Political Science 2300: The Study of Politics

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Office hours
Tues 10:00-11:00
Wed 2:00-4:00

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Office hours:
TR 12:30PM to 2:00PM

Pedagogical Goals
The purpose of this course is to introduce students to basic approaches to studying political science. The course will provide students with a basic understanding of the means by which politics can be studied in a scientific manner—social science. In this approach, political scientists do not presume to be able to derive laws in the same way that physical scientists do. Rather, political science looks to examine and understand regularities that generally influence people’s political behavior and the behavior of political systems.

Course Requirements:
Students are responsible for all the material in the readings and discussed in lectures. Required texts for the course are: Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias, *Research Methods in the Social Sciences* and Zagare, *Introduction to Game Theory*. Additional materials may be posted to Blackboard as circumstances arise. Grades for the course will be based upon assignments (50%), a research design paper (20%) and a final exam (30%). The assignments are due at the beginning of class on the relevant date. Assignments and the research design paper that are late, starting any time after the beginning of class on those days, will be penalized 10 points per business—not class—days for as many as three days, at which point no credit will be given for the assignment. Questions on the final exam will be drawn from both the readings and the lectures. Makeup exams will be given only for documented absences and, with the exception of extended medical problems or family emergencies, exams must be made up by the next class period. Any other conflicts with exam times must be raised at least 3 business days in advance of the exam.

Extra Credit and Grades
You should not expect extra credit. If I do offer extra credit, it is only when I can make it available to everyone in the class and when it furthers some educational goal that complements the goals of the course curriculum. I will not offer it as a “do-over” to students who have not completed their work satisfactorily. If you need a particular grade to graduate, maintain a particular GPA, etc. make sure you are putting in the effort to get that grade. If problems arise, address them early before they become unresolvable.

Grades will be posted on Blackboard in a timely fashion. In the event of discrepancies with those grade records, discrepancies must be resolved within two weeks of their posting and students must be able to produce their assignments and exams. So, for example, challenges to recorded grades from assignments in September will not be entertained at the end of the semester. So be sure to pick up and save your assignments. If I do not have a record of your taking an exam or doing an assignment and you cannot produce the evidence that you did the work, your grade on that exam or assignment will be 0. Finally, keeping apprised of your standing with respect to your grades is your responsibility. Use the percentages above to calculate a rough estimate of your current grade. The TA and I will not calculate your overall grade during the semester.
Classroom Policies:

Attendance is not required. Whether or not you attend lecture is your decision. You are solely responsible for any consequences of missing lecture. There may be in-class activities that contribute to your grade. If you do miss lecture, check with your classmates or the Blackboard site for any announcements and lecture slides. More importantly, if you miss class, be sure to get the notes from one of your classmates. The lecture slides provide only an outline of discussion. All information from the lectures is fair game for exams.

Finally, I am the only one who answers cell phones in class—and I don’t carry mine with me. Please remember to turn off and put away your cell phones before lecture. The first time a cell phone is out, you will be asked to put it away. The second time, you will be asked to leave. During exams, cell phones and any other electronic devices should be turned off and placed in your bags or under your seats. If you take these items out during an exam, you will receive a grade of zero for the exam. Also, please behave in ways that are respectful and courteous to your fellow students.

Disabilities Accommodation:

The University of North Texas complies with Section 504 of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act and with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. The University of North Texas provides academic adjustments and auxiliary aids to individuals with disabilities, as defined under the law. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring accommodation, please see the instructor and/or contact the Office of Disability Accommodation at 940-565-4323 during the first week of class.

Academic Integrity:

The Political Science Department adheres to and enforces UNTs policy on academic integrity (cheating, plagiarism, forgery, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty and sabotage). Students in this class should review the policy (UNT Policy Manual Section 18.1.16), which may be located at http://policy.unt.edu/sites/default/files/untpolicy/pdf/7-Student_Affairs-Academic_Integrity.pdf. Violations of academic integrity in this course will addressed in compliance with the penalties and procedures laid out in this policy.

1 Fundamentals of Political Science

1.1 Introduction (Aug. 26)

1.2 The Scientific Study of Politics (Aug. 31-Sep. 7)

These lectures make the argument that human political behavior can be studied in a scientific manner and describes the process by which political behavior can be studied scientifically.

a. RMSS Ch. 1

b. “Inequity Responses of Monkeys Modified by Effort” (Blackboard).

Recommended: Shively Ch. 1

1.3 Theory and Causation (Sep. 9-16)

These lectures describe the elements that are necessary for a valid scientific theory of political behavior.
1.4 Formal Theory (Sep. 21-23)

These lectures describe how mathematical logic can be used to develop deductive theories of political behavior.


***Theory recognition assignment due Sep. 23***

2 Research Design

2.1 Experiments (Sep. 28-30)

These lectures present experiments as a “gold standard” for isolating causal relations in the scientific investigation of political behavior and describe how the logic of an experimental design can be useful for developing research designs when experimental methods are either impractical or unethical.

a. RMSS Ch. 5

Recommended: Shively Ch. 6

***Game theory assignment due Sep. 30***

2.2 Quasi-Experiments (Oct. 5-7)

Quasi-experiments mimic the experimental method, but they do not provide the same degree of control as experiments. These lectures will describe different ways to isolate causal relations when experimental control is not available.

a. RMSS Ch. 6
b. Lazarsfeld, et al. *The People’s Choice*, Ch. 1, 7, and 8 (blackboard)

2.3 Conceptualization and Measurement (Oct. 12-14)

The conceptualization of measurement of key concepts is essential in any scientific endeavor. These lectures will discuss various issues involved in defining central concepts in theories of political behavior and when developing measures of those concepts.

a. RMSS Ch. 7 & 18

**Recommended:** Shively Ch. 4-5

2.4 Sampling and Case Selection (Oct. 19-21)

It is not practical—or necessary—to examine every possible case when testing scientific theories of political behavior. These lectures will discuss relevant factors that researchers need to consider when collecting cases to study.

a. RMSS Ch. 8


**Recommended:** Shively Ch. 7

***Theory development assignment due Oct. 20

3 Observation

3.1 Survey Research (Oct. 26-28)

Survey research is one of the dominant means of observing people’s political behavior. These lectures will discuss how political scientists use surveys for testing theories of politics in a scientific manner.

a. RMSS Ch. 10

3.2 Field Research (Nov. 2-4)

In many cases, it is preferable to observe the objects of political study in their natural environments. These lectures describe how political scientists have to conduct themselves when in the “field” in order to have their presence influence the behavior of their objects of study.
3.3 Archival Research (Nov. 9-11)

While much political science research involves the examination of live political actors, some questions can be studied only using records from the past. These lectures discuss the issues involved in trying to use archival records objectively to test scientific theories of politics.

a. RMSS Ch. 13

4 Analysis

4.1 Univariate Statistical Analysis (Nov. 16-18)

These lectures will discuss the various ways to describe how single variables are distributed.

a. RMSS Ch. 15

***Data collection papers due Nov. 18

4.2 Bivariate Statistical Analysis (Nov. 23-25)

The lectures will discuss the various ways to describe how two variables covary with one another.

a. RMSS Ch. 16

4.3 Inference (Nov. 30-Dec. 2)

These lectures will discuss the proper ways to use statistical evidence to draw inferences regarding scientific theories of politics.

a. RMSS Ch. 19

***Final paper due Dec. 2 (though, no penalty assessed until Dec. 9)

5 Conclusion (Dec. 7-9)

These lectures will provide an overview of the topics covered during the semester to describe an integrated view of the scientific study of politics.

Final Exam (Check Registrar’s Web Site for Time)