

Course Syllabus
PLSC 251: Modern Political Analysis

Spring 2018

Class Time: Tue, Thu 8:30 – 9:45 AM

Class Location: Welles Hall 128

Professor: Kenneth Miller

millerk@geneseo.edu

Office: Fraser Hall 105 A

Office Hours:

Tue 10:00 AM – 11:30 AM,

Thu 11:30 AM – 1:00 PM

Course Description and Objectives

This course is an introduction to the methods of empirical research in political science. We will learn how to take a scientific approach to questions about political phenomena instead of the more familiar advocacy approach taken by politicians, interest groups, lobbyists, debate teams, and your friends and enemies on social media. In other words, we will learn how to ask empirical questions about the political world; how to answer these questions scientifically using the appropriate types of evidence; and how to clearly convey our arguments, evidence, and conclusions to others. The course topics will accordingly include the logic of the scientific method; the measurement of political concepts; research design; statistical and graphical techniques for describing data; and the principles of statistical inference. You will also learn to use statistical software: write commands, create graphs, and interpret output in Stata, a user-friendly statistical software program.

At the end of the course, you will be comfortable thinking about and analyzing political phenomena in a scientifically critical manner. This is a skill that you will find useful in your future education and useful in your career.

PLSC 110, 120, or 140 are a prerequisite for this course. No background in statistics or mathematics beyond high school algebra is assumed.

Course Format

The course will use a lecture format, but we will often spend class time getting familiar with statistical software we are using, working on exercises, and other activities.

Attendance

Class attendance for a course like this is essential. Much of the material is sequential and cumulative. Miss a day, and the next class will often be confusing. In addition, to add an incentive, attendance counts for 5% of the total course grade. It will be measured by taking attendance on five randomly selected class meetings.

Evaluation

There will be two in-class exams each worth 25% of your grade (50% total), an applied political analysis project that will count for 25% (10% and 15%, respectively), homework sets will count for 20%, and attendance will count for 5% of your grade

	<u>Date</u>	<u>Portion of Course Grade</u>
Midterm Exam	3/1	25%
Research Design	3/8	10%
Data Analysis	4/26	15%
Final Exam	5/7	25%
Homework Sets	ongoing	20%
Attendance	ongoing	5%

Exams: 50%

There will be two exams in this course. The exams cover both the readings and lecture material, though the lectures follow the reading material very closely. Because this course builds on previous material, the exams are cumulative. The exams will include a mix of question types: multiple choice, true/false, and problems requiring open-ended solutions.

Both exams must be taken in class, on the day and time that they are administered. Make-up exams are only given for: (1) University sanctioned events (verification required); (2) extreme emergencies (and I am the sole arbiter of what constitutes an extreme emergency); or (3) religious observations. If you intend to miss class for a religious holiday, you must notify me of your pending absence at least 14 days in advance.

Research Design and Analysis: 25%

This course will have a writing assignment where you propose a hypothesis (or hypotheses) and empirically evaluate your claim(s). The project will be broken into two small, manageable parts:

- 1) Research design: a brief document (about 3 pages double-spaced) where you describe the question you want to address, state your hypothesis, and describe the variables you will use to evaluate the hypothesis.
- 2) Data analysis: a brief document (about 5 pages double spaced) in which you perform a regression analysis to assess your hypothesis and present your results.

Both portions of the project must be typed, double-spaced, with 12 point font and 1 inch margins. You should use pre-existing, easily available data for this project. Several large datasets will be available to you in this class, and we can find many others to suit your research interests.

When these two pieces are combined together with the type of paper writing you are more accustomed to, you will see how a thorough, detailed research paper comes together. We will discuss this project a great deal more as the class progresses.

Homework Sets: 20%

Throughout the semester there will be numerous homework assignments. They will generally be pulled from exercises included in the textbook and workbook. Working with classmates on homework is fine, but your work that you hand in must be your own.

Overall course grades are assigned according to the following scale:

93.0% - 100%	A	77.0% - 79.9%	C+
90.0% - 92.9%	A-	73.0% - 76.9%	C
87.0% - 89.9%	B+	70.0% - 72.9%	C-
83.0% - 86.9%	B	60.0% - 69.9%	D
80.0% - 82.9%	B-	0% - 59.9%	E

Final course grades are calculated based on a percentage rounded to the nearest tenth of a percent. For example, a final score of 92.95 is rounded to 93.0 and is an A, while a 82.91 is rounded to 82.9 and is a B-.

Course Materials

Three books and some software are required for this course:

The Essentials of Political Analysis, 5th Edition. by Pollock. Cambridge Press

A Stata Companion to Political Analysis, 3rd Edition. by Pollock. Cambridge Press

Thinking Like a Political Scientist. by Howard. University of Chicago Press

Additional readings will be provided online.

In this course we will also use a statistical package to perform data analysis. The package we will use in this course is Stata. A 6-month license for Stata/IC is available for \$45 via stata.com. If you already own and are sufficiently familiar with another statistical software package (i.e. SPSS, R, or SAS) and you wish to use that instead, please see me and we can discuss that option.

Other Policies and Procedures

Classroom Environment: I will do my part to start and end class on time: we will start at 8:30 AM and end by 9:45 AM. Please do your part and do not make a habit of arriving late to class or leaving class early. I encourage you to engage in class discussions, ask questions, and respond when I ask you questions. However, side discussions during lecture are distracting and make my job a lot harder.

Technology: Laptops and tablets are welcome in class for taking notes (though for this class I recommend handwriting notes). Using laptops and tablets in a manner that is distracting to the instructor or other students, or in an otherwise inappropriate way is not acceptable. If students report distracting behavior with laptops and tablets this policy may change and the devices may be banned from the class. Turn off all mobile phones prior to entering the classroom. Texting and messaging on laptops and tablets during class in not acceptable.

Power Point Slides: Due to the nature of the material, I will use Power Point often in this course. As an aid for your study, I will be providing my slides to the class. You should use these to assist in your note taking, not as a replacement for taking notes.

Readings: You should perform the readings listed on the syllabus in preparation for the week on which they are listed.

Communication: The best way to communicate with me is during office hours. I encourage you to visit me in office hours for any reason: you are having trouble with something, you have questions, you just want to talk politics, polling, statistics, or most anything else. Email correspondence is also welcome. Please format your emails as business correspondence, with a greeting and signature. I will try to get to your emails within 24 hours or, at the latest, during my next scheduled office hours, unless the answer to a question is in the syllabus or was discussed in class (in which case you should consult a classmate). I may also answer through a general email to the class, rather than writing you back personally, if your question reflects a general concern. I am also available after class, during office hours, or by appointment if you cannot make my office hours.

Procedures for Dealing with Grade/Evaluation Concerns: Grade/evaluation concerns will only be considered if the following procedure is followed: All grade complaints must be typed and must clearly express the student's specific concerns. These written statements must be accompanied by citations of support from course materials, i.e. readings, textbook, and/or lecture notes, in order to ensure accuracy. Written statements will not be considered until one week after the assignment is returned to students. This allows the student time to reread his/her answers and think carefully about what improvements could have been made. Grievances will not be considered once two weeks have passed. For example, if I return a graded assignment on Monday, the student must submit a complaint before the Friday of the following week. Once class is over on that Friday, no complaints will be considered for that assignment. In other words, there is a one-week window to submit a written statement. Since class time is limited, I will only deal with questions or concerns during scheduled office hours. Finally, submitting a grade grievance will result in a complete re-grade of the assignment.

Disability Accommodations: Students with disabilities may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Office of Disability Services:
https://www.geneseo.edu/dean_office/disability_services If you require accommodation, it is your responsibility to bring your note to me EARLY in the semester (2nd week of class) so we can work out our arrangements.

Academic Integrity: Plagiarism, cheating, and other academic misconduct are serious violations of your contract as a student. Plagiarism is using someone else's language without quotations and attribution or using someone else's idea (even in different language) without attribution. Incidents of cheating, plagiarism, and other forms of academic dishonesty will be treated per the university guidelines. For more information

about academic standards of conduct please see Academic Dishonesty page on the Dean of Students' site: https://www.geneseo.edu/dean_office/dishonesty

Emergency Evacuation Policy: In the event of a fire or other emergency, it may be necessary to evacuate a building rapidly. Students should familiarize themselves with all the exit doors of each room and building they occupy at the university, and should remember that the nearest exit routes may not be the same as the way they typically enter buildings. Students requiring assistance in evacuation should inform me during the first week of class.

Course Schedule and Required Readings

Because some topics may run long and some topics may wrap up a little more quickly, the dates on this schedule are a best guess. As a general rule, I will try to use Monday and Wednesday classes for lecture and Friday classes for application of the concepts and techniques covered that week. Readings noted as “Pollock” are in the *Essentials* textbook. Readings noted as “Workbook” are in the *Stata Companion* book. Additional readings are posted to the class Canvas page.

<u>Dates</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Reading</u>
1/16	Introduction	
1/18 & 1/23	The philosophy of science and asking good research questions	Howard 1, Popper (on Canvas);
1/25 - 2/1	Concepts and variables Working with Stata	Pollock 1, Howard 2
2/6 & 2/8	Describing data	Pollock 2; Workbook 2, and Workbook 3
2/13 & 2/15	Explanations, hypotheses, and comparisons	Pollock 3, Howard 3; Workbook 4
2/20 & 2/22	Research design	Pollock 4; Howard 4
2/27 & 3/1	Review 2/27, Midterm 3/1	
3/6 & 3/8	Making controlled comparisons, Research Design Due 3/8	Pollock 5; Workbook 5
3/20 & 3/22	The foundations of inference	Pollock 6; Workbook 6
3/27 & 3/29	Significance and association	Pollock 7, Workbook 7
4/3 & 4/5	Correlation and regression	Pollock 8
4/10 & 4/12	Correlation and regression, cont.	Workbook 8, 9
4/19 & 4/24	Presenting data	Few (on Canvas)
4/26 & 5/1	Review, Data Analysis Due 5/1	
Mon 5/7 8:00-10:30	Final Exam	