

PSC 301-001:

Political Science Methods

Spring 2023 | TR 12:45 – 2:15 pm
Classroom: Brewer Hall 228

Professor: Dr. Benjamin Gross
Office: Brewer Hall 205D
Office Hours:
Physical – T/R: 8-9 am & 2:30-4:00 pm
Virtual – W: 9:00 am – 2:00 pm
Appointment – contact for mutually agreed upon date and time
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“If you hire the best scouts, put them in a position to see the player at the right time and get good solid accurate scouting reports, you see the player through a strong traditional scouting lens. If you hire the best analysts, get the most accurate data, make the best adjustments, do the most thorough analysis and you come out with the best available statistical information, that’s another lens to which to view the player. The way to see the player most accurately, to get the truest picture of the player, is to put both those lenses together and look through them simultaneously and you get a pretty darn accurate picture of the player.”
- Theo Epstein, Former General Manager of the Chicago Cubs

Course Description & Rationale:

Be it the push to discover new medications to fight diseases like [Ebola](#), Zika, or COVID-19, the development and use of [sabermetrics](#) in baseball, or analyzing the financial markets to create the best [algorithms](#) for producing wealth, the modern scientific world relies on statistics and statistical analyses.

This is also true for quantitative political science, or the application of modern science to the study of politics and governments. On his website, [FiveThirtyEight.com](#), Nate Silver (a son of a political scientist) uses the tools of the trade to forecast elections (in 2020 he [correctly](#) predicted 48 out of 50 states for the Electoral College, 32 of 35 Senate races, and 417 of 435 House elections). We use these same tools to examine an array of questions. What factors increase the likelihood of a country falling into civil war? What impact does female representation within legislative bodies have on international peace agreements? What ideas or values influence the decision-making of a Supreme Court Justice? What are the effects of debating immigration policy on racial attitudes within the state?

Questions like these, and so many others, have potential answers that may be difficult to sort out, and can be even harder to demonstrate conclusively. This is partially because data is only one of the tools a political scientist must use to understand humans – as seen in the failed forecasts of multiple elections and referendum votes in [2016](#). This course will help you think more carefully and systematically about political puzzles, their potential answers, and the types of data and methods you need to evaluate and analyze these puzzles.

The first half of this course introduces students to social science research by discussing how you develop a [research design](#). We will trace through the process of puzzles, research questions, literature reviews, theories, hypotheses, and data collection. The second part of the course provides students with some of the methodological tools necessary to test hypotheses systematically and quantitatively. This means that you will learn some basic statistics.

Some students studying political science are anxious when they find out they are taking a quantitative methods course (I remember many of my friends who felt this way). Learning data analysis, however, is like learning any other craft; it takes practice. Furthermore, these skills are becoming vital for success in many [careers](#). In fact, the average base salary for someone with knowledge of SPSS is [\\$61,000 per year](#).

This course is also beneficial for your undergraduate education in at least two ways. First, it will help you in your other courses by making it easier to understand political science research. You will have the skills to dissect articles and other texts to their basic parts, which will assist you in analyzing these pieces of research. Second, upper-level courses will require you to compose research designs, if not full research papers. You will learn the steps and processes to producing these academic works, which is vital for your success in future assessments. Thus, this course is not intended as a headache or form of punishment. Instead, it prepares you with the tools to be successful in earning your Bachelor of Arts in political science. Furthermore, it gives you tools that you can apply to your future endeavors; be them graduate school in the social sciences; a professional career; or simply being able to engage in a civil political conversation that rests its premises in statistical data and analyses. Who knows, you might even want to take another [statistics course](#) or two after this one!

Course Goals:

By the end of the course, you will be able to:

- Explain the difference between causation and correlation;
- Formulate puzzles, research questions, and review current literature;
- Compose theories that generate hypotheses;
- Design a research project involving data analysis to test hypotheses;
- Explain quantitative results to a person who did not take this class;
- Employ basic statistical methods to test hypotheses concerning politics and governments.

Required Texts:

* Johnson, Janet Buttolph and H. T. Reynolds. 2012. *Political Science Research Methods*, 7th ed. Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, Inc. ISBN: [978-1608716890](#).

Optional Texts:

* Kirkpatrick, Lee A. and Quentin Kidd. 2012. *A Simple Guide to SPSS for Political Science*. Boston: Cengage Learning. ISBN: [978-1111353797](#).

* LaVaque-Manty, Mika and Danielle LaVaque-Manty. 2015. *Writing in Political Science: A Brief Guide*. New York: Oxford University Press. ISBN: [978-0190203931](#).

Assessments & Grading:

Four Take Home Assessments	20%
Professionalism	10%
Tocqueville Lecture Series	10%
Research Design Paper	
Research Question	2.5%
Literature Review	2.5%
Theory and Hypotheses	2.5%
Rough Draft	2.5%
Final Draft	10%
Peer Participation Grade	10%
Midterm & Final Exam	30%

Grading Scale:

A = 90-100%
B = 80-89%
C = 70-79%
D = 60-69%
F = <60%

Assessment Details:

Four Take Home Assessments:

To facilitate the development of your research design and statistical analysis skills, you have four take home assessments. Each assessment is worth 5% of your course grade. Thus, together, all four assessments are worth 20% of your course grade.

I will provide specific details on the assessments themselves. For now, know that three of these assessments require [SPSS](#). We will work through several SPSS exercises together. You then need to demonstrate your ability to use your new skills on your own. The location for our in-class use of SPSS is in Brewer Hall; you will be able to complete take home assessments requiring SPSS through the JSU computer labs.

Make sure to save often and backup your work when using computer programs, as technical malfunctions – such as, but not limited to, computer viruses, hard drive failure, a computer crash, or printer problems – are not acceptable excuses for late assessments. Furthermore, it is okay for you to discuss assessments among your classmates, but all final work must be your own. **Be sure to understand what plagiarism is and how one can even plagiarize on assessments like these. Turning in duplicate assessments is plagiarism.**

Rationale for this assessment: I assess students through these take home assessments as these demonstrate a student's proficiency of the course concepts and rationale. Furthermore, these assessments mimic the real-world setting, as students will have similar timelines to complete such projects in the professional setting.

Professionalism:

All students begin the semester with 10% of their course grade. To keep this grade, students need to engage in professional behavior within class. Students lose points from their professionalism grade when they engage in unprofessional behaviors. The professionalism addendum on our Canvas page shares the values of professionals, unprofessional behaviors, and results of these unprofessional behaviors.

Rationale for this assessment: Students are graded on professional behavior to prepare them for their [future career](#). I have spoken with individuals in numerous sectors (e.g., accounting, mental health, logistics, construction, healthcare, and more). Consistently, these individuals inform me that recent college graduates either did not get a job offer or were fired quickly upon being hired due to unprofessional behaviors. The time to develop professionalism is now, not upon graduation.

Tocqueville Lectures:

Jacksonville State University is proud to host the Tocqueville Lectures Series. This series brings lectures to present on topics that foster the academic environment of the campus. These lectures relate to topics that are important with ideas in our course.

As a student in an upper-level political science course, these lectures are excellent an opportunity for exposure to new ideas, practicing engagement within the discipline, and developing a professional connection. All students are required to attend two Tocqueville Lectures. By attending a lecture, you earn 5% of your course grade.

These lectures will be presented via hybrid or virtual format. More information about the lecture modalities, dates, and registration process is shared during the course.

Rationale for this assessment: Students are graded on active participation in Tocqueville Lectures as this engagement demonstrates the ability to participate with the materials of this course in a professional setting. This will help to prepare students for how to engage with presentations in academic, business, and governmental settings.

Research Design Paper:

By the end of the semester, you will have composed a research design paper. This paper is the “front-half” of a full research project, which means it contains a puzzle/research question, literature review, theory, hypothesis or hypotheses, and research design. Thus, the paper **does not** include the statistical testing of hypotheses – which is the “back-half” – of the project.

The assessment is broken up into smaller parts. You will submit elements of the assessment step-by-step for three main reasons. First, while the project composes 30% of your total grade, it is unfair to have a novice submit one attempt for such a large percentage of their grade. By building the paper slowly, it will allow you and your group to make mistakes on smaller percentage assessments, which can be corrected for your final version of the paper. Second, composing a research design/paper takes a lot of time. You cannot sit down and compose it in a night. Thus, by spreading the assessments over the semester, the structure of the assessment facilitates success (i.e., the structure does not guarantee success; it only assists). Finally, we will be working in our small groups to develop and compose our research designs. It takes time to build group dynamics until a final product can be created. This is a process you will experience in any form of employment, as business proposals, academic papers, lesson plans, and a host of other written works are always “shopped around” for feedback to improve them from their rough draft to their final form.

I provide specific details for each part of the assessment two weeks in advance of the deadline. In general, all assessments require Times New Roman font, 12-point font, double-spacing, 1-inch margins, and following the American Political Science Association’s [style manual](#). Finally, you will submit all parts of the assessment prior to its due date on Turnitin, which you access through the course’s Canvas page.

In addition to the paper itself, a third of your grade comes from peer-review of your participation in the assessment. This assessment puts you into a small group. Within these small groups, you will work together to co-author your research design. Co-authoring is an important skill to develop. By working with others, we will develop our skills of providing critical **and** constructive feedback, compromising, and working with a group to complete a project. We will also work through assessments together, as this environment provides a way for us to engage with each other’s work that is not possible at the class-level.

I expect all group members to participate. At the end of the semester, group members will grade each other’s small group participation. **Do not view this part of the assessment lightly.** This component determines a third of your research design grade.

Rationale for this assessment: I evaluate students on their ability to complete a research design as it puts into practice the course goals. This reinforces the course goals for students, as learning by doing is a powerful method of education.

Midterm and Final Exams:

The midterm and final exams, combined, account for 40% of your course grade. The final exam is not cumulative (i.e., the final exam only tests you on material covered after the midterm exam). These tests are in-class, closed-note, closed book, technology-free, and contain a mixture of multiple-choice and short answer questions. You will need a non-scientific calculator for the final exam. **On exam day, once I receive a student’s exam, another student cannot begin an exam.** I provide additional exam rules on the exam itself. Each exam is worth 20% of your course grade.

Rationale for this assessment: I use exams to evaluate the level of competency that students demonstrate on the core topics, ideas, and concepts of the course.

Classroom Behavior:

Courtesy and regard for one another guides classroom behavior. Since this course concerns politics, discussion can be passionate at times. During class, we will treat everyone with respect, especially during dialogues. This means listening and letting a classmate finish their thought before responding, debating ideas (not people), speaking to each other in a civil tone, and refusing to engage in personal attacks. During our dialogues, I ask you all to respect the ideas of your fellow students. We, however, should challenge ideas; respect does not mean acceptance.

I expect students to be attentive during all aspects of class. Students who sleep, read the newspaper, persistently talk with other students, text, use their cell phones, surf the internet, use computers for non-note taking reasons, or are otherwise inattentive/disruptive will be asked to leave the class, lose professionalism points, and will be subject to being dismissed from the course at the professor's request. Furthermore, due to [findings](#), I strongly suggest students take physical notes.

Other Policies:

Late Work:

Assessments turned in late will be accepted up to one week after the original due date. Every business day it is late, an assessment loses three-percentage points (e.g., 89% to 86%). One week after its due date, the professor will no longer accept late work. Any student or group that does not submit an assessment on time or within one week after its due date will receive a zero on that assessment.

Make-up Exams:

Make-up exams are generally not provided.

In the most extreme emergencies (e.g., hospitalization, natural disaster, required university activities, or so forth), the professor may use discretion to offer a make-up assessment.

If such an emergency prevents you from completing an assessment, you need to notify the professor by email **prior to the** exam date and as soon as possible. This immediate communication initiates, but does not guarantee, a make-up assessment.

Upon your return the course, you must submit documentation of the emergency. If granted an extension/make-up, upon review of this documentation, the professor and student will mutually agree on a time to complete the assessment in question. Furthermore, the make-up midterm will differ from the in-class midterm to prevent sharing of information, as the make-up midterm is an essay exam.

If you are unable to attend the final exam period due to extreme circumstances, please inform the professor and he will work with you to set forth the best course of action.

Health/Wellness:

This course does not grade attendance. Thus, if you are sick, please inform the professor and take the steps necessary to fully recover. By informing the professor of your absence, and providing documentation upon your return, you preserve your professionalism score. The professor is reasonable and will work with you.

In addition, if you are experiencing issues or struggling with mental health, I suggest you contact [Counseling Services](#) at the university. This service is free to all currently enrolled students. In addition, this office offers additional [groups](#) that can support you.

Academic Integrity:

This course does not tolerate academic dishonesty. The professor adheres to and enforces JSU's policy on academic honesty (e.g., cheating, plagiarism, forgery, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, and sabotage). I address violations of academic integrity in compliance with the procedures laid out in JSU's [student handbook](#) (see page 97). You can learn more about academic dishonesty [here](#). In addition, the use of Artificial Intelligence is considered academic dishonesty.

Campus Resources for Writing:

The Writing Center offers several free in-person and online services including writing and digital writing consultations, virtual presentation audiences, ESL conversation partners, and special-topics workshops for all JSU faculty, staff, and students. A team of undergraduate and graduate consultants are trained to assist with academic, personal, and professional writing. Appointments can be scheduled through the Navigate app. For more information, visit [here](#).

Accommodations:

Jacksonville State University is committed to creating an inclusive learning environment that meets the needs of its diverse student body. If you are currently experiencing or anticipate that you will have any barriers to learning in this course, please feel welcome to discuss your concerns with me.

It is my goal to create a learning experience that is as accessible as possible. If you have a disability, or think you may have a disability, that may have some impact on your work in this course and for which you may require academic adjustments or accommodations, please work with a staff member in [Disability Resources](#) so that accommodations can be considered. Students that receive accommodation letters, or Individualized Post-Secondary Plans (IPPs) should meet with me to discuss the provisions of your accommodations as early in the semester as possible.

You can find more information about the Office of Disability Resources on the [web](#) or by visiting the Student Success Center on the 2nd Floor of the Houston Cole Library. You may also call (256) 782-8380 or email at disabilityresources@jsu.edu. All discussions will remain confidential.

Religious Observances:

If assigned work conflicts with your religious holidays, please tell me in advance so we can make alternative plans. Informing me of religious obligations after the fact, however, will not count as an excuse.

Title IX:

JSU does not discriminate on the basis of sex in the educational programs or activities that it operates. JSU is required, by Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 and the Department of Education regulations to implement Title IX, not to discriminate in such a manner. This requirement to not discriminate in educational programs and activities extends to employment by the university and to admission thereto. This may include sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, domestic violence, dating violence, stalking and other conduct that is addressed in our ["Sex-Based Harassment and Misconduct Policy."](#)

Anyone with knowledge of this type of conduct is asked to immediately report such incidents to the University Police Department at (256) 782-5050 or the Title IX Coordinator at (256) 782-5769. If an individual wishes to keep the information

confidential, the individual speak with a counselor at the Counseling Services office at (256) 782-5475 or a medical provider at JSU's Health Center (256) 782-5310.

For more information about Title IX or to report a concern, please visit the JSU Title IX webpage at <http://www.jsu.edu/titleix>.

Military-Connected Student Statement:

The Office of Veteran Services serves all active duty, guard, reserve, veteran, and dependent students at JSU. If you have any questions about Veteran Services, please contact them at (256) 782-8838, veterans@jsu.edu, or at the physical location in the basement of Daugette Hall.

If you are a student currently serving in the military (Active Duty, Guard, or Reserves) with the potential of being called to military service or training during the course of the semester, you are encouraged to contact me no later than the first week of class to discuss the class attendance policy. I may make accommodations for this absence or suggest that you take the course at another time.

Tutoring resources at JSU:

All JSU students can access online tutoring assistance through tutor.com. To access tutor.com, log into Canvas and click the tutor.com link in the navigation pane.

For more information about tutor.com contact Debra James at dmjames@jsu.edu.

Withdraws:

Please be advised, the last date to withdraw from the course without academic penalty is Friday, March 31. There are other important dates regarding withdrawing from the course concerning refunding your tuition and if you receive an academic penalty, which you can find [here](#). If you choose to stop attending the course, it is your responsibility to withdraw from the course. If you do not withdraw from the course, the professor will enter the grade you have earned as your final grade.

Student Notifications:

I post all notifications on Canvas via the Announcements section of our course. Be sure to check these for all notifications.

Questions About Your Grades:

I am more than happy to take questions about your grade in-person during my office hours/appointments. I, however, do not discuss grades over e-mail or phone due to FERPA regulations and protecting your privacy. See [here](#) for more information.

E-mail Policy:

I will do my best to respond to all e-mails within 36 hours. **All e-mails that can be answered via the syllabus will receive the response: "Please refer to your syllabus." and a picture of Alf.**

To ensure you have read the syllabus prior to e-mailing me, the first e-mail you send me must include a picture of a **platypus**. If your first e-mail does not have a picture of a platypus, I will respond to your e-mail with: "Please review the syllabus." This policy ensures that you have helped yourself by using the tools I have provided you.

To help response time, please include an appropriate subject line in your e-mail. Furthermore, please take time to construct a formal e-mail with proper etiquette and language. **E-mails constructed in a manner like, "Yo, Mrs B i will b submitting the**

thing late 2day” or using emojis to represent words/ideas will receive the response, “Please refer to your syllabus.” and a picture of Godzilla.

How to be Successful in this Class:

The best way to be successful is to be prepared. Being prepared means reading all of the assessment carefully and, most likely, rereading the assessment. By reading the assessment prior to class, you will be able to fully participate and get the most out of our classroom experience.

Furthermore, good note taking is vital. Take [physical notes](#). Learn to listen carefully. I find students who write down the questions that are asked, and then the responses to these questions, are the most successful. If you only write down the answer, the note is meaningless, as it lacks the context of the question.

After class, review your notes to see if they make sense. By reviewing them sooner than later, you will be able to remember things from class to sort out any points of confusion in your notes.

Finally, get together with other students to form study groups (even if these are digital meeting). If you get together periodically and go over notes, you are more likely to have a complete set of notes. You will not only be able to go over your notes together to fill in the gaps, but by discussing with each other the topics of the class your group may come to new insights.

Tentative Class Schedule:

<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Textbook Reading</u>
1/10 & 12	Introduction & Philosophy of Science	Ch. 1
1/17	Puzzles and Research Questions	Ch. 2 & Ch. 3 pp. 74-81
1/19	The Literature Review	Ch. 3 pp. 81-101
1/24 & 31	Theories Generating Hypotheses	Ch. 4
1/26	Literature Reviews & the Library (Visit Houston Cole Library & Ms. Westbrooks)	NO READING
2/2 & 7	Measurement	Ch. 5
2/9	Research Design	Ch. 6
2/14	Sampling and Data Collection	Ch. 7 & Ch. 8
2/16	Data Collection	Ch. 9 & Ch. 10
2/21	Review	NO READING
2/23	MIDTERM EXAM	NO READING
2/28	Introduction to SPSS	Ch. 11 pp. 354-61
3/2	Transforming variables	Ch. 12 pp. 396-401; & Ch. 13 pp. 440-56
3/7 & 9	Controlled Comparison	TBD
3/14 & 16	Univariate & Descriptive Statistics	Ch. 11 pp. 361-94 & Ch. 12 pp. 402-427
3/21 & 23	SPRING BREAK	NO READING
3/28 & 4/4	Chi-Square & Measures of Associations	Ch. 13 pp. 438-490
3/30	Computer Lab Day	NO READING
4/6 & 11	Bivariate Regression	Ch. 13 pp. 438-490
4/11	Multivariate Regression	Ch. 14 pp. 527-550
4/13	Computer Lab Day	NO READING
4/18	Dummy Variables & Interactions	Ch. 14 pp. 550-568
4/20	Review	NO READING
4/25	FINAL EXAM (10:30 am – 12:30 pm)	NO READING