

PSC 301
Research Methods
Fall 2007
Section 2: MWF, 10:00 am
209 Graham

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Syllabus

This course is concerned with the basic methods and techniques used in the empirical analysis of political and social data. We will cover the various aspects of research in political science, including definition of the project, design of the research, collection of the data, and analysis of the data.

The focus of this course is on the logic behind the application of various methods, with the aim of improving your understanding of the principles of quantitative research. This course should increase your ability to interpret and evaluate such research, including both proposed research and completed studies. It also should improve your ability to conduct empirical research in political science.

This is not primarily a statistics course. It is a course in research methods. A substantial portion of this course is devoted to data analysis in political science. In covering this topic, we will cover applications of statistics to data analysis, but this course is not a substitute for a course in statistical theory. No statistical background is required for this course, but those with some exposure to statistics (e.g., STA 108) should benefit from that experience.

Student Learning Objectives

As a result of taking this course, students should improve their ability to:

1. Develop researchable questions and hypotheses.
2. Evaluate research questions and hypotheses put forth by others.
3. Construct good measures of political and social data.
4. Conduct and assess data analyses that would be used in political science.

Books

The following books are at the bookstore:

Janet Johnson and H. T. Reynolds, *Political Science Research Methods*, 5th ed. (CQ Press, 2005).
Marija Norusis, *SPSS 15.0 Guide to Data Analysis* (Prentice-Hall, 2006).
Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone* (Simon and Schuster, 2002).

Most of the reading for this course is in the above books. For a couple of topics, there is inadequate coverage from the texts, so there is a small amount of reserve reading for this course. These items are identified in the syllabus as "(R)" and are available as e-reserves through Blackboard.

Course Requirements

My philosophy is that students learn research methods best by active engagement, not by taking tests. Therefore, I have planned a set of four papers, each of which is intended to improve your research skills in some way. The first two papers have to do with the development of research questions and research designs, while the final two papers deal primarily with the analysis of data to answer research questions. In addition to the four papers, performance in computer lab sessions and general class participation will count toward the final course grade. Further details on each of these items are below:

1. A paper on hypothesis construction is tentatively scheduled to be assigned on Aug. 24 and due on Sept. 17. This paper will count 15% toward the final course grade.
2. A paper on measurement is tentatively scheduled to be assigned on Sept. 17 and due on Oct. 10. This paper will count 20% toward the final course grade.
3. A paper on the analysis of survey data is tentatively scheduled to be assigned on Oct. 22 and due on Nov. 14. This paper will count 20% toward the final course grade.
4. A paper on the analysis of aggregate data is tentatively scheduled to be assigned on Nov. 19 and due on the final exam day (Dec. 12). This paper will count 20% toward the final course grade.
5. There are five computer lab sessions scheduled for this course. The tentative dates are: Oct. 24, Oct. 29, Nov. 9, Nov. 16, and Nov. 26. Performance in the lab sessions will count 10% toward the final course grade.
5. Class participation will count 15% toward the course grade. This includes class attendance, participation in class discussions, and involvement in group work.

Course Policies and Expectations

1. Class attendance and participation are extremely important in this course. You cannot expect to do well in this course if you do not attend class. Attendance will be taken, and your participation in class discussions and group activities will be noted. These factors will be count toward determining your final grade, as explained above.
2. Students are expected to come to class having read the assigned material and prepared to discuss the material in class. Many class sessions will involve group work or other exercises that involve applying the assigned readings to problems. If you are not prepared for these class sessions, you will not be able to participate effectively.
3. Students are expected to follow the UNCG Academic Integrity Policy for all work. The Academic Integrity Policy is available at <http://academicintegrity.uncg.edu/>.
4. Students are encouraged to discuss the course material with others and to otherwise work together to better understand the material. Of course, all written work that is submitted by a student must be that person's own work.
5. Late papers will be marked down unless your receive permission to submit your paper late. Such permission must be requested prior to the due date and will be granted only for legitimate reasons.

Course Schedule and Reading Assignments

<i>Topic</i>	<i>Dates</i>	<i>Reading Assignment</i>
A. Formulating researchable questions		
1. The aims of quantitative research	8/22-24	Johnson and Reynolds, chpt. 1-2
2. Variables and hypotheses	8/27-9/14	Johnson and Reynolds, chpt. 4 Putnam, chpts. 1, 10, 16
B. Measurement and data collection		
1. Principles of measurement	9/17-9/28	Johnson and Reynolds, chpt. 6 Putnam, chpts. 2-5, 8
2. Data collection	10/1-10/5	Johnson and Reynolds, chpts. 7-8, 10
3. Sampling	10/8	Johnson and Reynolds, chpt. 9
C. Research Design		
1. Types of research designs	10/10	Johnson and Reynolds, chpt. 3
2. Inference from non-experimental designs	10/12-10/19	Putnam, chpts. 11-14, 18
D. Describing and presenting data	10/22-10/24	Johnson and Reynolds, chpt. 11 Norusis, chpts. 1-2, 4-5, 7
E. Analyzing survey data		
1. Elementary survey analysis	10/26-10/29	Johnson and Reynolds, chpt. 12 (pp. 339-366) Norusis, chpt. 8
2. Advanced survey analysis	10/31-11/12	Johnson and Reynolds, chpt. 13 (pp. 403-415) Kay, <i>Analysis of Political Data</i> , chpt. 17 (R) Norusis, chpts. 17, 19
F. Inferential statistics	11/14-11/16	Norusis, chpts. 6, 10-12, 14
G. Analyzing aggregate data		
1. Bivariate regression analysis	11/19-11/28	Johnson and Reynolds, chpt. 12 (pp. 372-402) Moore, <i>Statistics</i> , chpts. 14-15 (R) Norusis, chpts. 9, 20
2. Multiple regression analysis	11/30-12/10	Johnson and Reynolds, chpt. 13 (pp. 415-451) Norusis, chpt. 23