

POLITICAL SCIENCE RESEARCH METHODS
PSC 2019, High Point University Dr.
Mark Setzler
Fall 2023 Syllabus

COURSE BASICS:

Instructor contact information:

Phone: 336/841-9018 (office)

Email: msetzler@highpoint.edu

Website: marksetzler.org/ResearchMethods (password when needed for readings: icecream)

Office location: Norcross Hall, Room 160

Seminars

- *Section 1:* MWF: 9:15 – 10:25 in Phillips School of Business, room 117
- *Section 2:* MWF: 2:00 – 3:10 in Phillips School of Business, room 117

Office hours

- Monday, Wednesday: 11:00 – 12:30
- Tuesday and Thursday: 8:15 – 8:45
- Friday: 10:30 – 11:30
- If you are in classes during these times, I will be happy to schedule virtual or in-person meetings at other times as long as you give me sufficient notice.

Please let me know in advance that you would like to come by during office hours. I try to schedule student appointments so that they do not overlap, leaving you hanging out in the hallway as I give each student the full attention they deserve. I understand that parking anywhere near my office is difficult, and I can schedule virtual meetings via MS Teams if you give me some lead time. If you would like to meet remotely, just reach out by email so that I can send you a meeting link.

I am here to help! The best way to thrive in a course that involves complex material that is different than what you have studied before is to not let yourself ever fall way behind. Sometimes, you will find that you don't know how to do something in this course simply because you have not done anything like it before. If you are struggling to figure out what resources you need to use to answer a question or complete an assignment, the fastest, simplest way to resolve the issue most likely involves contacting me for some one-on-one guidance.

UNIVERSITY BULLETIN DESCRIPTION AND EXPECTED LEARNING OUTCOMES

In recent decades, empirical research in the social sciences has transformed our understanding of domestic and international politics. Yet, how can we be confident that researchers are presenting valid results rather than just reproducing their own biases and preferences? This course addresses this question by surveying the primary techniques that political scientists use to describe and explain individual, group, and mass political behaviors. Course topics will include the ethical conduct of research, proper project design, hypothesis development and testing, and the reporting of results. The methodologies investigated will include practices such as interviewing and observation, focus groups, survey research, content analysis, and various types of statistical analysis. Students will gain hands-on research experience in exercises and small projects.

By the end of this course, students should be able to:

- Explain what it means to study politics scientifically
- Assess political phenomena through the use of analytical models and variables

- Formulate an effective research question and prepare a research design regarding a political issue
 - Clearly conceptualize and operationalize the concepts addressed by a research question
 - Describe the strengths and limitations of the various methods researchers use to analyze the social world and establish causality
 - Identify and address ethical issues relevant to the study of human subjects
 - Critique survey questions written by others and be able to develop effective survey questions oneself
 - Analyze data presented in cross-tabulations
 - Analyze data using univariate and bivariate statistics using SPSS
 - Interpret SPSS output of selected univariate, bivariate, and multivariate statistics
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READING SOURCES AND MATERIALS

The **required** materials for this course are:

1. Carolyn Forestiere. 2022. *Beginning Research in Political Science*, 2nd edition. New York: Oxford University Press.
 2. You will read numerous selections from methodology texts, academic journals, and the popular press. These readings will be accessed from links placed on the course's reading schedule. To open and read many of the assignments downloaded from the course website, you will need to use a PDF reader of some type.
 3. SPSS. You will be required to use the SPSS statistical software package. In class, you will be given instructions on using your HPU credentials to download this program and a 6-month license key at no cost. There are Mac and PC versions of the software, which you will use on your personal laptop.
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STUDENT ASSESSMENT

Grades will be weighted as follows:

Three unit exams	45%
SPSS assignments	15%
SPSS assessment test	15%
Research design essay	15%
Engagement/Professionalism	10%

Exams: At two points during the term and again at the end of the semester, you will take examinations that assess your understanding of the course material.

SPSS assignments: These SPSS assignments will introduce you to statistical analysis software and help develop your quantitative skills. They will be completed on BlackBoard.

SPSS assessment test: This will be an in-class assignment at the end of the semester where you will complete a test showing your mastery of several skills in SPSS. The exam will require you to use the SPSS program previously loaded onto your computer to modify a dataset, create/recode variables, and run/interpret various statistical procedures.

Research design essay: This assignment will require you to develop a short research proposal. Your work will involve a modest amount of research on previous scholarship in your topic area and

require you to apply social science methods to a research question of your choosing (but subject to instructor approval to make sure you are on the right track). You will receive more detail on this assignment as we approach the mid-term break.

Engagement and professional conduct. I assess engagement and professionalism at the end of each course unit, adjusting the component's overall grade up or down to reflect how you have done up to that point in the term as a whole. As described in detail in the rubric posted on the course website, this grading component will evaluate your consistent adherence to course policies as well as your ability to demonstrate the pre-class preparation, listening, note-taking, and speaking skills required to actively participate and contribute in professional settings for extended periods. In short, this component of the course assesses the extent to which you are building and demonstrating the professional life skills necessary to thrive once you leave HPU.

FINAL GRADE CALCULATION:

University policy requires letter grades to accurately reflect student performance. Per that policy, A-range grades are reserved for excellent work that is “notably superior” to what is typical for a given course’s grade level. Bs are assigned to work that is “clearly above average,” when compared to the typical student’s work at that course level. C-range grades are assigned to “satisfactory work” that at least meets the very low end of a course’s expectations. Ds are assigned where student performance is obviously “unsatisfactory” and thus markedly weaker than what is typical for a student taking a college course of this level. An F indicates that a significant portion of the work has not been completed or is so deficient that it does not merit any college credit.

You will not be graded on a curve, and you are not competing against your classmates. A B grade, for example, needs to reflect a level of performance that is clearly above what is average for a typical sophomore-level social science major taking a required methods class at any US university; a B grade in this class does *not* require you to earn higher assignment grades than most your colleagues. For most of the students who take this particular class, levels of attendance, engagement, and term-end knowledge will be higher than what is found in similar classes at most US colleges. And the learning resources you will have available will be more generous than what is typical elsewhere. As a consequence, course-end grades in this class typically skew higher than a normal distribution (and you’ll know what this means for sure once you’ve taken this class!).

To facilitate the calculation of assignment and overall course grades involving multiple types of activities and differing grade weights, most instructors convert letter grades into numerical values and vice-versa. When I assign letter grades to tests, papers, or course and assignment elements, those grades are recorded as numerical scores, which are then weighted as explained in the grading components section of the syllabus and on assignment rubrics. Unless otherwise specified in an assignment’s instructions, the numerical values substituted for letter grades are calibrated so that a modestly lower letter grade on one item or component will not lower your overall grade if you earn higher grades on at least three other equally weighted items. For example, a student who obtains an A- on each of three test essay questions and then a B+ on a fourth item will earn a 90 A- grade for the four items as a whole.

At the end of the semester, I will convert the overall numerical score you have earned into a letter grade using these cut-off points: 93.5% and above, A • 90, A- • 87.5, B+ • 83.5, B • 80, B- • 77.5, C+ • 73.5, C • 70, C- • 67.5, D+ • 63.5, D • 60, D- • Below 60%, F

COURSE POLICIES:

- **Changes to the schedule, specific assignments, or course policies.** Instructors and the University reserve the right to modify course requirements and policies as

unanticipated circumstances dictate. I don't expect to make any major changes to courses once I have written their syllabi, but sometimes I need to make modifications part way through the semester as unexpected challenges or opportunities emerge. If any alterations are necessary, you will be notified as soon as possible.

- **Attendance.** Students are expected to attend class except for documented instances of: 1) documented illness or serious emergency; 2) OARS-approved online accommodations in combination with an instructor-approved plan to replace missed classwork with alternative assignments or; 3) other unavoidable, documented circumstances.

If you need to miss a class or two during the semester for personal, professional, or university-sanctioned obligations, please discuss your situation with me as soon as possible, the same way you will need to do so in future work environments. I have built a maximum number of permissible absences to accommodate these rare types of situations.

If you are unable to attend a class for any reason, you are responsible for obtaining missed materials and submitting assignments when they are due. As discussed below, make sure to contact me as soon as possible about any absences that will influence your ability to complete assignments as scheduled.

Attendance concerns will be documented in Starfish, and *students who miss more than five classes typically will be withdrawn*. If you are tardy for a class, it is your responsibility to alert the instructor at the end of class so that you are not marked as missing and to explain why you are late. Your punctual, regular attendance also is assessed as part of your professionalism grade.

Make sure to consult the university's Academic Calendar before making your end-of-term, mid-term break, and holiday travel plans. Students are expected to attend class and be available for presentations, assignments, and tests whenever the university is in session or final examinations are being held. Out of fairness to all students (most of whom would like to leave early for breaks and holidays), if you book a ticket to leave school early at the end of the term or for a school break, be prepared to receive a zero grade on any assignments you will miss. You should note the date of the final exam for this course (and all of your others) on the first day of the course.

- **Student remote access to classes.** HPU is committed to in-person learning, and the faculty have been instructed to not permit short-term remote attendance to classes unless explicitly approved by the University (specifically, Karen Naylon, our dean of Academic Services, knaylon@highpoint.edu). Long-term remote learning related to accessibility issues must be approved by the Office of Accessibility Resources and Services (OARS).
- **Late work and extensions.** Make-up tests for unscheduled absences normally will not be allowed except in the case of serious extenuating, verifiable circumstances (e.g., a serious illness). As likely will be the case with your future employers, I can be more flexible about postponing tests and giving assignment extensions when you provide advance notice and a reasonable justification for needing to move an assignment's date. If you know you will not complete an assignment, take a test, or give a presentation as scheduled (e.g., required participation in a university-sponsored event or a religious holiday), see if I am willing to grant an extension well before the assignment is due.

If a student's late work is accepted or a late exam permitted, the typical penalty will be a five percent deduction per day, starting the same day the work was due. This penalty will double if a student does not promptly notify me that they have missed a due date, explained why work is tardy, and told me when the work will arrive.

- **The use of electronic devices in class.** Please do not use phones, laptops, or other distracting electronic devices during our seminar meetings unless their use has been approved explicitly or you have been instructed otherwise. Repeated use of electronic devices will result in a reduction in your course grade as explained in the online grading rubric addressing expectations and grading for professionalism and engagement. If you

have OARS accommodations or a unique situation related to computer use, see me for guidance.

- **Recording and distributing course content.** Some students may seek permission to record in-class lectures to assist in their notetaking. Neither your instructor nor your classmates have granted permission for any recorded or online content to be shared outside the instructional purposes of this class. Per college guidelines, “Any audio or video recording in the class, including the instructor’s lecture/discussion, or other classroom activity, is strictly prohibited unless authorized by the instructor and students in the classroom. This includes the unauthorized recording of online discussions and online breakout rooms.”

If you want to record classes to enhance your own studying, this will be encouraged as long as you check in with your instructor ahead of time to make sure you understand the guidelines and restrictions.

You also may not share any completed assignments, test questions, or graded work with other students who are or will be preparing similar assignments. Unless explicitly told otherwise, assignments and feedback in this course are intended to assess your understanding of the material and analysis; distributing or posting online completed work, test items similar to those that other students may be asked to complete in the future, or providing answers to other students undermine the instructional purpose of assignments. Regardless of intent, distributing materials in these ways would provide other students with an unfair academic advantage and violate the University’s Honor Code even if you have no idea who the recipient of your assistance will be. This prohibition includes posting your assignments, tests, or any graded work onto “study” websites, as doing so may help others to violate HPU’s Honor Code.

- **E-Mail accounts.** Like many faculty and staff, I will use your HPU email account to distribute important course materials and announcements. I assume that any message sent to your university mailbox will be accessed by you within one day. When contacting me, use my email account as I may well not see messages sent via Starfish or Blackboard.
- **Using OARS-approved accommodations.** Students with accommodations due to a diagnosed disability must submit appropriate documentation and receive instructions from the Office of Accessibility Resources and Services (336-841-9026; oars@highpoint.edu). Only that office can approve accommodations (including requests to use a computer for note-taking). Remember, by federal policy, students must verbally request each specific accommodation to which they are entitled and proactively discuss with instructors the implementation of their accommodation(s). Accommodations cannot be applied retroactively. If your OARS-approved accommodations include typing exams, a separate testing environment, or extended testing time, you must follow OARS policies and procedures that require you to *make appropriate arrangements with the testing center several days ahead of exams*.
- **Using artificial intelligence assistants, including ChatGPT and similar technologies.** Public access to artificial technology (AI) bots capable of writing and editing clear, elegant prose is a recent development. At least in the short term, you will find that courses and instructors have different policies regarding the use of AI assistants, depending on each course’s specific learning outcomes.

For this class, any use of any AI assistance for proofreading *must* be disclosed in a short note at the start of your assignment (in the title section where you put your name and other assignment specifics).

One of the key objectives for all of the political science classes I teach is to help you learn how to better formulate, organize, synthesize, and articulate *your* comprehension of and views about facts, concepts, theories, and ideas covered in class materials and homework. In other words, my pedagogy and assignments are structured to help you build critical thinking, analytical, writing, and communication skills by applying them. You build and

demonstrate knowledge and mastery by learning how to explain complex ideas in your own words. Consequently, you will *not* be permitted to use AI assistance for *any* of the following purposes:

- To *write*—either in draft or final form—partial or full responses to any prompt on any assignment.
- To *patchwrite* material, which is taking a block of someone else’s writing and replacing some words or slightly rearranging the phrasing to conceal the fact that the writing or structure of the prose is mostly not your original work.
- To *paraphrase* material written by someone else, presenting in any assignment the reworked writing as if you had used your own effort, understanding, and writing skills to synthesize and summarize someone else's ideas.

In short, do not cheat yourself out of opportunities to build and hone *your* fundamental writing skills. If there is any doubt about the authorship of any writing you submit for credit, you will be asked to complete an oral or written assignment demonstrating your ability to clearly explain passages from your assignment as well as the course materials on which the assignment is based.

- **Academic dishonesty.** We all must support and enforce the university's Honor Code. As a condition of membership in the university community, every High Point Student is honor-bound to refrain from cheating, collusion, and plagiarism. You also are honor-bound to report violations of the honor code should you ever observe them. Without exception, students taking or facilitating an inappropriate academic advantage will have an honor code violation case filed, and they will be sanctioned according to the applicable university policies.

While there are many forms of academic dishonesty, its core element is easy to understand: Cheating refers to any effort to gain academic credit or a higher grade by representing that you have behaved appropriately, completed work, and adhered to both syllabus and assignment-specific expectations when this is not true. The HPU Honor Code also states that facilitating cheating by other students is an act of academic dishonesty. Examples of academic dishonesty include:

- The presentation of writing or work done by another student or an AI assistant as your own work (unless explicitly instructed otherwise, you must use quotation marks around phrasing that is not your own)
- Patch writing, which is plagiarism with slight modifications to the original writing (see above)
- Verifying test or assignment answers against other students’ work without having been given instructor permission to do so or without other students being aware they are providing you with assistance
- Splitting assigned work among multiple students who subsequently each represent in papers or exams that they individually completed the entirety of the required work on their own
- Hiring other students or external services to complete your assignments, such that you are passing off the effort and original work of someone else as though it were your own (working with HPU’s tutors, seeing the writing center, or asking an HPU peer to read through your work to assist you with proofreading or provide you with critical feedback are all appropriate stopes and encouraged; having others do your work for you is not appropriate and violates the Honor Code)
- Working with other students or outside resources to obtain test questions or assignments in advance of when they are distributed to all students in a class. Providing such assistance either directly or by posting course assignments to websites facilitates cheating and will be treated as such

- Misconstruing the circumstances under which class meetings, exams, or assignment deadlines have been missed in order to avoid a grade deduction
- Substantially overstating the word count of an assignment in order to meet minimum-length requirements
- Submitting without preapproval by all involved instructors the same work for academic credit in multiple courses

MAJOR TOPICS OUTLINE & ASSIGNMENT DEADLINES:

Please consult the online version of this document for more detail and links to all of your readings and assignments.

Topic 1—Why are you taking this class, and what can you expect to learn?

Topic 2—What is "empirical" research, and what kinds of questions do political scientists seek to answer? In what sense is political science a "science"?

Topic 3—Why would we want to study politics "scientifically"? What do we give up by studying politics this way?: A history and some critiques of the "discipline" of political science

Topic 4—How do you turn an interesting question into a doable research project?: Theories, hypotheses, and causal arguments in practice

Topic 5— How is possible to learn so much about the world by studying examples and samples? Using case studies and other types of samples to make inferences about larger "universes"

Topic 6— What makes some surveys' designs much more likely to yield satisfactory results than others, and why did so many pollsters "miss" in their predictions of who would win the 2016 presidential election? How well did election polls do in 2020 and 2022?

Unit 1 examination

Topic 7— An introduction to some tools of the trade: How to use Google Scholar, Pew's collection of survey datasets, and a leading statistics program

Mid-term break:

Topic 8—Operationalization and variable measurement

Topic 9—Frequencies, min-max, means, and standard deviations (aka, just enough univariate stats to make sure that your variable coding makes will work

Topic 10— Analyzing key univariate stats and comparing mean values across two or more groups

Topic 10—Using Excel (and perhaps confidence intervals) to make figures that compare variable means

Unit 2 examination TBA

Topic 12—Categorical analysis and associations

Topic 13— Correlation, multilinear regression, and multicollinearity

Topic 14— Dummy variables and interaction effects

Topic 15— Logistic regression and its interpretation

In-class examination TBA: SPSS assessment test

Topic 16— What happens next? Why is all of this political science stuff worth doing?

Final examination. Your three-hour final test will be taken during the university-scheduled exam period.

Final exam periods are scheduled by the University and listed here:
<https://www.highpoint.edu/registrar/final-exam-schedule/>.

Do not make your end-of-term travel arrangements until you have verified when your exams are scheduled. By college policy, all students except for students who are graduating in December must take the exam during the regularly scheduled period; early exams will not be given. The examination will include a unit-end test, and you will need to submit a research design essay. For the essay, you will have the option of writing it in advance or completing it during the second half of the final examination period.