COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course introduces the scientific approach to the study of politics. Studying politics scientifically means, principally, that one seeks to learn about political life through the application of methods that are systematic, replicable and public. The last of these values may be the most central, and certainly it is the value about which political scientists are most agreed. While different scholars favour different research techniques – some preferring detailed analyses of particular historical episodes, others preferring to learn from comparisons across thousands of cases using statistical techniques – almost all political scientists concur that clear and explicit description of the methods used to arrive at one’s conclusions is essential to assessing the merits of scientific research.

Accordingly, the aim of this course is to inform students about the principal research designs and techniques used by political scientists, and to encourage students to think carefully about methodological considerations both as consumers and producers of research about politics. The course begins by introducing students to the role of well-constructed concepts, theories and hypotheses in scientific research. We then learn about the basic approaches employed by political researchers, that is, qualitative, quantitative, comparative and experimental methods. With these broad categories as a foundation, the remainder of the course focuses on quantitative techniques of data collection and analysis.

Quantitative methods are used extensively across the social sciences and to address topics in all the traditional fields of empirical political science (comparative politics, international relations, public policy and Canadian politics). As importantly, the study of quantitative methods helps to illuminate the logic of scientific inference underlying the other basic research approaches, including comparison, experimentation, and some types of qualitative analysis. Consequently, while the course does not offer detailed coverage of all the major ways of studying politics, in providing a solid foundation in quantitative methods, the course should enable students to think about and apply more carefully a wide array of research strategies employed by scholars of politics.

The course’s exploration of quantitative methods begins with issues that are basic in all empirical research: determining how and what to observe. Once these two issues (a.k.a., operationalization and sampling) are addressed, we learn about three widely used types of quantitative data collection: survey research, content analysis, and the use of aggregate data. The final half of the course is focused on the analysis of quantitative data and will include a significant laboratory component. Students will be introduced to Stata, a popular statistical computing program in political science, and learn how to: visualize (or graph) data; examine relationships between variables using two- and three-way tables; quantify relationships between variables using simple statistics; and estimate a bivariate, linear regression model.

Although this course generally focuses on quantitative techniques, we will not focus on mathematical issues and it is not assumed that students will possess knowledge of mathematics beyond what is required of Canadian high-school graduates. To be sure, simple equations and mathematical symbols will appear in lecture and in the readings; however, nothing beyond knowledge of arithmetic and basic algebra is required to understand this material. In any case, the emphasis in the course is decidedly on conceptual understanding, rather than mathematical detail.

FORMAT

The class meets twice per week for approximately 75 minutes. 20 of the 24 sessions will be formatted as lectures and take place in SN 4040; 4 sessions will meet in the Digital Learning Centre, SN 4030, and will be formatted as labs. (Note that two sessions are cancelled for the winter break; see “Course Schedule”, below.)
REQUIRED READINGS

The required textbook for the course, available in the Memorial University Bookstore, is Craig Briars, et al., *Empirical Political Analysis: Quantitative and Qualitative Research Methods, Eighth Edition*. The course schedule, below, refers to this book as simply *EPA*. Also, certain weeks include additional readings – marked with an asterisk (*) on the course schedule. These readings are available on D2L.

**DESIRE2LEARN**

Many important course materials – including this syllabus, assignment guidelines, certain readings, supplementary materials and PowerPoint slides – can be found on Desire2Learn (a.k.a., D2L). Also, D2L is where you will find course news and announcements throughout the term. If something has been announced on D2L, then it is assumed that you know about it – so be sure to access the D2L course regularly. Access the course page through [https://online.mun.ca/](https://online.mun.ca/). As important as D2L is as a means of communicating with you, it should not be used for communications with the professor. This mailbox is checked only infrequently. It is much better to email the professor directly at jsmatthews99@gmail.com.

**EVALUATION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Deadline</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Midterm exam</td>
<td>February 18(^{th})</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lab exercises (3 × 5 percent)</td>
<td>March 1(^{st}), 10(^{th}), 22(^{nd})</td>
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<td>Data analysis project</td>
<td>April 15(^{th})</td>
<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final exam</td>
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**LECTURES**

The primary goal of the lectures is to draw out, clarify and elaborate on major concepts and themes developed in the course readings. That said, lectures will not cover all the material covered in the readings and the readings do not cover some material presented in lecture. It is critical, therefore, that students are both present in lecture and diligent in completing their readings. Optimally, students will complete readings prior to the relevant lectures, and certainly students should not allow their reading to fall more than a class or two behind the lectures. To facilitate preparation for exams, MS-PowerPoint-format lecture slides will be available after lecture via D2L. Copies of the professor’s lecture notes will not be provided to students. If a student misses a lecture, it is her/his responsibility to approach another student for a copy of her/his notes.

**LABS**

The role of the labs is to introduce students to the application of quantitative techniques of political data analysis. To participate in the labs, students will require their MUN login information (i.e., your ID and password for MUN mail), student number and a USB flash drive (or USB key) for storing lab work. Attendance in labs is critical to success in POSC 3010. Instruction in the labs will not be duplicated in lectures or available in the textbook; as important, students are required to complete three lab exercises that, barring reasons justifying an accommodation (see “Accommodations”, below), must be submitted at the end of the labs in question. Finally, completing the course assignments – the lab exercises and the Data Analysis Project, discussed below – will require students to use statistical software, *Stata*, that is generally not available elsewhere on campus.

The focus of each lab will be an exercise designed to help you learn about some aspect of data analysis (e.g., constructing a graph or cross-tabulation). Students will follow a lab manual that will be introduced briefly at the beginning of the lab. Students are expected to work independently; however, the professor will be available throughout the lab to address any questions or problems as may arise. At the end of the lab, students will submit the required components of their lab work to the professor electronically. These components will generally consist of *Stata* output (e.g., tables and graphs generated by the program), copied-and-pasted into a word-processing document.

Students will be able to use the two labs in the Digital Learning Centre (DLC) – SN 4030 and SN 4022 – outside of class time (for complete information, see [http://www.mun.ca/dlc/](http://www.mun.ca/dlc/)). This lab access will be critical to
completion of the Data Analysis Project (see below); in addition, students are encouraged to practice their data analysis skills as much as possible. The DLC is generally open from 9 am to 5 pm, Monday to Friday. However, during times when a class is scheduled to take place in one of the centre’s two labs, priority for the computers is given to students enrolled in that class. Note, also, that some professors do not permit students to use the lab when their classes are in session. Students are advised to consult the schedules for the two lab rooms (see http://www.mun.ca/dlc/hours/sn4030.php and http://www.mun.ca/dlc/hours/sn4022.php). Finally, while staff are on duty at all times in the Digital Learning Centre, students should note that these staff will not be able to address questions students may have regarding Stata, statistical methods, or POSC 3010 content and assignments.

DATA ANALYSIS PROJECT

The major assignment in this course is the Data Analysis Project, due April 5th. In essence, the assignment requires students to combine knowledge of research design (acquired in lecture and readings) with data analysis skills (acquired in the lab exercises) to execute a small, original study of a research question in political science. Using a political dataset provided by the professor, students must: propose a research question (making sure to define key concepts and state key theoretical premises); state a clear, testable hypothesis involving two variables; describe the univariate distribution of the variables included in the analysis (including figures, as appropriate); propose and execute a test of the hypothesis using tabular analyses and figures; rule out a plausible rival explanation for the hypothesis using a three-way cross-tabulation; and interpret and report the findings of the study in scholarly prose. The assignment requires no outside research. The finished product should consist of 7 to 10 pages, including all tables and figures, with double-spaced text formatted in 12-point font. Detailed instructions for this assignment will be provided in class on March 3rd.

MIDTERM AND FINAL EXAM

A midterm exam will take place in class on February 18th. The exam will cover the first 12 lectures (including associated readings) of the course and will consist entirely of multiple choice questions. The final exam will take place during the winter examination period, focusing on lectures and readings after the midterm. Further details will be announced in class.

IN-CLASS PARTICIPATION

Students are strongly encouraged to ask questions, and to respond to the professor’s questions, during lectures and labs. Aside from the personal benefit of having your questions answered, other students benefit when you share your comments, concerns or confusion. Attempting to answer a question posed by the professor will have similar effects. More generally, discussion and interaction during lectures and labs help to generate and sustain interest and enthusiasm (as much for the professor as for the students!). While it can be intimidating to ask questions in a large class, it is almost always worth the effort, and becomes easier with time and practice. And remember: there are absolutely no stupid questions, except those that are left unasked!

CHECK-IN EXERCISE

Students will participate in an anonymous, not-for-credit exercise designed to provide an opportunity to give mid-semester feedback on the course to the professor. This “check-in exercise” will take place in class on February 16th. The exercise invites students to comment on the highs and lows of the course and to provide any other kind of feedback to the professor on how the course is going. Further details will be announced in class.

ON-CAMPUS RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS

The university provides a host of resources to support students. The Commons (QEII library) provides access to print, electronic and technology resources. The Counselling Centre (UC-5000) helps students develop their personal capabilities, ranging from study strategies to assisting distressed students. Student Affairs and Services (Answers, UC-3005) answers questions about such things as courses, housing, books, financial matters and health. The Writing Centre (SN-2053) is a free, drop-in facility for students and helps them become better writers and critical thinkers. The Glenn Roy Blundon Centre (UC-4007) serves students whose disabilities involve conditions affecting mobility, vision, hearing, learning (disabilities), chronic illness, or mental health; support is also provided to students with documented temporary illnesses and injuries.
PLAGIARISM

Memorial University values academic integrity, and the professor and teaching support staff for this course will be vigilant in checking for instances of plagiarism. All students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences. See http://www.mun.ca/regoff/calendar/sectionNo=REGS-0748.

LATE ASSIGNMENTS

Late assignments will be penalized **5 percentage points on the first day and 2 percentage points per day thereafter, including weekends, up to a maximum of 21 percentage points**. For lab assignments, the first penalty accrues 10 minutes after the end of the lab; for the Data Analysis Project, the first penalty accrues 10 minutes after the start of the class during which the assignment is due. For both types of assignment, the next penalty of 2 percentage points, accrues the next day at 4:30 pm. Subsequent penalties accrue at 4:30 pm each day. At 4:30 pm on the day after the day when the maximum penalty of 21 percentage points is reached, assignments will no longer be accepted in the absence of a properly documented illness or personal emergency approved by the professor. Late lab assignments can be submitted to the professor via email. Late Data Analysis Projects must be submitted during office hours or to the Political Science General Office (SN 2028) during regular office hours: Monday to Friday, 8:30 am - 1:00 pm and 2:00 pm - 4:30 pm, except holidays. **Papers slipped under the professor’s door will not be graded**, as the time and date of submission cannot be verified.

Please note that students are expected to take a **prudential approach** to completing their assignments and handing them in on time – which means that you should **expect the (somewhat) unexpected**. Your computer may crash; the power may suddenly go out; you may miss the bus on the way to campus; or some other minor, but reasonably foreseeable mishap may intervene to prevent you from submitting work on time. You must take such contingencies into account by, for instance, starting work on your assignments well in advance of deadlines, backing up your work in multiple locations, or planning to arrive on campus early when an assignment is due.

ACCOMMODATIONS

From time-to-time, students request various accommodations – for example, an extension on a written assignment or a deferred exam. **The policy in this course is to grant accommodations only in the event of a properly documented illness or personal emergency approved by the professor.** This means that the following arguments for accommodations, among others, will not be accepted: to participate in a voluntary campus activity (sporting events, student politics, etc.); to coordinate with travel arrangements; to attend work or a job interview; and so on.

Although this policy is a strict one; it is justified on grounds of equity and fairness. Simply put, as all students passing POSC 3010 will be awarded the same course credit on their academic transcripts, all students should be subject to the same opportunities and constraints in completing this course. Secondly, the policy helps the professor to avoid making tricky and potentially arbitrary judgments about ambiguous comparisons (e.g., is Mary’s playing in a basketball tournament equivalent as a justification to Johnny’s attending a family wedding?). Therefore, if you feel you will have important obligations over the semester that will conflict with the requirements of the course, then it is not advisable to take POSC 3010.

That said, it should be noted that **the professor takes a broad view of the term “personal emergency” and most reasonable requests on these grounds can be accommodated**, subject to the constraint that the professor must maintain the integrity of the course. If you are unsure if your request fits these criteria, do not hesitate to contact the professor.

Finally, please note that requests for accommodation must be made as **early as possible, preferably in advance** of the due date of the assignment or date of the exam. If, for reasons beyond your control, you cannot request an accommodation in advance, then you must make the request as soon as possible. Even if illness or other circumstances prevent you from coming to campus, you are expected to **make all reasonable efforts to communicate** with the professor (e.g., by email or telephone). A failure to make your request in a timely manner may constitute grounds for rejecting your request for an accommodation. Requests for accommodations made at the end of term in regards to assignments early in the term will generally not be successful.
GRADE APPEALS

Professors and teaching assistants sometimes make mistakes when evaluating students’ work, awarding too little (or even too much!) credit than is deserved. If you feel that your work in POSC 3010 has been graded incorrectly, then you should certainly consider appealing your grade.

In order for an appeal to be considered, students must prepare a written statement that describes specifically and in detail why an appeal is warranted. The written statement should be roughly 1 typed, single-spaced page in length. In making the case, students must demonstrate that the grading of their assignment fails to conform to the guidelines for the assignment in question. It will not suffice to claim that the grade awarded doesn’t reflect the student’s level of effort, is lower than grades the student has received on other assignments or in other courses, or is simply lower than the student would like (say, in order to secure a scholarship or admission to other academic programs).

Requests for an appeal must be made within two weeks of the date that the assignment in question is returned. Also, a mandatory “cooling off period” applies with regard to appeals. That is, requests for appeals will not be considered during the two days following the returning of the assignment. This waiting period is designed to ensure students reflect carefully before requesting an appeal.

Finally, while appeals are welcome, it is worth noting that they almost always result in very small grade changes (1 or 2 percentage points) on assignments. These small changes, in turn, must be discounted by the weight of the assignment in the course evaluation. (For instance, a 2 percentage point increase in a student’s grade on an assignment worth 20 percent of the overall grade in a course would increase that student’s overall grade by less than half a percentage point.) As such, it may not always be worthwhile devoting time to preparing an appeal.

MAKE-UP ASSIGNMENTS?

There are no make-up assignments available to students who seek extra credit to compensate for poor performance on a component of the course. Of course, if you miss an assignment or exam for a valid reason (see “Accommodations”, above), then a make-up assignment will be designed for you. Otherwise, students will only be awarded marks for completing the assignments described in this syllabus.

OFFICE HOURS

Each Tuesday and Thursday, 1 to 2:30 pm, you can meet the professor during office hours to take up any questions or concerns you may have. Students are free to drop in during these periods; however, if possible, it is helpful to email first to set a specific time. If you’re unable to make the professor’s office hours and feel your concerns can’t be effectively handled over email, then you may attempt to arrange an appointment outside the professor’s office hours. As it may take a while to find a time convenient for both you and the professor, it is important to make your request for an appointment in a timely manner. Note that the final regular office hours of the term will take place on April 5th.

EMAIL POLICIES

Students are encouraged to email the professor (ismathews99@gmail.com) with any questions or concerns they may have. The professor generally responds within a few hours, unless the email arrives in the evening or on the weekend. Note that you should not contact the professor through D2L or using his MUN email address – these emailboxes are checked only infrequently.

When emailing the professor, please observe the following guidelines: before sending an email, quickly review this syllabus to ensure that the question is not addressed here (if you ask a question that is answered in the syllabus, the reply will be simply “check the syllabus”); email from your MUN account to avoid spam filters; in the subject line, note the course number and a meaningful description of the topic of your email (e.g., “POSC 3010: Problem downloading this week’s supplemental reading”); be sure to sign your name to the email; and, to save time, please be as concise as possible (if you find it hard to be concise in regards to your concern, it’s possible your issue is better handled in person during office hours).
INTRODUCTION

1. January 7: Course Introduction
   • Read: POSC 3010-001 Course Syllabus
2. January 12: Studying Politics Scientifically
   • Read: *EPA*, Ch. 1 & Robert Keohane, “Political Science As a Vocation”*

THERY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

3. January 14: Building and Testing Theories
   • Read: *EPA*, Ch. 2
   • Read: *EPA*, Ch. 4
5. January 21: Causal Inference
   • Read: W. Phillips Shively, “Causal Thinking and the Design of Research”*
6. January 26: Small-n Research Designs
   • Read: *EPA*, Chs. 4 & 12
7. January 28: Large-n Research Designs
   • Read: *EPA*, Chs. 4 & 6

DATA COLLECTION

8. February 2: Operationalization and Measurement
   • Read: *EPA*, Ch. 5
9. February 4: Sampling
   • Read: *EPA*, Ch. 7
10. February 9: Types of Quantitative Data
    • Read: *EPA*, Chs. 8, 10, & 11

DATA ANALYSIS

11. February 11: Coding & Describing Data
    • Read: *EPA*, Chs. 14 & 15
    • Note: Format and expectations for the midterm discussed.
12. February 16: Univariate Statistics
    • Read: *EPA*, Ch. 16
    • Note: Check-in exercise conducted.

13. February 18: Midterm Exam

14. February 23: Class cancelled (winter break)
15. February 25: Class cancelled (winter break)
16. March 1: Lab 1: Getting to Know Your Data
17. March 3: Tabular Analysis with Two Variables
    • Read: *EPA*, Chs. 15 (esp. pp. 273-276) & 17
    • Note: Guidelines for Data Analysis Project provided.
18. March 8: Bivariate Statistics
    • Read: *EPA*, Ch. 17
19. March 10: Lab 2: Tabular Analysis with Two Variables
20. March 15: Tabular Analysis with Three Variables
    • Read: *EPA*, Ch. 18 (esp. pp. 311-314)
21. March 17: Assessing Statistical Significance
    • Read: W. Phillips Shively, “Introduction to Statistics: Inference, or How to Gamble on Your Research”*
22. March 22: Lab 3: Tabular Analysis with Three Variables
23. March 24: Regression Analysis I
    • Read: *EPA*, Ch. 17 (esp. pp. 303-310) & Leo Kahan, “An introduction to the Linear Regression Model”*
24. March 29: Regression Analysis II
    • Read: *EPA*, Ch. 18 (esp. pp. 314-322).
25. March 31: Lab 4: Regression Analysis
26. April 5: Catch-up/Review
    • Note: Data analysis project due.