University of Oklahoma
P SC 2013: Introduction to Political Analysis

Dr. Rachel Blum

Spring 2022

Class time: 1:30-2:45pm TR
Class meets: Gaylord Hall, 2030.
Instructor: Dr. Rachel Blum   TA: Peter McLaughlin
Instructor's email: `rblum@ou.edu`
TA's email: `peter.t.mclaughlin@ou.edu`
Online office hours available with the instructor or TA by appointment.

Course Description

This course acquaints students with scientific and data-driven approaches to asking and answering questions about political problems. Through class lectures and hands-on assignments in programs such as Excel, students will learn the vocabulary of research design, fundamental concepts of statistical analysis, and how to describe and visualize relationships among variables. By the end of the course students will have confidence in their ability to intelligently consume data as presented in popular and scholarly outlets. Students will also be equipped with the real-world skills to identify their own research questions, to generate plans to answer these questions, and to present them in a compelling way to others.

Brief Overview

The following is a brief overview of what to expect in this course. I go into greater detail on these policies in the remainder of the syllabus.

- **Canvas** is the launchpad for this course. It will house the syllabus, lectures, assignment instructions, readings, announcements, and more. Please enable notifications

from Canvas and check it regularly. I will also be using Canvas to email you all with any updates or announcements.

- **Communication** will be key to success in this course. Communicate any questions or concerns via email to the TA and myself (e.g., absences, illness, sporting events, confusion with an assignment, etc). Whenever possible, please allow 24 hours for us to respond to any questions, but we will do our best to respond sooner if the question is urgent.

- **Assignments** will include two exams (midterm and final), a series of shorter hands-on applications of what we are learning, and a final data project. More detailed information can be found below, as well as on Canvas.

- **Class periods** will typically feature a short lecture, followed by an activity or discussion.

Course Policies

Attendance and absences

I expect all students to attend class whenever possible. If you can't make it to class, please follow the steps outlined below to notify me of your absence.

- **Excused absences:** I am happy to grant excused absences for a variety of reasons (e.g., religious holidays, sporting events, health events, family events and emergencies, etc) as long as you notify me before the class in question.

  - **How to get your absence excused:** Email me (rblum@ou.edu) and copy the TA (peter.t.mclaughlin@ou.edu). Put "Requesting excused absence for MM/DD" in the subject line. In the body of the email, provide a brief explanation of your reason for the absence. Please email us before class meets. If for any reason you cannot do this, email us as soon as you can.

  - You are welcome to submit paperwork to support your explanation (e.g., a health note), but *I do not require it*.

- **Unexcused absences:** If you don't show up to class and don't email the TA and myself to notify us of your absence, we cannot excuse it.

Deadlines and turning in assignments

I expect all students to meet posted (here or on Canvas) course deadlines for assignments and other submissions.

- **Late work:** Credit for late work will be at my discretion. Factors taken into consideration include how late it is, how much you've communicated with me about the work, and whether an extenuating circumstance was involved. If you think you will be submitting your work late, please notify me (see below).

- **Requesting extensions:** If you think you are going to be late in submitting your work for any reason (e.g., technical difficulties, illness, too many deadlines) please email me ASAP and we will agree on a reasonable extension.

- **Making up assignments:** In order to be fair to all students, I am unable to allow students to make up missed assignments that require in-class work, group work, or discussion.

- **Canvas submissions:** Unless otherwise specified, all assignments will be submitted on Canvas. It is your responsibility to make sure your files and discussion comments post correctly. If your file does not post (you are timed out, for example), becomes corrupted, contains a virus, or if your response is blank/partial, you should re-post prior to the deadline so that you may receive a grade. Always check to see that your response or file has correctly posted before you exit Canvas. If you cannot post your files to Canvas, please email them to the TA and the instructor prior to the deadline to make sure we have received them.

Academic Dishonesty

- **Cheating** is strictly prohibited at the University of Oklahoma, because it devalues the degree you are working hard to get. As a member of the OU community it is your responsibility to protect your educational investment by knowing and following the rules. For specific definitions on what constitutes cheating, review the Student's Guide to Academic Integrity here.

- **Working with others** will sometimes be allowed/encouraged in this class. I will clearly note on each assignment whether you are encouraged to work with others, or whether the work needs to be yours alone. If you have a question, email me and the TA to check.

- **Plagiarizing work or getting others to do your work** are never allowed.

Accommodations

- **Requesting accommodations:** If you need accommodations regarding accessibility or disability, please register with the Accessibility and Disability Resource Center. Any student in this course who has a disability that may prevent full demonstration of the student's ability should contact me directly as soon as possible to discuss accommodations necessary to ensure full participation and to facilitate educational opportunities.

- **Accessibility:** I do my best to make my course, materials, and assignments as accessible as possible. I typically provide flexible exam formats as well. Please contact me with any concerns.

Emails and Canvas

- I will post all relevant class materials on Canvas, including this syllabus, class lecture slides, and detailed assignment information.

- You are responsible for reading and following any instructions I send via email or send/post on Canvas.

- You are encouraged to email the TA and myself with questions about the course, deadlines, assignments, and so forth. Please allow up to 2 business days for a response, although we will try to respond sooner to time-sensitive requests.

- Please copy *both* the TA and myself on all emails unless you have a specific reason not to.

- Please follow this checklist when emailing the TA and myself:

  - Make sure your question is not readily answered by consulting Canvas, the syllabus, a classmate, the University's resources (IT, library, etc.), or google.

  - Keep your requests reasonable and appropriate (e.g., a request for a recommendation with adequate time is reasonable; a request to print your paper is not).

  - Be professional and courteous. Use my correct titles (Dr. Blum or Professor Blum). Use complete sentences. Keep your request clear and concise.

Software and technology

- We will be using Microsoft Excel to conduct basic statistical analyses in class. Although there are many other programs that are designed for more extensive statistical analyses, everything we cover in this class can be done in Excel. In the process you will gain a familiarity with Excel that will be useful in a variety of vocations, as well as a familiarity with syntax that you can build on if you take other classes on coding or statistics.

- Students will need to use Excel or a similar program, such as Google Sheets, which is free. If you have never used an Excel-style program, I encourage you to familiarize yourself with it prior to class.

- Students are allowed to use the statistical program R if they wish. Extra resources can be provided at your request.

Graded Assignments

See below for a description of each graded assignment, as well as its percentage of your class grade.

- **Participation: 15%** This grade will reflect the quality of your engagement in the class as a whole. Participation includes, but is not limited to: regular attendance, communication with the professor and TA via email or in office hours, participation in class discussions, and efforts in group work.

- **Applied analysis exercises: 35%** Instead of assigning homework sets or giving pop quizzes, I will give you a variety of opportunities to engage in fun (ish), hands-on learning. Some exercises will be individual, and some will involve group-work. Clear instructions will be given for each exercise on Canvas and/or in class.

- **Midterm exam: 15%** Your midterm exam will occur on March 1st.

- **Final exam: 15%** The final exam will occur during the scheduled final exam period.

- **Data analysis project: 20%** Throughout the semester each of you will be working on your own applied research project. The finished project will be worth 15% of your grade. The applied analysis exercises will give you the building blocks for these projects.

Grading Policy and Metrics

- **Grading turnaround:** The TA and I will endeavor to return graded work to you as quickly as possible, but never more than two weeks after the assignment due date.

- **Grading rubrics:** I will typically post rubrics along with the assignment instructions/submission pages on Canvas. Our grades and comments will appear in these rubrics.

- **Canvas's grading metrics:** Canvas has a variety of grade-calculation features, most of which only reflect the work you've turned in up to that point without taking into account the relative weight of assignments or the weight of the remaining assignments. I strongly advise you to avoid relying on Canvas's grade-calculation metrics for a sense of how you are doing in the class. The only grading features you should pay attention to on Canvas are the posted grades for individual assignments.

- **How to get info on your class grade:** I will calculate and post your class grade at two points: at the midterm, and before the final. If you are concerned about your grade at any other point, you may use the assignment weights in this syllabus (we'll go over how to do this in excel).

- **Grading scale:** Your final grades will be posted in the common A-F format required by the University. Your individual assignment grades will be based on the points each assignment is worth.

- **Grading disputes:** If you believe a mistake was made in a grade you received, please follow these steps to dispute the grade:

  - **If the mistake is simple and obvious** (e.g., a miscalculation, a typo, or a deviation from the answer key), please copy the TA and me on an email explaining the mistake. Attach photos or screenshots to show the mistake. We will promptly correct any mistakes made on our end.

  - **If the dispute involves a matter of interpretation**, please write a 2-4 paragraph memo explaining why you think you should receive a different grade, and email it to both the TA and myself. Provide any supporting documents or information that you think will help us understand your dispute. We will re-grade the disputed item *de novo* (as if never graded before) within 2 weeks. Please note that this re-grade may result in a higher *or* lower final grade.

  - **Timeline for disputes:** all disputes to grades must be made within 48 hours of the grades being posted. Please allow up to 2 days for us to correct mistakes, and up to 2 weeks for us to re-grade disputed assignments.

Textbook

We will use *The Essentials of Political Analysis*, 6th edition (Pollock and Edwards). You have several options for obtaining the textbook:

- Purchase it from the bookstore

- Purchase it online from a seller like Amazon

- Rent it

- Purchase a digital version

If you have the 5th edition of this book, it will still work. There might be a few mismatches between the assigned readings and what is in your book, but do your best, and contact me with any questions.

Finally, you can access free student materials on the Political Analysis student resource site. Bookmark this page!

Schedule

The schedule is tentative and subject to change. Readings will be posted on Canvas, and should be completed before the class for which they are assigned. Assignments should be turned in by the date/time for which they are assigned.

Module 1: Thinking like a scientist

- **1/18**: Introduction + what is political *science*?

- **1/20**: Identifying research questions

    - Reading: The syllabus; *Essentials of Political Analysis* Introduction

- **1/25:** Reading scientific papers

    - Readings: Short article on how to read scientific papers; New York Times article and associated studies on Canvas.

- **1/27:** Developing research questions

    - Reading: Overview of the language of research
    - Optional reading: review chapter 1 of *Essentials of Political Analysis*

- **2/1**: Operationalizing concepts

    - Application 1: Scientific paper summary
    - Reading: *Essentials of Political Analysis* Ch 1, sections 1-3 (Learning objectives, Conceptual definitions, and operational definitions)
    - Optional reading: Overview of Conceptualization in research

- **2/3**: Measurement and data

    - Reading: *Essentials of Political Analysis* Ch 1, sections 4-5 (Measurement error, working with datasets)

Module 2: Describing like a data scientist

- **2/8**: Describing data 1: overview

    - Reading: *Essentials of Political Analysis* Ch 2

- **2/10**: Describing data 2: tabulations in excel

- **2/15**: Visualizing data 1: overview

    - Application 2 Due: Operationalize research questions

– Readings: Two articles on Canvas (Wainer 1984; Kastellec and Leoni 2007)

- **2/17**: Visualizing data 2: tabulations in excel

- **2/22**: Relationships in data

- **2/24**: Snow day

    – Application 3 Due: Simple data description

- **3/1**: Midterm review

- **3/3**: Midterm

Module 3: Becoming a researcher

- **3/8**: Scientific method and hypothesis testing

    – Reading: Popper on Canvas
    – Reading: *Essentials of Political Analysis* Ch 3 (scan of 6th edition on Canvas).

- **3/10**: Describing and visualizing data 3: Relationships in excel

- **3/15**: SPRING VACATION! No class.

- **3/17**: SPRING VACATION! No class.

- **3/22**: Correlation or causation?

    – Readings: *Essentials of Political Analysis* Ch 4, sections 1-2 (Learning objectives, establishing causation)
    – Optional video and reading: on Canvas

- **3/24**: Experiments and identification

    – Readings: *Essentials of Political Analysis* Ch 4, sections 3-4 (Experimental designs, selecting cases)
    – Optional reading: Summary of research design

- **3/29**: Controlled comparisons

    – Application 4 Due: Data comparison
    – Readings: *Essentials of Political Analysis* Ch 5

- **3/31**: Survey methods overview

    – Readings: All are on Canvas.

* Pew Research Center's survey methodology
    * Smyth article
    * Brennan and Charbonneau article.

- **4/5**: Sampling and measurement

    - Readings: *Essentials of Political Analysis* Ch 6

- **4/7**: Gathering data

    - No in person class today
    - Readings: Student Exit Poll article on Canvas; Gerber and Green article on Canvas

- **4/12** Ethics and strategy in research

    - Readings: *Essentials of Political Analysis* Ch 4, section 5 (conducting research ethically)
    - Optional reading: Overview of Ethics in research
    - Application 5 Due: Design survey questions

- **4/14**: Data analysis project workshop day

- **4/19**: Statistical inference and significance

    - Readings: *Essentials of Political Analysis* Ch 7
    - Optional resources: readings and video on Canvas

- **4/21**: Looking beyond: other ways to test relationships

    - Readings: *Essentials of Political Analysis* Ch 8
    - Optional reading: Short article on reading a regression table

- **4/26**: Data analysis project presentation

    - Data analysis project due

- **4/28**: Data analysis project presentation and final exam review

Final Exam during exam period