

Foundations of Political Analysis

POL 601

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Class meets: T/TR, 1:15-2:35 pm, HRN 202

Course Description

One of the core courses in the Political Science M.A. program, POL 601 is designed to complement the skills learned in POL 603 and POL 604 (the statistical methods sequence). This course will give you the theoretical tools you need to complete your final project for the program, including how to make informed decisions about the study of political questions, and how to connect your interests to broader areas of inquiry in the discipline of political science. Our course has three modules, each aligned with an objective. In the first, you will gain a basic understanding of the enterprise of political science, and how it relates to social science more generally. In the second part of the course, you will examine literature in the field to understand the questions that political science equips us to answer. In the third, you will learn to identify the best methodological tools to answer different political questions. You will apply your newfound knowledge throughout the semester via various assignments, including a guided draft of your final project.

Student Learning Outcomes

This course will further the learning outcomes for MA students in Political Science in the following ways:

1. Through course readings and discussions, students learn to identify and apply methodology, design and analysis for a problem and understand ethical components of research choices.
2. Through course readings, discussions, and written assignments, students will learn to apply political science knowledge to contemporary issues and problems and identify and evaluate alternative political science-based solutions.

3. Students may draw on course material to formulate, propose and advocate political science-based solutions to contemporary political issues and problems.
4. Course readings and assignments will provide students with introductory skills to conduct and communicate independent, professional-level investigations into sub-disciplinary problems and contribute to knowledge base.

Course Policies

The following is a summary. More detailed explanation of policies are below.

Students are expected to:

- Come to every class prepared to actively discuss and engage in the readings and participate in discussions.
- Communicate with me about any issues related to deadlines, scheduling conflicts, or health exceptions as early as possible.
- Turn in assignments on time unless you have received an extension.
- Check email and read the Canvas site frequently.

In return, you can expect that I will:

- Foster an atmosphere where discussion-based learning can occur.
- Show an interest in your learning, and respect your opinions.
- Give timely feedback on your work.
- Check email and read the Canvas site frequently.

Attendance and deadlines

- **Excused absences:** If you communicate with me before the class in question, I am happy to grant excused absences for a variety of reasons, including but not limited to those recognized by the University (e.g. illness, athletic events, family emergencies, etc.).
- **Unexcused absences:** Any absences which are not communicated to me before class time are considered unexcused. I will not explicitly penalize for these, but they will impact your participation and other grades. I strongly encourage you to discuss any absences with me so I can help you (and excuse them).
- **Deadlines:** Assignments that require a Canvas submission will be locked at the specified time. I will not accept late assignments *unless* you have communicated with me about an extension beforehand.
- **Extensions:** I am happy to grant reasonable extensions on deadlines if you communicate with me before the deadline in question.

Academic Dishonesty

Cheating, plagiarism, and any form of academic dishonesty in any portion of the academic work for a course will not be tolerated and shall be grounds for awarding a grade of Withdrawal Academic Dishonesty (W(AD)) for the entire course. A W(AD) is calculated as an F in your grade point average.

Classroom Conduct

- Cellular Phones: My expectation is that you will turn your phone off and place it in a bag or otherwise out of view during class time.
- Laptop computers/tablets: My expectation is that you will not bring these to class, or will keep them in a bag. If you will need computers for a class activity, I will let you know in advance.
- Engagement and Civility: My expectation is that students will be highly engaged and active in our learning environment. While politics is at times a contentious and controversial subject, I expect students to maintain the highest level of civility and respect to one another and to the professor in the class regardless of differences of opinions.

Questions and emails

- You are responsible for reading and following any instructions I send via email/Canvas.
- You are encouraged to email me with questions, but follow this checklist first:
 - If your question can be answered by the syllabus, a classmate, the university's resources (IT, library, etc.), or google, do not email me until you have exhausted other options. Otherwise, I may not respond.
 - Only email me with reasonable and appropriate requests. E.g. a request for a recommendation with adequate time is reasonable; a request to print your paper is not.
 - Although I attempt to respond quickly, please allow at least two business days for response.
- Be professional and courteous in your emails. Address me by my correct title (Dr. Blum or Professor Blum), use complete sentences, and keep your request clear and concise.

Graded components

Grading System and disputes

- A range (90-100): Achievement that is outstanding relative to the level necessary to meet course requirements.

- B range (80-89): Achievement that is significantly above the level necessary to meet course requirements.
- C range (70-79): Achievement that meets course requirements in every respect.
- D range (60-69): Achievement that is worthy of credit even though it fails to meet fully the course requirements.
- F (0-59): Represents failure (or no credit) and signifies that the work was either (1) completed but at a level of achievement that is not worthy of credit or (2) was not completed.

Any grading disputes must be made in writing within 48 hours of receiving the grade.

Grade distribution

- Class participation: 10%
This includes attendance, participation in class discussions, participation in in-class activities, and participation in office hours. A combination of these factors will determine this final component of your participation grade.
- Discussion posts and questions: 15%
Before most classes, discussion posts or questions will be due on Canvas. For classes with readings, I will often require discussion questions (i.e. 1-2 thoughtful questions on the Canvas discussion board prior to each class session). Occasionally, I will ask you to respond to a prompt on Canvas instead (discussion posts). Detailed instructions will be given on Canvas.
- Book review: 15%
I will provide suggestions for additional reading on various topics based on your final project topics. You will choose a book by September 24th. I will divide you into two presentation groups. On your presentation day you will submit a two-page summary of the book's argument (instructions on Canvas), and briefly present it to the class.
- Research proposal: 20%
Throughout class, I will guide you through the incremental crafting of research proposals which will provide the foundation for your final MA project (a draft of which is your final project for this class). We will also workshop these in class. Each of the four parts will be worth 5% of your final grade. These are:
 - Part I: Research topic and question
 - Part II: Brainstorming research design
 - Part III: Literature review
 - Part IV: Preliminary proposal

- **Project presentation: 10%**
Before your final draft is due, we will devote two class periods to student presentations. This will ensure that you develop your argument thoroughly, give you all the opportunity to provide each other with feedback, and give you practice in scholarly presentations.
- **Final project draft: 30%**
The main assignment of the course is a draft of your MA final project. We will work towards this sequentially via your research proposal. This will consist in identifying and stating a research question you think has not been fully answered, choosing a research design, summarizing and analyzing key literature on that question, and offering suggestions for future directions. More instructions will be posted on Canvas. The projects will be due at the time of the final exam.

Schedule

- *All readings should be completed by the assigned date.*
- *All readings are on Canvas unless otherwise indicated.*
- *As we go through the semester, occasional changes to the schedule may be necessary. I will both discuss these in class and publish these on Canvas in advance.*

Module 1: The Science of Politics

August 27: Finding examples of political science (CLASS WILL NOT MEET)

Online discussion post (more instructions on Canvas)

August 29: Engaging with examples of political science (CLASS WILL NOT MEET)

Online replies to discussion posts due August 30th (more instructions on Canvas)

September 3: What is social science?

Post discussion questions on Canvas

Readings on Canvas (excerpts from Durkheim and Geertz)

September 5: Can social science be neutral?

Post discussion questions on Canvas

Readings on Canvas (excerpts from Taylor and Weber)

September 10: What is political science?

Post discussion questions on Canvas

Readings on Canvas (Bond; King; Lijphart; Grant)

September 12: What makes people do things?

Post discussion questions on Canvas

Readings on Canvas (Sen; Alford, Funk and Hibbing; Jennings and Niemi; Schuessler)

September 17: What is a Democracy?

Post discussion questions on Canvas

Readings on Canvas (Benhabib; Warren; Hirschmann)

September 19: Research Design Part I

Post discussion replies on Canvas

Readings on Canvas (Duke: Writing in Political Science; Social Science Research Methods (Foundations); Kirschner (How to Write); Green (How to Read))

In-class activity

September 24: Research Design Part II

In-class activity

Choose book to review (submit via Canvas)

Proposal Part I due by class time (submit via Canvas)

Module 2: The World of Analysis**September 26: Modes of Inference**

Post discussion questions on Canvas

Readings on Canvas (Rothman et al.; Geber et al.; Collier and Mahon; McDermott; Morton and Williams)

October 1: American political behavior

Post discussion questions on Canvas

Readings on Canvas (Converse chapters; Bartels)

October 3: Public opinion research

Post discussion questions on Canvas

Readings on Canvas (Abramowitz and Saunders; Druckman et al.; Pew Research Center short pieces)

Take Pew's Ideology quiz (link on Canvas)

October 8: Public administration

Post discussion questions on Canvas

Readings on Canvas (Heinrich; Tummers; Moynihan and Pandey)

October 10: Book Reviews Day 1

Book reviews due for group 1 (groups will be assigned)

October 15: Case studies

Post discussion questions on Canvas

Readings on Canvas (Gerring; Collier; Lieberman)

October 17: The "State" and Designing a proposal

Post discussion questions on Canvas

Readings on Canvas (Anderson; Ross)

October 22: Book Reviews Day 2

Book reviews due for group 2 (groups will be assigned)

October 24: Workshopping research design

Proposal Part II due by class. Submit online and bring to class.

In-class activity

October 29: Finalize research plans + Q&A Day

Submit revised Proposal Part II by class

In-class activity

October 31: Institutions

Post discussion questions on Canvas

Readings on Canvas (Bailey et al.; Lebo et al.; Nicholson et al.)

November 1: Finalize committees and submit proposal by today**November 5: Parties**

Post discussion questions on Canvas

Readings on Canvas (Bawn et al.; Blum; Koger, Masket, and Noel; Clark and Golder; Bale et al.)

November 7: Political communication

Post discussion questions on Canvas

Readings on Canvas (King, Pan, and Roberts; Grimmer; Hopkins)

Module 3: The Art of Presentation**November 12: Data & Literature Reviews**

In-class activity

Readings on Canvas (types of data and literature reviews)

November 14: Review of Literature Reviews

Proposal Part III due (submit on Canvas and bring to class)

November 19: methods and assumptions

Post discussion questions on Canvas

Readings on Canvas (Grimmer; King; Adcock and Collier)

November 21: How to compellingly present results

In-class activity

Readings on Canvas (King et al.; Tufte)

November 26: Proposal peer review and presentation tips

Proposal Part IV due via Canvas and in-class

November 28: NO CLASS (THANKSGIVING)

December 3: Class presentations day 1

December 5: Class presentations day 2

December 10: Final Paper Due via Canvas by 2:45 pm