



Introduction to Political Research

POLS 3800-002 (CRN 53460)
Summer 2022: 7-Week Session



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Class Location: Classroom South 411
Class Meetings: TR 10:55am – 1:25pm
Office Hours: TR 9:30am – 10:30am
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.

Given that this course compresses a standard fourteen-week semester into seven weeks, this course will move very quickly. You should expect approximately double the workload that you would normally receive in a standard course. Moreover, if you fall behind on the readings or research paper assignments, it will be very difficult to catch up. You will need to 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. Due to the speed of the course, the first two chapters are 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 Evaluation

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 (24% 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 two or three 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 by the start of class (10:55am) for their respective due dates. There are 8 assignment sets, thus each is worth 3% of your final grade.

Midterm Exam (30% 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 50 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.

At this time, there will be no study guide for this exam. You are instead encouraged to study collectively. However, by knowing each of the ‘concepts’ defined at the end of each chapter, answering the learning objectives in the class schedule at the end of this syllabus, and being prepared to answer questions similar to the exercises you’ve previously completed, you will be well prepared for the exam.

Research Paper (36% of final grade)

You will complete a research paper by the end of the course worth 34% of your overall course grade. This consists of a statement of topic, annotated bibliography, literature review, theory 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, June 19th at 11:59pm on iCollege

You will submit several paragraphs outlining the general topic you wish to write your research design 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.

Annotated Bibliography (5% of final grade): Due Sunday, July 3rd 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 Guide](#) for the required format. We will discuss in detail what the final version of the annotated bibliography should look like in class.

Literature Review (5% of final grade): Due Sunday, July 10th 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 great detail as the deadline approaches. This will require a correctly formatted bibliography in APSA format. See the [APSA Style Guide](#) for the guidelines.

Theory Section (5% of final grade): Due Sunday, July 17th 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 adaption 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 in K&W. 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.

Final Draft (16% of final grade): Due Thursday, July 28th 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 and theory 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. This will include a discussion of whether a quantitative or qualitative methodology would be most appropriate. 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 – as conform to the following Plus/Minus Grade Scale:

A+: 97 – 100	B+: 87 – 89	C+: 77 – 79	D+: 67 – 69	F: Less than 60
A: 93 – 96	B: 84 – 86	C: 74 – 76	D: 64 – 66	
A-: 90 – 92	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 found at the following link: <https://deanofstudents.gsu.edu/files/2021/07/Academic-Honesty.pdf>. 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/>

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 July 1st. 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 Policy Prohibiting Students from 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.

Diversity, Inclusivity, and Respect Statement

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 (in the discussion posts and in person) 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.

Course Deadlines

Due by:	Textbook Assignment	Other Deadlines
Thursday, June 9 th at 10:54am	Chapter 1 & Exercises 2, 4, and 8	
Tuesday, June 14 th at 10:54am	Chapter 2 & Exercises 1, 3, and 4	
Thursday, June 16 th at 10:54am	Chapter 3 & Exercises 3, 6, and 9	
Sunday, June 19 th at 11:59pm		Statement of Topic
Tuesday, June 21 st at 10:54am	Chapter 4 & Exercises 1, 4, and 8c	
Thursday, June 23 rd at 10:54am	Chapter 5 & Exercises 1, 2, and 3	
Tuesday, June 28 th at 10:54am	Chapter 6 & Exercises 3 and 5	
Thursday, June 30 th at 10:54am	Review 2.6	
Sunday, July 3 rd at 11:59pm		Annotated Bibliography
Tuesday, July 5 th at 10:54am	Review 1-6	
Thursday, July 7 th at 10:54am		Midterm
Sunday, July 10 th at 11:59pm		Literature Review
Tuesday, July 12 th at 10:54am	Chapter 7 & Exercises 4 and 5	
Thursday, July 14 th at 10:54am	Chapter 8 & Exercises 1, 2, and 7	
Sunday, July 17 th at 11:59pm		Theory Section
Tuesday, July 19 th at 10:54am	Levy Ch. 27	
Thursday, July 21 st at 10:54am	Freedman Ch. 12	
Thursday, July 28 th at 11:59pm		Final Paper

Class Schedule

- **Week 1**
 - *Tuesday, June 7th: Course Introduction*
 - *Thursday, June 9th: Chapter 1 – Political Science as Science*
 - Explain what it means to say that political science is a “science”.
 - Describe how studying politics from a scientific perspective can help you become a better producer and consumer of information.
 - Diagram the process by which political scientists use models to develop and test causal theories about relationships between independent and dependent variables to generate scientific knowledge.
 - Define key concepts introduced in Ch. 1 including theory, hypothesis, data, dependent and independent variable.

- **Week 2**
 - *Tuesday, June 14th: Chapter 2 – The Art of Theory Building*
 - Differentiate time-series measures from cross-sectional measures in the context of observing variation in a variable of interest.
 - Describe the strategies that scholars use to generate a testable theory.
 - Evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of using formal theory and expected utility theory in political science using one of the specific examples provided in pages 38-42 of your text.
 - List the strategies your textbook offers to help answer if you have a “good” theory.
 - *Thursday, June 16th: Chapter 3 – Evaluating Causal Relationships*
 - Discuss what it means to say that most scientific theories focus on “bivariate relationships” despite the fact that in reality the social world is “multivariate”?
 - Differentiate between a deterministic and probabilistic understanding of causality in social science.
 - List and describe the four hurdles discussed in this chapter that one should consider before asserting a causal relationship between two theorized variables.
 - Diagram the path to evaluating a causal relationship presented in your text on page 58.
 - Assess whether studying causal relationships in political science is an important endeavor for crafting effective public policies – draw from the examples in your text starting on pg. 62.

- **Week 3**

- ***Tuesday, June 21st: Chapter 4 – Research Design***

- Differentiate between experimental and observational research designs.
- Explain how both experimental and observational research designs seek to test theories about causal relationships between variables.
- State how the textbook defines an “experiment” and why *random assignment*, but not necessarily *random sampling*, is a crucial feature of an experiment.
- Assess the strengths and weaknesses of experimental research designs for generating causal inferences that apply to the domain of politics.
- State how the textbook defines an observational research design and be able to differentiate between types of observational designs your text presents – e.g., cross-sectional versus time-series.
- Evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of observational research designs for generating causal inferences that apply to the domain of politics.

- ***Thursday, June 23rd: Chapter 5 – Measuring Concepts of Interest***

- Describe how political scientists measure, or quantify, concepts / variables that they are interested in studying – e.g., to test a hypothesis.
- Identify limitations associated with measuring concepts in social science as opposed to physical sciences (also, recall probabilistic versus deterministic notions of causality).
- Explain what it means to say a measure has a high degree of “validity” and differentiate between face validity, content validity, and construct validity.
- Discuss what it means to say that a measure is “reliable” from the perspective of measurement.
- Assess the consequences of poor measurement for the examples presented in the text on Measuring Democracy and Political Tolerance.
- Define a *measurement metric* and distinguish between *categorical*, *ordinal* and *continuous* variables.
- Explain why it is important to know the central tendency (e.g., average value, or frequency) of a particular construct one has measured.
- Identify the types of descriptive statistics that are best suited for describing categorical and continuous variables.
- Calculate statistical moments with actual data including frequency and dispersion statistics – i.e., mean, median, mode, standard deviation, variance.
- Identify the following types of graphs and related terminology: histogram, bar graph, box-whisker plot, skewness, outlier, and order statistic.
- Evaluate the advantages and limitations of descriptive statistics and graphs of a single variable.

- **Week 4**
 - ***Tuesday, June 28th: Chapter 6 – Getting to Know Your Data***
 - Differentiate between a *sample* and a *population* and explain how statistical inference is used to make inferences from a sample about what is likely to be true about a population.
 - Distinguish between *sampling uncertainty* and *fundamental uncertainty* with respect to political outcomes one may be interested in studying.
 - Describe how we can use probability calculations to decide whether patterns of relationships we observe in a sample could have occurred by chance.
 - Define the following terms in bold in your text: *normal distribution*, *65-95-99 rule*, *frequency distribution*, *sampling distribution*, and *standard error of the mean*.
 - Explain what the *central limit theorem* tells us about the shape of any sampling distribution that is calculated from a random sample, and how we can use this information to construct *confidence intervals* about the likely location of a population mean that we do not observe.
 - Given data from a random samples of Presidential approval ratings, calculate a sample mean, variance, standard deviation, standard error of the mean and construct confidence intervals about the likely location of the population mean.
 - Recognize how an increase in the size of a sample affects the size of the standard errors and the size of the confidence intervals one is constructing.
 - ***Thursday, June 30th: Literature Reviews & Annotated Bibliographies***
 - What are the key differences between literature reviews and annotated bibliographies
 - Look at one of your sources. How did the author(s) frame the literature within which they situated their research?
 - What are some common pitfalls when writing a literature review?
- **Week 5**
 - ***Tuesday, July 5th: Midterm Review***
 - ***Thursday, July 7th: Midterm***

- **Week 6**
 - ***Tuesday, July 12th: Chapter 7 – Probability and Statistical Inference***
 - Assess what information we can learn from a bivariate hypothesis test from a sample of data
 - Explain when you should conduct the following statistical tests to evaluate whether or not two variables are “statistically significant”: chi-squared test, difference of means test (t-test), and correlation coefficient.
 - Define a “p-value” (see bottom of page 147 and top of page 148) and explain how this statistic helps researchers decide whether or not the relationship observed between two variables (i.e., bivariate) in a sample is likely to hold true in a population.
 - Explain what a “critical value” is in a t-test table or a chi-squared test table and how to use this information to determine whether or not there is enough evidence in the sample to “reject the null hypothesis”.
 - Calculate a chi-squared statistic from a sample of tabular data.
 - Calculate a difference of means statistic (t-test) from a sample of data.
 - Calculate a correlation coefficient from a sample of data.
 - ***Thursday, July 14th: Chapter 8 – Bivariate Hypothesis Testing***
 - Explain what it means to say that a bivariate regression is a line that is “fit” to a sample of data in order to model a relationship between the two variables.
 - Write down the population regression model and the sample regression model; explain what “parameters” are estimated in a bivariate regression model.
 - Define a *residual* and explain how this tells us something about the estimated *sampling error* from a regression model.
 - Describe how ordinary-least squares (OLS) is used as a rule to draw a “line of best fit” between two variables in a bivariate regression.

- **Week 7**
 - ***Tuesday, July 19th: Quantitative Approaches***
 - Explain what is meant by a quantitative approach?
 - What type of questions are quantitative approaches best suited to answer?
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 - ***Thursday, July 21st: Qualitative Approaches***
 - Explain what is meant by a qualitative approach?
 - What are some examples of qualitative approaches?
 - What is the difference between quantitative and qualitative approaches, with a specific focus on the logic underlying both?
 - What type of questions are qualitative approaches best suited to answer?