

**SENIOR SEMINAR IN  
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS & POLITICAL SCIENCE  
PSC 4099, High Point University  
Prof. Mark Setzler  
Fall 2024**

**Instructor Contact Information:**

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Class Website: <https://marksetzler.org/SeniorSem>  
Office location: Norcross Hall, Room 160

**Seminar Meetings**

Tuesdays and Thursdays: 9:45 - 11:25 in Phillips School of Business, Room 117

**Office hours**

- Monday, Wednesday: 12:40 - 1:40
- Tuesday and Thursday: 8:15 - 9:00; 11:30-12:15
- 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 if you will be coming to office hours. I try to schedule student appointments so they don't overlap and leave you waiting out in the hallway. I understand parking near my office is often difficult and can schedule virtual meetings via MS Teams if you give me some lead time. If you would like to meet remotely, email me so I can send you a meeting link.

**Catalog Description**

This seminar is a capstone course for political science and international relations majors. Working closely with one or more faculty mentors, students will complete and publicly present a substantial original research project on an approved topic of their choice.

**What is this course designed to do?**

This course is not your only option to complete the capstone or 4000-level class requirement for your major (this seminar meets both requirements). Senior seminar is a great choice for students who want to spend a semester researching a topic of their choice or who plan to attend graduate or law school. Be aware that you have signed up to take the highest-level course our department offers; I encourage you to begin the semester by carefully reflecting on whether this is the class for you.

Senior seminar provides a challenging experience in hands-on, largely independent, and advanced learning. The course is designed to be a bridge between regular college coursework and your graduate school training or professional employment after HPU. You will be developing a complex, semester-long independent project involving statistical coding and quantitative analysis. Much of the course's work is self-guided, and your success in getting the most out of the class depends on your ability to be a self-disciplined, engaged, positive, proactive learner. Many students begin the term at least somewhat anxious about the statistical components of the

course; however, the SPSS coding and statistics used in student projects mostly involve techniques previously learned in PSC 2019.

The key to thriving in this class is effectively applying the professional and life skills you have cultivated during your several years at HPU. If you do not feel comfortable working independently with only periodic feedback, receiving feedback on your work in front of others, being held to high standards, or working to the best of your ability, this course may not be a good choice for you. On the other hand, if you are looking for a learning experience that will help you to transition from college into a demanding professional job or graduate school that will reward you for effectively applying your years of training as a social scientist, you are in the right place.

### **Learning Outcomes:**

*Successful students in this course will:*

- Learn to ask interesting social science research questions.
- Demonstrate the research and technology-use skills (both search engine and library database skills) necessary to develop a research-based literature review.
- Craft a research design capable of testing causal theories with appropriate hypotheses, dependent variables, independent variables, and controls.
- Conduct basic statistical coding and quantitative analyses using SPSS.
- Leave the course with a strong grasp of how the scientific method and basic statistical techniques are selected, applied, and analyzed in contemporary social science.
- Leave the course well prepared to explain and interpret findings from the statistical techniques most often used in political science, the other social sciences, and major-relevant professional settings.
- Make advances in presenting original research with the aid of presentation software and computer-generated graphics.
- Apply and refine the soft skills necessary for professional advancement.

### **Required and Recommended Materials**

Most of your reading in this class will involve independent research related to your thesis project. Consequently, there is no required textbook, although you will be asked to carefully read various materials posted on the course website that either explain or apply the core concepts and research methodologies taught in this course.

At many points during the term, will be asked to review screencasts, and you should view these assignments as just as important as assigned readings; in most cases, they are being assigned so that we can apply their key concepts in class through hands-on work.

Course assignments and your thesis will require the 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.

### **Student Assessment**

*Your course grade will be based on the following assignments, summarized here and described in greater detail below:*

Assignment	Percent of Grade	
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		<b>Components</b>
Final Thesis	30	
Final Presentation	15	
Preliminary Thesis Assignments	20	(1) Research question assignments – 5% (2) Thesis front end (the study’s justification, and theory, supported by a literature review) – 5% (3) Methods and operationalization section, with a codebook appendix – 5% (4) Results sections that summarize hypotheses tests and findings (including tables and figures) – 5%
Professional Development Assignments	25	(1) Mentor meetings – 5% (2) SPSS proficiency assignments – 10% (3) Preliminary presentations (Front end, results section – 5% (4) Final practice presentation (full project) – 5%
Engagement in small exercises and professionalism	10	

The primary purpose of this course is to complete a **thesis**. This multi-section paper will present the findings of an original research project statistically analyzing the results of a publicly available survey dataset. A detailed handout explaining the expectations for the final version of the assignment will be available online from the start of the semester.

At the end of the semester, **on Reading Day**, students will give a **presentation** summarizing their thesis work and take audience questions. A detailed handout explaining the expectations for this assignment is available online.

Throughout the semester, you will submit **preliminary thesis assignments**, which are graded checkpoints to help you stay on track; collectively, these assignments and your grade for professionalism will determine your final course grade more than the thesis paper itself. Separate assignments will require you to formulate a suitable research question and write thesis sections justifying your study, the way data will be used in your study, and a summary of your main findings. Additional information about each of these assignments will be provided along the way, but draft versions of each assignment are already available online.

You will also complete **professional development assignments**: meeting with your thesis mentor, completing an SPSS workshop assignment, and making preliminary presentations. You will receive detailed handouts further explaining each of these assignments.

Finally, you will receive a grade assessing your **participation, engagement, and professionalism**. This course requires you to exhibit the habits and attitudes that will be essential for you to thrive in a post-college professional job or graduate school. Being professional in this class includes carefully reviewing materials that you have been asked to review ahead of classes, staying focused on work when in class, consistent attendance, honoring appointments, and completing goals and assignments in a timely and responsible fashion. It also entails using well the time that you are supposed to be spending on independent work, following instructions carefully, consistently putting in your best effort, and carefully applying the feedback you are given to help you improve over time. You will receive critical feedback and must-follow guidance on your project—everyone in this course will. This is normal for thesis work, and is standard operation procedure in the employment fields for which we are training you. For more

general guidelines on the expectations in this area, you should review the online rubric I use to grade professionalism in all of my other classes.

## Grading

University policy mandates that letter grades accurately reflect student performance. As noted in the University Bulletin, 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 typical student work. C-range grades are assigned to “satisfactory work” that at least meets the course’s minimum 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 at this level. An F grade indicates that a significant portion of the work has not been completed or is so deficient that it does not merit any college credit.

To facilitate the calculation of overall assignment and 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, and 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 two other equally weighted items. For example, a student who obtains an A- on two essay questions and then a B+ on a third question will earn a 90 A- grade for the three 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: 92.5% and above, A • 90, A- • 87.5, B+ • 82.5, B • 80, B- • 77.5, C+ • 72.5, C • 70, C- • 67.5, D+ • 62.5, 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 (e.g. weather-related cancellations, having too many presentations scheduled for a given day) 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 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 four classes typically will be withdrawn*. If you are tardy for a class, it is your responsibility to alert me 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 mid-term break and holiday travel plans.* Students are expected to attend class and be available for presentations and assignments whenever the university is in session. Out of fairness to all students (many of whom would like to leave early for breaks and holidays), if you book a ticket to leave school early for a school break, be prepared to receive a zero grade on any assignments you miss, including other students' presentations. Note: To allow faculty and students to attend the required final presentations, this class does not have a final exam. **Instead, final presentations will be on Reading Day**, which has the added plus of giving you time to make last-minute revisions to your thesis if necessary.

- **E-Mail accounts.** I rely on 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, please use my email account; I may well not see messages sent via Starfish or Blackboard.
- **Starfish flags.** HPU has adopted the Starfish system a way to alert you and others on campus when you may need additional support to achieve academic success in your courses. When instructors observe situations in which you are struggling with assignments or tests, seem disengaged from class, or even in distress, they may raise a Starfish flags to notify you of a concern. They may also refer you to your academic advisor, or another support resource on campus. Flags do not directly affect your grade or carry any punitive consequence, but they are intended to signal that you need to make some changes in how you are approaching your coursework
- **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. There are a limited number of absences built into the syllabus; any instances of remote attendance will need to be approved on a day-by-day basis by your professor and Dr. Kifer, the Chair of Political Science, mkifer@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 and presentations for unscheduled absences normally will not be allowed except for 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, explain why work is tardy, and tell me when your 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 your learning style, see me for guidance.

- **Recording and distributing course content.** Some students may want to 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 our college's 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 assist in effective note-taking, this will be encouraged as long as you check in with me 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 might 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.

- **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*.

**When and how can you use AI in *this* course?** Public access to artificial technology chatbots capable of generating clear, elegant prose is a recent development. At least in the short term, you may find that courses and instructors may have different policies regarding the use of AI, depending on each course's specific learning outcomes. Read this course's policies very closely:

*Here, you may use AI to assist in proofreading; editing **your** writing for clarity, and grammar; and getting general feedback on ways to improve your writing.* Here are some rules and suggestions:

The HPU Honor Code says that you may not claim academic credit for work you did not do and must explicitly acknowledge sources when writing is not your own. US scholars often formally acknowledge the assistance of editors and other assistants, but not AI editing assistance. For this class, any AI assistance with submitted work *must* be disclosed in a short note at the start of your assignment, and your note should include a short description of how you used AI (put this information in the title section where have noted your name and other assignment specifics). This is a requirement that is specific to my class; I want to see how and when these resources are being used so that I can provide you with guidance.

Before you submit any work in this class, you *should* use the free version of Grammarly (or a comparable resource) to help you identify basic glitches in your writing. Spelling mistakes in professional writing are no longer acceptable because most word processors

have built-in spellchecking; that is where we are arriving with basic grammar errors, too. Carefully review any Grammarly suggestions to make sure they are correct (in complex sentences, Grammarly sometimes recommends commas in the wrong place or gets things wrong with subject/verb agreement).

When using AI to proofread, you are responsible for any factual, grammar, or phrasing issues introduced into your writing (just like you would be if the spell-checker “corrected” your spelling to a word whose meaning differs from what you were trying to write). As has long been the case with an electronic thesaurus, don’t use any word or phrasing you do not understand completely and that fits the exact idea you are trying to communicate.

Once you have written and carefully proofread an assignment, consider uploading it to Claude.ai for additional feedback and suggestions. Here is a prompt I might use for this purpose:

*“I am a college senior writing part of my senior thesis. This assignment is written for an academic audience of college students and professors who do not necessarily have a background in my topic area. Give me feedback on the clarity and elegance of my writing. Are there general areas or specific instances where the writing could be more effective? As you are suggesting edits, keep in mind that this needs to be my writing and in my voice: (And then paste or upload the full assignment).”*

Here are some follow-up prompts you might use:

*Do you see additional areas or specific sentences that could be clearer? Are there places where the argument would be stronger with additional examples or citations? Are there instances where the writing could be more concise?*

*You also may carefully use AI to assist you in locating and understanding previous research related to your topic. As an exception to the general rule noted above, you do not need to declare your use of Google Scholar; I expect everyone to use Google Scholar, which relies on AI algorithms to generate search engine results. Especially early on in the research process, Consensus’s AI tool (<https://consensus.app/>) is a very useful resource to nail down a research topic that is both new/interesting, but non-subscribers have limited access time.*

**When and how can’t you use AI in this course (i.e., what uses would be considered to be a violation of the Honor Code’s provisions that you may only take credit for your own ideas and work)?** One of the key objectives for all of the political science classes I teach is to help students learn how to better formulate, organize, synthesize, and articulate *their* comprehension of and views about facts, concepts, theories, and ideas covered in class materials. 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 and present original arguments in your own words.

Consequently, you will *not* be permitted to use AI for *any* of the following purposes:

- To *write*—either in draft or final form—any assignment. In other words, think of AI as a tutor. Unless told otherwise, is perfectly acceptable for you to author an assignment and then ask a friend or University tutor for editorial assistance to improve your writing, but you can’t ask a friend, tutor, AI, or anyone else to author your assignments for you.
- To *paraphrase* material written by someone else if you then present that writing in any assignment as if you had used your own effort, understanding, and writing skills to synthesize and summarize someone else’s ideas. Again, AI can’t do the writing for you even when you are summarizing and citing the ideas of other authors.

- These restrictions above include patchwriting (i.e., taking AI-generated phrasing and either substituting or reordering words to make it appear as though the ideas and writing were your own).

In short, do not cheat yourself out of opportunities to build and hone *your* fundamental reading and 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 hand-written assignment demonstrating your ability to clearly explain passages from your assignment.

- **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)
- 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 work. Don't patch write unless explicitly told you may do so in this class (you will be given different guidelines when writing about the coding of variables in the methods section of your thesis).
- 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, using AI resources to edit, or asking an HPU peer to read through your work to assist you with proofreading or provide you with critical feedback are all appropriate stops and encouraged within the context of this class; 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 to avoid a grade deduction
- Substantially overstating the word count of an assignment to meet minimum-length requirements



- Submitting without preapproval by all involved instructors the same work for academic credit in multiple courses

## Course Schedule and Topics

The table below lists the course topics in the order we will cover them and the assignments that will accompany them. Assignment specifics and due dates will be noted in the online schedule.

<b>Topic Schedule</b>		<b>Assignments Due</b>
Week 1	Course introduction and identifying a suitable thesis topic	
Weeks 2 & 3	Refining your research question, finding datasets, and using SPSS to prepare datasets	Preliminary topic/s
Week 4	Using Google Scholar/ILL to obtain scholarly resources and interpreting statistical tables/regression	Revised topic with a suitable dataset
Week 5	Operationalizing your key variables	Mentoring meeting #1
Week 6	SPSS Workshop: Coding and labeling your key variables; verifying data work with frequencies, descriptives, and codebooks	Thesis part 1 (draft of the “front end” of the thesis”)  SPSS workshop assignment
Week 7	Coding and writing week	Mentoring meeting #2
Week 8	Midterm break	
Week 9	SPSS Workshop: Descriptive statistics, frequencies & bar charts with >1 variable	SPSS workshop assignment
Week 10	Student presentations (front-end, coding summary, descriptive statistics table)	Preliminary presentations
Week 11	SPSS Workshop: Correlation & multivariate analysis with linear and logistic regression	Thesis part 2 (draft of the “methods and data” section)  SPSS workshop assignment
Week 12	Applying SPSS to analyze multivariate relationships in your own data	
Week 13	Student presentations (including bar charts and regression findings)	Preliminary presentations
Weeks 14 & 15	Finalizing your projects	Thesis part 3 (draft of the “findings” and “conclusion” sections)  Graded preliminary Presentations

Weeks 16 & 17	Final presentations and theses due	<b>Final Presentations are on Reading Day.</b> The revised thesis will be due the following Wednesday to allow for minor revision.
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