

# PS490: Honors in Political Science

Dogus Aktan

Fall, 2023

## Course Time and Location

T / TR  
2:00 pm - 3:45 pm  
Whitehall Classroom 339

## Contact Information

dogus.aktan@uky.edu  
Office Hours: by appointment

## 1 Course Description

This course will provide, in a seminar setting, the opportunity for students to concentrate on developing and implementing research projects on topics of their own choice. The course will allow discussion of various perspectives in political science as well as on problems encountered in the research process.

This class is designed for those wanting to graduate with Political Science Departmental Honors (i.e., those who meet the other requirements and need to write a department honors thesis). This class provides the opportunity for students to concentrate on developing and implementing a research project on a political science topic of their own choice. The goal is to develop a senior seminar thesis research paper that you work on throughout the semester, eventually completing a final draft and presenting it to the class. A senior seminar research paper is usually 20-30 pages, although there are no set page minimums or maximums. We will discuss the components and steps to writing a research paper, focusing largely on empirical research papers. Because the focus of the class is on completing a senior departmental honors thesis, much of the work is done independently by you. You must learn to structure your workload and time. A number of checkpoints have been built into the calendar to help provide some structure.

## 2 Course Objectives

- Learn about best practices for performing original empirical research that contributes to our body of knowledge about political affairs.
- Hone and refine the skills essential to conducting original research, including strong writing skills, the development of a research question, theory building, how to create a research design, and data analysis.
- Learn how to interpret and constructively respond to feedback to create the strongest possible study.
- Develop a professional quality presentation in which one communicates technical findings to a lay audience.
- Create a polished, professional piece of original research.

## 3 Course Readings and Expectations

There are no required books to buy for this course. We will discuss a variety of readings from academic journals, excerpts from various textbooks, and the popular press. All readings will be made available on Canvas.

The load of readings will be relatively light. This is a course where students are expected to become producers of research. Readings are designed to help students in this process either by providing guidelines or good examples.

## 4 Class Format and Policy

The class format throughout will combine lecture and discussion. Given the nature and goal of the course, we will focus more on discussion and feedback. This means active participation and interest in your colleagues' research is essential to your learning and thus final grade.

## 5 Evaluation and Grades

Your final grade is a weighted average of the following components:

- Class Participation: 10%

- Introduction: 10%
- Literature Review: 10%
- Theory: 10 %
- Research Design and Analysis: 10 %
- Presentation of Thesis: 20 %
- Final Paper: 30%

## 5.1 Grading Scale

The grading scale is:

A	90-100
B	80-89
C	70-79
D	60-69
E	Below 60

- Each of the individual assignments is a building block towards the final paper. When the final paper is due, you will not be writing it from scratch but largely refining what you've already written.
- Do not underestimate the time commitment involved in conducting original research. In addition to the extensive reading and writing necessary for any paper, you'll have to develop an original theory and research design and revise them subject to feedback, and you'll also have to collect and analyze data. You are advised to start each phase well in advance of its deadline. There is simply no way to write a strong thesis if you save much of the work for late in the semester.
- The writing process is progressive, so you should revise and turn in all previous sections of the paper when your next one is due. For example, you will receive feedback on your literature review before the theory section is due. When you turn in the theory section, you should also revise and include your literature review.
- Papers should be doubled spaced, 12-point font, Times New Roman. Make sure to include a full works cited every time you turn in a portion of the project in which you cite articles. There are no minimum or maximum page length requirements, but I provide some suggested ranges for each section below. As this is an honors seminar, I will not accept late work, and I am not inclined to offer incompletes.

- You should follow the stylistic and formatting guidelines (including citation format) in the APSA Style Manual (<https://connect.apsanet.org/stylemanual/>) or examine the most recent volume of the American Political Science Review (APSR).

## 5.2 Graded Components

### 5.2.1 Class Participation

I expect you to attend every meeting, prepared fully and participating actively. About half of the time, we will meet as a full group, and your participation is essential to the course running effectively. As this is an honors course with limited meetings, I expect perfect attendance. I also expect you to be actively engage and provide feedback for your peers.

### 5.3 Introduction

You will be required to formalize your research question. To do so, pick a case-based example that illustrates your research question and its importance. Explain this example and state your research question in your paper. I will give you feedback on your research question and next steps. **Note: you may not proceed with your thesis until I have approved the research question.** Suggested length: 1-2 pages.

### 5.4 Literature Review

Once your research question has been approved, the next step is to explore the social science literature related to it. Your literature review should be exhaustive and up-to- date. The goal is to write a sophisticated, professional literature review that accomplishes two goals: (1) synthesizes insights from the existing literature and (2) explains the gaps in knowledge. The synthesis portion is critical – do not simply list sources and explain them one-by-one, but rather bring together insights and themes across articles in a critical discussion.

### 5.5 Theory

After you have identified gaps in the existing literature, you should develop a theory and a set of specific expectations that help fill in the gaps in order to answer your research question. There is a careful balance you have to strike

here. You will use your own voice to explain your theoretical expectations, providing a novel answer to the question you pose, yet your theory should be informed by the knowledge scholars have already accrued. In the theory section, you are required to list at least one specific hypothesis.

## **5.6 Research Design and Analysis**

This section explains how you will design the empirical portion of your study in order to test your hypotheses. It is necessary to consider what types of data you'll need to conduct your research, whether this data exists (or what alternatives are available), and how you will go about analyzing the data. The section should explain the data (where it comes from, how it was constructed, what years it covers, etc.).

We will discuss your operationalization and measurements strategies and the limitations of available data.

## **5.7 Presentation**

We will do a final poster session where you both present your work to a broader audience (i.e. political science faculty and students at UK). Your presentation should explain the research question and its importance, provide an overview of your theory and research design, and highlight notable results from your analysis. Plan for a 10-minute presentation, followed up by 2-3 minutes of audience questions.

## **5.8 Final Paper**

This is the full, final project. The thesis should include the following sections: Intro, Literature Review, Theory, Research Design, Results, and Conclusion, plus a full works cited. Suggested length: 15-40 pages.

# **6 Assignment and Exam Policy**

All assignments and exams must be completed on time in order to pass this course. Make ups will only be granted under extraordinary circumstances such as documented and verified medical or family emergencies. All documentation corresponding to such emergencies should be forwarded to the professor. Per-

sonal reasons are insufficient excuses for making up missed assignments, exams, or quizzes.

All assignments must be submitted via Canvas. I do NOT accept assignments via e-mail.

I do not grade on a curve. Each student's work will be evaluated independently based on its quality. It is possible for every student in the class to get an A. However, getting such high marks will require hard work on your part.

If a student wishes to dispute their grade on an assignment, they must contact me within 48 hours of receiving their grade and set an appointment to discuss it. At this appointment they must bring a typed summary of the reasons why they believe the grade is unfair. I will then reevaluate the assignment on the basis of these reasons. All revised grades are final, and they may be lower than the original grade.

## 7 Policy on Student Questions

I am always happy to answer student questions during office hours or over e-mail. I will generally reply to e-mails within 24 hours but make sure you send your questions in a timely manner. Keep in mind that most questions you may have (about assignments, policies, etc. . . ) can be answered by simply taking a close look at the syllabus. Every student should read the entire syllabus carefully at the beginning of the class and before sending me a question. When you have finished reading the syllabus for the first time, send me an e-mail, telling me what your favorite animal is.

## 8 Administrative Policies

### 8.1 Absences From Classes and Exams

An absence will be considered unexcused unless you give me documentation of the absence as defined by the University (Senate Rule 5.2.4.2). Senate Rules 5.2.4.2 defines the following as acceptable reasons for excused absences: (a) serious illness, (b) illness or death of family member, (c) University-related trips, (d) major religious holidays, and (e) other circumstances found to fit "reasonable cause for nonattendance" by the professor. According to SR 5.2.4.2, a student's absence is excused for "Significant illness of the student or serious illness of a member of the student's household (permanent or campus) or immediate

family.” University Health Services (UHS) has prepared a statement about class attendance and student illnesses. The statement discusses public health and policy reasons why a sufficiently ill student ought to be absent from class and circumstances when a student need not make a visit to UHS. UHS has defined three levels of documentation. A Tier 2 or Tier 3 form is required for an excused absence; Tier 1 forms will not be accepted. Students must forward the email to the professor.

The University Senate has indicated that excused absences for in-person participation include quarantine and other recommended/required absences by a medical, public-health, or government officials. Nonattendance will not be penalized during unscheduled university closings. Per Senate Rule 5.2.4.2, students missing any graded work due to an excused absence are responsible for informing the professor about their excused absence within one week following the period of the excused absence (except where prior notification is required) and, for making up the missed work. Senate Rules state that advance notice is required in three circumstances:

- Absence for a major religious holiday requires advance written notification. Students anticipating an absence for a major religious holiday are responsible for notifying the professor in writing of anticipated absences due to their observance of such holidays no later than the last day in the semester to add a class. Two weeks prior to the absence is reasonable, but should not be given any later. Information regarding major religious holidays may be obtained through the Ombud (859-257- 3737), [http://www.uky.edu/Ombud/ForStudents\\_ExcusedAbsences.php](http://www.uky.edu/Ombud/ForStudents_ExcusedAbsences.php)
- Trips for members of student organizations sponsored by an educational unit, trips for University classes, and trips for participation in intercollegiate athletic events, when advance notice is feasible, require advance written notification. If advance notice is not feasible, the student must provide adequate notification and documentation within one week after the student’s return to class.
- Interviews for full-time job opportunities post-graduation and interviews for graduate or professional school require advance notice.

These absences will be accommodated in a way that does not arbitrarily penalize students who have a valid excuse. Makeup exams will be allowed in the case of an extraordinary circumstance if accompanied by sufficient documentation within two days after the exam. More information on academic policies can be found at: <https://www.uky.edu/universitysenate/acadpolicy>

## 8.2 Class Recording Notification

The University of Kentucky Student Code of Conduct defines Invasion of Privacy as using electronic or other devices to make a photographic, audio, or video record of any person without their prior knowledge or consent when such a recording is likely to cause injury or distress. Meetings of this course may be recorded. All video and audio recordings of lectures and class meetings, provided by the instructors, are for educational use by students in this class only. They are available only through the Canvas shell for this course and are not to be copied, shared, or redistributed.

As addressed in the Student Code of Conduct, students are expected to follow appropriate university policies and maintain the security of linkblue accounts used to access recorded class materials. Recordings may not be reproduced, shared with those not enrolled in the class, or uploaded to other online environments.

If the instructor or a University of Kentucky office plans any other uses for the recordings, beyond this class, students identifiable in the recordings will be notified to request consent prior to such use. In anticipation of such cases, students may be asked to complete an “authorization of use” form by a faculty member.

Video and audio recordings by students are not permitted during the class unless the student has received prior permission from the instructor. Any sharing, distribution, and or uploading of these recordings outside of the parameters of the class is prohibited. Students with specific recording accommodations approved by the Disability Resource Center should present their official documentation to the instructor.

All content for this course, including handouts, assignments, and PowerPoint lectures are the intellectual property of the instructor and cannot be reproduced or sold without prior permission from the instructors. A student may use the material for reasonable educational and professional purposes extending beyond this class, such as studying for a comprehensive or qualifying examination in a degree program, preparing for a professional or certification examination, or to assist in fulfilling responsibilities at a job or internship.

## 8.3 Academic Integrity

Cheating and plagiarism will not be tolerated. You are encouraged to review the University’s policies regarding academic honesty, outlined in the University Senate Rules (6.3.1 & 6.3.2). The Ombud site also has information on plagiarism, which are available at: [http://www.uky.edu/Ombud/ForStudents\\_](http://www.uky.edu/Ombud/ForStudents_)



`AcademicIntegrity.php`. Be sure to familiarize yourself with UK's plagiarism policy. Not only will plagiarism of other work result in an automatic zero, but self-plagiarism, including multiple submissions of the same paper to different courses, will also result in an automatic zero.

## 8.4 Library Services

You can get personalized or group research assistance from reference librarians at Young Library. The Political Science Librarian is Taylor Leigh ([taylor.c.leigh@uky.edu](mailto:taylor.c.leigh@uky.edu)). Taylor can help you:

- Find sources for research projects .
- Identify and evaluate different kinds of sources.
- Navigate databases and the library catalog effectively.
- Perform a literature review
- Brainstorm keywords and subject terms

Taylor also maintains the Political Science Research Guide (<https://libguides.uky.edu/c.php?g=222933&p=1476312>), which is full of useful resources to help you in this class. Please contact Taylor directly with any questions regarding the library or research assistance.

## 8.5 Americans with Disabilities Act

Students with disabilities needing academic accommodation should: (1) register with and provide documentation to the Disability Resource Center; and (2) bring a letter to the instructor indicating the need for accommodation and what type. This should be done during the first week of class. Disability Resource Center

University of Kentucky

725 Rose Street

Multidisciplinary Science Building

Suite 407 Lexington,

KY 40536-0082

(859) 257-2754

<http://www.uky.edu/StudentAffairs/DisabilityResourceCenter/>

## 8.6 Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

The University of Kentucky is committed to our core values of diversity and inclusion, mutual respect and human dignity, and a sense of community (Governing Regulations XIV). We acknowledge and respect the seen and unseen diverse identities and experiences of all members of the university community <https://www.uky.edu/regs/gr14>. These identities include but are not limited to those based on race, ethnicity, gender identity and expressions, ideas and perspectives, religious and cultural beliefs, sexual orientation, national origin, age, ability, and socioeconomic status. We are committed to equity and justice and providing a learning and engaging community in which every member is engaged, heard, and valued.

We strive to rectify and change behavior that is inconsistent with our principles and commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. If students encounter such behavior in a course, they are encouraged to speak with the instructor of record and/or the Office of Institutional Equity and Equal Opportunity. Students may also contact a faculty member within the department, program director, the director of undergraduate or graduate studies, the department chair, any college administrator, or the dean. All of these individuals are mandatory reporters under University policies.

For information on non-discrimination and Title IX policy, please visit: <https://www.uky.edu/universitysenate/acadpolicy>

## 8.7 Resources Available to Students

The University offers many resources for students, ranging from computer access to counseling services. More information on these services can be found at: <https://www.uky.edu/universitysenate/student-resources>

## 9 Class Schedule

### Module 1: Building Blocks

This module gives a broad overview of the course and state of the discipline of political science. We look at the academic enterprise and what it means to do political science.

We also explore key tools and concepts that will help you narrow your broad research *interests* into research *questions*.

#### Week 1: Introduction and Overview

- **August 22:** Introduction, Overview, Logistics
- **August 24:** Overview of the Discipline
  - Adam Przeworski “Is the Science of Comparative Politics Possible?”

#### Week 2: Science of Politics

- **August 29:** Science of Politics
  - Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, “Principles of International Politics” (Chapter 1; Evaluating Arguments about International Politics)
- **August 31:** Science of Politics
  - Ethan Bueno de Mesquita and Anthony Fowler “Thinking Clearly with Data (Chapter 1)”
  - Judea Pearl and Dana Mackenzie “Book of Why (Introduction)”

#### Week 3: Political Science Research

- **September 5:** Example Research Paper
  - Charles Butcher and Jonathan Pinckney, “Friday on My Mind: Re-Assessing the Impact of Protest Size on Government Concessions.” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*
- **September 7:** Choosing a Research Question
  - Scott Minkoff “A Guide to Developing Research Papers in Political Science”
  - Frank Schilbach “5 Steps to a Great Paper”

- Judea Pearl and Dana Mackenzie “Book of Why (Chapters 1 & 2)”
- Cyrus Samii “Methodologies for “Political Science as Problem Solving”

## Module 2: Individual Project Phase

### Week 4: Research Questions and Introductions

- **September 12:** Discussion and Feedback on Research Questions
- **September 14:** How to Write an Introduction
  - Andrew Little “Three Templates for Introductions to Political Science Articles”
  - “The Introduction Formula”
  - Kieran Healy, “F\*ck Nuance”

### Week 5: Introductions

- **September 19: Introductions Due** Discussion and Feedback on Introductions
- **September 21:** How to Do a Literature Review
  - Raul Pacheco-Vega, “Literature Reviews”
  - Jeffrey Knopf, “Doing a Literature Review.” *PS: Political Science and Politics*

### Week 6: Literature Review Discussions

- **September 26:** Introduction to AI platforms and Software for Literature Reviews
  - No Readings
- **September 28: Literature Review Due** Literature Review Discussions and Examples
  - Emily Ritter and Courtney Conrad, “Preventing and Responding to Dissent: The Observational Challenges of Explaining Strategic Repression”
  - Devorah Manekin and Tamar Mitts, “Effective for Whom? Ethnic Identity and Nonviolent Resistance ”

## **Week 7: How to Write a Theory**

- **October 3:**

- W. Philips Shively, “The Craft of Political Research (Chapter 2)”
- Stephen Van Evera, “Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science (Chapter 1)”

- **October 5:**

- Raul Pacheco-Vega, “Writing theoretical frameworks, analytical frameworks and conceptual frameworks”
- Cyrus Samii, “How to judge a theoretical model”

## **Week 8: From Theory to Research Design**

- **October 10: Theory Due**

- Ethan Bueno de Mesquita and Anthony Fowler “Thinking Clearly with Data (Chapter 3)”
- Judea Pearl and Dana Mackenzie “Book of Why (Chapter 7)”

- **October 12:**

- Ethan Bueno de Mesquita and Anthony Fowler “Thinking Clearly with Data (Chapter 4)”
- Nick Huntington-Klein “The Effect (Chapters 6-8)”
- David Waldner and Benjamin Smith “Survivorship Bias in Comparative Politics: Endogenous Sovereignty and the Resource Curse”
- Christopher H. Achen and Duncan Snidal, “Rational Deterrence Theory and Comparative Case Studies”

## **Week 9: DAG Workshop and Measurements**

- **October 17: DAG Workshop DAGs Due**

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- **October 19:**

- Paul M. Kellstedt and Guy D. Whitten “The Fundamentals of Political Science Research (Chapter 5)”
- Cullen Hendrix “Measuring state capacity: Theoretical and empirical implications for the study of civil conflict”

- Andrew Little and Anne Meng, “Subjective and Objective Measurement of Democratic Backsliding”
- Valerie Bauerlein, “How to Measure a Storm’s Fury One Breakfast at a Time.”

### **Week 10: Data Analysis**

- **October 24:** Fall break, no class
- **October 26:** Data Analysis
  - Paul M. Kellstedt and Guy D. Whitten “The Fundamentals of Political Science Research (Chapter 6)”

### **Week 11: Data Discussion and Workshop**

- **October 31: Data Analysis Due**
  - Andrew Gelman, “Correlation does not even imply correlation”
- **November 2:** Data Analysis Workshop
  - No Readings

### **Week 12: Presentation Preparation and Discussion**

- **November 7:**
  - Branislav L. Slantchev, “Talk on Talks”
  - Rachel Meager “Public Speaking for Academics”
- **November 9:** Poster Preparation and Presentation
  - No Readings

### **Week 13: Getting Your First Draft**

- **November 14:**
  - Readings TBD depending on student needs
- **November 16: First Draft Due**
  - Readings TBD depending on student needs

**Week 14: First Draft Workshops**

- **November 21:**
  - No Readings
- **November 23:** Thanksgiving, no class

**Week 15: Presentations**

- **November 28:**
  - No Readings
- **November 30:**
  - No Readings

**Week 16: Finals Week**

- **December 5:** No Class Meeting
- **December 7:** No Class Meeting **Final Papers Due**