discuss in detail what the final version of the annotated bibliography should look like in class.

- Required length: 20 peer reviewed articles with 150-250 word annotations

Literature Review (5% of final grade): Due Sunday, October 22nd at 11:59pm on iCollege

Following the completion of your annotated bibliography, you will produce a literature review using the sources you used in the previous assignment. A literature review synthesizes numerous sources into a clear accounting of the current state of the literature on a specific topic. It is not a recitation where – this paper says X, this paper says Y. Rather, you are to group articles into ‘camps’ wherein several articles will be making roughly the same practical and/or theoretical claims. These camps should be placed in rough opposition to one another, with arguments and counterarguments, and varied evidence for each. You will likely find one camp more persuasive than the others. You should incorporate this view into the theme of your literature review – in other words, you will place your favored camp at the fore of your literature review then place the other camps in opposition. It is incumbent on you to give a fair and accurate interpretation of opposing views. We will discuss this assignment in detail as the deadline approaches. This will require a correctly formatted bibliography in APSA format. See the [APSA Style Manual](#) for the guidelines.

- Suggested length: 2500 words

Theory Section (5% of final grade): Due Sunday, November 5th at 11:59pm on iCollege

You will produce a detailed discussion of your proposed explanation for the relationship you identify in the statement of topic – why does X cause Y. This may be an original theory, an adaptation of existing theory, or an interpretation of an established theory. The inspiration for your adopted theory must be appropriately cited if applicable. The requirement is not necessarily a novel theoretical development as this is one of the most difficult things to do in Political Science. Rather, you should demonstrate a holistic understanding of the theory generation process and address the elements discussed both in K&W and in class. This should be informed by the annotated bibliography and literature review process and will generally take the form of adopting a specific ‘camp’ in a current debate. You will finally propose one or more testable hypotheses based on your theory.

- Suggested length: 1000 words

Methods Section (5% of final grade): Due Sunday November 19th at 11:59pm on iCollege

You will produce a detailed plan for data collection and analysis of your proposed hypotheses. This will include the explicit identification of your dependent and independent variables, a discussion of how these variables would be operationalized, and what potential confounding, intervening, or mediating variables need to be accounted for. You will then propose a data analysis plan considering the lessons learned throughout the course. This will include the identification of where these data may be found or, if you propose collecting novel data, the data collection process your proposed research would require. You are not required or expected to collect data and complete your proposed plan.

- Suggested length: 750 words

Final Draft (15% of final grade): Due Friday, December 8th at 11:59pm on iCollege

The final draft will primarily consist of incorporating the feedback you’ve received throughout the previous assignments. This may be relatively minimal edits but will more likely will require significant changes. You will combine the literature review, theory, and methods sections, and add an introduction and conclusion. The introduction will introduce, as the name implies, your research question, theory, and expected findings. The conclusion will outline your expected findings if you were to carry the project to conclusion. Proper APSA format is required for both text and references. Proper spelling, grammar, and style choices count towards your final grade.

Grading Policies

Grading Scale

Grades will conform to the following Plus/Minus grade scale:

A+: 97 – 100	B+: 87 – 89	C+: 77 – 79	D+: 67 – 69	
A: 94 – 96	B: 84 – 86	C: 74 – 76	D: 64 – 66	F: Less than 60
A-: 90 – 93	B-: 80 – 83	C-: 70 – 73	D-: 60 – 63	

Posting of Grades

I will post your final grades on iCollege after the course period has closed and before final grades are submitted. I will not calculate final (or current) overall grades until the end the semester. I reserve the right to adjust (e.g., “apply a curve”) after the final drafts are graded but before final grades are reported. I will be using iCollege to report your “raw scores” on the exercises, midterm, and components of the research paper, so that you have immediate feedback on your performance. Your final grade will depend on the overall class distribution on these and any final adjustments.

Miscellaneous Class Policies

Announcements:

When I need to make announcements to the class as a whole, I will do so by posting an announcement on our iCollege class homepage and to the class if applicable. If you need to contact me, please send a normal email (i.e., NOT from iCollege) to the following address: rluke2@gsu.edu. The iCollege internal email system is notoriously unreliable – don’t use it for this course. If I need to contact you individually, I will do so by sending an email from my GSU email account to your student panther email address. (I will NOT be using the iCollege “email” system.)

Written Assignments:

All written assignments must be submitted via iCollege to their respective folder. All assignments will be checked for plagiarism via iCollege’s imbedded checking system (TurnItIn). Flagged assignments will be considered as plagiarism and treated in line with the penalties discussed in the ‘Cheating and Academic Misconduct’ section. All submitted files must be in either PDF or Word document form. All submitted assignments must conform to the following guidelines: 1-inch margins, double spaced, 12-point font, Times New Roman or Computer Modern (LaTeX default) fonts.

Late Assignments:

Assignments are due at their stated date and time in the course schedule. Late assignments will be accepted with a 20% penalty per day the assignment is late. For clarity, 1 minute past the deadline will be considered as a day late, just as an assignment 23 hours overdue will be. All assignments are due on iCollege. The due date for each assignment is explicitly stated both on

iCollege and in the syllabus. Submission time is determined by iCollege's internal servers. By design, any assignment more than 5 days late will be graded as 0. The only exceptions to this rule are extenuating circumstances outlined in the University's 'Approved Absences' section of the student handbook. Any such extenuating circumstance will require official documentation and instructor approval. It is better to turn in an unfinished assignment before the due date than turn in an unfinished assignment late.

Extra Credit:

There are currently no planned extra credit opportunities. This may change as the course progresses. I will make an announcement to the entire class if this changes.

Electronic Devices:

The writing assignments of this course must be typeset (Word, LATEX, etc.) and submitted via iCollege. Research will need to be primarily conducted via accessing internet repositories of academic articles. As such, reliable access to a computer with internet connectivity is a requirement for this course. The university does have a library of borrowable electronic devices, so reach out to me if this requirement is an issue before dropping the course. Laptops are allowed during class, but the use of phones or other electronic devices is prohibited. If you continue use such devices during class after I ask you to cease, you will be asked to leave the classroom. If you need to use your phone or other device let me know before class begins.

Cheating and Academic Misconduct:

Academic integrity is fundamental to the process of learning and evaluating academic performance. Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated in any form. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, tampering with academic records and examinations, falsifying identity, posting of course materials to online repositories, and being an accessory to acts of academic dishonesty. Any violations of Georgia State University's Policy on Academic Dishonesty (Section 409) will be prosecuted to the fullest extent – this includes, but is not limited to, assignment of a zero grade for an assignment, course failure, academic probation, and expulsion. The University's policy on academic honesty can be in the Student Code of Conduct and [here](#). If you believe you may have witnessed violation of the student code of conduct or any other university policy, on or off campus, in social media or in personal communications, please consult the university policies below as to how, and to whom, to report it. All Georgia State University students agree to uphold the Student Code of Conduct:

<https://codeofconduct.gsu.edu/>

Use of Artificial Intelligence

Generative AI tools, such as ChatGPT, are designed to assist in creating and analyzing text, code, video, audio, and other multimedia. Use of these resources in your coursework comes with benefits and risks. ***In this course, AI may not be used to generate any written work submitted for a grade, partial or complete.*** This includes, but is not limited to, having an AI tool write an assignment draft and then editing or tailoring this draft for submission. You may use AI to aid in the literature collection phase, and we will cover the correct usage of these tools for this purpose in class. Any unapproved use within the course will be considered a breach of academic honesty. The unauthorized use of AI may result in failing the assignment, failing the class, being placed

on academic probation, or expulsion from the university. While exercising responsible and ethical engagement with AI is a skill you may hone over time, your unique human insights, critical thinking, and creative contributions remain pivotal to your learning experiences and success.

Problems, Emergencies, and Counseling Services:

If a problem or emergency arises that prevents you from taking an exam or completing an assignment, you should contact me. Also, generally speaking, college can be a challenging time for students and it can all feel overwhelming at times. If you are feeling a lot of stress, thinking of harming or taking your own life, have been a victim of a crime, and/or are having difficulties in your relationship with an intimate partner, there are a lot of people and resources eager to help you at GSU and off-campus. Please consider taking advantage of these opportunities if you might benefit from help:

- GSU Counseling Center: 404-413-1640
 - Offers immediate crisis help (including after-hours), counseling, support groups, stress management and meditation classes, and more.
 - <https://counselingcenter.gsu.edu/crisis-services/>
 - <https://counselingcenter.gsu.edu/immediate-help>
- GSU Student Victim Assistance: 404-413-1965
- GSU Campus Police: 404-413-3333
- Off-Campus Resources:
 - National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255
 - Rape Crisis Center: 404-616-4861
 - Atlanta Victim Assistance: 404-588-4740
 - Multi-County Crisis Helpline: 1-800-715-4225

Disability Policy:

Students who wish to request accommodation for a disability may do so by registering with the Access & Accommodation Center (located in Suite 304 of Student Center East). Students may only be accommodated upon issuance by the Access & Accommodation Center of a signed Accommodation Plan and are responsible for providing a copy of that plan to instructors of all classes in which accommodations are sought. Please advise me (and provide me with a signed copy of your Accommodation Plan) if you have a documented disability that needs to be accommodated.

Withdrawals and Hardship Withdrawals

The last day to withdraw and receive a W is October 10th. Students who withdraw on or before that day receive a W; students who withdraw after will receive a WF. W's have no effect on your GPA whereas WF's count as Fs for GPA calculation purposes. Students can receive a maximum of six W's in their academic careers at Georgia State; after reaching that total they will automatically receive a WF. Another kind of withdrawal, called "Hardship Withdrawals," are only given if students experience non-academic emergencies beyond the midpoint of the semester which interfere with or prevent the completion of their coursework. Such hardships are usually due to medical, personal or financial emergencies, and are not to be used for academic issues. These withdrawals also do NOT count as F's for GPA calculation purposes.

Privacy and Personal Information

In keeping with USG and university policy, this course website will make every effort to maintain the privacy and accuracy of your personal information. Specifically, unless otherwise noted, I will not actively share personal information with anyone except university employees whose responsibilities require access to said records. However, some information may be subject to the Georgia Open Records Act. This means that while I do not actively share information, in some cases I may be compelled by law to release information. Also, your information will be managed in compliance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), which prohibits the release of education records without student permission. For more details on FERPA, go [here](#).

End-of-Course Evaluations

Your constructive assessment of this course plays an indispensable role in shaping education at Georgia State. Upon completing the course, please take time to fill out the online course evaluation.

GSU Prohibition on Posting Instructor-Generated Materials on External Sites

The selling, sharing, publishing, presenting, or distributing of instructor-prepared course lecture notes, videos, audio recordings, or any other instructor-produced materials from any course for any commercial purpose is strictly prohibited unless explicit written permission is granted in advance by the course instructor. This includes posting any materials on websites such as Chegg, Course Hero, OneClass, Stuvia, StuDocu and other similar sites. Unauthorized sale or commercial distribution of such material is a violation of the instructor's intellectual property and the privacy rights of students attending the class and is prohibited.

Classroom Diversity, Inclusivity, and Respect

It is my intent that students from all diverse backgrounds and perspectives be well served by this course, that students' learning needs be addressed both in and out of class, and that the diversity that students bring to this class be viewed as a resource, strength, and benefit. It is my intent to present materials and activities that are respectful of all diversity including gender, sexuality, disability, age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, political beliefs, and culture. Your comments related to the class and content will be encouraged and appreciated. Please let me know ways to improve the effectiveness of the course for you personally or for other students or student groups.

Class Schedule

Class Date	Lecture Material
Tuesday, August 22 nd	Course Introduction
Thursday, August 24 th	The Social Scientific Method
Tuesday, August 29 th	Variables and Causality
Thursday, August 31 st	Generalizability and Parsimony
Tuesday, September 5 th	Identifying Variation in Cases of Interest
Thursday, September 7 th	Theory Construction
Tuesday, September 12 th	Surveying the Literature
Thursday, September 14 th	Using the Literature
Tuesday, September 19 th	Correlation and Causality
Thursday, September 21 st	Hurdling towards Causality
Tuesday, September 26 th	Research Designs: Experimental
Thursday, September 28 th	Research Designs: Observational
Tuesday, October 3 rd	Measurement and Operationalization
Thursday, October 5 th	Reliability, Bias, and Validity
Tuesday, October 10 th	Types of Variables & Measurement
Thursday, October 12 th	Describing Data
Tuesday, October 17 th	<i>Midterm Review</i>
Thursday, October 19 th	<i>Midterm Exam</i>
Tuesday, October 24 th	Probability
Thursday, October 26 th	Applying the Central Limit Theorem
Tuesday, October 31 st	p -values
Thursday, November 2 nd	Types of Hypothesis Testing
Tuesday, November 7 th	Linear Regression I
Thursday, November 9 th	Linear Regression II
Tuesday, November 14 th	Qualitative Methods in Theory
Thursday, November 16 th	Qualitative Methods in Practice
Tuesday, November 21 st & 23 rd	<i>Thanksgiving Break</i>
Tuesday, November 28 th	Advanced Topics
Thursday, November 30 th	Wrapping Up

Assignment Deadlines

Due Date	Assignments
Sunday, September 3 rd by 11:59pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Read K&W Chapter 1• Complete Chapter 1 Exercises: 2, 3, 4, 8
Sunday, September 10 th by 11:59pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Read K&W Chapter 2.1 to 2.5• Submit Statement of Topic on iCollege
Sunday, September 17 th by 11:59pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Read K&W Chapter 2.6 to 2.9• Complete Chapter 2 Exercises: 1, 3, 4, 6
Sunday, September 24 th by 11:59pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Read K&W Chapter 3• Complete Chapter 3 Exercises: 3, 4, 6, 9
Sunday, October 1 st by 11:59pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Read K&W Chapter 4• Complete Chapter 4 Exercises: 1, 4, 5, 8c
Sunday, October 8 th by 11:59pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Read K&W Chapter 5• Complete Chapter 5 Exercises: 1, 2, 3• Submit Annotated Bibliography
Sunday, October 15 th by 11:59pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Read K&W Chapter 6• Complete Chapter 6 Exercises: 1, 3, 5
Thursday, October 19 th during class	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Midterm Exam
Sunday, October 22 nd by 11:59pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Submit Literature Review
Sunday, October 29 th by 11:59pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Read K&W Chapter 7• Complete Chapter 7 Exercises: 3, 4, 5
Sunday, November 5 th by 11:59pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Read K&W Chapter 8• Complete Chapter 8 Exercises: 1, 3, 7• Submit Theory Section
Sunday, November 12 th by 11:59pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Read K&W Chapter 9• Complete Chapter 9 Exercises: 3, 4, 6, 9
Sunday, November 19 th by 11:59pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Submit Rough Draft
Friday, December 8 th by 11:59pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Final Paper Due