DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY
Inspiring Minds

Department of Political Science

POLI 3492: Political Inquiry I

Winter 2014
Friday: 8:35-11:25
McCain Building 2019

Instructor: Conor O'Dea
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Hours: By appointment only
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Course Description

This course is a general introduction to quantitative research methods in political science. It assumes no prior experience in this area. It will cover quantitative methods from basic statistics to regression methods as well as offering more theoretical content on methodological issues. Students will learn the basics of statistical analyses, and over a series of small assignments culminating in a final paper, deploy those methods to explore specific research questions using the statistical software package **STATA.**

Course Format: Lectures and Lab Sessions

This is primarily a lab course based on the assigned text, **A STATA Companion to Political Analyses.** Other readings, which will cover topics handled in lecture, will be made available via OWL/BBL.

The class will be divided into three lab sessions as per the below, in which specific instruction will be provided on quantitative methods and in which students will work small assignments using STATA.

Website

The course website can be accessed through

OWL/BBL. It will include, among other resources, a digital copy of the syllabus, updates to any changes to the syllabus throughout the semester. If you have a technical problem with the course website, email the Help Desk: helpdesk@dal.ca.

Textbook

There is only one required text for this course, and it is available at the university bookstore:

Philip H. Pollock III. Explorations. *A STATA Companion to Political Analysis.* Washington: CQ Press, 2011.

Other readings

Other readings and suggested readings will be posted on OWL/BBL.

Requirements and Grading

Hypothesis/Research Question - 15%   (February 14th)

Literature Review - 20% (March 7th)

Methodology - 30%   (March 28th)

Final paper   - 35%   (April 18th)

1. **Hypothesis/Research Question**

Here, four things are crucial:

   a. Clearly outline a research question.
   b. Provisionally identify a dataset you want to work with and think about the variables you want to use.
   c. Provisionally identify a dependent/outcome variable and subsequently identify possible independent variables and relevant control variables.
   d. Formulate a clear hypothesis based on the above.

To be submitted on February 14th.

Suggested Length: 1000 words

2. **Literature Review**

Review the scholarly literature for theory and research relevant to your hypothesis. Assess the major arguments regarding what seems to predict change in your dependent variable and explore the alternative explanations offered in the literature.

To be submitted on March 7th.

Suggested Length: 2000 words

3. **Methodology**

The methodology paper is basically your research design; it should specify the quantitative method(s) you have chosen and show how you will apply it to the dataset and variables you identified in earlier assignments. Briefly, it should include an explanation and justification of the selected analytical methods, explicitly identify independent, dependent, and control variables, and offer some discussion of measurement and sampling issues.

Suggested Length: 2000 words.

To be submitted on March 28th.

4. **Final Paper**

This paper is really a culmination of the earlier assignments with discussion and conclusion sections. It will test your capacity to apply what you have learned by identifying and pursuing a specific research problem and tackling it with statistical analysis. The key focus here is on Interpreting your results: was the hypothesis supported or unsupported? What are the implications in terms of the scholarly literature? What are the repercussions for policy recommendations?

To be submitted April 18th.

Deadlines and Late Penalties

Any assignment received after the due date will be subject to a late penalty of 5% per day, unless prior arrangements have been made with me or appropriate written documentation such as a doctor's note is provided. Please plan your work well ahead of time to avoid this. If you stay on top of the work, this class is streamlined to make learning stats comparatively painless. Falling behind will very quickly become problematic.

Plagiarism and Academic Integrity

Plagiarism is a serious violation of academic ethics. All students in this class are to read and understand the policies on plagiarism and academic honesty referenced in the Policies and Student Resources sections of the plagiarism.dal.ca website. Ignorance of such policies is no excuse for violations.

OSAA Syllabus Statement on Accommodation

Students may request accommodation as a result of barriers related to disability, religious obligation, or any characteristic under the Nova Scotia Human Rights Act. Students who require academic accommodation for either classroom participation or the writing of tests and exams should make their request to the Advising and Access Services Center (AASC) prior to or at the outset of the regular academic year. Please visit www.dal.ca/access for more information and to obtain the Request for Accommodation – Form A.

A note taker may be required as part of a student's accommodation. There is an honorarium of

$75/course/term (with some exceptions). If you are interested, please contact AASC at 494-2836 for more information.

Please note that your classroom may contain specialized accessible furniture and equipment. It is important that these items remain in the classroom, untouched, so that students who require their usage will be able to participate in the class.

Lab Slots

Group 1: Mondays, 2:00-4:00, McCain 2019

Group 2: Wednesdays, 9:30-11:30, McCain 2019

Group 3: Fridays, 2:00-4:00, McCain 2019

Course Schedule (Lecture Topic/Lab Topic)

Week 1: Introduction:

- Introduction to Course
- What is Statistical Analysis?
- Review of Syllabus
- Housekeeping Items – Lab slots, etc.

Week 2: Selecting a Dataset and Determining a Research Question (no lab)

Week 3: Formulating a Clear Hypothesis/Introduction to Stata

Week 4: Populations and Samples/Descriptive Statistics I

Week 5: Understanding Variables/Crosstabs

Week 6: What is Significance?/Tests of Significance

Week 7: Reading Week

Week 8: Variation and Correlation/Correlation

Week 9: Prediction and Causation/Introduction to Regression

Week 10: More on Methods/Linear Regression

Week 11: Upping the Complexity/Multiple Regression

Week 12: Problem Data/Missing Data and Regression Diagnostics

Week 13: Work on Final Paper