**GVPT 100**  
**Scope and Methods for Political Science Research**

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(You may also contact me via the email function on ELMS)  
Office hours: 12-2 pm Tuesdays and Thursdays. I will be online and ready to answer questions via email.

**Introduction:**

The purpose of this course is to give an introduction to the essential concepts and tools necessary for students to begin to think like social scientists. Students will be taught the building blocks for a strong research design, introductory statistical concepts, data preparation, and how to use statistical software.

A major goal of this course is to provide a relatively non-threatening introduction to quantitative methods and the use of standard statistical software. But most importantly, the course will provide students with a basic grasp of what most political scientists do (whether statistically or not)—how they construct theories, how they assemble evidence, and how they relate theories and evidence. After completing the course students will be able to better evaluate causal claims, they will have a clear understanding of commonly used terms in political science articles, and they will have a foundation for further knowledge of quantitative methods.

This is an online course. This course is typically taught over 12 weeks in the fall and spring or 6 weeks in the summer, but the winter course is only three weeks long. It therefore requires a substantial amount of self-directed learning in a short amount of time. We will be communicating through blackboard. The web address for the blackboard (also known as elms or canvas) is elms.umd.edu. Get familiar with this site as soon as you can as it will be the tool we use for 99.9% of our class communication.

Lastly, the grading in this course is straightforward and the assignments will be clear cut. If you do the work on time and you make the effort from week to week, then you will have a strong chance of getting a good grade at the end of the semester.

**Books:**


**Software:**
Student version of SPSS (Required).

The student version of SPSS can be purchased for $15 and then downloaded from OIT here: https://terpware.umd.edu/Windows.Package/2181

Note that you can call the terp store to pay by credit card and activate your SPSS license (tel #: 301-314-7000)

R statistical Software. (Recommended)

This software is free and can be downloaded here: http://cran.r-project.org/bin/windows/base/

Requirements and Grading

Your course grade will be determined by several homework assignments, a midterm and the final exam. Final grades will be heavily weighted towards your homework grades. Completion of each homework assignment on time is essential to getting a good grade in this course.

Final Grades will be weighted as follows:

Homework: 60%
Midterm: 20%
Final Exam: 20%

You will also have multiple opportunities to gain extra points via extra credit assignments.

Exams:
The exams will be based on material covered in the books, homework assignments and the lectures. Note that you must watch the lectures and do all assigned readings to do well in this course. Lectures at times do not overlap directly with the readings and some key concepts and cases will be discussed in lectures only. Strictly speaking the exams are not cumulative (that is, the first midterm emphasizes material covered from the beginning of the class up to the first midterm and the final covers material covered after the first midterm but before the final exam).

Exams will be posted to the blackboard site and must be completed within 24 hours. If you have a medical issue or some other reason for why the exam (or any assignment) cannot be completed on time, tell me as soon as you can before the due date.

Lectures and Homework

This course runs for three weeks from January 4th to January 22nd. Each Monday I will post a lecture and an assignment that will be due by Wednesday at 5 pm. On Wednesday I will post the second lecture and an assignment that will be due by Friday at 5 pm. Lectures will be in audio or video format with accompanying documents and will have two goals: to cover the essential concepts you need to study for the week and to review any problems that the class found difficult in the previous
assignments. Homework assignments will, for the most part, include tutorials that walk you through how to use SPSS and then ask you to do a problem set.

In addition to posting lectures and assignments on Mondays I will be online and available for questions each Tuesday and Thursday afternoon from 12 pm to 2 pm. During this time period you can contact me via elms email or my regular email addresses and I will be posting selected questions and answers from these conversations to a discussion board the class can refer to for extra help (this information will be rewritten and students names from emails or chats will not be included).

Course Outline

**Week 1: 1/4-1/6 Research Questions, Hypotheses, and Describing Variables**

Chapters 1-2 Pollack Political Analysis, homework 1 due 1/6

Extra Credit: Read a chapter from “An R Companion to Political Analysis”, complete the first two problems at the end of the chapter and email me your answers.

**Week 1: 1/6-1/8 Making Comparisons, Research Design: Experiments and Observational Studies**

Chapters 3-4 Pollack Political Analysis, homework due 1/8

Extra Credit: Read another chapter from “An R Companion to Political Analysis”, complete the first two problems at the end of the chapter and email me your answers.

**Week 2: 1/11-1/13 Making Comparisons Continued, Exam Review**

Chapter 5 Pollack Political Analysis, Midterm exam posted 12 pm 1/12. Due 1/13 by 12 pm (no homework due)

**Week 2: 1/14-1/15 Statistical Significance for Cross-tabs and Means Comparisons**

Chapters 6-7, homework due 1/15

Extra Credit: Read another chapter from “An R Companion to Political Analysis, complete the first two problems at the end of the chapter and email me your answers.

**Week 3: 1/18-1/20 Correlation and Linear Regression**

Chapter 8, homework due 1/20

Extra Credit: Read another chapter from “An R Companion to Political Analysis”, complete the first two problems at the end of the chapter and email me your answers.

**Week 3: 1/20-1/22 Multiple Regression and Exam Review**

Review for final exam, Final exam 1/21 posted online at 12 pm. Due 1/22 by 12 pm.