

PSCI 2300: Introduction to Political Science Research

Dr. Paul Hensel

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<http://www.paulhensel.org>

Office: 165 Wooten Hall (Hours: MW 8:30-9:30 AM, F 1-2)

Spring 2018

MWF 12:00-12:50 PM

121 Wooten Hall

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Course Description

The primary purpose of this course is to introduce students to the methods and terminology used by social scientists. We will examine basic concepts used in research (such as theories, hypotheses, independent and dependent variables, reliability and validity, and sampling). We will also examine basic statistical techniques that are used to examine data, with an emphasis on interpreting the results (ranging from descriptive statistics to crosstabs, correlation, and regression). Upon completion of this course, students should be able to understand and interpret most research published in political science journals, as well as public opinion polls, surveys, and research findings reported in the news. As a result, students who complete this course should be prepared for future coursework in the social sciences, as well as for a life as an educated and informed citizen.

Students are expected to finish the course readings before the class period for which they are assigned, attend class regularly (showing up to class on time and staying through the end), and participate actively in class discussion where relevant. The course will be graded using three examinations (two midterms and a final) and six homework assignments (several of which will require the use of SPSS statistical software).

Required Texts

- **Book:** This should be available at the usual Denton locations, or maybe cheaper through online bookstores -- but wherever you buy it, be sure to get the correct edition!

--Philip H. Pollock III (2016). *The Essentials of Political Analysis*, 5th ed. Sage/CQ Press.

- **Blackboard:** The remaining readings are available online through the Blackboard page for this course, which you can access by using your EUID to log in at <<https://learn.unt.edu>>.

- **SPSS software:** Some of the homework assignments toward the end of the semester will require the use of SPSS statistical software, which is installed in many UNT computer labs. If you are interested in getting your own copy of SPSS rather than depending on computer labs, you may order it through UNT at a substantial student discount. You will need the "SPSS Statistics" version of the SPSS Grad Pack, which is available for both Mac and Windows at a cost of \$58.99 (6 month rental) or \$86.99 (12 month rental) at the following site:

<<https://untsystem.onthehub.com/WebStore/ProductsByMajorVersionList.aspx>>

Course Requirements

(1) **Examinations:** Three (noncumulative) exams are required. The exams will involve a mixture of questions to measure understanding of the wide variety of material covered in this course, including some multiple choice and some short answer (some requiring the interpretation of results and others requiring calculations). Each exam will be worth 25% of the total course grade.

(2) **Homework Assignments:** There is no better way to learn concepts than through hands-on experience. There will be six (6) homework assignments, which will each be handed out one week before the due date. Together, these assignments will be worth 25% of the total course grade; each student's lowest homework grade will be dropped.

Be aware that the course rules require completing all assignments in order to receive a non-failing grade for the course, so you must turn in at least five of the six homework assignments to pass the course (if you only turn in five the sixth would count as the lowest score being dropped).

(3) **Preparation and Attendance:** An important part of a course like this is making sure that students understand the concepts as the semester is moving along. The best way to do this is to attend class regularly, having done the assigned readings beforehand (trying to cram a month's worth of reading, or xeroxing a classmate's notes from the entire semester, a few days before an exam is rarely a good strategy). Class preparation and attendance will not be graded directly, but students are expected to prepare for class and attend regularly, and failure to do so will almost certainly be reflected in one's performance on exams and homework.

Course Rules

(1) Makeup exams, whether for full credit or not, can take place only on UNT's designated "Reading Day" at the end of the last week of classes. Only one time slot on Reading Day will be offered for all makeup exams in any of the instructor's courses; students seeking to take a makeup exam in this time slot must contact the instructor no later than 5 PM on Tuesday of the last week of classes. Makeup exams will only be offered as essay examinations (regardless of the type of exam that is being made up) over the same material that would have been covered by the original exam.

Full-credit makeup examinations are given only with prior instructor approval (if at all possible) and with appropriate documentation. Note that the documentation must indicate why you could not be in class *at the exact time of the originally scheduled test*. If appropriate documentation is not provided, any makeup examination that might be offered will face a grade penalty of five letter grades, equivalent to showing up late at the original exam after one or more students have already finished and left the room.

(2) Failure to complete any paper assignment or failure to take any exam will result in a failing grade for the entire course; a passing grade requires completion of all course requirements. Late work will be assessed a substantial penalty (one letter grade per day that it is late), based on when the instructor receives the assignment, so it is in your interest to email a copy to the instructor as soon as it is completed; as long as you turn in an identical printed copy at the next class meeting, the late penalty will be based on when the email was received.

Note that the scheduled final exam time represents the conclusion of the course. No late assignments or documentation will be accepted after the conclusion of this two-hour period, and no makeup exams will be offered after this time.

(3) Students must keep an extra copy of each assignment until the instructor has returned the graded copy of that assignment. Students must also keep graded, returned copies of all assignments. Failure to do so will invalidate any potential question or protest about grades.

Also, students are responsible for maintaining backups of any written work for this course, preferably in a location away from the main computer that is being used (such as online backup through Dropbox). No extensions will be granted for work that is not turned in on time because of computer, hard drive, or printer failure, theft, power surge, or similar causes.

(4) All students must treat the instructor, the other students, and the classroom setting with respect. This includes arriving on time and staying for the entire class (or notifying the instructor in advance if this will not be possible), turning off cell phones and similar devices during class, and refraining from reading, passing notes, talking with friends, and any other potentially disruptive activities. This also means showing respect for alternative opinions and points of view, listening when either the instructor or a fellow student is speaking to the class, and refraining from insulting language and gestures.

Following departmental policy, any student engaging in unacceptable behavior may be directed to leave the classroom. Additionally, the instructor may refer the student to the Center for Student Rights and Responsibilities to consider whether the student's conduct violated UNT's Code of Student Conduct (which may be found at <http://deanofstudents.unt.edu/conduct>).

(5) The instructor's lecture notes and PowerPoint slides will not be posted online or otherwise handed out to students under any circumstances. If you are unable to attend one or more class meetings, make arrangements with another student to borrow or copy their notes.

Also be aware that any PowerPoint slides presented to the class will not contain all material that will be necessary for an "A" grade on course exams. The instructor's verbal lecture will also include important information that is not presented directly on the slides, so students should be careful to take notes on verbal lecture material as well as the brief overviews presented on the slides.

(6) Failure to abide by these policies will be dealt with in an appropriate manner, which may include a reduction in the course grade. Any exceptions are given at the instructor's discretion, only with prior approval where possible, and only with appropriate documentation.

Before asking for an exception, be aware that I will not grant exceptions that might be perceived as giving one student an unfair advantage or an opportunity that was not available to the remaining students who followed the rules correctly, turned in their work on time, and so on.

(7) The instructor's teaching-related policies and expectations are described in more detail at <http://www.paulhensel.org/teachgrade.html>. Failure to visit that web site does not constitute a valid excuse for ignorance of these policies. In particular, note that I do not "round up" grades -- an 89.9 counts as a B rather than an A -- and the only extra credit opportunity will be offered in class on the last class period before Thanksgiving (for fall semesters) or spring break (for spring semesters).

(8) Consistent with UNT rules, instructors (whether professors, teaching fellows, or teaching assistants) may not discuss student grades over email, telephone, or in any other setting that is not face-to-face due to privacy and security concerns. If you have questions about your grades, you may meet with me during office hours, or I will be glad to make an appointment at a more convenient time.

(9) I will never cancel class on my own for weather-related reasons; unless you hear official word through UNT's Eagle Alert service, class will be held at the regular time and place. Students who are unable to make it to class due to weather are still responsible for any material covered in lecture that day. If class is canceled, the next class meeting after school resumes will cover the material that would have been covered in the canceled class meeting, and a revised syllabus will be posted as soon as practical to adjust the schedule of remaining class meetings. More detail on the instructor's weather-related policies is provided at <http://www.paulhensel.org/teaching.html>.

(10) The content of this syllabus may be modified by the instructor at any time during the semester if deemed necessary. Any such changes will be announced in class as well as via Blackboard's class email

list; students are responsible for making sure that they check the email account that is on file with Blackboard.

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is defined in the UNT Policy on Student Standards for Academic Integrity, which is located at: <<http://policy.unt.edu/policy/06-003>>. This includes such issues as cheating (including use of unauthorized materials or other assistance on course assignments or examinations), plagiarism (whether intentional or negligent), forgery, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, and sabotage. All students should review the policy carefully; failure to read or understand the policy does not protect you from sanctions for violating it.

Any suspected case of academic dishonesty will be handled in accordance with current University policy and procedures. Possible academic penalties range from a verbal or written admonition to a grade of “F” in the course; further sanctions may apply to incidents involving major violations. You will find the policy and procedures at <<http://facultysuccess.unt.edu/academic-integrity>>.

Americans with Disabilities Act

The University of North Texas makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking reasonable accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide you with a reasonable accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding your specific needs in a course. You may request reasonable accommodations at any time, however, ODA notices of reasonable accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of reasonable accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. Students are strongly encouraged to deliver letters of reasonable accommodation during faculty office hours or by appointment. Faculty members have the authority to ask students to discuss such letters during their designated office hours to protect the privacy of the student. For additional information see the Office of Disability Accommodation website at <<http://www.unt.edu/oda>>. You may also contact them by phone at (940) 565-4323.

Sexual Discrimination, Harassment, and Assault

UNT is committed to providing an environment free of all forms of discrimination and sexual harassment, including sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking. If you (or someone you know) has experienced or experiences any of these acts of aggression, please know that you are not alone. The federal Title IX law makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender are Civil Rights offenses. UNT has staff members trained to support you in navigating campus life, accessing health and counseling services, providing academic and housing accommodations, helping with legal protective orders, and more.

UNT's Dean of Students web site at <<http://deanofstudents.unt.edu/resources>> offers a range of on-campus and off-campus resources to help support survivors, depending on their unique needs. The Student Advocate may be reached through email at SurvivorAdvocate@unt.edu or by calling the Dean of Students' office at (940) 565-2648. You are not alone; we are here to help.

Instructor's Web Site

The instructor maintains a web site at <<http://www.paulhensel.org>> that includes -- among other things -- teaching policies, solutions to common student writing problems, syllabi for my other courses, and

Internet resources for students of international relations. Students are strongly encouraged to become familiar with this web site during the semester. The online version of this syllabus can be found at:

<<http://www.paulhensel.org/Teaching/psci2300.html>>.

Course Schedule

"There are three kinds of lies: lies, damn lies, and statistics."

--Benjamin Disraeli/Mark Twain

"People can come up with statistics to prove anything, Kent. 40% of all people know that."

--Homer Simpson

1. Wednesday, Jan. 17: Overview of Course

- *Assigned Readings*: None
- *Overview*: Introduction to the course and the instructor; no substantive lecture today.

2-4. Friday, Jan. 19 - Wednesday, Jan. 24: The Scientific Approach to Knowledge

- **Homework #1 (survey): handed out and completed in class Jan. 24**
- *Assigned Readings (day 1 of this topic)*: Pollock: Introduction
- *Assigned Readings (day 2)*: Pollock: Chapter 3 (*Proposing Explanations, Framing Hypotheses, and Making Comparisons*: read Introduction, "Proposing Explanations," and "Framing Hypotheses" sections only)
- *Assigned Readings (day 3)*: none
- *Overview*: The first general topic will introduce students to the scientific study of politics. We will discuss how the scientific approach differs from other possible sources of knowledge, and how this approach works in political science. We will then discuss theories and hypotheses, which are important building blocks in the scientific approach. After completing this topic, students should have a good idea about what the primary goals of political science are and (in general terms) how we pursue these goals; the rest of the semester will explore the techniques that are used to pursue them.

5-6. Friday, Jan. 26 - Monday, Jan. 29: Research Design and Causality

- **Homework #2 (theories/hypotheses/research design) handed out Jan. 29, due Feb. 5**
- *Assigned Readings (day 1 of this topic)*: Pollock chapter 4 (*Research Design and the Logic of Control*)
--*Blackboard*: Stephen Ansolabehere, Shanto Iyengar, Adam Simon, and Nicholas Valentino (1994). "Does Attack Advertising Demobilize the Electorate?" *American Political Science Review* 88, 4, (December): 829-838.
- *Assigned Readings (day 2)*:
--*Blackboard*: Donald T. Campbell and H. Laurence Ross (1968). "The Connecticut Crackdown on Speeding: Time-Series Data in Quasi-Experimental Analysis." *Law and Society Review* 3, 1: 33-54.
- *Overview*: This topic will discuss research design issues, particularly relating to the ways that poli sci research differs from work in the natural sciences. This will include the difference between correlation and causation (with possible approaches to solving this problem) and the lack of full experimental control in most poli sci applications (including quasi-experimental and other potential solutions). The Campbell and Ross reading is a classic application of quasi-experimental design, while the Ansolabehere et al. reading is an interesting application of a true experiment; for each reading, think about how convincing the authors' approach is (are you convinced that Ansolabehere et al.'s findings would hold outside of the laboratory setting? are you convinced that Campbell and Ross's findings actually reflect the causal process they claim?).

7-10. Wednesday, Jan. 31 - Wednesday, Feb. 7: Concepts, Variables, and Measurement

- *Assigned Readings (day 1 of this topic)*: Pollock chapter 1 (*The Definition and Measurement of Concepts*)

--*Blackboard*: Jeffery J. Mondak and Mitchell S. Sanders (2003). "Tolerance and Intolerance, 1976-1998." *American Journal of Political Science* 47, 3 (July): 492-502.

- *Assigned Readings (day 2)*: Pollock: Chapter 2 (*Measuring and Describing Variables*: Introduction and "Measuring Variables" sections only)
- *Assigned Readings (days 3-4)*: (none)
- *Overview*: This topic will address the difference between concepts, variables, and indicators, and the different types or levels of variables that can be used. We will also consider measurement error and issues related to reliability and validity. The Mondak and Sanders article illustrates many of these measurement issues with respect to the concept of tolerance, and highlights the difficulties inherent in measuring the concept accurately. We will conclude this topic by considering where and how we get our data. We will discuss a variety of different data sources -- using existing data sets, observation, document analysis, and surveys -- considering the advantages and disadvantages of each.

11-12. Friday, Feb. 9 - Monday, Feb. 12: Reading Political Science Research

- *Assigned Readings (day 1 of this topic)*:

--*Blackboard*: Leanne C. Powner (2015). *Empirical Research and Writing: A Political Science Student's Practical Guide*. Chapter 3 ("Doing Pre-Research").

--Skim over the journal articles that we read earlier in the semester (Ansolabehere et al., Campbell/Ross, and Mondak/Sanders), focusing on how each article is organized (using the six sections of most articles that Powner discusses at the beginning of the assigned reading). Be sure to bring your copies of the articles to class, so we can talk about the various elements that they include.

- *Assigned Readings (day 2)*: (none)
- *Overview*: This topic will cover a number of skills that will be invaluable in the rest of your undergraduate studies: what to look for when reading poli sci research; how to do a literature review; and why, when, and how to cite your sources when writing a poli sci research paper.

13. Wednesday, Feb. 14: Review

- *Assigned Readings*: (none)
- *Overview*: This class period will be devoted to catching up on any remaining material if needed, as well as reviewing for the first midterm exam.

14. Friday, Feb. 16: MIDTERM EXAM #1

15-18. Monday, Feb. 19 - Monday, Feb. 26: Descriptive Statistics

- *Homework #3 (article summary) handed out Feb. 26, due Mar. 5*
- *Assigned Readings (day 1 of this topic)*: Pollock chapter 2 ("Describing Variables" and Summary sections only)
- *Assigned Readings (days 2-3)*: (none)
- *Assigned Readings (day 4)*: Pollock chapter 6 ("Variation Revisited: The Standard Deviation" section only)
- *Overview*: The remainder of the course will examine specific methods and techniques that we use in the scientific study of politics. The first topic in this section of the course will focus on the use of descriptive statistics to summarize data, beginning with such basic descriptives as percentages, proportions, and histograms. We will then move on to measures of central tendency (mean, median, and

mode) and measures of dispersion (such as range, variance, and standard deviation). These techniques are important for getting a basic understanding of any variable of interest, which you will need to do before you can start studying how this variable might be related to other variables.

19-22. Wednesday, Feb. 28 - Wednesday, Mar. 7: Sampling and Inferential Statistics

- **Homework #4 (descriptive statistics) handed out Mar. 7, due Mar. 19**
- *Assigned Readings (day 1 of this topic):* Pollock chapter 6 (*Foundations of Statistical Inference*)
- *Assigned Readings (days 2-4):* (none)
- *Overview:* This topic will begin by looking at probability and the normal curve/distribution, which are very useful for a lot of what we do. We will then explore some of the ways that these topics are applied, such as the logic of sampling (why do surveys like Gallup polls work the way they do?) and the calculation of confidence intervals for the purpose of inference. These techniques are necessary for studying topics where we do not have easy access to the entire population of interest, such as political surveys (which rarely interview more than several thousand individuals but desire to understand the attitudes of an entire group or country).

23 & 27-32. Friday, Mar. 9 & Monday, Mar. 19 - Friday, Mar. 30: Hypothesis Testing

24-26. March 12-16: NO CLASS (Spring Break)

- *Assigned Readings (day 1 of this topic):* review Pollock chapter 6 ("Inference Using the Normal Distribution," "Inference Using the Student's t-Distribution," and "What about Sample Proportions?" sections only)
- *Assigned Readings (days 2-3):* (none)
- *Assigned Readings (day 4):* Pollock chapter 7 (*Tests of Significance and Measures of Association*: read everything before "The Chi-Square Test of Significance" section)
- *Assigned Readings (days 5-7):* (none)
- *Overview:* The next group of lectures will examine the process of hypothesis testing, which is used to determine whether the differences we observe are "statistically significant." We will begin with hypothesis tests using one sample, where the goal is to compare the mean (or proportion) of a variable between one group and the larger population from which it was drawn. We will then examine hypothesis testing using two samples, where the goal is to compare the means (or proportions) of two different groups. We will conclude this topic by examining analysis of variance (ANOVA), which can be used for more than two groups. These techniques are useful for all kinds of comparisons between groups, ranging from the grades of different groups of students to the political attitudes of different groups of voters or the socioeconomic conditions in different types of countries.

33. Monday, Apr. 2: Review

- *Assigned Readings:* (none)
- *Overview:* This class period will be devoted to catching up on any remaining material if needed, as well as reviewing for the second midterm exam.

34. Wednesday, Apr. 4: MIDTERM EXAM #2

35-40. Friday, Apr. 6 - Wednesday, Apr. 18: Measures of Association

- **Homework #5 (crosstabs/chi-square) handed out Apr. 18, due Apr. 25**
- *Assigned Readings (day 1 of this topic):* Pollock chapter 7 ("The Chi-Square Test of Significance" section only)
- *Assigned Readings (days 2-3):* (none)
- *Assigned Readings (day 4):* [nominal] Pollock chapter 7 ("Measures of Association" and Summary

sections only)

- *Assigned Readings (day 5-6):* (none)

- *Overview:* The next general topic will address ways to measure the association between variables. We will begin with the use of crosstabulation and Chi-square (X^2) tests to study the relationship between categorical variables. This will then be followed by measures of association between nominal and ordinal variables. These techniques are useful for evaluating the extent to which two variables are related to each other, or the extent to which knowledge of one variable allows us to predict the value of the other.

41-43. Friday, Apr. 20 - Wednesday, Apr. 25: Bivariate Correlation and Regression

- **Homework #6 (regression) handed out Apr. 25, due May 2**

- *Assigned Readings (day 1 of this topic):* Pollock chapter 8 (*Correlation and Linear Regression*: read all but "Multiple Regression" section)

- *Assigned Readings (days 2-3):* (none)

- *Overview:* The last few weeks of the semester will examine how we study associations between interval- or ratio-level variables. We will begin by focusing on bivariate relationships (i.e., associations between one independent variable and one dependent variable). This will cover graphical techniques (scatterplots), as well as the interpretation of bivariate regression and such matters as significance testing and assessing model fit. These techniques are an important starting point for understanding most Political Science research that has been published in recent years.

44-45. Friday, Apr. 27 - Monday, Apr. 30: Multivariate Analysis

- *Assigned Readings (day 1 of this topic):* Pollock chapter 8 ("Multiple Regression" and Summary sections only)

- *Assigned Readings (day 2):* Pollock chapter 9 (*Logistic Regression*)

- *Overview:* The final week of the course will finish bivariate regression analysis, focusing on such matters as significance testing and assessing model fit. We will then conclude the course by examining extensions such as multiple regression analysis (bringing in more than one independent variable) and logit / probit analysis (where the dependent variable can only take on a value of zero or one). These techniques are used in most published research in Political Science, so it is important to be able to understand them in order to be able to read or conduct research in this field.

46. Wednesday, May 2: Course Wrapup

- *Assigned Readings:* Pollock chapter 10 (*Thinking Empirically, Thinking Probabilistically*)

- *Overview:* This is the day when we try to wrap up the entire course and bring everything together. Look back to the summary of the class in this syllabus and in the notes from the first class meeting, as those offered a brief outline of what the course was meant to do, what you were expected to learn, and what skills you were expected to develop through the course.

47. Friday, May 4: NO CLASS (Reading Day)

Wednesday, May 9: FINAL EXAM, 10:30 AM-12:30 PM (in the regular classroom)

- *The final exam is held on the day during Final Exam Week that is assigned by UNT, based on the time when our class meets: <<http://registrar.unt.edu/exams/final-exam-schedule>>*