

PLS 201: INTRODUCTION TO METHODS OF POLITICAL ANALYSIS

Lectures—Mondays and Wednesdays: 3:00-4:20pm (Akers Hall 137)

Lab Sections—Tuesdays OR Wednesdays (S. Kedzie Lab 222)

I. Course Instructor:

Marty P. Jordan, Ph.D. Candidate

Managing Editor, *American Journal of Political Science*

Department of Political Science, Office: 236 S. Kedzie Hall

Email: jordan61@msu.edu OR marty.jordan@gmail.com

(*Please include PLS 201 in the subject line)

Office Hours: Tuesdays (2:00 – 4:00pm) or by Appointment

Honors Lab Recitation Section (03H): Wednesdays, 12:40 – 1:30pm

II. Course Teaching Assistants:

TEACHING ASSISTANT	EMAIL / OFFICE	LAB RECITATION SECTION
Erica Briggs	briggse3@msu.edu S. Kedzie 230	(1) Wed. 10:20am – 11:10am (2) Wed. 11:30am – 12:20pm
Zac Coeman	coemanza@msu.edu S. Kedzie 228	(4) Wed. 9:10am – 10:00am (5) Tues. 9:10am – 10:00am
Tim Hibbard	hibbard6@msu.edu S. Kedzie 233	(6) Tues. 10:20am – 11:10am (7) Tues. 11:30am – 12:20pm
Nick Bichay	bichayni@msu.edu S. Kedzie 227	(8) Tues. 12:40pm – 1:30 pm (9) Tues. 1:50pm – 2:40pm
Alexis Smith	Undergraduate Learning Assistant	

III. Course Objectives:

Consider these questions:

- What is the probability that two countries will go to war in a given year?
- How likely is it that an incumbent will be re-elected to the state legislature?
- What factors help explain how justices on the U.S. Supreme Court decide a case?

While we may have general intuitions about how to answer these questions, one of the broad goals of political science is to seek a more rigorous and systematic answer to these types of inquiries. This course is designed to introduce you to the *scientific study* of politics and make you aware of some of the tools political scientists use to analyze political phenomena of interest.

Although this course emphasizes and relies on statistics and numbers, it is not a “math” class (although you should be familiar with basic algebra). Rather, this course is about logic, critical thinking, scientific analysis, and the use of statistics and numbers as tools to organize information, understand and assess sociopolitical phenomena. You will learn about developing research questions, setting up a test of those questions (research design), gathering relevant information (data), and making sense of that information (analysis). The course will foster comprehension of theoretical aspects of statistical analysis and the use of computer software for conducting analysis.

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There are five main objectives. First, you will become generally familiar with the “philosophy of science” as it pertains to the social sciences. Second, you will be introduced to different puzzles, theories, and sub-fields of political science. Third, you will learn about the importance of research design and scientific methods. Fourth, you will gain an understanding of how to use numbers and data to accurately construct and test theoretically-motivated hypotheses. Finally, you will incorporate your statistical knowledge into a generally persuasive yet still truthful argument. Ultimately, our main goal is to tie all of these objectives together into a coherent understanding of the discipline of political science.

As such, you should leave this course with the following competencies:

- You should learn about some common errors in human thinking and how these errors sometimes lead us to wrong (if comfortable) conclusions.
- You should understand that our discipline is made up of a set of rules and methods that are in place to prevent us from falling into these common human thinking errors.
- You should have a better understanding of the different subfields in political science and be able to employ both qualitative and quantitative methods to answer interesting and important research questions.
- You should have experience working with and writing about data on a broad array of topics ranging from international conflict to elections to the courts.
- You should become a *critical* consumer of news, data, and social science research results, and learn how to make “some” sense of the daily deluge of data and information.
- You should have a clearer idea about what political scientists do, and how to properly analyze academic studies, evaluate evidence, consider and develop theories, and summarize a large amount of literature in a manner that complements your own research.

Prerequisites for this course: PLS 200 or MC 201

IV. Course Materials:

➤ Textbook and Readings:

REQUIRED: Please purchase, rent, borrow, or check out from the library the following (in hardcover or paperback):

- Wheelan, Charles. 2013. *Naked Statistics: Stripping the Dread from the Data*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company.

OPTIONAL: We will be using Microsoft Excel for the statistical analysis portion of this course. If you are unfamiliar with Excel, the following text may be a useful resource for you. Using an earlier edition, such as the 2nd edition, is also acceptable.

- Neil J. Salkind. 2016. *Excel Statistics: A Quick Guide* (3rd edition). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

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There will also be additional assigned materials—e.g., book chapters, research articles, news reports, video links—that I will make available via the course website on D2L (<http://d2L.msu.edu>).

➤ Poll Everywhere:

We will also use the interactive platform, Poll Everywhere, to enhance your participation and engagement during lectures (and possibly lab recitation sections). Poll Everywhere will allow you to submit answers to multiple choice and survey questions during class in real time via your cellphone, tablet, or computer. A smart phone is not required. If using your cellphone, you will be able to respond via text message or an app on your iOS or Android device. If using your computer or tablet, you will also be able to respond to polls by visiting PolleEv.com/martypjordan.

REQUIRED: To participate in class using Poll Everywhere, you are required to register your device by clicking on the following link and filling in your information:

<https://www.polleverywhere.com/register?p=76qzj-iis6&u=SGSmqgX5>. **In addition, you must bring \$2 cash to your first recitation section to cover the cost of this service.** Failure to do so may result in lost participation points for lecture and recitation section. I will provide more instructions on how to participate using Poll Everywhere on the first day of class.

➤ Software and Calculator:

We will use Microsoft Excel in this course to calculate descriptive statistics and perform statistical analyses. You are not required to have Microsoft Excel on your computer as all computer labs on MSU's campus has the software program. However, owning a copy of Microsoft Excel may make your life a little easier. In addition, you may want to have a scientific calculator for use on problem sets and exams. Any calculator with power functions, root functions, logarithms and exponential functions is sufficient. Graphing calculators are not allowed.

➤ Course Website:

The course website is Desire2Learn (hereafter D2L): <http://d2L.msu.edu>. You can access the additionally assigned readings and activities on D2L. Grades will be posted periodically on the course website. I will also announce schedule or course changes here. And, any assignment submissions will be done electronically via the Dropbox feature on D2L. Please check our course website on a regular basis.

V. Course Requirements:

TWO EXAMS: (25% EACH). There will be both a midterm and a final exam administered during the semester. The format of each exam will be described in a class session before the exam, but, in general, both exams will consist of a mixture of multiple choice, short answer, and/or problem solving questions. The exams will assess your knowledge of material contained within the assigned readings, from lecture, from lab sections, and from our course discussions. The first exam will cover material from the first half of the course. The final exam is not cumulative, though information from the beginning of the semester will certainly be helpful as we discuss information from the latter portion of the class.

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RESEARCH PROJECT: (20% TOTAL). You will be asked to complete a research project using one of several provided datasets. This project will build on the concepts and practices that you learn from this course. I will provide more details in a few weeks, but in general, you will first select a dataset (of interest to you) from a set of five datasets that I will make available. With your dataset selected, you will then be asked to come up with a research question, put forward a theory (or theories) that might answer your question, carry out hypothesis testing from cross tabulation calculations, difference of means or proportions tests, or basic regression analyses, and make inferences pertaining to your research question. See below for the key components needed in the final write-up of your research project:

Intro:	What is your Research Question? Why does it matter?
Theory and Hypotheses:	What theory or theories might answer this question? What are your hypotheses to test the theory or theories?
Data and Methods:	What dataset and variables are you using to analyze hypotheses?
Preliminary Findings:	Using your dataset and selected variables, what are your preliminary results from cross tabulation calculations, difference of means or proportions tests, or basic regression analyses? How can you best visually present your findings (e.g., table, graph)?
Limitations:	What are some potential limitations to your research design or findings? What might be another way to check those results (i.e., robustness check), to ensure they are not due to other factors?
Conclusion:	In a paragraph, recap what did you study, what did you find, and why does it matter (what are the implications)?

Overall, the final research proposal should be between 4 – 6 pages (double-spaced, 12pt. standard font, 1-inch margins), is worth 20% of your final grade, and is due Wednesday, April 25, 2018. This may all sound ominous but you will be capable of doing all of these tasks by the end of the semester.

LAB ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION: (20%). Attendance and active participation in your lab section is an important part of this course. We cover new material in lecture, and then students get a chance to engage this material in their individual sections. This is where students get to ask more in-depth questions, follow-up questions, discuss any problems with material, and truly dissect the material in a manner that cannot be done in lecture. Your section grade will be a function of two components: attendance (10%) and active participation (10%) in any in-class activities such as group work, individual exercises and quizzes. Your individual section Teaching Assistants are responsible for grading your punctuality and participation and will advise you of their policies.

Attendance will be taken in all of the sections. Each student is allowed **TWO** unexcused absences in their section. This will cover illness, missed alarms, gone to the movies, etc. Beginning with the 3rd absence, students will lose 2 percentage points of their attendance grade for each subsequent absence (out of 10% total). Students will also lose their participation points for all missed classes. There are no makeups for missed quizzes and exercises. Medical absences for more than one class session should also be brought to my attention to ensure that you are not falling too far behind in the course.

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LECTURE ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION: (10%). The final portion of your grade is based on your ability and willingness to contribute to our lectures. What does this require of you?: (1) Preparation, (2) Regular Attendance, and (3) Meaningful Participation.

(1) Preparation: I expect you to complete the assigned readings and activities for each class as scheduled and come prepared to answer review questions, discuss the material, or ask insightful questions.

(2) Regular Attendance (5%): I also expect you to attend class on a regular basis. You will not do well in this course if you do not show up. If you miss a class, you bear the responsibility of getting notes, information about assignments, or changes to the syllabi from a classmate. See the section below on how to deal with Late Work, Make-Ups, Missed Quizzes or Exams.

We will use Poll Everywhere at the beginning of lectures to take attendance. **Each student will be allowed FOUR unexcused absences during lecture.** This will cover illness, missed alarms, gone to the movies, etc. Beginning with the 5th absence, students will lose 1 percentage point of their attendance grade for each subsequent absence (out of 5% total). Medical absences for more than one class session should also be brought to my attention to ensure that you are not falling too far behind in the course.

(3) Meaningful Participation (5%): Meaningful participation comes in a number of forms: asking questions to clarify course topics, answering questions that I pose in class, drawing connections between course topics and current events, and offering respectful comments during class. Meaningful participation is not checking your cellphone, surfing the web, or chatting with your neighbor during class conversations or activities.

In other words, good participation is simply being a good member of our class community. Everyone's experience in this course is enhanced by regular attendance and active participation; conversely, everyone's experience suffers if individuals do not attend and participate. Remember that a sincere question often adds as much (if not more) to our understanding of the course material as an explanation of the week's readings. So, don't be afraid to speak up!

Your participation will also be gauged using Poll Everywhere. I will post several questions throughout each lecture to stimulate class discussion and review your understanding of key course material. You will need to answer (right or wrong) all questions during lecture to receive full credit for participation that class. If you answer zero questions, you will get no credit for participation. If you answer some but not all of the questions, you will get 50% credit for that day. Each class session will be treated as a separate grade, regardless of the number of questions that I ask.

I will drop your FOUR lowest scores during the semester and take the average of the rest for your lecture participation grade. This means, in other words, that you can completely miss four class sessions without being penalized in terms of your participation grade. Because of this cushion, there will be no make-up points, excused absences, or any additional allowances made if you forgot your cell phone, tablet, computer, or anything similar.

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You must be registered with Poll Everywhere and pay your \$2 cash before the start of lecture on Wednesday, January 10th. If you fail to register with Poll Everywhere, then you won't receive credit for class that day and any subsequent days where you are not registered and have paid your \$2.

You are prohibited from entering responses using the cell phones, tablets, or computers for classmates who are absent. Students caught engaged in this activity will receive a grade of zero for the entire participation portion of the course and may have formal disciplinary proceedings for academic dishonesty initiated against them. The same action will be taken against the student(s) whose cellphones, tablets, or computers are being used for this activity.

VI. Student Evaluation and Grading:

Grading Weights—your grade will be determined using the following weights:

- Midterm Exam: 25%
- Final Exam: 25%
- Research Project: 20%
- Lab Attendance (10%) and Participation (10%): 20%
- Lecture Attendance (5%) and Participation (5%): 10%

- TOTAL: 100%

Grading Scale:

4.0	90 – 100	2.5	75 – 79	1.0	60 – 64
3.5	85 – 89	2.0	70 – 74	0.0	Below 60
3.0	80 – 84	1.5	65 – 69		

*This is the grade scale that I will use to guide my grading decisions. If you earn the percentage listed above, you are assured at least that grade. However, I reserve the right to curve the final grades upward should I deem it necessary.

VII. Course Outline:

The outline below is subject to changes as necessary to account for the unique dynamics of our class. In the event that changes are made, they will be announced with ample notice during lecture, sent via email, and/or documented on D2L. The readings and activities assigned to a particular date will be discussed in class. You should be prepared to answer any questions about the material for that day.

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Date	Topic	Assigned Readings and Activities / Due Dates
Monday, Jan. 8	Intro & Syllabus Review	*Sign up for Poll Everywhere (using the link above or sent in email) and bring \$2 to your lab recitation on Tuesday or Wednesday
Wed., Jan. 10	Errors in Human Thinking and Coping Mechanisms	*Read Kida: Introduction: A Six-Pack of Problems (D2L)
Monday, Jan. 15	MLK Day---NO Class	
Wed., Jan. 17	Science vs. Pseudo-science—What is Science?	*Read Kida: Science vs. Pseudo-science (D2L) *Read Okasha, Chp. 1: What is science? (D2L)
Monday, Jan. 22	Philosophy of Science: Popper, Hume, Feyerabend	*Read Okasha, Chp. 2: Scientific Reasoning (D2L)
Wed., Jan. 24	Philosophy of Science: Kuhn & Paradigm Shifts; Political Science vs. 'Hard' Sciences	*Read Okasha, Chp. 5: Scientific Change and Scientific Revolutions (D2L) *Read There's No Such Thing as "Sound Science" At: https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/the-easiest-way-to-dismiss-good-science-demand-sound-science/ (D2L)
Monday, Jan. 29	The Research Process	*Read Wheelan, Chp. 1: What's the Point? *Read Pollock, Chp. 3: Proposing Explanations, Framing Hypotheses, and Making Comparisons (D2L)
Wed., Jan. 31	Descriptive Statistics and Inference I	*Read Wheelan, Chp. 2: Descriptive Statistics *Read Wheelan, Chp. 3: Deceptive Description
Monday, Feb. 5	Descriptive Statistics and Inference II	*Read Wheelan, Chp. 4: Correlation *Read Washington Post article: "Aren't more white people than black people killed by police? Yes, but no." (D2L)
Wed., Feb. 7	Measurement & Describing Variables I	*Read Pollock, Chp. 1: The Definition and Measurement of Concepts (D2L)
Monday, Feb. 12	Measurement & Describing Variables II	*Read Pollock, Chp. 2: Measuring and Describing Variables (D2L)
Wed., Feb. 14	Observational vs. Experimental Studies I	*Read Pollock, Chp. 4: Research Design and the Logic of Control (D2L)
Monday, Feb. 19	Observational vs. Experimental Studies II	*Read Gerber, Green, Larimer (2008) article (D2L) *Listen to Freakonomics Podcast: http://freakonomics.com/podcast/how-do-we-know-what-really-works-in-healthcare-a-new-freakonomics-radio-podcast/
Wed., Feb. 21	Ethical Issues in Science and Political Science	*Read The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks chapters (D2L) *Read "Cruz Mailer, Inspired by Political Scientists..." Washington Post article. (D2L)
Monday, Feb. 26	Mid-semester Recap and Review	*No Assigned Readings
Wed., Feb. 28	Midterm Exam	Akers Hall 137

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Monday, March 5	Spring Break---NO Class	
Wed., March 7	Spring Break---NO Class	
Monday, March 12	Basic Probability and Problems with Probability	*Read Wheelan, Chp. 5: Basic Probability *Read Wheelan, Chp. 6: Problems with Probability
Wed., March 14	Data, Polling, Surveys, and Sampling	*Read Wheelan, Chp. 7: The Importance of Data *Read Wheelan, Chp. 10: Polling
Monday, March 19	Data Visualizations and Graphics	*Read Schneider & Jacoby (2016): Graphical Displays of Public Opinion Research (D2L)
Wed., March 21	The Central Limit Theorem	*Read Wheelan, Chp. 8: The Central Limit Theorem
Monday., March 26	Statistical Estimation and Inference I	*Read Wheelan, Chp. 9: Inference
Wed., March 28	Statistical Estimation and Inference II	*Read Pollock, Chp. 6: Foundations of Statistical Inference (D2L)
Monday, April 2	Making Controlled Comparisons	*Read Pollock, Chp. 5: Making Controlled Comparisons (D2L)
Wed., April 4	MPSA Conference---NO Lecture, Lab Sections still meet	
Monday, April 9	Hypothesis Testing I	*Read Pollock, Chp. 7: Tests of Significance (D2L)
Wed., April 11	Hypothesis Testing II	#Watch “Scientific Studies.” Last Week Tonight with John Oliver. At: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Rnq1NpHdmw
Monday, April 16	Hypothesis Testing III	*No Assigned Readings *Work on Research Project
Wed., April 18	Hypothesis Testing IV	*No Assigned Readings *Work on Research Project
Monday, April 23	Regression I: The Workhorse of Statistics	*Read Wheelan, Chp. 11: Regression *Finish up Research Project Analysis
Wed., April 25	Review: The Power and Limitations of Science	*Final Research Project Due Today
Wed., May 2	Final Exam: 5:45 – 7:45pm	Akers Hall 137

#Content Disclaimer. Assignments marked with “#” contain content that may be offensive to some students. These comedy clips contain considerable profanity, irreverence for some individuals and groups’ beliefs, and regular mentions of or depictions of sexual acts. While these clips are not terribly explicit by modern standards, if you prefer not to be exposed to these clips, you will not be required to do so nor will you be evaluated on the content from these clips. Despite their vulgarity, however, these clips do offer useful information on the assigned topic, reinforcing important concepts.

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VIII. Course Policies and Procedures:

Classroom Decorum: Politics can be controversial. And we will discuss controversial issues from time to time. I desire to create a space where meaningful and constructive dialogue is encouraged, and your opinions are shared. However, this requires from all of us mutual respect, a willingness to listen, and tolerance of opposing viewpoints. I expect that respect for individual differences and alternative points of view will be maintained at all times in this course. One's words and use of language should be tempered and within acceptable bounds of civility and decency.

Late Work, Make-Ups, Missed Quizzes or Exams: I expect students to make every effort to turn in assignments, take required quizzes / exams, or complete other activities on time and as scheduled. The only exceptions that will be made pertain to medical emergencies experienced by you or someone in your immediate family that necessitate your absence from campus, participation in a University-sponsored event or activity, or observance of a religious holiday. If you know in advance you will miss such a requirement, you must notify me in advance. If you are ill or other extenuating circumstances cause you to miss a required graded activity, notify me as soon as possible and provide appropriate documentation (e.g., doctor's note) that allows me to verify the validity of your claim.

Please note that for those assignments or activities turned in after the deadline that do not meet the aforementioned exceptions, we will apply a 25% penalty to your assignment grade for every 24-hour period beyond the due date and time.

Communication with the Instructor and Teaching Assistants: We care about you and your success in this course, at MSU, and beyond. We welcome suggestions, comments, questions, and conversations about the course, political science, graduate school, or the professional arena outside academia. Feel free to stop by our offices (my office hours are listed above), set up an appointment, call, or email us. We will try to respond to all emails within 24 hours, although it may take longer on the weekends. We will also use email and our D2L site to frequently communicate with you about course assignments, activities, and any changes to the course schedule or syllabus. When emailing us, please be sure to include PLS 201 in the subject line.

Grade Appeals or Challenges: We are not infallible and make grading errors, including grading miscalculations, from time to time. We will use our course's D2L site to input attendance / participation and assignment scores. Be sure to check the D2L site to ensure that we have not made any mistakes, and let us know as soon as possible if you believe we have.

If you have a question or concern regarding your performance on an assignment, quiz, or an exam, you should contact the individual responsible for grading that item. With the exception of arithmetic errors in calculating your score, all challenges must be presented in a written (or email) statement that concisely expresses why you believe your grade should be altered. This statement must reference the grading rubric (if there is one) to justify the grade change. All concerns – arithmetic or otherwise – relating to a specific exam or lab assignment must be raised within one week of when the assignment/exam was distributed (it is your responsibility to attend the class session in which materials are returned; the one-week clock starts when we make the initial attempt to distribute the exam/assignment *regardless* of whether you were there to collect it). After this one-week period, no grade challenges will be entertained. Also, please note that if you appeal a grade on an assignment

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and we decide to reexamine the assignment, the grade may go up *or* down. It will be treated as a new grade on the assignment, and all aspects of the assignment are open to reexamination.

Academic Integrity: Plagiarism and other academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. All work is expected to be original, and not previously or simultaneously turned in for credit in another course (unless you get explicit permission from me beforehand). All students at MSU are responsible for knowing and adhering to the academic integrity policies of this institution. Violations of this policy may include: cheating, plagiarism (including “patchwriting”), aid of academic dishonesty, fabrication, lying, bribery, and threatening behavior. Students who are found to be in violation of the academic integrity policy will be subject to both academic sanctions from the faculty member (including but not limited to a zero for the assignment and/or course, being reported to the Dean’s office) and non-academic sanctions (including but not limited to probation, suspension, or expulsion from the university).

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities (from the Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities (RCPD): Michigan State University is committed to providing equal opportunity for participation in all programs, services and activities. Requests for accommodations by persons with disabilities may be made by contacting the Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities at 517-884-RCPD or on the web at www.rcpd.msu.edu. Once your eligibility for an accommodation has been determined, you will be issued a Verified Individual Services Accommodation (“VISA”) form. Please present this form to me at the start of the term and/or two weeks prior to the accommodation date (test, project, etc.). Requests received after this date may not be honored.

Religious Observation Policy:

<http://www.hr.msu.edu/documents/facacadhandbooks/facultyhandbook/religiousobservance.htm>

Sexual Harassment or Assault: Michigan State University and I are committed to fostering a culture of caring and respect that is free of relationship violence and sexual misconduct, and to ensuring that all affected individuals have access to services. For information on reporting options, confidential advocacy and support resources, university policies and procedures, or how to make a difference on campus, visit the Title IX website at www.titleix.msu.edu.

I am available if you would like to speak to me about an incident of sexual harassment or assault that occurred while you are a student at MSU. However, it is important to note that all MSU faculty members (and teaching assistants) are mandatory reporters through Title IX (the law that prohibits sex discrimination, which includes harassment, domestic and dating violence, sexual assault and stalking). If you speak to me about a personal experience, I have a responsibility to report my knowledge of the incident to the Title IX coordinator.