Syllabus
Political Inquiry (PLSC 2910)
M/W 8:00-9:50AM, 411 Sturm Hall
Winter 2015
Professor Seth Masket

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Office Hours: Wednesdays 10AM-12PM, 466 Sturm Hall

Purpose
How do we know what we know? This course is designed less to teach you a series of political facts than to teach you how we go about learning them. We will examine several different approaches to the study of politics, although most of our work will be focused on quantitative approaches. We will discuss how to develop theories, how to test hypotheses, and how to use interviews, surveys, statistics, and other tools to evaluate our claims. You will learn some basic statistical techniques in this class that will make you a better consumer of political information.

Many students find themselves averse to or intimidated by statistics. In reality, the kind of statistics we’ll be doing in this class is nothing more than pretty basic middle school math applied to problems in the social sciences. I assure you that you have the skills and abilities to understand and do this work. There really isn’t much to the idea that some of us have “math brains” and some of us don’t. You can do this, and it’s the sort of work that will help you in other classes and throughout your life.

Work
This class takes place in the Quantitative Research Lab (Sturm 411), which is filled with computers so that we can go over research problems and figure out techniques together in real time. You will have occasional quizzes and short assignments to make sure that you are learning the techniques we examine in class. There will also be an in-class midterm on Monday, Feb. 2nd, and a research paper due during finals week.

Your final grade for the class will be a weighted average of all your work, broken down as follows:

- Quizzes (20% of grade)
- Short assignments (20%)
- Midterm (25%)
- Research paper (35%)
Work that is turned in past its due date may be accepted, but with a five percentage-point penalty for each late day. Thus an essay turned in three days late can receive no higher than an 85%. Late assignments may be accepted without penalty only with documented evidence of a medical problem (e.g.: a note from a health care provider).

Final course grades will be given as follows:
- 93% and up — A
- 90-92.9% — A-
- 87-89.9% — B+
- 83-86.9% — B
- 80-82.9% — B-
- 77-79.9% — C+
- 73-76.9% — C
- 70-72.9% — C-
- 67-69.9% — D+
- 63-66.9% — D
- 60-62.9% — D-
- Below 60 — F

**Etiquette**
We will have many dialogues in class in which we will discuss our views and interpretations of research and data. In these discussions, you are encouraged to use your personal experiences and perspectives, as well as your understanding of the course material and current events. Direct personal attacks against others in the class are not permitted. Insulting anyone one inside or outside the class on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, religion, or national background is not permitted. Violations of these rules will be reflected in your grade and, if they continue, may result in disciplinary action by the University.

**Academic Honesty**
You are required to submit your own work for the course, and to ensure that it is original and properly cited. Students who are found to have plagiarized coursework will receive a failing grade for the assignment and may fail the entire course. For additional information, please refer to DU’s policies on student conduct: http://www.du.edu/studentlife/ccs/code.html

**Students with Disabilities**
Appropriate accommodations will be made for students with disabilities. Please visit DU’s website on its Disabilities Service Program for additional information. http://www.du.edu/studentlife/disability/dsp/
Contacting Me
I frequently check e-mail (seth.masket@du.edu), so that is usually the best way to get in touch with me. I can also be reached on my office phone (x12718). I will also have regular office hours on Wednesdays from 10AM to 12PM. If you need me to get back to you within the same day, definitely e-mail me before 9PM. I can't promise I'll look at e-mail after that.

Required Textbook

Strongly Recommended Software Purchase
- Stata version 13 (Small version, six-month license). Available from statacom.

Stata is a powerful and flexible program for statistical analysis. DU students can buy a six-month license for the program at a discounted price of $35 for either Mac or PC. To purchase the program, go to the Stata website and find the "Small Stata 13: For students with very small datasets." Be sure to use the Campus GradPlan to receive the discounted price. The following link will take you directly to the web page where you will find the proper version of Stata listed for the discounted price and available for download: http://www.stata.com/order/new/edu/gradplans/campus-gradplan/

Stata exists on all the computers in the Sturm 411 lab, and you can access the lab for limited hours outside class. However, you will have homework assignments and papers requiring the use of Stata, which is why I strongly recommend purchasing a version for your own computer.

All other course materials are available on the course Canvas website.
Week by Week Syllabus

Week 1 – Introduction: Theories, Hypotheses, and Inference (Jan. 5th, 7th)
Topics: Understanding causality, theories, testable hypotheses, models
Readings:
- Kellstedt and Whitten ch. 1
- Kimball and Smith, “There’s One Key Difference Between kids who Excel at Math and Those who Don’t”

Week 2 – Research Design (Jan. 12th, 14th)
Topics: Measurement, tests, the makings of good studies, experiments, observations, causality, selection effect
Readings:
- Kellstedt and Whitten, chapter 4
- Johns, “Causality?”
- Mayhew, “The Case of the Vanishing Marginals”
- Gelman, “Rich State, Poor State”

Week 3 – Ethics in Research (Jan. 21st)
Topics: Ethical studies, informed consent, deception
Readings:
- Willis, “Professors’ Research Project Stirs Political Outrage in Montana”
- Stanford Prison Experiment (slide show)
- Milgram Experiment (DU CourseMedia)

No class on Monday, Jan. 19th, in observance of MLK Day

Week 4 - Qualitative Research (Jan. 26th, 28th)
Topics: Interviews, participant-observation, ethnography
Readings:
- Fenno
- Wadsworth

Guest speaker in class on Wednesday, Jan. 28th — Prof. Nancy Wadsworth

Week 5 – Probability (Feb. 2nd, 4th)
Topics: Probability, odds, central limit theorem
Readings:
- Kellstedt and Whitten, chapter 6
- Hofstadter, “Number Numbness”

Midterm in class on Monday, Feb. 2nd.
Week 6 – Describing and Comparing Variables (Feb. 9th, 11th)
Topics: Means, medians, standard deviations, different types of variables, histograms, tables
Readings:
- Kellstedt and Whitten, chapter 5

    Guest speaker in class on Monday, Feb. 9th — Prof. Kris Kanthak, University of Pittsburgh

Week 7 – Statistical Sampling (Feb. 16th, 18th)
Topics: Normal distributions
Readings:
- Kellstedt and Whitten, chapter 7
- Heidenrich, “How Many Iraqis Died?”

    Monday, Feb. 16th is President’s Day! We still have class! Say something nice about a president today.

Week 8 – Significance Testing (Feb. 23rd, 25th)
Topics: t-tests, p-values, Bayesian inference
Readings:
- Kellstedt and Whitten, chapter 8
- Silver, excerpt from “The Signal and the Noise”

Week 9 – Relationships Between Variables (Mar. 2nd, 4th)
Topics: Correlations, scatterplots, regression
- Kellstedt and Whitten, chapter 9
- Masket, “Does Unemployment Affect Midterm Elections?”

Week 10 – More Relationships Between Variables (Mar. 9th, 11th)
Topics: Multivariate regression
Readings:
- Kellstedt and Whitten, chapter 10

    Final papers due by 10AM on Thursday, March 12th