What this course is about

Success in this course will mean that you have improved skills, especially skills related to data and numbers, that will help you in other courses at Oneonta and when you leave college. Policy analysts, consultants, journalists, and researchers regularly do data analysis as part of their work and many other professionals are consumers of social science research. We are constantly bombarded by data and arguments in the media. Successful completion of this course will help you better evaluate this information.

The primary goal of this course is to provide an introduction to research methods and elementary data analysis for students who have little or no experience with statistics. This work is interesting, even fun, and these skills can be applied to all areas of life. You will begin to learn how to think like a social scientist: find data, analyze arguments that use data, analyze data yourself, and to present the results of your analysis.

We will learn by doing in POLS 200. This class will include a bit of lecture, some discussion, in class group work, and time to work on skills. You will have options on what skills you develop. You will use Word, Excel, SPSS—a statistics software package—to conduct data analysis. You will gather data yourself. You will complete a series exercises that will reinforce concepts encountered in readings and in class.

What I Will Help You Learn This Semester

By the end of the semester, I hope that you—my students—can:

- Understand key issues and concepts in studying political science;
- collect and assess data from a variety of sources; find and assess political science literature;
- describe data and explain relationships between variables, present data using appropriate strategies and software;
- write a research paper using student chosen data.

Contact Information

Classroom   HIRC 120AB, MWF 10:00 a.m.–10:50 a.m.

In Person   Location: Schumacher 14J. Office Hours: M Noon-12:50 p.m., W 2:00 p.m.-4:00 p.m., F 2:00 p.m.–3:00 p.m., and by appointment

Electronic bill.wilkerson@oneonta.edu (Please include a subject in all email!)
              https://app.gradecraft.com & https://blackboard.oneonta.edu
              Sign up for remind.com as noted in class for text messages.
              607-436-3272

Department Schumacher 10. -3522. Secretary: Moira Rouggly. Hours: 8:00 a.m.–4:30 p.m. M–F.

Books to purchase

The book has been ordered through the campus bookstore. It is also available online. Please buy this edition.

Powner, Leanna C. *Empirical Research and Writing: A Political Science Student's Guide.* Los Angeles: Sage–CQ Press, 2015. ISBN: 978-1-4833-6963-1.

Note: Other reading is required and will be distributed in class or through Gradecraft or Blackboard.

Topic outline and reading assignments

The course outline lists topics, required reading, and approximate dates for each section of the course. I will do my best to stick to the outline as laid out below, but I reserve the right to make changes I think appropriate.

W 1/16 — F 1/25 Introduction to the class & What is political science? (no class on F 1/19, professor attending conference)

Read: Powner pp. 1-3; **Malici & Smith ch. 1.

Topics: Most of you are in this class because you are interested in politics. You may be thinking: "Research methods? Why should I care?" Learning about how to study politics is important both for learning about the subject and as a way of developing skills that you can use in college and beyond. We will begin the semester by thinking a bit about why the study of politics is called political science? The goal of political science is to not only describe, but to explain. The scientific method is important in trying to explain political phenomena. We will find current research and think about how they apply the scientific method.

We will also get to know each other a bit and learn about the grading system and GradeCraft, the course management system alternative we will be using this semester.

M 1/28 — M 2/4 Research design

Read: Powner ch. 4; **Malici & Smith, ch. 2; **articles to assigned in groups.

Topics: Political scientists conduct research in a variety of ways. We will examine some of the ways that researchers approach the interesting research questions that they develop.

W 2/6 — F 2/8 Developing a topic & research question

Read: Powner ch. 1.

Topics: Choosing a topic and writing a research question can be daunting. This week will practice this skill. Powner has a lot of great ideas to help you generate a topic and research questions for this class and others classes as well. We will spend class time developing and critiquing topics and research questions. This will be useful in classes, but understanding how to hone in on a problem is often useful in many professional settings.

M 2/11 — F 2/1 5 Measurement, hypotheses, concepts and variables

Read: Powner ch. 2 & pp. 157-171.

Topics: We will apply the scientific method to political science questions. In class, we will examine how to measure political phenomena and develop clear hypotheses using clearly specified variables. We will extend this to discuss how surveys are conducted.

M 2/18 — F 2/22 Finding & documenting the literature

Read: Powner ch. 3.

Topics: College professors talk a lot about "the literature," a highfalutin term for the previous research published on a particular topic. It is important to know what others have written and found about your topic before jumping into your own research. We will work on finding the literature on your research question/topic as well as learning how to document, or cite, this literature. Being able to research a topic in a sophisticated way is a useful skill in and out of academia. Citation is less important to the rest of the world, but is very important in college.

M 2/25 — F 3/1, M 3/11 —F 3/22 Gathering—and interpreting—data for analysis (no class M 3/4 — F 3/8, spring break)

Read: Powner chs. 5-8; web resources.

Topics: To answer questions about political science, we need to gather information—often referred to as data—to help us. Data can come in many forms and can be analyzed, interpreted, in a variety of ways. We will

examine several types of data: interviewing, observation, documents, numerical data, and secondary data. We will also examine the ethics of conducting social science research.

M 3/25 — M 4/1 Analyzing one variable

Read: **Analyzing Data for POLS. (Powner ch 8 is a resource for data analysis sections.)

Topics: We will explore SPSS and look at what you can learn from looking at a single variable. By examining measures of central tendency and measures of dispersion, it turns out you can learn a lot. Being comfortable with basic statistics is important in college and in life. Improving your skills is important.

W 4/3 — W 4/10 Analyzing two variables

Read: **Analyzing Data for POLS.

Topics: Once you have a second variable you can begin to try and explain why something occurs. This is the power in statistical analysis. We will look at tools for trying to explain one variable with another.

F 4/5 — W 4/10 Analyzing three or more variables (no class F 4/11, professor attending conference)

Read: **Analyzing Data for POLS.

Topics: Most political phenomena are complex and require sophisticated explanations with many variables. We will learn about how to do statistical analysis with multiple independent variables.
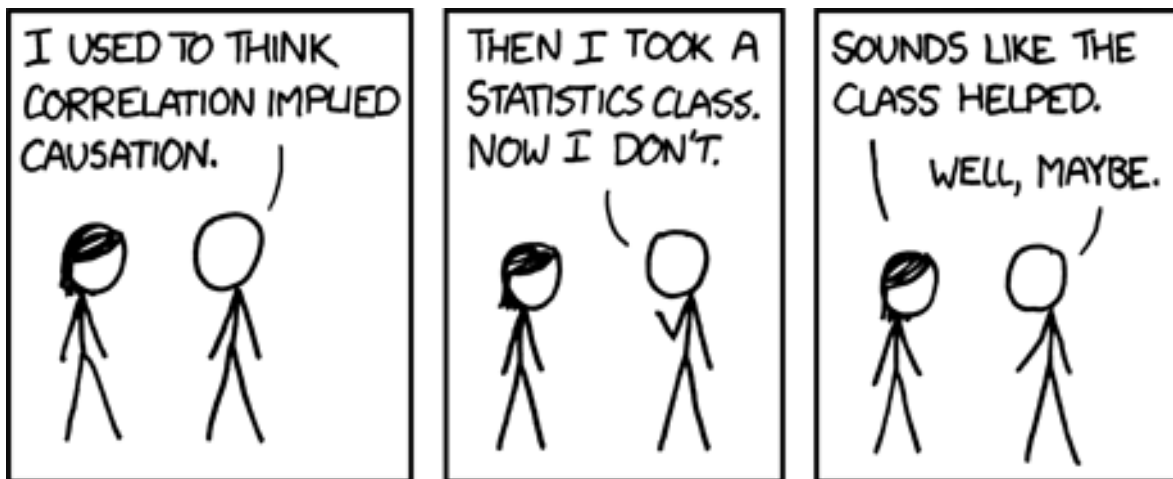
M 4/15 — M 4/29 Work on extension assignments and challenge projects

Read: Powner chs. 9 & 10; **Analyzing Data for POLS.

Topics: Meetings and class work on your extension assignments, project and presentation.

W 5/8 8:00am–10:30am Challenge project presentations

Note: To earn an A you will present your challenge project results using Pecha Kucha.

Source: http://xkcd.com/552/

Assessment

In POLS 200 Approaches to Political Science you can choose the grade you want to aspire to, and within limits, earn it doing the work that you want to do. Everyone in this class starts with zero points. Every assignment successfully completed will add to your point total, you can never lose points. Also, there are many opportunities throughout the semester to earn points, and these opportunities come from different kinds of assignments. To do well in POLS 200 Approaches to Political Science—to earn a B or above—you will need to do multiple things well. The exact path you take is up to you. We will use both Blackboard and a new site, GradeCraft turn in work, plan your path, and to track your progress. Below are the point totals required for each grade level.

Point total requirements

Grade	Points
A	37,000 or more total points
A–	34,000 (note: to earn a grade of A- or above you must earn at least 9,000 core assignment points)
B+	27,000
B	23,000
B–	20,000 (note: to earn a grade in the B range you must earn at least 8,000 core assignment points)
C+	17,000
C	15,000
C–	12,000
D+	10,000
D	7,500
E	7,499 or fewer total points

Assignments (ways to earn points)

Core assignments

You are not required to earn credit for any single assignment, but some assignments must be attempted, and students must earn core points to do well in the course. In addition, some core assignments must be completed before you can move on to more advanced assignments. Core assignments include the following types:

Research basics. There are two types of research basic assignments. One group of assignments introduces students to research questions (1000 points) and to research design (2000 points total). These assignments must be attempted for successful completion of the course. A second group of assignments provides an introduction to different research skills: documenting your work, learning about the theory of political science, gathering data and analyzing data. Each assignment is worth 1000 points. *Complete all four and you earn a 1000 point bonus*. There are intermediate assignments in each of these four areas and to be eligible to attempt them you must complete the core introductory assignment.

Attendance. Students will earn 50 points for each class session attended. There are a total of 2000 points that can be earned in this category.

Events. Students can earn 1000 points each for attending two campus events and reporting on them as social scientists. One event will be one of your choosing. It should be academic and, if possible, broadly related to political science. The second is the Student Research and Creative Activity Day (Thursday, 4/18 and Friday 4/19, details on times and locations as they are available. *Successful completion of both events earns you a 500 point bonus.*

Extension assignments

Based on the four research skill areas noted above, extension assignments provide you with an opportunity develop, extend your skills in areas of your interest. Each category will have at least one assignment. Some can be repeated. Each extension assignment, with one exception, is worth 3000 points. *If you successfully complete an extension assignment in each of the four categories you earn a 3000 point bonus*. The four categories are:

Documenter. Social scientists must document the work that they do. This includes learning to find the academic literature that exists on the research question you are interested in, properly citing it, and knowing how to summarize what you have found. You can write an annotated bibliography to learn more about how to do this work. This assignment may be repeated for credit once for a maximum total of 6000 points.

Theorist. Social scientists must learn how to read and interpret previous research. Students and practice and develop this skill by writing article reviews (worth 1000 points each), or book reviews (worth 3000 points each). You may earn up to 6000 points in this category; 3000 each for article reviews and a book review.

Data gatherer. To learn about the world around us, social scientists must gather information, often referred to as data, so that they can analyze it. There are many kinds of data that social scientists used. You will have the opportunity to practice some of these techniques, including participating in data crowdsourcing, gathering data on oneself, observing or interview others, creating a brief survey, or collecting data already gathered by others. You cannot repeat an assignment, but you can gather up to 6000 points in this category. (You can also earn a 1000 point bonus if you go through the campus review process for your work.)

Data analyst. Social scientists also seek to analyze the data that they gather. Before doing this, sometimes data must be "cleaned" to make it appropriate for later analysis. Analysis can take various forms. You will be given the opportunity to practices these skills through cleaning a data set, presenting a dataset visually, or analyzing data. Analyze the data you gathered! You can earn 6000 points in this category.

Challenge projects

To earn an A- or A in POLS 200 you must complete one of two challenge projects. Each is worth 10,000 points. One challenge project will ask you to move to the next level with your documenter/theorist skills by writing a literature review and completing a research plan. The second challenge project will require you to further extend your data gathering and data analysis skills by writing a longer paper. To be eligible to move forward with one of these challenges you must have earned enough points before the Thanksgiving break so that successful completion of the challenge project will move your point total into at least the A- level.

GRADING OF ASSIGNMENTS

All of the assignments noted above will be assessed on an all-or-nothing—satisfactory or unsatisfactory—basis using a rubric that will be posted in advance. Bonus points may be available for especially well done work.

All assignments will have a due date, late work will be allowed with the following penalties: 1) you will earn 80% of the possible points for a satisfactory assignment turned in within 72 hours of the due date/time; 2) satisfactory assignments after 72 hours earn 50% of the possible points; and, no exemplary bonus points can be earned. Finally, late work can be used to earn other bonuses.

SECOND CHANCES

All or nothing grading can be stressful, so to ease stress, and to encourage you to try out skills that are at the edge of your comfort zone, and most of all, to maximize opportunities for learning, every student starts the course with three (3) virtual tokens that can be "exchanged" for some leniency or opportunities for revision. Using a token will allow a student to do one of the following:

- resubmit an unsatisfactory assignment within the deadline agreed upon (usually within one week of a grade being assigned);
- earn full credit for an assignment turned in with 72 hours of due date/time.

You may earn more tokens by attending campus events and writing reflections. Note though that you must have a token available at the time the assignment is graded.

Examples of paths to an A

The all-rounder. In this approach your goal is to earn bonuses and work on a range of skills. So you might do the following:

Complete the research question and research design assignments	3000
Complete the event assignments (and get the bonus)	2500
Complete all four introductory assignment (and get the bonus)	4000 + 1000
Attend all but a couple of classes	1900
Complete 3000 points of extension assignments in all four areas (and get the bonus)	12000 + 3000
Complete the challenge assignment of your choosing	10000
Total	**37400**

I want to focus. Maybe there are types of assignments you just want to do, and your are willing to complete more assignments to avoid a category or two.

Complete the research question and research design assignments	3000
Complete the Life of the Mind Assignment	1000
Complete three of four introductory assignment	3000
Attend all but a couple of classes	1900
Complete 6 3000 points extension assignments plus an article review	19000
Complete the challenge assignment in the area you like	10000
Total	**37900**

There are many possible paths to an A. And there are similar variations if your goal is a B or a C. GradeCraft has a tool to help you plan how to move forward.

A Few Rules and Other Notes

1. Come to class and come to class prepared. Your presence and participation are important your success.

2. Keep up with the class using GradeCraft, text messages, and other media as appropriate.

3. Be considerate of others. Each person in this classroom is valued. Everyone has the right to determine your own identity, to select the name you wish, pronounced correctly. If you find that instruction or the classroom environment is creating a barrier to inclusion for you, please contact me. I will do my best to help.

4. Please put away your cell phone unless asked to use it for class.

5. Make your work your own. Dishonest work will be punished to the full extent that the Student Handbook allows.

6. Technology fails sometimes. Servers go down, files corrupt. Start early and backup your work. You are responsible for getting work in on time and for sending me readable files in the manner required.

7. Please discuss your disability accommodations with me early in the semester. And you should use these accommodations until it is clear that you don't need them!

Student Well Being

The well-being of students is centrally important. If you are facing any challenges related to your mental or physical health or obstacles related to food or housing security, there are caring people on campus who are there to help. Please don't hesitate to contact me to assist you in finding that help and insuring that you are in the best possible position to succeed.

Catalog description

Designed to provide students with an understanding of the fundamentals of both the philosophy and the practice of political science research. The first portion of the course will focus on how political scientists develop research questions, design and conduct projects, and evaluate their findings. Topics will include: the use of evidence in political writing, fallacy in argument, the distinction between empirical and normative arguments, and the "scientific" study of politics. The second portion of the course will focus on the description and analysis of quantitative data. Students will analyze data using statistical software.

SUNY General Education Attribute

This course carries the S2 and SS3 (Social Science) general education attributes. The SUNY learning outcomes for social science courses as defined by the SUNY Board of Trustees:

> Students will demonstrate an understanding of the methods scientists use to explore social phenomena, including observation, hypothesis development, measurement and data collection, experimentation, evaluation of evidence, and employment of mathematical and interpretive analysis; and knowledge of major concepts, models and issues of at least one discipline in the social sciences.

Emergency evacuation/shelter–in-place procedures

In the event of an emergency evacuation (i.e., fire or other emergency), classes meeting in this building are directed to reassemble at the lobby of IRC so that all persons can be accounted for. Complete details of the College's emergency evacuation, shelter-in-place and other emergency procedures can be found at http://www.oneonta.edu/security/.

College ADA (American With Disabilities Act) Statement

Accessibility Resources (formerly Student Disability Services) is committed to creating an accessible educational experience for students with disabilities.

We partner with students, faculty, and other college resources to design accessible environments and to coordinate accommodations for entitled students under federal legislation. In doing so we affirm the worth of each individual and the spirit of diversity inherent in an inclusive college.

We encourage self-advocacy for students and will assist faculty in meeting the needs of all SUNY Oneonta students. For more information go to https://suny.oneonta.edu/accessibility-resources.