Contact Information

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Course Introduction

In this course, we will explore the various research approaches utilized in the social sciences with a view to applying one or more of those methods to your Croft senior thesis. Gaining familiarity with multiple research methods will allow you to be a better consumer of the work of others as well as prepare you for future graduate work. By the end of the semester, you will be prepared to (1) read, understand, and evaluate social science research; (2) design and complete your own research in the form of a Senior Thesis; (3) execute basic statistical tests as well as more advanced techniques of quantitative analysis.

Expectations

- Come to class. I know that seems like an obvious one, but it’s important nonetheless. Learning research design and statistics is a cumulative practice; what we learn in one class will build upon what was covered in previous sessions. Missing class creates gaps in your knowledge that will be difficult to build on.

- Complete all assignments. Much like the practice required for learning a foreign language, you’ll have to practice the techniques we learn in this class to get them to stick, and the homework is a good way to do that. These exercises will also help you familiarize yourself with the software packages necessary to perform even simple analysis in a timely fashion.

- Keep an open mind about the math. This course assume no previous exposure to calculus or statistics, and we will walk through the essential mathematical concepts in a way I hope will be clear to everyone. If at any point, it is not clear, please let me know.
Course Goals and Learning Objectives:

1. Describe the relationship between the scientific method and the social sciences.
2. Formulate research questions, theories, and hypotheses.
3. Describe the basics of the standard research approaches in the social sciences.
4. Evaluate the soundness of a research design.
5. Perform basic statistical analyses.
6. Execute basic international studies research.

Readings:

The readings for this course will be drawn from several sources. One book is required, and additional materials will be available online via Blackboard.


References That Might Interest You

Everyone’s thesis is going to be different, and thus everyone’s needs in terms of research methods are going to be different. In the past, students with a qualitative focus have benefited from Lisa Baglione’s Writing a Research Paper in Political Science (CQ Press). More statistical detail can be found in Agresti and Finlay’s Statistical Methods for the Social Sciences (Prentice Hall). You may also want to talk to your thesis advisor about whether or not there’s a research design book that’s the gold standard for your particular field.

Assignments and Grading

The requirements for this course include two exams, weekly homework assignments, and a research paper. These elements are weighted as follows:

- First Exam 20%
- Final Exam 25%
- Research Paper 30%
- Homework Assignments 25%
Late assignments: All work for the course must be handed in on time. Any paper handed in after 5PM on the day the assignment is due will be counted as late. Late papers will be penalized one full letter grade for each day past the deadline. If papers will be unavoidably late due to illness or other serious impediment to school work, please alert me as soon as possible and an extension may be offered at my discretion. No makeup exams will be offered, unless unusual circumstances such as serious illness, university sanctioned events, or extreme family crisis arise. A letter from the college office will go a long way toward convincing me that you truly need a make up exam.

Academic Integrity: Students will be expected to adhere to the university honor code for all assignments. Work handed in by any student should be solely the work of that student – end of story. If you draw on the ideas of others, please cite them. Failure to do so will result AT MINIMUM in a zero for the assignment. Further action may be take depending on the severity of the infraction.

ADA: Any student with a learning disability or physical handicap that might affect class performance should notify me as soon as possible. Ole Miss can make a variety of arrangements that help insure equal opportunity. It is your right and we are glad to work with you on this. For necessary accommodations to be made, please let me know prior to the first exam.

Course Outline

August 21: Course Introduction

August 23: Putting the Science in Social Science
  • Kellstedt and Whitten, ch.1
  • King, Keohane and Verba, ch. 1

August 28: Thinking Theoretically
  • Kellstedt and Whitten, ch. 2

August 30: Class Cancelled for American Political Science Association Meeting

September 4: Thinking Causally
  • Kellstedt and Whitten, ch. 3

September 6: Designing Good Research
  • Kellstedt and Whitten, ch. 4.
  • Johnson and Reynolds, ch. 2
September 11: Large N and Small N Designs
• King, Keohane, and Verba, ch. 2

September 13: Finding the Right Sources
• Johnson and Reynolds, ch. 3.

September 18: Refining Your Concepts
• King, Keohane, and Verba, ch. 3.
• Johnson and Reynolds, ch. 4.

September 20: Measuring Your Ideas
• Kellstedt and Whitten, ch. 5.
• Johnson and Reynolds, ch. 5

September 25: Levels of Measurement
• Kellstedt and Whitten, 104-109.
• Hofstadter, “On Number Numbness”

September 27: Summarizing Your Data
• Kellstedt and Whitten, 109-119.

October 2: Visualizing Your Data
• Johnson and Reynolds, ch. 11

October 4: Midterm Exam

October 9 & 11: Inference
• Kellstedt and Whitten, Ch. 7

October 16 & 18: Hypothesis Testing
• Kellstedt and Whitten, Ch. 8

October 23 & 25: Bivariate Regression
• Kellstedt and Whitten, Ch. 9
October 30 & November 1: Multiple Regression
  • Kellstedt and Whitten, Ch. 10

November 6 & 8: Extensions to the Regression Model
  • Kellstedt and Whitten, Ch. 11 (except Section 11.4)

November 13 & 15: Dichotomous Outcomes
  • Kellstedt and Whitten, Section 11.4
  • Logit application article

November 20 & 22: Thanksgiving Break

November 27: Paper Workshop
  • Bring your data and bring your questions

November 29: Catch Up and Review

December 5: Final Exam, 4PM