

Political Science 30
Political Inquiry
Spring 1999

Lectures MW 12:20-1:10 Center Hall 119

Prof.. Beck

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TA contact information and office hours available on class homepage

This course is designed to help you understand research in the social sciences and public policy. While we focus on quantitative research, most of the lessons we learn apply equally to qualitative research (qualitative and quantitative analysis share the same underlying logic). Statistics play a large role in social science research, so we spend about half the course trying to understand how statistics are used in the social and policy sciences. The goal of the course is to help you understand how statistics are used and to make you a knowledgeable reader of social science and policy debates; there is no attempt to make you into practicing statisticians! Another goal of the course is to help you understand the basic logic of research, including how you might go about doing your own research.

Examples are drawn from political science and public policy. It is hard to be an informed citizen if you are ignorant of how we use data to inform public policy debates. Many of these debates turn on the underlying logic of research rather than technical statistical issues.

In short, the course is intended to help you understand the research discussed in all your other courses, and to help you make sense of all the analyses you will be bombarded with throughout your life. Homework and exams are designed to test skills that you should keep through your entire life, rather than a series of skills that you will forget the day the course is over.

The course also serves as a BRIEF introduction to the use of computers in political science and policy research. This is done via a few homework exercises using the "friendly" program, Stata. Instructions on the use of Stata will be given in section. All exercises deal with relevant political or policy data. The midterm and final do NOT have any computer questions.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Statistics: Concepts and Controversies (4th Ed.) by David MOORE and

The Craft of Political Research (4th Ed.) by W. Phillips SHIVELY.

IT IS STRONGLY RECOMMENDED THAT STUDENTS BUY THE STATAQUEST PROGRAM (sold with Anagnoson and DeLeon, Stataquest 4). This will enable you to do the projects on your home computer and not fight the crowds in the Solis Lab. While there are no required readings from the Anagnoson and DeLeon manual, you will find the manual to be of help for the exercises. Students who do not purchase Stataquest must do their exercises in the Solis Hall Computer Lab. But your lives will be happier if you purchase Stataquest and work at home!

WEB SITE: Specifics on readings and other late minute course details will be communicated via the PS30 homepage (<http://weber.ucsd.edu/~nbeck/ps30.html>).

THE OUTLINES FOR THE LECTURES ARE AVAILABLE ON THE WEB SITE - IT WOULD BE WISE FOR STUDENTS TO BRING HARD COPIES OF THESE OUTLINES TO CLASS! (Feel free to share the task of making the hard copies. One outline may serve for two or three lectures. The outlines will be up in lecture via an overhead projector, but why waste time trying to frantically copy down the overheads when they are available on the web????)

GRADING: There is a midterm and final. The midterm is worth 20% of your grade, the final 45%. The midterm is a series of short questions and identifications. The final has two parts: a midterm covering the second half of the course and a comprehensive exam covering the entire course. Questions on comprehensive part of the final will in general be longer and broader than the midterm type questions.

The exams do not require any complex computations and so no calculators are needed for the exams. The exams stress interpretation and understanding, NOT the rote computation of simple statistical tests.

Students can get a good idea of the what the exams will look like, as well as what I expect students to learn from the class, by looking at last year's exams posted on the class website. Looking at these exams should both help alleviate any "math anxiety" and also guide your studying for the course.

30% of your grade is determined by your work on an ongoing project. Each student will choose his or her own project, in consultation with the TAs. Each project MUST be formally approved by your TA. These projects allow you to use the skills and ideas of the class on a project of interest to you. I will spend some time during the first class discussing the project. Sections the first week will also deal with the project. Section discussion, in general, will revolve around ideas and/or problems that will arise or perhaps have arisen in the projects. Each week a short report on one aspect of your project dealing with the materials covered the prior week is due; in general these are due in class each Monday, starting with the second week of class. A final project report is due on Monday of Finals Week. Late reports will be severely penalized (and only accepted at the discretion of your TA).

Specific instructions on the projects are on a separate handout.

5% of your grade is based on participation. Since the lectures are large, most of your participation grade will be assigned by your TA. You may improve your participation grade by taking part in the electronic news groups as described on the class homepage. You can also improve your participation grade by showing interest in the more usual, pre-electronic, ways (e.g. by attending office hours and the like). You are also encouraged to converse with either the instructor or the TAs via email (again via the homepage).

SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND READINGS

Mon. March 29 - Introduction to the course and discussion of projects - Read Moore x-xvii and Shively, ch. 1

PART I - RESEARCH DESIGN AND CAUSAL THINKING

Wed. March 31 - Theories and hypotheses - Read Shively ch. 2

SECTIONS THIS WEEK WILL DEAL WITH CHOOSING RESEARCH TOPICS

Mon. April 5 - Assessing causality: experiments as the "gold standard" - Read Moore 94-125

("Prospectus" for project due in class)

Wed. April 7 - Causality without experiments - Read Shively ch. 6

SECTIONS THIS WEEK WILL DEAL WITH ISSUES OF CAUSALITY

PART II - SOCIAL SCIENCE DATA

Mon. April 12 - Gathering data by random sampling (surveys) - Read Moore, 3-16

Wed. April 14 - Measurement - Read Shively ch. 3 and 4 and Moore 157-179

SECTIONS THIS WEEK WILL DEAL WITH SAMPLING AND MEASUREMENT

Mon. April 19 - Displaying data - Read Moore 201-236 (Part of today's class will also deal with some measurement issues left over from previous class)

(Exercise on measurement due in class)

Wed April 21- Descriptive statistics - Read Moore 236-259

SECTIONS THIS WEEK WILL DEAL WITH DISPLAYING DATA INCLUDING AN INTRODUCTION TO STATA - SECTIONS MAY MEET IN SOLIS LAB (CHECK WITH YOUR TA BEFOREHAND)

MIDTERM ISSUES

Mon. April 26 - Review for midterm (what have we learned?) - no assigned reading (NO EXERCISE DUE THIS WEEK)

Wed. April 28 - MIDTERM

SECTIONS THIS WEEK WILL CONTINUE WITH INTRODUCTION TO THE USE OF COMPUTERS IN SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH - SECTIONS MAY MEET IN SOLIS LAB (CHECK WITH YOUR TA BEFOREHAND)

PART III - TOOLS FOR DESCRIBING RELATIONSHIPS

Mon. May 3 - Two-way tTables - read Moore 284-301, Shively 116-123
(Exercise on descriptive statistics due in class)

Wed. May 5 - Scatterplots and correlation - read Moore 301-331

SECTIONS THIS WEEK WILL DEAL WITH INTERPRETING TABLES

Mon. May 10 - Regression - read Moore 334-350, Shively ch. 7
(Exercise on tables due in class)

PART III - STATISTICAL INFERENCE

Wed. May 12 - Probability - Read Moore 402-423

SECTIONS THIS WEEK WILL DEAL WITH INTERPRETING REGRESSION

Mon. May 17 - From samples to populations - Read Moore 21-51
(Exercise on regression due in class)

Wed. May 19 - The normal distribution and skills - Read Moore 259-277

SECTIONS THIS WEEK WILL DEAL WITH PROBABILITY AND THE NORMAL DISTRIBUTION

Mon. May 24 - Confidence intervals and statistical tests - Read Moore 457-467 and 483-490
(NO EXERCISE DUE THIS WEEK)

Wed. May 26 - Interpreting statistical significance - Read Shively ch. 9

SECTIONS THIS WEEK WILL DEAL WITH INTERPRETING TESTS AND CONFIDENCE INTERVALS

FINALS ISSUES

Mon. May 31 - Memorial Day Holiday - no class

Wed. June 2 - Preparation for final and wrap up. No assigned reading
(Exercise on interpreting statistical tests due in class)

SECTIONS THIS WEEK WILL BE PREPARATORY FOR THE FINAL

A GENERAL REVIEW SESSION MAY BE ANNOUNCED

Tues.. June 8 - Final project write-up due IN POLITICAL SCIENCE OFFICE (SSB Third Floor) by 10AM.

Fri. June 11 - FINAL EXAM 11:30AM-2:30PM (please confirm on June 2)

