

# Syllabus

## P SC 4093 Capstone Seminar in Political Science: What's the Matter with Voters? Political Behavior and 2020 Presidential Election

Spring 2022

Instructor: John Kuk

### Time & Room

Class: M, W 3:00 – 4:15PM  
Room: Gould Hall 0150  
Course website: Canvas

### Office

John Kuk  
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*Office Hours:* Friday 1:00 - 3:00 PM on Zoom

## Course Description

“What’s the Matter with Kansas?” Thomas Frank asked in his book why the poorest county in America solidly voted for the Republican Party. This is not the only puzzle in the study of American politics. Why do low income voters support tax cut when the policy only benefits high income earners? Why do people who benefit from Affordable Care Act oppose the policy? Political scientists have asked the role of self interest in public opinion, policy preferences, and voting behavior for more than 50 years. What kind of data did they use to find answers to these puzzles? They used public opinion surveys. Public opinion surveys not only helps us understand how self interest matters in public opinion, but it also give us tremendous amount of opportunities to answer interesting social science questions.

In this capstone seminar, we are going to learn how to analyze and write a social science research paper using high quality survey data such as American National Election Studies (ANES), Cooperative Congressional Election Studies (CCES), Views of the Electorate Research (VOTER) Survey, and Nationscape. Students will ask their own research question, conduct literature review, develop hypotheses, test the hypotheses by analyzing survey data using R, and write the whole process as a social science research paper.

## Prerequisites

A willingness to work hard on possibly unfamiliar material is key.

## About the Class

**Class Structure:** The main purpose of this class is writing a research paper. We will workshop ideas, and work collaboratively to help you realize how to come to a research question that coincides

with your personal interests in the field of political science. Everybody has their own interest. Each student has to pursue their own research question. Even though there is no common ground in personal interest, what we do have is some interesting data that might allow us to explore your own question a bit more thoroughly. My goal as an instructor is to help you acquire the set of skills that will allow you to not only explore the data yourself, but also communicate the results of that analysis to others. In the course schedule below I outline the core skills I think will be most relevant but the actual course will be responsive to what we discover together as a class as well as the pace at which participants master the relevant data analysis techniques.

**Class Expectations:** This problem-driven structure means that the success of the course depends heavily on how seriously all of you take each session. I will occasionally assign light readings to provide background on the day's topic and we expect you to come to class having read and reflected on them. To help with learning the programming skills necessary to analyze data, I will be giving assignments in an online interactive learning system called Datacamp ([www.datacamp.com](http://www.datacamp.com)). Learning to program is a lot like learning a language, it is best to have consistent, daily practice. Because we will be working hands-on with the data in class, I expect you to keep up with the Datacamp programming exercises so you can actively participate. Finally, I want every student to bring a laptop to class every day so we can all explore together. If you don't own a laptop please email me and I will make arrangements for you.

## Requirements and Evaluation

Class participation: 10%

Datacamp: 10%

Homework Assignments: 30%

Final Project: 50%

**Class participation (10%):** This is a student driven class. There will be frequent student presentation and feedback sessions. Students with frequent participation will not only get high scores on participation, but also get extra credit.

**Programming Exercises (10%):** Throughout the semester we will learn the statistical programming language R. We will use the open-source statistical software environment *R Studio*, which makes it much easier and more intuitive to work with data using R. There is a steep learning curve with R, and you will discover that learning to program is fun and exciting, but it can also be frustrating at times. To facilitate learning of R, we will be using DataCamp. DataCamp will enable you to work through the programming exercises at your own pace, while accessing various types of support, both within DataCamp and the broader class community. The system will teach you all you need to know to use R for your own analyses, and you will have access to several supplementary courses that you can use to extend your knowledge beyond what is covered in the course. With the resources and exercises provided by DataCamp, activities and instruction during class and experience working through the problem sets, we are confident that all of you will learn the language of R during the semester, but students should expect to spend additional time learning and practicing.

**Homework Assignments (30%):** There will be about 8 homework assignments. They are designed to help you write your final research paper and practice R skills that we learned in class.

**Final Paper (50%):** Our goal in this class is to work together to learn something about the public using survey data and write our findings as a research paper. In the process we will learn how to make convincing arguments using quantitative data. As a capstone project, each student will be required to choose a research topic you are interested in, pull data from any survey data, and use it to make an argument. The due date for submitting the final paper is May 11, 11:59 PM.

## Logistics

**Slack** I will set up a Slack work space for our class. We will use this area to ask questions about course material, assignments, or logistics. I will respond to Slack messages sent during the week within 24h. I will respond to Slack messages sent during the weekend at my own discretion. *Slack* is designed so that students can answer each other's questions. I strongly encourage students to answer peers' questions if you know the answer. Students who are active on Slack will get extra credit for the class. The link to the slack channel is here: <https://psc4093capstone.slack.com>

**Emails and Canvas:** Email should be used for personal issues, such as to schedule an appointment outside of office hours, to request an excused absence, or for feedback about grades. All other questions should be asked either on *Canvas* or on our course *Slack* channel. If you have a question about course content assignments, or logistics, please check *Canvas* and *Slack* first to see whether it has been asked already. If you email me with a question that is relevant to other members of the class, I will respond by directing you to post your comment to *Slack*.

**Late Submissions:** For the seminar to work, all students must keep up with the course load throughout the semester. To encourage students to keep up with the material and to allow the instructors to provide timely feedback, assignments must be turned in on time. All assignments turned in after the deadline will be docked 10% (one letter grade), and an additional 10% for every 24 hours the assignment is delayed.

## Readings

The majority of course readings will be articles. We have two recommended books:

- Wayne C. Booth, Gregory Colomb, and Joseph Williams, *The Craft of Research*, 3rd edition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008.
- Kieran Healy, *Data Visualization: A Practical Introduction*.

## COVID-19 Considerations

COVID-19 has been challenging to everybody. If you are facing any issue, come talk to me during Office Hours, or via email, and share any concerns you may have. I do not have all the answers, especially in this situation, but I care about your education and well-being, and I will do my best to help. There is more to the situation than simply logistics, however. Teaching properly and learning well requires effort from me and from you. We will try to remember how fortunate we are to have this opportunity to work and learn together, even though things are more difficult than usual. You

can expect me to be sensible and reasonable in the work I require for the course, and to be flexible and responsive as circumstances change over the duration of the semester. I ask that you do your best to proceed in good faith, to care for yourself and your classmates, and to work with me to make the best things.

## Masking

For the first two weeks of the semester (through January 31) masking will be required in classroom settings. Beginning February 1, 2022, the Norman campus will revert to the Fall 2021 masking guidance, and encourages masking in the classroom and requires masking for a two-week quarantine period when a confirmed positive COVID-19 case in the class is identified. According to the Fall 2021 masking guidance, OU community members are expected to mask indoors, especially in high-density settings, such as classrooms and at special events when not eating or drinking.

While cloth masks are still permissible, the university strongly recommends the use of KN95 masks or disposable surgical masks as they provide far greater amounts of protection against Omicron. KN95 and disposable surgical masks will be made available to OU community members. Campus Safety will provide masks to building supervisors to be made available at all entrances.

## Course Schedule

Here is a general overview of the three units and the weekly topics. Weekly topics are largely framed in terms of learning research process and data analysis skills I will be teaching but will also be driven by topics in the domain area.

I reserve the right to change or adjust reading assignments as we move through the semester. I will provide you with at least one week notice of any changes to the readings.

### Unit 1. How to Get Started with Research

#### Week 1. Introduction to the class

#### Week 2. Introduction to Research and R

- Topic:
  1. What is research
  2. Learn how to use R and R Markdown
- Read:
  1. Read (until January 24) Preface, Prologue, Chapters 1 in Booth, Colomb, and Williams, *The Craft of Research*, 3rd edition.
  2. Watch [What is R Markdown?](#)
  3. [Using Markdown](#)
  4. [Using R Markdown](#)

5. Chapter 3 in Booth, Colomb, and Williams, *The Craft of Research*

- Assignment #1 Due: Read [Installing R](#), then install R and RStudio.

### **Week 3. Framing Questions and How to Narrow Them Down**

- Read: Finish either Datacamp *Intro to tidyverse* or *RStudio Premiers*
- Topic:
  1. Learn how to ask social science research questions and narrow them down
  2. Presentation of your research question
- Assignment #2 Due (9/9): One-page summary of your proposed final paper topic.

### **Week 4. Discussion of Research Topics: Developing An Argument**

- Read:
  1. Chapter 4 in Booth, Colomb, and Williams, *The Craft of Research*
- Topic:
  1. Continuing presentation
  2. How to develop an argument
- Assignment #3 Due: Submit a knitted R Markdown document.

### **Week 5. Literature Review: Library Session**

- Topic: Literature reviews and engaging primary and secondary sources
- Read: Chapters 5 and 6 in Booth, Colomb, and Williams, *The Craft of Research*
- Assignment #4 Due: Find 10 articles or books related to your research question

## **Unit 2. Understanding Data**

### **Week 6. Introduction to Survey Data: ANES, CCES, and Nationscape**

- Topic: Find my variables and create my dataset
- Read: ANES, CCES, and Nationscape questionnaire
- Assignment #5 Due: Submit your variables of interest

### **Week 7. Understanding Your Data**

- Topic:

1. Generate a simple frequency table.
2. Summarize a dataset
3. Create a table showing both frequency and proportions.
4. Summarize a single variable to show the minimum, IQR, maximum, and mean values

### **Week 8. Data Manipulation 101**

- Topic:
  1. Create new labels for a categorical variable that is stored as a numeric variable.
  2. Create a standardized numeric variable from two other numeric variables
  3. Create a categorical variable that represents equally-sized intervals across a range of a continuous variable
  4. Create a categorical variable that represents equally sized groups across the range of a continuous variable
- Assignment #5 Due: Finish R in-class exercise

### **Week 9. Presentation**

- Topic: Present your question, argument, hypothesis, dataset, and first cut results

## **Unit 3. Visualizing Data**

### **Week 10. Principles of Graphical Communication**

- Topic: Good and bad visualization
- Read: *Data Visualization* Ch. 1

### **Week 11. Plotting the Data**

- Topic: Learn how to use *ggplot2*
- Assignment #6 Due: Finish *ggplot* in-class exercise

### **Week 12. Labeling and Annotating Graphs**

- Topic: Learn how to refine your graphs
- Topic 2: Presentation of your graphs using only 2 slides
- Assignment #7 Due: Submit your graphs based on your data

### **Week 13. Correlations and Regressions**

- Topic:

1. Additional modeling
  2. How to present your findings
- Assignment #8 Due: Submit your updated graphs

### **Week 14. Final Presentation**

### **Week 15. Writing Week**

## **Acknowledgment**

I learned tremulously from my teachers and friends. This course is built upon, or borrows from, course materials prepared by Brandon Stewart and Margaret Frye (Princeton Sociology 320), Margaret Frye (U of Michigan Sociology 210) and Molly Roberts (UCSD POLI170A).

## **Academic Misconduct**

Academic misconduct includes plagiarism, cheating on exams, improper collaboration, and fraud (such as submitting the same assignment for different classes or fabricating sources). See <http://integrity.ou.edu/students.html> for more information on OU's Guide To Academic Integrity. Assignments involving academic misconduct will automatically be given a zero.

## **Adjustments for Pregnancy/Childbirth Related Issues**

Should you need modifications or adjustments to your course requirements because of documented pregnancy-related or childbirth-related issues, please contact me as soon as possible to discuss. Generally, modifications will be made where medically necessary and similar in scope to accommodations based on temporary disability. Please see [www.ou.edu/content/eoo/faqs/pregnancy-faqs.html](http://www.ou.edu/content/eoo/faqs/pregnancy-faqs.html) for commonly asked questions.

## **Final Exam Preparation Period**

Pre-finals week will be defined as the seven calendar days before the first day of finals. Faculty may cover new course material throughout this week. For specific provisions of the policy please refer to OU's Final Exam Preparation Period policy.

## **Religious Holidays**

It is the policy of the University to excuse the absences of students that result from religious observances and to provide without penalty for the rescheduling of examinations and additional required classwork that may fall on religious holidays. Please see the instructor immediately if you will need to miss class any time during this semester.

## **Students with Disabilities**

The University of Oklahoma is committed to providing reasonable accommodation for all students with disabilities. Any student in this course who has a disability that may prevent him or her from fully demonstrating his or her abilities should contact the instructor personally as soon as possible to discuss accommodations necessary to ensure full participation and facilitate your educational opportunities. Students with disabilities must be registered with the Office of Disability Services prior to receiving accommodations in this course. The Office of Disability Services is located in Goddard Health Center, Suite 166, phone 405-325-3852 or TDD only 405-325-4173.

## **Title IX Resources**

For any concerns regarding gender-based discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, stalking, or intimate partner violence, the University offers a variety of resources, including advocates on-call 24-7, counseling services, mutual no contact orders, scheduling adjustments, and disciplinary sanctions against the perpetrator. Please contact the Sexual Misconduct Office at 405-325-2215 (8-5, M-F) or the Sexual Assault Response Team at 405-615-0013 (24-7) to learn more or to report an incident.

## **Disclaimer**

I reserve the right to alter this syllabus at any time.