

POL 200-01: Political Analysis

Spring 2024

Instructor: Professor Sara Morell (she/her/hers)

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Class Time: Mondays and Thursdays 9:30-10:50 a.m. in Social Sciences 225

- *Starting week two, Monday class will be held in Social Sciences 021. Thursday class will always be in Social Sciences 225 unless otherwise specified.*
- *Five additional class sessions will be held to work on the problem sets on Wednesdays from 9:00-9:50 a.m. in Social Sciences 021. See the schedule below for details.*

Office Hours: Mondays and Thursdays 11:00 a.m. – 12:15 p.m. ([SIGN UP HERE](#))

Office Location: Social Sciences 239

You: If you would like me to refer to you by a name or pronouns other than those on the class roster, please let me know.

Course Overview:

The purpose of this course is to introduce you to the methods that political scientists use to form and answer questions about the world. As political scientists, we seek to use rigorous analysis to make political claims. We aim to design objective studies that allow us to answer questions such as “What is the effect of a particular policy on individual well-being?” or “What factors explain how people form opinions about political issues or candidates?” You will gain experience with theory building, research design, hypothesis testing, statistical methodology, and data analysis. This course does not require any formal math background, but will focus on the statistical thinking used commonly in the usual sciences and will introduce students to the R programming language. This course will also challenge you to think about the assumptions made in social science thinking, making you better consumers of information.

Learning Goals:

More specifically this course aims to introduce students to methods of analysis common in the political science discipline in the following ways:

- Students will develop key quantitative and original research skills by applying the tools in class to their own questions and areas of interest within political science. These tools will be instrumental to political participation and are helpful for advancing a wide range of professional and personal goals.
- This course will also develop student’s abilities to constructively evaluate other social science research, by teaching students how to assess the assumption made throughout the research design process.
- Students will become better consumers of knowledge, increasing their ability to engage meaningfully with scholarly articles, news sources, and everyday conversation. These tools will help students engage meaningfully in politics and interpret information about the political and social world.

The course is designed to meet several Middle States/School of Humanities and Social Sciences learning goals, including: 3. Scientific and Quantitative Reasoning, 5. Critical Analysis and

Reasoning, 6. Information Literacy, 11. Preparation to Participate in Civic Life, 14. Understanding key political processes and institutions at all levels.

This course's "fourth hour" is met through additional learning tasks that students complete outside the classroom to make the semester's learning experience more deeply engaging and rigorous. Students are required to read extensively, remain up-to-date on current events, and complete outside research and writing projects. All information on course content will be included in the Canvas weekly modules.

A Note for Majors:

POL 200 is one of Political Science's core courses. All political science majors must receive a C grade or better in the course to remain in the major and to move onto POL 390 the following year. For more information, please see the [program bulletin for Political Science](#). Students who do not meet the minimum grade threshold after a second attempt at the course will need to apply for Department approval to retake the course and stay in the major, per the Department's course repeat policy.

Course Format:

Each week, the course will be divided into two parts. The first part of the course will focus on discussing readings and topics relating to a different stage of the research design and analysis process. This will be a mix of lectures, and small and large group discussions.

The second part of the week involves working to develop your skills in statistical and data analysis, using R. There is no expectation that you have prior experience with coding or any particular math background. However, part of learning how to do data analysis is learning how to solve problems and troubleshoot using available resources. I want to emphasize that I know how challenging this can be, and so have included five additional Wednesday morning sessions to work on the homework and final projects with me available for feedback and support.

I realize that this course is difficult, as you will be dealing with concepts and methods you may never have encountered before. I also realize that you don't stop being people simply because you are students, and personal and extenuating circumstances may arise that will mean you need additional accommodations. I am willing to grant extensions in cases of personal or family emergencies. However, you must ask for an extension at least 24 hours before the assignment is due. We will then work out a new deadline to account for the personal emergency, which you must abide by. If you do not request an extension in this timeframe, you should assume any late assignments will get a lateness penalty. Though I'll be flexible on deadlines if something extreme happens, I cannot ignore TCNJ's deadlines for turning in grades at the end of the semester. In all other circumstances, lateness will result in one point taken off the grade for the assignment per additional day late. Homework turned in after the answer key is posted (one week following the assignment), will not be accepted.

Grade Breakdown:

The grade for this course consists of three quizzes, four lab assignments, a final original research project and proposal, and participation in class. I will discuss the research proposal in more detail later in the semester, but a general overview of the process is below.

Quizzes: 15%

There will be three short quizzes throughout the semester, which will test your comprehension of the major research design and statistical concepts taught throughout the course. Quizzes will be administered via Canvas.

Problem Sets: 40%

There will be four problem sets throughout the semester. These problem sets are designed to give you the tools necessary to complete the data analysis for your final project. The problem sets build on one another and reflect the skills discussed in the reading each week.

Each problem set builds on material covered by a lab that we will go over in class. All of the functions that are necessary to complete the problem sets are included in these labs. If you plan to use any functions not covered in class, you need to write a paragraph explaining what every step of the new function and surrounding code does, in order to demonstrate knowledge of the function you're using. You must do this for **each** additional function included in your homework that was not covered in class.

Problem Sets are Graded as Follows:

Amount Completed	Points Assigned
Did not seriously attempt homework, failed to submit, or submitted too late for a grade.	0
Seriously attempted homework. However, less than 50% of the steps and questions are correct.	7
Did not attempt advanced but at least 50% of the remaining steps and questions are correct.	7.5
Did not attempt advanced but at least 75% of the steps and questions are correct OR attempted advanced and more than 50% of the steps and questions are correct.	8.5
Did not attempt advanced but at least 80% of steps and questions are correct OR attempted advanced and more than 75% of the steps and questions are correct.	9
Did not attempt advanced but more than 90% of steps and questions are correct OR attempted advanced and more than 80% of the steps and questions are correct.	9.5
Attempted advanced and more than 90% of steps and questions are correct.	10

Class Participation: 10%

This class uses active learning, which means we're going to be trying a lot of the tools you need for the homework and final project in class. You have to participate in these activities to get credit. Participation includes actively working in pairs or alone, asking substantive questions about the material, summarizing small group discussions, etc. To ensure you keep up with the material and are able to participate effectively, please complete all readings for the week by class on Monday.

You must come to class to get credit for participating. **You have one unexcused; no questions asked absence that you can use at any time without notifying me.** After that, if you are unable to attend a class, you must email me the day before. Unless it's medical, a personal/family emergency, or a TCNJ recognized excused absence (e.g. religious observances or school sponsored activities), you should assume that your absence is unexcused. I will not expect a doctor's note for medical absences, but may change this policy if it is overused.

Research Project: 35%

By the end of the semester, you will have conducted an original research project. A complete research project consists of developing a theory, crafting hypotheses, finding data, justifying variable measures, conducting analyses, and presenting your results. Throughout the semester you will be graded on smaller parts of this project, including a research proposal (10%), a submission of your data, variable coding, and justification of your measures (5%), and a final project (20%). More details will be available about each of these assignments as we get closer.

Campus Engagement: 3% extra credit

The campus engagement grade allows you to get three percentage points of extra credit for attending either a Politics Forum event or the Political Science Independent Research Showcase at the end of the semester and writing a one-page summary and commentary on each talk. Turn this in on Canvas within one week of the talk to get credit.

Downloading R + RStudio: 1% extra credit

You need to download both R and RStudio in order to participate in this course. Both programs are free and you will be able to use them after this course and after you graduate, giving you data analysis tools that you can take with you beyond this course. You get one point of extra credit for downloading both R and RStudio before the first class session. All instructions for how to do this are on Canvas and I will provide assistance if you are struggling to download either program.

A Note About Grading:

The final grade breakdowns for this class are as follows: A (93-100), A- (90-92), B+ (87-89), B (83-86), B- (80-82), C+ (77-79), C (73-76), C- (70-72), D+ (67-69), D (63-66), D- (60-62), F (Below a 60)

You are always welcome to speak with me to get more information about why you received the grade you did and what you can do to improve on future assignments.

Course Required Materials:

One book is required for this class and available for purchase at the bookstore or through online sellers:

- Paul Kellstedt and Guy Whitten. 2018. The Fundamentals of Political Science Research. Third Edition. Cambridge University Press. (*Referred to as K+W Below*)

All other readings will be available through the library's website or available for download on Canvas.

This course requires students to download R and RStudio, both of which are free and commonly used tools for data analysis. You can find a document for how to download both on Canvas.

Schedule for Lecture and Readings:

WEEK ONE: Introduction to the Course (January 22nd and 26th)

- **ASSIGNMENT (FOR CLASS ON MONDAY):** You must follow the instructions for downloading R and RStudio. Upload a screenshot from your computer of R Studio open to Canvas to confirm you downloaded it successfully. You get a point towards your final grade for doing this on time.
- **FOR CLASS ON THURSDAY:** K+W Chapter One

WEEK TWO: Arguments, Theories, and Knowledge (January 29th and February 1st)

- K+W Chapters 2-3

WEEK THREE: Research Design (February 5th and 8th)

- K+W Chapters 4-5
- Shanto Iyengar + Don Kinder: News That Matters (Chapter 2 – pages 6-16)

WEEK FOUR: Measurement and Description (February 12th and 14th)

- K+W Chapter 6
- Hakeem Jefferson: The Curious Case of Black Conservatives: Assessing the Validity of the Liberal-Conservative Scale among Black Americans
- **ASSIGNMENT:** First exercise due by 11:59 p.m. on February 16th

*NOTE THAT THERE IS CLASS ON FEBRUARY 14th IN SSB 021 TO WORK ON EXERCISE ONE.
NOTE THAT THERE IS NO CLASS ON FEBRUARY 15th BECAUSE OF THE TEACHING AND LEARNING SUMMIT.*

WEEK FIVE: Data Visualization (February 19th and 22nd)

- Catherine D'Ignazio and Lauren F Klein: [Data Feminism \(Chapter 3\)](#)

WEEK SIX: Statistical inference: populations, samples, and error (February 26th and 29th)

- K+W Chapter 7
- **QUIZ:** First Canvas quiz due by 11:59 p.m. on February 25th at 11:59 p.m.

WEEK SEVEN: Bivariate Hypothesis Testing Part One (March 4th, 6th, and 7th)

- K+W Chapter 8
- **ASSIGNMENT:** Second exercise due by 11:59 p.m. on March 8th

NOTE THAT THERE IS CLASS ON MARCH 6th IN SSB 021 TO WORK ON EXERCISE TWO.

WEEK EIGHT: SPRING BREAK – NO CLASSES MARCH 11th – 15th

WEEK NINE: Bivariate Hypothesis Testing Part Two (March 18th and 21st)

- Review K+W Chapter 8
- **ASSIGNMENT:** Project Proposal and Annotated Bibliography due by 11:59 p.m. on March 17th

WEEK TEN: Reviewing Measurement and Causality (March 25th and 28th)

- Catherine D'Ignazio and Lauren F Klein: [Data Feminism \(Chapter 6\)](#)
- Maintenance Phase: [The Sleep Loss Epidemic \(podcast episode\)](#)
- **QUIZ:** Second Canvas quiz due by 11:59 p.m. on March 24th

WEEK ELEVEN: Introduction to Linear Regression -- Bivariate (April 1st and 3rd)

- K+W Chapter 9
- **ASSIGNMENT:** Third exercise due by 11:59 p.m. on April 5th

*NOTE THAT THERE IS CLASS ON APRIL 3rd IN SSB 021 TO WORK ON EXERCISE THREE.
ALSO NOTE THAT CLASS IS CANCELLED ON APRIL 4th.*

WEEK TWELVE: Linear Regression with Controls – Multivariate (April 8th & 11th)

- K+W Chapter 10

WEEK THIRTEEN: Practice Interpreting Linear Regression (April 15th & 18th)

- Abby Long, EGAP: [10 Things to Know About Reading a Regression Table](#)
- **QUIZ:** Third Canvas quiz due by 11:59 p.m. on April 14th

WEEK FOURTEEN: Dummy Variables and Interactions (April 22nd, 24th & 25th)

- K+W Chapter 11
- **ASSIGNMENT:** Data and justification of measures due by 11:59 p.m. on April 26th

NOTE THAT THERE IS CLASS ON APRIL 24th IN SSB 021 TO WORK ON YOUR FINAL PROJECT VARIABLE CODINGS

WEEK FIFTEEN: Regression Assumptions and Limitations (April 29th, May 1st & 2nd)

- **ASSIGNMENT:** Fourth exercise due by 11:59 p.m. on May 3rd

NOTE THAT THERE IS CLASS ON May 1st IN SSB 021 TO WORK ON EXERCISE FOUR.

FINAL PROJECTS DUE ON May 10th AT 11:59 P.M.

Additional Information:

Many of the TCNJ policies and resources can be found at [this link](#) to the TCNJ website.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:

My experience has been that plagiarism is extremely rare. However, out of fairness to all students behaving ethically, I have absolutely no tolerance for any type of cheating, including plagiarism. The best way to ensure you are not plagiarizing is to cite all of your sources. Ignorance of what constitutes plagiarism or cheating does not provide an excuse or justification for engaging in such behavior. To familiarize yourself with these issues, you should read TCNJ's [Academic Integrity Policy](#).

CANVAS

I will post a Canvas announcement on Friday of each week, going over the material for the following week, along with any updates or announcements you will need before class on Monday. It is your responsibility to set up your Canvas notifications so that you receive these in your inbox, or make sure you check the Canvas announcements page each week on Friday after 5:00 PM.

COMMITMENT TO DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION, ACCESS, AND BELONGING

The TCNJ community is composed of people with diverse backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences, and the college is committed to diversity, equity, inclusion, access and belonging. The college's [Campus Diversity Statement](#) can be viewed here.

CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT & COMMITMENT TO STUDENT SUCCESS, SAFETY, AND WELL-BEING

The TCNJ community is dedicated to the success, safety and well-being of each student. TCNJ strictly follows key policies that govern all TCNJ community members rights and responsibilities in and out of the classroom. In addition, TCNJ has established several student support offices that can provide the support and resources to help students achieve their personal and professional goals and to promote health and well-being. You can find more information about these policies and resources at the "[TCNJ Student Support Resources and Classroom Policies](#)" webpage here. Students who anticipate and/or experience barriers in this course are encouraged to contact the instructor as early in the semester as possible. The Accessibility Resource Center (ARC) is available to facilitate the removal of barriers and to ensure reasonable accommodations. For more information about ARC, please visit [the ARC website](#).

EMAIL POLICY:

I will reply to emails that I receive during regular working hours (i.e., Monday through Friday, 9 AM to 5 PM) as soon as possible, often the same day. For emails received outside of those working hours, I will generally reply during the next working day. **This policy also applies to emails sent the day an assignment is due. If you have a question about an assignment, it is always best to ask it at least one day in advance.**

IT SUPPORT:

If you have technology issues or needs during the semester, please contact the IT Helpdesk at 609-771-2660 or helpdesk@tcnj.edu.

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING:

Adjusting to college is difficult and I know that many of you may be struggling with issues of mental health and wellbeing. Please also know that if you are having difficulties that are impacting your ability to succeed in this course, you should feel free to contact me to figure out what steps to take to address these issues.

If you or someone you know feels overwhelmed, depressed, and/or in need of support, here is some information about the available resources. Request help if [you are in crisis](#), or if you are [concerned about a friend](#), report [discrimination or harassment](#), or request [counseling or psychological services](#).

OFFICE HOURS:

Office hours are held in person in my office (Social Sciences 239) on Mondays and Thursdays from 9:30-10:50 a.m. In person office hours are by appointment and you can sign up at the link at the top of the syllabus. If these times do not work for you, because of a class conflict, you may reach out to me directly.

SPECIAL ACCOMMODATIONS:

Students with documented disabilities who require academic accommodations should notify me and contact Disability Support Services (609-771-3199). Accommodations are individualized and in accordance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1992. A link is available [here](#).