

# POLS 3000: Research Methods in Political Science, Spring 2020

CRN 26428: Mondays and Wednesdays 2:00 p.m.–3:15 p.m., TEB 373 (Macon Campus)

Dr. Christopher N. Lawrence <christopher.lawrence@mga.edu>

Associate Professor of Political Science, Middle Georgia State University

Website: <http://www.cnlawrence.com/teaching> Twitter: @DrLawrenceMGA Phone: (478) 471-5748.

Office Hours: Mondays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays 3:30–5:30 p.m., Teacher Education Building 316 (Macon)

Tuesdays 3:30–5:30 p.m., Wiggs 14 (Cochran).

Also available by appointment.

The purpose of this course is to train students in how to analyze political and social phenomena in a rigorous and scientific manner. This knowledge requires an understanding of two different components: research design and statistics.

In the first component, students will learn how to discriminate between theories, pose proper research questions, construct a relevant hypothesis, make valid causal inferences, operationalize concepts, and test their hypotheses. The latter component offers the student a “statistical toolbox” to use as he or she pursues the scientific study of the social sciences. This component covers quantitative topics such as central tendency and dispersion, measures of association, and regression analysis, using both manual computation and computer software.

Above all else, it is my hope that this course will whet your appetite for the study of politics as a *science*, and thus prepare you to better understand the content of future classes in the social sciences and perform your own inquiries into political and social phenomena.

To be successful in this class, you should have either already taken a course in college-level algebra or statistics.

**Required Materials:** There are two required books for this course:

▷ Paul M. Kellstedt and Guy D. Whitten. 2018. *The Fundamentals of Political Science Research*, 3rd ed. New York: Cambridge University Press. ISBN 978-1-316-64267-2.

▷ James E. Monogan III. 2015. *Political Analysis Using R*. New York: Springer. ISBN 978-3-319-23445-8.

These textbooks should be available, new and used, at the bookstore in the Student Center; you may also be able to order them on-line at a discount.

Additional readings may be assigned at the discretion of the professor and will be provided for you at the library reserve desk, on the course Brightspace (D2L) site, or as handouts in class.

**Note:** You are required to own, or have access to, a copy of the textbooks for the duration of the course (through the final examination).

**Technology Requirements:** You are required to have access to Brightspace for the duration of the course. You will also need access to a computer, tablet, or smartphone that can read Portable Document Format (Adobe PDF) files and supports HTML5 technologies for browsing the Internet.

To complete lab assignments, you will also need access to a computer capable of running **R**, which is a free statistical analysis program. It will run on Windows, Mac OS, and Linux; unfortunately, at present, there is no solution (that I am aware of) that will let you easily use R on an iPad or Chromebook.

**Grading:** Your final grade in this course will be based on the following elements, weighted as follows:

Midterm Exam	25%	Research Project	25%
Final Exam	25%	Labs and Homework	20%
Participation	5%		

Your final grade in the course will be assigned based on this scale:

Final Average	≥ 90.0	≥ 80.0	≥ 70.0	≥ 60.0	< 60.0
Grade	A	B	C	D	F
Grade Points	4.0	3.0	2.0	1.0	0.0

**Exams:** The midterm exam and final exam will be in-class examinations, including short-answer questions and data analysis problems. The midterm exam will cover topics covered in the first half of the course; the final exam is *comprehensive*, with greater emphasis on the second half of the course.

On quantitative questions, you will be expected to show all of your work. If you do not show sufficient work to indicate how you arrived at your answer, **you will not receive any credit for that question**, even if your answer is mathematically “correct.”

**Homework and Lab Assignments:** The class will include regularly-scheduled homework assignments, designed to improve your understanding of the material presented in the lecture. An assignment will also be included as part of each lab.

Homework assignments and labs, unlike the exams, will primarily be graded on the basis of whether or not a reasonable effort was made to correctly answer the problems (correctness is a secondary consideration). It is in your best interest—both in terms of your grade on the homework, and your performance on the exams—to complete these assignments to the best of your ability.

Homework and lab assignments will generally be due 5–7 days after they are assigned.

**Research Project:** Each student will be assigned a topic to produce an individual research paper, in which they will make use of social scientific data to explore an important political topic.

After you are assigned a topic, the paper is developed in three stages; their weight within your total paper grade is listed in parentheses:

1. You will first produce a *literature review* incorporating discussion of relevant past research; typically this literature review will be around 5–7 pages in length. (20%)
2. You then will produce a first draft of the final paper; typically this draft will be around 8–10 pages long, and incorporate the literature review (edited in light of comments from the professor on that assignment). (25%)
3. Finally you will produce a final version of the paper, typically 10–12 pages in length, incorporating revisions based on the professor’s comments on your draft. (30%)
4. You will also make a oral presentation to the class at the end of the semester that summarizes your findings. (25%)

Each stage of the paper will be an element of the research project grade. The “new” material in each subsequent draft of a paper will generally be graded more leniently than material that was expected to be revised in the more complete draft. You should expect *substantially greater* grade reductions for problems that remain uncorrected after being pointed out to you in subsequent drafts of a paper, even if the penalties for those problems were relatively light in the initial draft where the problems appeared.

Students should expect that their draft and final papers will be graded using a course rubric; a copy of this rubric will be posted in Brightspace for your reference. Further details on what each stage of the project entails will be presented in class.

**Participation and attendance:** 5% of your grade will be based on your level of participation in class. This will be evaluated holistically by the professor.

Students who have multiple absences that are not *excused* should expect to receive a substantial reduction in their participation grade. The full definition of an excused absence, and acceptable documentation thereof, is below.

**Contacting the Professor:** My regularly-scheduled office hours are listed at the beginning of the syllabus. During those times, I generally do not schedule appointments; rather, meetings are “first come, first serve.” When I am not busy with a student in-person, I will also be available “virtually” at these times by phone or web chat. If you wish to make a confirmed appointment to see me *outside* my scheduled hours, please do so

at least two business days in advance.

If you do contact me outside my office hours, please bear in mind that my other work and personal obligations may be on a different schedule than what is convenient for you; for example, I may be in class, in the midst of research, or at a meeting. Except under extraordinary circumstances, if your email includes a question or otherwise requires a response, I will always get back to you within one business day, and frequently sooner; messages that merely inform me of a class absence may not be acknowledged.

If you call my office outside my office hours, please avoid leaving voice mail or messages with university staff; it is an incredibly unproductive and inefficient means of communication. You will usually receive a much quicker response by email.

To protect the privacy of your educational records, all discussion regarding grades or other confidential information must be conducted in person, via Brightspace, or via your official *mga.edu* email address; I will not discuss confidential information over the phone or via any non-school email address. If you have not yet activated your official university email address, please see <https://www.mga.edu/technology/services/email.php>.

**When contacting me outside of class, please be sure to specify both the course and section you are in, as it will allow me to respond more quickly to you.**

**Class Policies:** The primary expectations of all Middle Georgia State University students are integrity and civility. Each student should approach his/her academic endeavors, relationships and personal responsibilities with a strong commitment to personal integrity and interpersonal civility.

I believe that for our class to be successful, we must establish a supportive and respectful environment in the classroom and related settings (such as the class website on Brightspace). Accordingly, disruptive behaviors such as repeated tardiness, side conversations, reading materials unrelated to the course (such as the student newspaper), or use of communication technologies (e.g., web browsing/IMing/texting during class) will adversely affect your grade; repeated or egregious disruptive behavior may result in you being asked to leave class for the day, which will reduce your participation grade by one letter grade.

► **Electronic devices:** In the past I have found that while a few students are able to use laptops and tablets effectively as note-taking aids in the classroom, the vast majority find it difficult to avoid distractions from email, Facebook, and other sources online. Ordinarily this wouldn't cause much of a problem, but in the classroom setting this creates what social scientists refer to as "negative externalities"; specifically, when you're watching that funny YouTube video of the monkey washing a cat, everyone around you is also going to see it and be distracted too. Accordingly, you should mute or switch off your cell phones and any alarms during class, and refrain completely from using laptops, tablets, e-readers, "smart" or "dumb" phones, and other portable electronic devices during class.

There may be times in class when I *specifically* ask you to use your cell phone or a laptop or tablet (for example, to participate in a web-based activity); on these occasions, of course, it would be OK to do so.

► **Extra credit:** To be fair to all students, I do not offer individualized extra-credit opportunities. If you believe you might benefit from extra credit, I strongly advise you take advantage of any opportunities offered to the whole class as they are announced over the term.

► **Notes:** I do not provide lecture notes for students under any circumstances. If you miss class, you will have to rely on the generosity of a classmate or make use of any materials provided on the textbook website or its study guide, if applicable. (Students with disabilities who require notes or other learning environment accommodations should consult with me and the MGA Disability Services Office to arrange notetaking assistance.)

You may make audio recordings of in-class lectures; recordings are for your own, personal use, and may not be shared with students who are not enrolled in this course.

► **Revisions to the syllabus:** While I will make every effort to follow the syllabus as-written, if unforeseen circumstances arise during the semester I reserve the right to amend any policy in this syllabus.

► **Attendance and absence policy:** To encourage regular attendance and participation in class, I will take daily

attendance. Your attendance an important factor considered when evaluating your participation grades; however, perfect attendance does not guarantee a perfect participation grade, and it is possible, but perhaps unlikely, that you could receive a perfect participation grade if you have missed a class meeting. Unlike in some of your other courses, “attendance” is not directly computed in your grade and there is no grade penalty for an absence.

Arriving late, leaving early, or unexplained/frequent trips outside of the room during class time for non-medical reasons will adversely affect your participation grade.

► **Make-ups:** Make-up examinations must be scheduled in advance in the case of an unavoidable planned or reasonably-foreseeable absence; otherwise, make-ups will be given only in the case of an illness or other emergency that is properly documented, after the fact. To be fair to all students, make-up exams must be completed within two weeks of the originally scheduled exam date; also, make-up exams may be administered in a different format than the original exam offered to the rest of the class, at my sole discretion.

Make-up quizzes will not be arranged under any circumstances. There are also no make-ups for missed classes; however, students with an excused absence will receive credit for attending any classes missed with a valid excuse (such as student illness or participation in class-related or sponsored activities), and any missed in-class quiz will be dropped from the grade.

To be fair to all students in the class, students are responsible for *all assignments*, regardless of their date of initial enrollment in the course.

**Late Assignments:** A late penalty of 10 percentage points per day will apply to work turned in after the deadline for the assignment to be completed. Notwithstanding this policy, any work received more than 48 hours after the scheduled final examination may not be graded, resulting in a zero (0) on any assignments outstanding at that point in the semester. (Please refer to the university policy on incomplete grades, discussed below, for exceptions.)

► **Grade Appeals:** Like everyone else, I am fallible and sometimes make mistakes. If I simply misrecorded a grade (for example, if I enter “70” in the gradebook when you earned an “80”) or made an arithmetic error, please bring me the returned assignment, and I will immediately correct the error.

If you believe you received an *unjust* grade, I am happy to discuss the grading of the assignment with you, in-person during regular office hours or at a scheduled appointment; please bring the graded assignment with you so we can have a productive conversation. If you remain unsatisfied with my explanation of the grade, to give us both ample time to consider the dispute, you will need to type a brief (one-page) explanation of your position and turn it in, along with the original graded assignment, *at least one week after* the assignment was originally returned to you. I will then consider your appeal and make a determination. Appeals must be submitted in hard copy format; no appeals submitted via email will be considered. Please refer to the Student Handbook and Catalog for policies regarding appeals of *final letter grades*.

► **Academic Misconduct:** You are responsible for reading, understanding, and abiding by the Student Code of Conduct; this is included in the current edition of the Student Handbook, which is available online at [http://www.mga.edu/student-affairs/docs/MGA\\_Student\\_Handbook.pdf](http://www.mga.edu/student-affairs/docs/MGA_Student_Handbook.pdf).

I take academic misconduct (including, but not limited to, cheating on exams and plagiarism of written work) very seriously. So does Middle Georgia State University. In this course the *minimum* penalty for academic misconduct is a grade of zero (0) on the assignment in question, with no opportunity to repeat the assignment, along with referral to the testing center to complete an examination on plagiarism, cheating, and the Student Code of Conduct. Second or subsequent violations, or egregious misconduct (for example, an organized effort to cheat involving multiple students, or academic misconduct that causes harm to other students), will automatically be referred to the Office of Student Affairs for a university-level resolution which may include a failing grade in the course, disciplinary probation, and/or academic suspension.

I offer some free advice, drawn from past experience as both a student and a professor: do not turn in plagiarized work because you have run out of time and feel as if you need to turn in *something*—taking the

late penalty is better than the sanctions for academic misconduct. Similarly, if you forgot to study, it's better to get a low grade on the exam than the zero you'll get if you cheat.

One of the early computer programmers, Admiral Grace Hopper, is reported to have said that “[i]t’s easier to ask forgiveness than it is to get permission.” That advice *does not* apply in this situation. If you have the slightest doubt about whether something is academic misconduct, *ask me before handing in the assignment for grading.*

A plagiarism prevention service is used in evaluation of written work submitted for this course. As directed by the professor, students are expected to submit or have their assignments submitted through the service in order to meet requirements for this course. The papers will be retained by the service for the sole purpose of checking for plagiarized content in future student submissions.

▸ **Tutoring:** Middle Georgia State University provides free tutoring services for political science courses at the Student Success Center on each campus. Hours when political science tutors are available are posted at the SSC website, <http://www.mga.edu/ssc>. Tutoring services are not a substitute for regular class attendance. All students are encouraged to take advantage of these *free* services.

▸ **Disability Accommodations:** While you are welcome to discuss any special needs with me in private, to be fair to all students, accommodations are only provided when supported by appropriate documentation from MGA Disability Services (478-471-2985 or 478-934-3023; Student Life Building, Room 266 (Macon) or Sanford Hall (Cochran)); <http://www.mga.edu/ds>).

▸ **Campus Emergencies:** In the event of a closure or delayed opening of the university due to inclement weather or other emergency, you should monitor the Knight Alert system for updates; sign up for these alerts at <http://www.mga.edu/police/alert.aspx>. You should expect communication via email and/or Brightspace regarding any assignments to be completed or revisions to the schedule while we are unable to meet.

▸ **End of Course Evaluations:** Student evaluations of faculty are administered online at the end of each term for all courses with five or more students. Students will receive an email containing a unique link to a survey for each course in which they are enrolled. All responses are anonymous and completion of evaluations are voluntary.

**Withdrawal Deadlines:** The last day to drop the course without it appearing on your transcript is Monday, January 13th. Students may withdraw from the course and earn a grade of “W” up to and including the midterm date, on Wednesday, March 11th. After this point, students who withdraw will receive a grade of “WF,” which is calculated in the GPA as an “F.” The MGA Withdrawal Form is available online or from the Office of the Registrar.

**“No-Shows” and Informal Withdrawals:** Students who have not attended any classes as of the reporting period (generally, during the second week of classes) may be reported as a “no-show” and may lose financial aid as a result. In addition, if you stop coming to class without withdrawing, it may jeopardize your eligibility for financial aid in future terms.

**Course Outline:** Any changes to this schedule will be announced in class and will be posted to the course calendar and in Brightspace. We will not necessarily read books “front-to-back”; please be sure you read the correct chapters *in advance* of the designated class dates.

While the professor may periodically remind students of upcoming scheduled events, it is **your responsibility** to be familiar with this schedule and any changes to it.

**Jan 8 No class: SPSA conference.**

**Jan. 13: What is Social Research?** Introduction to the course; paths to knowledge in the social sciences.

**Jan. 15: The Scientific Study of Politics** Applying the scientific method to the social world; causality.  
Kellstedt and Whitten, ch. 1.

**Jan. 20 No Class: Martin Luther King, Jr. Day**

- Jan. 22, 27: The Scientific Study of Politics** Continued from Jan. 15.
- Jan. 29; Feb. 3: Theory Building** Identifying interesting topics; developing new theories; thinking formally about causality.  
Kellstedt and Whitten, ch. 2.
- Feb. 5, 10: Evaluating Causal Relationships** Understanding causality; accounting for possible alternative explanations.  
Kellstedt and Whitten, ch. 3.
- Feb. 12, 17: Research Design** Demonstrating causality; experimental versus observational designs.  
Kellstedt and Whitten, ch. 4.
- Feb. 19, 24, 26: Measuring Concepts** Issues in measuring concepts; biased measures; reliability and validity.  
Kellstedt and Whitten, ch. 5.  
**Paper Topic Due: Feb. 24**
- Mar. 2 Midterm Exam**
- Mar. 4, 9, 11: The Basics of Data** Levels of measurement; basic descriptive statistics and graphics.  
Kellstedt and Whitten, ch. 6.  
Monogan, ch. 1–4.
- Mar. 16, 18 No class: Spring Break.**
- Mar. 23, 25: Probability and Statistical Inference** Samples vs. populations; the central limit theorem.  
Kellstedt and Whitten, ch. 7.  
**Literature Review Due: Mar. 25**
- Mar. 30; Apr. 1, 6: Bivariate Hypothesis Testing**  $p$  values; tabular analysis (including  $\chi^2$  tests); difference of means tests; correlations.  
Kellstedt and Whitten, ch. 8.  
Monogan, ch. 5.
- Apr. 8, 13, 15: Regression Models** Ordinary least squares regression: two-variable regression; OLS with multiple independent variables; assumptions and diagnostics.  
Kellstedt and Whitten, ch. 9–11.  
Monogan, ch. 6.  
**Research Paper Draft Due: Apr. 15.**
- Apr. 20, 22, 27 Presentations**
- Apr. 29 Review for Final Exam**  
**Final Research Paper Due.**
- Friday, May 1: 3:30 p.m.–5:30 p.m. Final Exam**