

POLS 300: Introduction to Political Science Methods

Spring 2007

MWF 1:00-1:50 pm, 3135 Faner Hall

Prof. Frederick Solt

Office: 3166 Faner Hall

Office Hours: MWF 2:00-4:00 pm

E-mail: fsolt@siu.edu

1 Overview

Unlike most political science courses you've likely taken so far, this course does not aim to teach you what political scientists know about political phenomena. Instead, its goal is to help you understand *how* to make discoveries about political phenomena for yourself—and to communicate what you've found to others—the same way political scientists do. You will learn how to formulate a research question, review previous work on the topic, identify data that are appropriate to your question, analyze these data, and write up your results.

2 Requirements

Your grade will be based on attendance, quizzes, an exam, and a research project consisting of short papers, research presentations, and a final draft.

2.1 Attendance

This should go without saying, but you can't learn if you don't show up. Missing class affects your grade in many ways—I have found that each ad-

ditional absence reduces a student's exam grades by an average of 3%—but it does so most directly through your attendance score. You may miss two classes without penalty, although you should be sure to get notes on what we covered from a classmate. All other absences will reduce your final grade by one percentage point each.

Our class time will be spent in a variety of activities: lectures, discussion, group work, in-class research, and one-on-one consultation. To succeed, all of these activities require your close attention and active participation. In turn, active participation requires that you come to class prepared by completing the readings and other assignments. Any class period in which you refuse to participate or otherwise convince me that you have arrived unprepared will count as an absence; that is, it will reduce your final grade by one percentage point.

2.2 Quizzes

Seven times during the semester, you will be asked to complete a short quiz on recent material. The typical quiz format will be five short-answer questions. *There are no make-up quizzes*; those who miss a quiz will receive a zero. Each quiz is worth 5% of your final grade, but your lowest quiz grade will be dropped. Quizzes will take place on January 24; February 2, 16, and 28; March 7 and 26; and April 4.

2.3 Exam

An exam testing your ability to understand and use the material covered by this course will be held in class on Wednesday, April 11. The exam is worth 20% of your final grade. We will have an in-class review session the preceding class period.

2.4 Research Project

During the course of this semester, you will undertake a research project on political attitudes or behavior. We'll do this in steps together; we'll cover how to complete each step in class. For your reference, the due dates for each step are listed below:

Jan 26: Identifying A Study Variable.

Jan 31: Research Question Due (4% of your final grade).

Feb 9: Literature Review Due (4%).

Feb 21-26: In-Class Proposal Presentation (7%).

Feb 28: Data and Measures Write-Up Due (4%).

April 18: Analysis and Results Write-Up Due (4%).

April 20-May 2: In-Class Project Presentation (7%).

May 4: Final Draft Due (10%).

You must *proofread* and *revise* any written assignment you turn in to me. You will find after graduation that misspellings and grammar mistakes are simply unacceptable in the working world. If I find more than one of these sorts of errors in your paper, I will deduct a letter grade. You may recover this credit by simply correcting the mistakes by hand on your paper and returning the paper to me in our next class meeting.

2.5 Grading

Your grade will be calculated on the following basis:

Attendance	10%
Quizzes	30% (six quizzes, 5% each)
Exam	20%
Research Project	40%
Short Papers	16% (four papers, 4% each)
Research Presentations	14% (two presentations, 7% each)
Final Draft	10%

2.6 Readings

There is one required book for this course, available at the University Bookstore:

Pollock, Philip H., III. 2005. *An SPSS Companion to Political Analysis*. 2nd ed. Washington, D.C.: CQ Press.

Always bring your copy of Pollock to class with you.

An additional assigned reading is available online at the link below. When you click on the link, you will be prompted for a username and password. I will announce these in class, but to refresh your memory, the username is “student” and the password is the name of an ancient breed of Egyptian greyhound. ***Print out this reading and bring it to class with you on the day it is assigned.***

Other resources we will use are also online. Some of these resources have a second link to use if you are off campus. If you are off campus, click where it says “Off-campus link;” you will be prompted for your SIU ID number and then taken to the resource.

3 Class Schedule

Introduction, Jan 17

W Introduction to the course.

The Research Question, Jan 19-29

F Theories, hypotheses, and variables.

Reading: [Van Evera, Stephen. 1997. *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. Pp. 9-21.](#) Don't forget to print this out and bring it with you to class!

M Variables in SPSS.

Reference: Pollock, 5-13.

Reference: [The World Values Survey Website](#).

W Quiz & Review.

F Finding a Research Question.

Assignment: Using SPSS (available in the computer labs in Faner 1025 & 1031 (south end, first floor) as well as in many other labs on campus), spend half an hour or so browsing the variables included in the World Values Survey dataset to get more familiar with the data available in the survey. Of the variables that, broadly speaking, deal with political attitudes or behavior, choose one that you find particularly interesting, type up its name and label, print them out, and bring them to class with you.

Reference: JSTOR. [[Off-campus link.](#)]

Reference: Project Muse. [[Off-campus link.](#)]

M Writing Up Your Research Question.

Reference: Pollock, 201-202.

Literature Review, Jan 31-Feb 2

W Conducting a Literature Review

Assignment: Write up your research question in one to two pages. Print it and bring it to class.

Reference: Pollock, 202.

F Quiz & Review.

Data and Measures, Feb 5-16

M Levels of Measurement.

W Working with Your Data.

Reference: Pollock, 59-71.

F Descriptive Statistics.

Assignment: Write up your literature review; it should be three to four pages. Print it and bring it to class.

Reference: Pollock, 15-23.

M Descriptive Statistics, cont.

W Writing Up Your Data and Measures.
Reference: Pollock, 202.

F Quiz & Review.

Presentations, Feb 19-28

M How to Present a Proposal.

W Proposal Presentations.

F Proposal Presentations.

M Proposal Presentations.

W Quiz & Review.

Assignment: Write up a discussion of your data and measures; it should be three to four pages. Print it and bring it to class.

Analysis: Crosstabs, March 2-7

F Crosstabs of Categorical Variables.
Reference: Pollock, 31-33.

M Crosstabs with a Continuous Variable.
Reference: Pollock, 33-35.

W Quiz and Review.

Analysis: Linear Regression, March 19-26

M Simple Linear Regression.
Reference: Pollock, 131-141.

W Multiple Linear Regression.

Reference: Pollock, 141-148.

F Interpreting Linear Regression Results.

M Quiz and Review.

Analysis: Logistic Regression, March 28-April 6

W Dichotomous Logistic Regression.

Reference: Pollock, 171-178.

F Ordered Logistic Regression.

M Interpreting Logistic Regression Results.

W Quiz and Review.

F Writing Up Your Analysis and Results.

Exam, April 9-13

M Review.

W Exam.

F Midwest Political Science Conference: **No Class.**

Presentations, April 16-May 4

M How to Present Your Project.

W Presentations.

Assignment: Write up the discussion of your analysis and results; it should be three to four pages. Print it and bring it to class.

F Presentations.

M Presentations.

W Presentations.

F Presentations.

M Presentations.

W Presentations.

F Papers due.

Assignment: Write up your research paper, print it, and bring it to class. Remember, no late papers will be accepted.