

POLS 5300 – Seminar in Scope and Methods

Instructor: Lucas Lothamer

Email: llothamer@uttyler.edu

Time: M 6-850p

Location: CAS 208

Office Hours: M/W 11:30a-1p and by appointment (CAS 123)

Course Description

This graduate seminar discusses political science as a scientific discipline in which inquiry is accomplished through use of the scientific method. The importance of theory grounding research is discussed along with defining concepts, creating measures, understanding sampling and distributions and how this affects descriptive explanations of the target population. Students will learn about observational research, the limits of such studies, the direction of the discipline toward causal inference, and research designs and data that achieve causal explanations of political phenomena.

Communication

I am always available to chat and happy to meet with students. If you ever need to chat, you can either stop by during office hours or email me to make an appointment (either in office or online). When emailing, please allow 24 hours for a response (emails over weekends may not be responded to till the next business day).

Be sure to only email using your student email account. Due to FERPA, I may not be able to respond with course information to personal email accounts.

Assignments

Participation: 30%

Paper 1: 20%

Paper 2: 20%

Paper 3: 20%

Class Presentation: 10%

Participation: Part of doing well in this course is showing up and participating in the class discussion. Participation is more than simply being physically present. It is achieved through completing the readings, sharing your thoughts in discussion, and taking part in class activities.

Paper 1: Students will complete a 5-10 page paper with citations mapping out an original theory of theirs. Past papers authored by the student can be used however the focus will be on mapping out the theory. The paper should use signposting and good transitions to clearly walk readers through their theory.

Paper 2: Students will author a 2-5 page paper on the key measures and variables they will use, taking care to indicate the nature of the dependent and key independent variables – along with appropriate control variables – that are essential for studying their theory outlined in Paper 1. These papers should reference past concepts and measures used by past studies and explain the rationale for their use.

Paper 3: Students will write a 5-10 page paper on their data collection, dataset, and specific tests or experimental designs and protocols used to offer evidence in support of their theory. Students should indicate the strengths of the approach of their method, any potential drawbacks of their methods, why their methods are appropriate given the theory and question being tested, and explain how results will be interpreted.

Presentation: Students will give a short, 10-minute presentation on their research paper to provide an overview of their theory, concepts, measures, data, and tests being used.

Letter Grades:

A = 90-100

B = 80-89

C = 70-79

D = 60-69

F = 59 and below

I will round up to the nearest decimal point. For example, if you end with an 89.5 I will round that from a B to an A. There will be no exceptions to this grading policy.

Late Work

As a general rule, I will not accept late work. This means all assignments, quizzes, exams, etc. are due by their posted due date. Only in extreme extenuating circumstances, such as a medical emergency, shall late work be considered.

Disability Services

I will abide by all accommodations approved by the university to ensure fair accessibility. It is the student's responsibility to meet with the instructor and inform them of the necessary accommodation on or around the first day of class. Do not wait to do so right before an exam!

To apply for services, please follow the link below:

<https://www.uttyler.edu/academics/success-services/disability-services/>

Title IX Reporting

The University of Texas at Tyler is committed to the principle that the university's learning and working environment be free from inappropriate conduct of a sexual nature. Sexual harassment in any form will not be tolerated, and individuals who engage in such conduct will be subjected to

disciplinary action, whether on or off campus. I will report any and all behavior that fits the definition of sexual harassment to the appropriate office.

On-Campus Food Pantry

The Patriot Pantry is dedicated to helping students, staff, faculty and community members in need. Its mission is to provide food and personal care items to members of the UT Tyler community. Our pantry is completely donor funded, and it is our goal that no student goes to class hungry! For more information please visit <https://www.uttyler.edu/offices/service-learning/food-pantry/>

Student Counseling

UT Tyler provides in-person and online counseling services to students. For more information, please visit <https://www.uttyler.edu/student-life/health-wellness/student-counseling-center/>

Artificial Intelligence Policy

UT Tyler is committed to exploring and using artificial intelligence (AI) tools as appropriate for the discipline and task undertaken. We encourage discussing AI tools' ethical, societal, philosophical, and disciplinary implications. All uses of AI should be acknowledged, as this aligns with our commitment to honor and integrity, as noted in UT Tyler's Honor Code. Faculty and students must not use protected information, data, or copyrighted materials when using any AI tool. Additionally, users should be aware that AI tools rely on predictive models to generate content that may appear correct but is sometimes shown to be incomplete, inaccurate, taken without attribution from other sources, and/or biased. Consequently, an AI tool should not be considered a substitute for traditional approaches to research. You are ultimately responsible for the quality and content of the information you submit. Misusing AI tools that violate the guidelines specified for this course (see below) is considered a breach of academic integrity. The student will be subject to disciplinary actions as outlined in UT Tyler's Academic Integrity Policy.

AI is not permitted in this course at all. I expect all work students submit for this course to be their own. I have carefully designed all assignments and class activities to support your learning. Doing your own work, without human or artificial intelligence assistance, is best for your efforts in mastering course learning objectives. For this course, I expressly forbid using ChatGPT or any other artificial intelligence (AI) tools for any stage of the work process, including brainstorming. Deviations from these guidelines will be considered a violation of UT Tyler's Honor Code and academic honesty values.

Students Rights and Responsibilities

To know and understand the policies that affect your rights and responsibilities as a student at UT Tyler, please follow this link: <http://www.uttyler.edu/wellness/rightsresponsibilities.php>

Course Schedule

The following is the planned schedule for the semester. While I do not foresee any changes to this, I reserve the right to make necessary changes to the syllabus in order to accommodate unforeseen events or due to the pace of the course.

8/24 – Course Introduction & The Scientific Method

Green, Amelia Hoover. 2013. “How to Read Political Science: A Guide in Four Steps.”

8/31 – Theoretical Inquiry (Map out the theories!)

Gray, Kurt. 2017. “How to Map Theory: Reliable Methods are Fruitless Without Rigorous Theory.” *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 12(5): 731-41.

Fox, Richard L. and Jennifer L. Lawless. 2014. “Uncovering the Origins of the Gender Gap in Political Ambition.” *American Political Science Review* 108(3): 499-519.

Wood, Dan B. 2009. “Presidential Saber Rattling and the Economy.” *American Journal of Political Science* 53(3): 695-709.

Rigby, Elizabeth and Gerald C. Wright. 2013. “Political Parties and Representation of the Poor in the American States.” *Midwest Political Science Association* 57(3): 552-65.

Carnes, Nicholas and Noam Lupu. 2016. “Do Voters Dislike Working Class Candidates? Voter Biases and the Descriptive Underrepresentation of the Working Class.” *American Political Science Review* 110(4): 832-44.

9/7 – Labor Day (No Class)

9/14 – Concepts

Gerring, John. 1999. “What Makes a Concept Good? A Criterial Framework for Understanding Concept Formation in the Social Sciences.” *Polity* 31(3): 357-93.

Collier, David and James E. Mahon Jr. 1993. “Conceptual ‘Stretching’ Revisited: Adapting Categories in Comparative Analysis.” *American Political Science Review* 87(4): 845-55.

Sen, Maya and Omar Wasow. 2016. “Race as a Bundle of Sticks: Designs That Estimate Effects of Seemingly Immutable Characteristics.” *Annual Review of Political Science* 19(1): 499-522.

Iyengar, Shanto, Yphtach Lelkes, Matthew Levendusky, Neil Malhotra, and Sean J. Westwood. 2019. “The Origins and Consequences of Affective Polarization in the United States.” *Annual Review of Political Science* 22: 129-46.

9/21 – Measurement

Adcock, Robert, and David Collier. 2001. “Measurement Validity: A Shared Standard for Qualitative and Quantitative Research.” *American Political Science Review* 95(3): 529-46.

Flake, Jessica Kay, and Eiko I. Fried. 2020. “Measurement Schmeasurement: Questionable Measurement Practices and How to Avoid Them.” *Advances in Methods and Practices in Psychological Science* 3(4): 456-65.

Treier, Shawn, and Simon Jackmon. 2008. “Democracy as a Latent Variable.” *American Journal of Political Science* 52(1): 201-17.

Campos, Nicolas and Christopher Federico. 2026. “A New Measure of Affective Polarization.” *American Political Science Review* 120(1): 160-78.

9/28 – Surveys and Sampling

- Berensky, Adam J. 2017. “Measuring Public Opinion with Surveys.” *Annual Review of Political Science* 20: 309-29.
- Lupu, Noam and Kristin Michelitch. 2018. “Advances in Survey Methods for the Developing World.” *Annual Review of Political Science* 21: 195-214.
- Ansolabehere, Stephen and Douglas Rivers. 2013. “Cooperative Survey Research.” *Annual Review of Political Science* 16: 307-29.
- Fowler. 2013. *Survey Research Methods*, 5th Edition. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.
- Prosser, Christopher and Jonathan Mellon. 2018. “The Twilight of the Polls? A Review of Trends in Polling Accuracy and the Causes of Polling Misses.” *Government and Opposition* 53(4): 757-90.

10/05 – Description

- Gerring, John. 2012. “Mere Description.” *British Journal of Political Science* 42(4): 721-46.
- De Kadt, Daniel and Anna Grzymala-Busse. 2025. “Good Description.” SocArXiv preprint.
- Fowler, Anthony, Seth J. Hill, Jeffrey B. Lewis, Chris Tausanovitch, Lynn Vavreck, and Christopher Warshaw. 2023. “Moderates.” *American Political Science Review* 11(2): 643-60.

10/12 – Sampling, Probability, and Experiments.

In-Class Examples and Lab

10/19 – Experimental Design

- Druckman, James N., Donald P. Green, James H. Kuklinski, and Arthur Lupia. 2011. “Experimentation in Political Science.” *Cambridge Handbook of Experimental Political Science* 3-11
- Druckman, James N., Donald P. Green, James H. Kuklinski, and Arthur Lupia. 2011. “An Introduction to Core Concepts.” *Cambridge Handbook of Experimental Political Science* 15-26
- Tomz, Michael R. and Jessica L.P. Weeks. 2013. “Public Opinion and the Democratic Peace.” *American Political Science Review* 107(4): 849-65.
- Gerber, Alan S., Donald P. Green, and Christopher W. Larmier. 2008. “Social Pressure and Voter Turnout: Evidence From a Large-Scale Field Experiment.” *American Political Science Review* 102(1): 33-48.

10/26 – Qualtrics, Design, and R

11/02 – Linear Regression

- Spirling, Arthur and Brandon M. Stewart. 2025. “What Good is a Regression? Inference to the Best Explanation and the Practice of Political Science Research.” *Journal of Politics* 87(4): 1587-99.

11/09 – MV Regression

- Berry, William D and Stanley Feldman. 1985. “Multiple Regression in Practice.” *SAGE Publications*

11/16 – Logit (Maybe)

11/23 – Thanksgiving Break (No Class)

12/07 – Presentations

