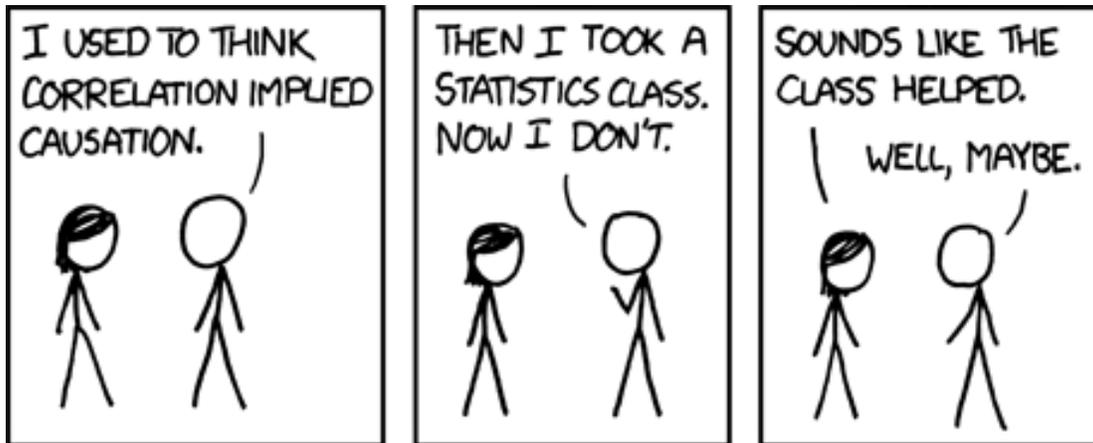

POLI 3000:0001: Understanding Political Research

Tues & Thurs 2:00–3:15 pm

Schaeffer Hall 66

Spring 2017



Course Information

Instructor: Dr. Menninga

Office: 308 Schaeffer Hall

Office Hours: Tues 9:00–noon, or by appointment

Phone: (319) 335-2343

E-mail: elizabeth-menninga@uiowa.edu

Class Website: icon.uiowa.edu

Course Description

This course is designed to achieve two objectives: (1) introduce you to research and quantitative analysis in political science, and (2) help you become critical (but not cynical) consumers of quantitative analysis used in political and policy-oriented reporting. Throughout the course we'll discuss the complexities of generating a good research design, starting with theory building and operationalizing concepts of interest to political scientists. We'll discuss the challenges and limitations of gathering good data to test these theories as well as various statistical tools that can be used to evaluate our theories. We'll tackle the challenge of what conclusions we can draw from these analyses, trying to disentangle cause and effect from observed correlations. To help our pursuit of these goals, we'll use computing software (Stata), also providing you an introduction to statistical computing. Throughout the course we'll use what we've learned to think critically about the use of quantitative research and the inferences drawn from that research by analysts, reporters, politicians, and policy advocates. As such, not only will you be learning to do your own analysis this semester, but also learning to evaluate such information when it's presented in the media.

Course Materials

The required book is available at the Iowa Hawk Shop or from your favorite on-line retailer.

- Paul M. Kellstedt, and Guy D. Whitten, *The Fundamentals of Political Science Research 2nd Edition*. 2013. Cambridge University Press. (Referred to as K&W)

Additionally, I recommend those students who have no experience with statistical computing or know that the computing part of this course might be a challenge to purchase a Stata tutorial. These can be excellent references so you can look up commands and see more examples. Two such books are:

- Kyle C. Longest. *Using Stata for Quantitative Analysis, 2nd Edition*. 2015. Sage Press.
- Alan C. Acock. *A Gentle Introduction to Stata, 5th Edition*. 2016. Stata Press

The first book is a little cheaper and much smaller. It covers most of the introductory commands we'll need this semester. The second is a more comprehensive resource for students who expect to use Stata not only this semester but in future semesters as well.

Any other course materials will be available electronically on the course ICON page or through the library's on-line resources.

Course Requirements and Grading

There are no prerequisites for this class, however, I will assume basic mathematical skills (mainly arithmetic). Your grade for the course will be determined by performance in four areas: class participation, problem sets, a critical analysis project, and exams.

Course Grade Breakdown

- Participation: 15%
- Problem Sets: 25%
- Critical Analysis Project: 20%
- Midterm Exam: 20%
- Final Exam: 20%

Participation (15% of final grade)

Class time will be divided between lecture and in-class activities. This class will include active learning opportunities frequently. These have been proven to help students learn, but also make the course more enjoyable. Active involvement in activities is an easy way to boost your participation grade (and thus your overall grade). Participation points are assigned based upon the quantity and quality of a student's contributions to the class. Quality is weighted significantly more heavily than quantity. While attendance will not be graded directly, absences will hurt your grade as you cannot participate if you are not in class.

Presentation of Misleading Statistics: At the beginning of most classes, one (or two) of you will be responsible for presenting a news article, blog post, or video clip that includes misleading (or incorrect) use of quantitative analysis. This can be incorrect reporting of what a statistic means,

drawing conclusions from poor samples, or any number of other ways data can be misinterpreted. The article should be recent (written within 6 months of your presentation) unless you get advanced permission to use an older article. The presentation should be a couple minutes long (no more than 3) highlighting the policy of interest, any relevant context or history, and most importantly how the article uses statistics misleadingly. You have substantial latitude here, so feel free to talk about a policy you find interesting or surprising in some way. You are welcome, but not required, to run your idea by me in advance.

Tips for selecting an article: Please pick an article from a reputable news outlet. You may use Huffington Post or other news aggregators to find interesting articles, but please circulate the original article (not the link to the aggregator). Please avoid news outlets that are well-known to be strongly partisan such as Fox News and MSNBC; the goal is to show that misleading statistics are in our everyday news exposure and to begin looking for and assessing the methods/statistics that are used to support policy positions.

Please focus on the use of quantitative analysis and be respectful in your presentation.

Problem Sets (25% of final grade)

Homework assignments will be assigned throughout the semester (approximately one every two weeks). The problem sets will be posted to ICON and are due at the beginning of class (2:00pm) on the due date. Late homework will result in a 10 point penalty (out of 100) for each day it's late. If you know that you will be unable to bring an assignment in person, you can deliver it to Schaeffer 308 (slide it under the door if necessary) or scan your assignment and e-mail it to elizabeth-menninga@uiowa.edu *before* the 2:00pm deadline (providing a hard copy as soon as possible). Late homework will no longer be accepted after the answer key is posted to ICON, typically about 5 days after the assignment is due.

Working together on the homework is not only allowed, but strongly encouraged. Working together is a great way to talk through tricky concepts and improve your understanding. The final product, however, is expected to be written and understood by the student turning in the work.

Your lowest homework grade will be dropped before calculating your final grade.

Exams (20% + 20% = 40% of final grade)

There will be one midterm and a final exam. Each is worth 20% of your final grade. Both exams will be closed-note, in-class exams. This work must be done on your own without consulting other students or friends. The final will be cumulative. Each exam will be a combination of short answer, definitions, and computational questions. The format of each exam will be discussed more completely in class when the exam date is closer.

You will need a calculator for both exams. You can purchase a simple one for about \$10. You may **NOT** use a smartphone/tablet as your calculator.

Policy on Unexcused Absences and Exams: You are required to be present for all scheduled ex-

ams. The only allowable exception to this policy is a documented emergency. If at all possible you should contact the instructor before the exam to discuss the emergency, provide documentation, and schedule the make-up.

Critical Analysis Project (20% of final grade)

Over the course of the semester, you will write a data analysis paper in which instead of doing your own analysis, you critique/evaluate the analyses used by opposing sides of a policy debate. The goal is to evaluate the use of statistics by the analysts/advocates of different policies. Such topics could include (but are not in any way limited to) climate change, marijuana decriminalization, income inequality, welfare programs, the relationship between democracy and development, domestic public opinion and conflict propensity, etc. The debate can be focused on one within the United States or a more comparative/International Relations approach is also appropriate. The daily reporting of misleading statistics could (and hopefully will) provide inspiration for topics. You may pick your own policy area but **are expected to get approval before you begin your critique.**

In this paper you are going to dig into the initial reports, tracking the data used and evaluating the research design as well as the analysis conducted and conclusions drawn. You will evaluate the merits of the research for *competing* sides, focusing on the quality of the quantitative analysis rather than arguing the policy position you personally prefer.

The final paper should be 5–10 pages long. Length is not as important as quality and thoroughness. A more specific prompt will be circulated later in the semester. For now, keep an eye out for a policy debate in which opposing sides use quantitative analysis to reach different conclusions.

In-Class Paper Workshop

On April 18 we'll have an in-class paper workshop. You will share your progress on the final paper with your group and use your peers to get advice/feedback/help. The instructor will also be present to give feedback. To do this most effectively, you'll circulate a draft of your paper to your group in advance (draft due April 11 at 2:00pm). Your assignment for the day of the workshop will be to read your group mates' drafts and bring comments with you to class. I find that opportunities like this substantially improve the quality of the final work. Take advantage of this opportunity!

Grading Scale

The grading scale for the course is as follows. Note that grades of A+ are reserved for exceptional circumstances when a student demonstrates intellectual capacity and rigorous scholarship.

Letter Grade	Percentage
A+	99-100
A	93-98
A-	90-92
B+	87-89
B	83-86
B-	80-82
C+	77-79
C	73-76
C-	70-72
D+	67-69
D	63-66
D-	60-62
F	59 or below

Important Dates

- Midterm Exam: March 2 (Thursday)
- Paper Draft Due to Group: April 11, 2:00pm (Tuesday)
- Final Paper Workshop: April 18 (Tuesday)
- Paper Due: May 2, 2:00pm (Tuesday)
- Final Exam: TBD

Expectations

Technology: Please turn your mobile phones off or to silent mode before class. On exam days your phones must be powered down and put away. Laptops are permitted for class purposes only. If you are using your laptops for notes or readings, sign out of everything else so you can focus on mastering the material at hand. There are days in which we will be using statistical software in class. I will try to always give you advanced warning (typically through e-mail) so you can know to bring your laptops on those days.

Software: We will be using statistical software in this course as we learn how to implement/interpret different statistical tests. We will primarily use Stata to execute these analyses. If you happen to already know a different software that you prefer, that is fine, but I will only provide technical assistance for Stata. While you may purchase a Stata license if you wish, there are free alternatives as students at Iowa. In particular you can access Stata on your laptops through Iowa servers at <https://virtualdesktop.uiowa.edu/>. In addition, computer labs throughout campus have Stata installed and available for student use. You can check which labs have the necessary software at https://maps.uiowa.edu/study-spaces?field_features_tid%5B%5D=65&=Apply. Click on the lab you are interested in and then you can click “view all software available in this lab”. I strongly recommend becoming familiar with and using your H drive to make accessing your files on different computers throughout campus convenient (<https://its.uiowa.edu/support/article/104047>).

Additionally, the political science department has a Technology TA who holds office hours in the Political Science Collab. The Political Science Collaboratory is located in 334 Schaeffer Hall. The Technology TA, currently Desmond Wallace, is available to consult with students in Political Science courses regarding technology that may be required for their homework or research projects. This might include tips on accessing or entering data, doing basic statistical analysis, or working with computers in other ways.

Desmond's office hours for Spring 2017 are Monday–Friday from 8:00AM–12:00PM. He is also available by appointment; his email address is desmond-wallace@uiowa.edu.

Email: Email is a useful way to ask quick questions. However, replying to long questions about the readings or lectures is highly inefficient for both you and me. If you want to talk about something you don't understand, come by my office hours. In general, while I respond to student emails, I prefer to talk in person. Come see me during office hours!

Contesting a Grade: If a student wishes to have a grade on his/her work reconsidered, the student must submit a written statement to the instructor within 48 hours of having the graded assignment returned. The written statement must include the student's rationale for why additional points should be given. The instructor will then review the written statement and the assignment. After review the instructor has the right to subtract points as well as add points if warranted.

CLAS Teaching Policies & Resources Syllabus Insert 2016-2017

Administrative Home

The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences is the administrative home of this course and governs matters such as the add/drop deadlines, the second-grade-only option, and other related issues. Different colleges may have different policies. Questions may be addressed to 120 Schaeffer Hall, or see the CLAS Academic Policies Handbook at <http://clas.uiowa.edu/students/handbook>.

Electronic Communication

University policy specifies that students are responsible for all official correspondences sent to their University of Iowa e-mail address (@uiowa.edu). Faculty and students should use this account for correspondences (Operations Manual, III.15.2, k.11).

Accommodations for Disabilities

The University of Iowa is committed to providing an educational experience that is accessible to all students. A student may request academic accommodations for a disability (which include but are not limited to mental health, attention, learning, vision, and physical or health-related conditions). A student seeking academic accommodations should first register with Student Disability Services and then meet with the course instructor privately in the instructor's office to make particular arrangements. Reasonable accommodations are established through an interactive process between the student, instructor, and SDS. See <http://sds.studentlife.uiowa.edu/> for more information.

Academic Honesty

All CLAS students or students taking classes offered by CLAS have, in essence, agreed to the College's Code of Academic Honesty: "I pledge to do my own academic work and to excel to the best of my abilities, upholding the IOWA Challenge. I promise not to lie about my academic work, to cheat, or to steal the words or ideas of others; nor will I help fellow students to violate the Code of Academic Honesty." Any student committing academic misconduct is reported to the College and placed on disciplinary probation or may be suspended or expelled (CLAS Academic Policies Handbook).

CLAS Final Examination Policies

The final examination schedule for each class is announced by the Registrar generally by the fifth week of classes. Final exams are offered only during the official final examination period. No exams of any kind are allowed during the last week of classes. All students should plan on being at the UI through the final examination period. Once the Registrar has announced the date, time, and location of each final exam, the complete schedule will be published on the Registrar's web site and will be shared with instructors and students. It is the student's responsibility to know the date, time, and place of a final exam.

Making a Suggestion or a Complaint

Students with a suggestion or complaint should first visit with the instructor (and the course supervisor), and then with the departmental DEO. (Wenfang Tang, 335-2358) Complaints must be made within six months of the incident (CLAS Academic Policies Handbook).

Understanding Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment subverts the mission of the University and threatens the well-being of students, faculty, and staff. All members of the UI community have a responsibility to uphold this mission and to contribute to a safe environment that enhances learning. Incidents of sexual harassment should be reported immediately. See the UI Comprehensive Guide on Sexual Harassment for assistance, definitions, and the full University policy.

Reacting Safely to Severe Weather

In severe weather, class members should seek appropriate shelter immediately, leaving the classroom if necessary. The class will continue if possible when the event is over. For more information on Hawk Alert and the siren warning system, visit the Department of Public Safety website.

Course Outline¹

Often only selections from the listed chapter will be assigned; pay attention to the page numbers.

Laying the Foundation

- January 17 (Tues): Overview of Course & Introductions
 - Syllabus
- January 19 (Thurs): Understanding Political Science
 - K&W, Chapter 1
- January 24 (Tues): Finding a Theory
 - K&W, Chapter 2
 - Barrington. 1997. “‘Nation’ and ‘Nationalism’: The Misuse of Key Concepts in Political Science” *PS: Political Science and Politics*. 39(4):712–716.
- January 26 (Thurs): Distinguishing between Correlation and Causation
 - K&W, Chapter 3

Designing a Study

- January 31 (Tues): Designing Research to Evaluate Theories I: Experiments
 - K&W, Chapter 4.1-4.2
 - Bailenson et al. 2008. “Facial Similarities between Voters and Candidates Causes Influence” *Public Opinion Quarterly*. 72(5): 935–961. (Focus on the design of the experiments.)
- February 2 (Thurs): Designing Research II: Observational Data
 - K&W, Chapter 4.3-4.4
- February 7 (Tues): Designing Research III: Qualitative Data
 - Levy. 2008. “Case Studies: Types, Designs, and Logics of Inference”. *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, 25:118
 - Recommended: Dion. 1998. “Evidence and Inference in the Comparative Case Study” *Comparative Politics*. 30(2): 127-146

¹I reserve the right to make changes with respect to topics and pacing, but will try to stick to the schedule as much as possible. You will be notified of any changes through e-mail as well as an updated schedule posted to ICON.

- February 9 (Thurs): **Measuring Concepts of Interest**
 - K&W, Chapter 5.1-5.6
 - Recommended: Munck & Verkuilen. 2002. “Conceptualizing and Measuring Democracy” *Comparative Political Studies*. 35(1):5–34. (Only the first 10 pages.)

- February 14 (Tues): **Describing Variables**
 - K&W, Chapter 5.7-5.12

- February 16 (Thurs): **Entering, Manipulating, & Summarizing Data in Stata**
 - Bring your laptops! Try to come a few minutes early if you have never accessed Stata before.
 - Guest Lecturer: Collab TA Desmond Wallace.
 - Download StataIntro.do file from ICON.
 - Recommended: Acock, Chapters 1-4 or Longest, Chapters 1-4

- February 21 (Tues): **The Importance of Good Data Visualization**
 - Find two graphics in the news. One you think is a “good” way of visualizing the data its trying to communicate and one that is a “bad” graph. Please email me the visualizations an hour before class and bring 4 printed copies to class.

- February 23 (Thurs): **No Class: ISA Conference**

- February 28 (Tues): **Visualizing Data in Stata**
 - Bring your laptops & download StataVisualization.do file from ICON.
 - Bring questions you have for the Midterm! I’ll save 20 minutes for Q & A.

- March 2 (Thurs): **Midterm Exam**

Analyzing Data & Interpreting Results

- March 7 (Tues): **Sampling from a Population**
 - K&W, Chapter 6.1
 - Hillygus. 2011. “The Practice of Survey Research: Changes and Challenges”. In *New Directions in Public Opinion*. Ed. Adam Berinsky

- March 9 (Thurs): Understanding the Probability in Statistics
 - K&W, Chapter 6.2
 - Be prepared to give an update on your project status. Topic/questions/challenges.
- March 14 & March 16: Spring Break
- March 21 (Tues): The Power of the Central Limit Theorem
 - K&W, Chapter 6.3-6.5
- March 23 (Thurs): Testing Hypotheses: Statistical Significance, CIs, & p-values
 - K&W, Chapter 7
- March 28 (Tues): Testing Bivariate Hypotheses
 - K&W, Chapter 7
- March 30 (Thurs): Testing Bivariate Hypotheses Using Stata
 - Recommended: Acock, Chapter 7 or Longest, Chapter 5 & 6
- April 4 (Tues): Going from Correlation Coefficients to Simple Regression
 - K&W, Chapter 8.1-8.3
- April 6 (Thurs): Estimating Simple Regressions
 - K&W, Chapter 8.4-8.5
 - Recommended: Acock, Chapter 8 or Longest, Chapter 7
- April 11 (Tues): Adding Covariates: Omitted Variable Bias
 - Draft of paper due to group for next week's workshop!
 - K&W, Chapter 9
- April 13 (Thurs): Including Categorical Independent Variables
 - K&W, Chapter 10
 - See ICON for group assignments and article to read.

- April 18 (Tues): **Critical Analysis Project Workshop**
 - See ICON for more detailed instructions. Come prepared to talk about your progress and questions as well as bring prepared comments for your group.

- April 20 (Thurs): **Visualizing Regression Results**
 - See ICON for -margins- and -marginsplot- documentation

- April 25 (Tues): **Branching Out from Continuous Dependent Variables**
 - K&W, Chapter 11.1-11.2

- April 27 (Thurs): **Unresolved Challenges of Causal Inference**
 - Sekhon and Titiunik. 2012. “When Natural Experiments Are Neither Natural nor Experiments”. *American Political Science Review*

- May 2 (Tues): **Reading, Analyzing, and Discussing Published Work**
 - See ICON for articles and guidelines for reading.

- May 4 (Thurs): **Catch Up & Final Exam Review**