

POL 397B The Origins of Data in Politics and Policy

Spring 2024

Course and Contact Information

Instructor: Dr. Fatih Erol

Class Hours: TuTh 9:30AM - 10:45AM

Physical Class Location: Communication #214

Office Hours: TuTh 11:00AM - 12:00PM

Office Location: Social Sciences Building #115A (Arizona Policy Lab)

Instructor Email: ferol@arizona.edu

Course Description

This course-based undergraduate research experience (CURE) will introduce freshman and sophomores to the main ways in which scholars and other experts in the fields of political science and public policy obtain and analyze data relevant to politics and policy in the United States and the international system. Beyond discussing these origins of data analyzed in our fields of study, we will also spend time collecting and working with our own original data in order to better understand both where data come from and how they are used in academic research. Finally, we will also discuss and practice how to effectively present data and research findings for non-academic audiences.

Course Objectives

This in-person course will involve a series of lectures delivered by the instructor as well as individual and small group activities covering (1) key methods scholars in our field use to generate and analyze original data, (2) how to collect and examine your own data, and (3) how to present original research using those data to different audiences.

Expected Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- describe various ways in which data are generated for research purposes in the fields of political science and public policy,

- develop a novel research question ,
- systematically collect original data, and
- present important details about original data and related research.

Grading

Your final grade will be determined by a series of homework assignments, in-class activities, and attendance/participation – there are a total of 100 points possible over the course of the semester. Separate assignment guides for each task will be provided during the semester.

- Worksheet on academic motivations for research questions: 5 points
- Worksheet on “real world” motivations for research questions: 5 points
- Reflection journal entries on methods of data generation: 25 points (5 points per entry)
- Individual data collection exercises: 20 points
- Practice IRB approval form: 5 points
- Blog post assessment worksheet: 10 points
- Individual blog post assignment: 10 points
- In-class presentation of data collection: 10 points
- Overall attendance & participation (including peer review tasks): 10 points

The grading scale is as follows:

A= 90-100; **B**=80-89.9; **C**= 70-79.9; **D**= 60-69.9; **E**= 59.9 and below

* Requests for incomplete (I) or withdrawal (W) must be made in accordance with University policies, which are available [\[here\]](#) and [\[here\]](#), respectively.

Extra Credit #1 (up to 5 points): Students may obtain up to 5 extra credit points toward their overall course grade by participating in research opportunities offered to SGPP undergraduate students. During most semesters, researchers in SGPP (professors, graduate students, and sometimes even undergraduate students) are conducting studies that rely on the participation of undergraduate students. These studies generally do not last more than 20-30 minutes. Those studies require going to the SGPP research lab in person (Social Sciences Building, #115A). To participate, students will log on to a web site called SONA (details will be made available through an email from the lab manager [myself]). The decision of whether to participate in studies will not harm your relationship with the instructor, and all data from the studies is kept anonymous and handled only by the researchers.

Extra Credit #2 (up to 5 points): There will be 5 short assignments (each worth 1% of the final grade) to be done in the open-source software *R* in the respective week. These assignments are designed to give you hands-on experience with the basics of data management, analysis, and reporting (as a starter). Consider these assignments and my cheat sheets as initial resources for your future inquiries (i.e., full-time/part-time job applications and internships).

Extra Credit #3 (up to 2 points): For those who read this syllabus before the first week session, January 16, 09:30 AM (as strongly suggested in my first message), I have created a short survey with five questions about the syllabus (each worth 0.4 points for the correct answers). Please finish up this survey ([\[here\]](#)) by January 16, 09:00 AM to earn your extra credit(s).

Academic Integrity and Late Assignment Policy

Academic dishonesty is taken extremely seriously in this course. Anyone found guilty of fabrication, falsification, or plagiarism will, at a minimum, receive an F for this course, and will be referred to university authorities. Fabrication means altering information dishonestly, falsification means inventing information dishonestly, and plagiarism means presenting someone else's work as your own, either by not giving proper acknowledgment of the source or by presenting in whole or in part any work that has been prepared by or copied from another person.

Course incompletes will not be given except in extreme situations where all the appropriate documentation is provided. Late assignments will be docked one letter grade if not handed by the due date/time.

UA Academic Policies Website

The syllabus policies are [here](#). This site includes information regarding:

- Absence and class participation
- Threatening behavior
- Accessibility and Accommodations (Disability Resource Center)
- Code of Academic Integrity
- Non-Discrimination and Anti- Harassment Policy

Additional Information

Resources for Students: UA Non-discrimination and Anti-harassment policy [\[here\]](#), UA Academic policies and procedures [\[here\]](#), Student Assistance and Advocacy information [\[here\]](#), and UA Confidentiality policy [\[here\]](#).

Subject to Change Statement: Information contained in this course syllabus, other than the grade and absence policies, may be subject to change with reasonable advance notice, as deemed appropriate by the instructor.

Electronic Devices Disruptions or interruptions in the classroom due to the improper use of cell phones or laptops (e.g., texting, chatting, browsing Facebook [Meta] / Twitter [X]) will not be tolerated. Students who are disrupting the class will be asked to stop using their electronic device and may be asked to leave. Any kind of **unauthorized recording** is **prohibited by law**.

Emailing If you have a question about the course or an assignment, I would encourage you to check the syllabus first to see if the answer to your question is there. You are also encouraged to discuss any questions or concerns about the course with me at office hours or after class. If you need to reach me outside of class or office hours, please send me an email and I will attempt to respond as quickly as I can within reason.

Academic Advising If you have questions about your academic progress this semester, please reach out to your academic advisor [\[here\]](#). Contact the Advising Resource Center [\[here\]](#) for all general advising questions and referral assistance. Call [520-626-8667](tel:520-626-8667) or email to advising@arizona.edu

Life Challenges If you are experiencing unexpected barriers to your success in your courses, please note [the Dean of Students Office](#) is a central support resource for all students and may be helpful. The Dean of Students Office can be reached at [520-621-2057](tel:520-621-2057) or email to deanofstudents@email.arizona.edu.

Physical and Mental-Health Challenges If you are facing physical or mental health challenges this semester, please note that Campus Health provides quality medical and mental health care. For medical appointments, call [520-621-9202](tel:520-621-9202). For After Hours care, call [520-570-7898](tel:520-570-7898). For the Counseling & Psych Services (CAPS) 24/7 hotline, call [520-621-3334](tel:520-621-3334).

Course Materials:

Students can purchase the textbook from which many of the assigned readings are drawn if they so desire, but it can also be available through the UA Library's Interlibrary Loan (ILL), and Document Delivery service ([\[here\]](#)).

- Dixon, J. C., Singleton, R. A., & Straits, B. C. 2022. *The process of social research*. Oxford University Press.

* This book's prior version (published in 2015) is also accessible via archive.org for free. Upon login, the website will allow you to borrow the book (online only) for one hour. You can renew 1-hour loan.

** Assigned chapters from the book should be completed prior to class on Tuesday of the respective week they are assigned.

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Week 1: Introduction and Overview (01-16-25)

- **Reading Assignment:** None.

Week 2: Developing a Research Question I (01-21-25, 01-23-25)

- **Reading Assignment:** Chapter 2
- **Homework Assignment:** Worksheet on “real world” motivations for research questions [5 pts]. **DUE 01-27-25 11:59 PM.** Assignment details are [\[here\]](#).

Week 3: Developing a Research Question II (01-28-25, 01-30-25)

- **Reading Assignment:** Chapter 4
- **Homework Assignment:** Worksheet on academic motivations for research questions [5 pts]. **DUE 02-03-25 11:59 PM.** Assignment details are [\[here\]](#).

Week 4: Identifying Relevant Concepts for Data Collection (02-04-25, 02-06-25)

- **Reading Assignment:** Chapter 5
- **Homework Assignment:** Begin individual data collection activities.

Week 5: Research Ethics / IRB / Conducting Research on Sensitive Topics (02-11-25, 02-13-25)

- **Reading Assignment:** Chapter 3
- **Homework Assignment:** Practice IRB approval form [5 pts]. **DUE 02-17-25 11:59 PM.** Assignment details are [\[here\]](#).

Week 6: Case Selection (02-18-25, 02-20-25)

- **Reading Assignment:** Chapter 9
- **Homework Assignment:** Reflection journal entry on selecting cases [5 pts]. **DUE 02-24-25 11:59 PM.** Assignment details are [\[here\]](#).

Week 7: Collecting and Using Observational Data (02-25-25, 02-27-25)

- **Reading Assignment:** Chapter 10
- **Homework Assignment:** Reflection journal entry on observational data [5 pts]. **DUE 03-03-25 11:59 PM.** Assignment details are [\[here\]](#).

Week 8: Checking in on Data Collection Progress (03-04-25, 03-06-25)

- **Reading Assignment:** TBD (based on the class' research topics).
- **Homework Assignment:** Written summary and small group discussion of individual data collection efforts so far [10 pts]. **DUE 03-17-25 11:59 PM.** Assignment details are [\[here\]](#).

Week 9: Spring Recess - No Classes (03-11-25, 03-13-25)

Please practice *R* more and make further progress in your data collection efforts during the break.

Week 10: Conducting Surveys (03-18-25, 03-20-25)

- **Reading Assignment:** Chapter 8
- **Homework Assignment:** Reflection journal entry on surveys [5 pts]. **DUE 03-24-25 11:59 PM.** Assignment details are [\[here\]](#).

Week 11: Conducting Experiments (03-25-25, 03-27-25)

- **Reading Assignment:** Chapter 7
- **Homework Assignment:** Reflection journal entry on experiments [5 pts]. **DUE 03-31-25 11:59 PM.** Assignment details are [\[here\]](#).

Week 12: Social Media and Other Text-as-Data (04-01-25, 04-03-25)

- **Reading Assignment:**
 - Brady, H. E. (2019). The challenge of big data and data science. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 22, 297-323. DOI: [10.1146/annurev-polisci-090216-023229](https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-090216-023229)
 - Hargittai, E. (2020). Potential biases in big data: Omitted voices on social media. *Social Science Computer Review*, 38(1), 10-24. DOI: [10.1177/0894439318788322](https://doi.org/10.1177/0894439318788322)
 - **Highly suggested to visit:** [quanteda Tutorials](#)
- **Homework Assignment:** Reflection journal entry on “big data” [5 pts]. **DUE 04-07-25 11:59 PM.** Assignment details are [\[here\]](#).

Week 13: Survey and (Survey) Experiment Design on Qualtrics & Meta (Facebook) Sampling (04-08-25, 04-10-25)

- **Reading Assignment:**
 - Mutz, D. C., & Kim, E. (2020). The progress and pitfalls of using survey experiments in political science. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*. DOI: [10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.929](https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.929)
 - Zhang, B., Mildenberger, M., Howe, P. D., Marlon, J., Rosenthal, S. A., & Leiserowitz, A. (2020). Quota sampling using Facebook advertisements. *Political Science Research and Methods*, 8(3), 558-564. DOI: [10.1017/psrm.2018.49](https://doi.org/10.1017/psrm.2018.49)
 - **Highly suggested to try covering the online training in the following page:** [Qualtrics Platform Essentials - Learning Content](#)
 - **Highly suggested to try covering the following resource by Anja Neundorff and Aykut Öztürk:** [Recruiting Research Participants through Facebook Advertisements: A Handbook](#)
- **Homework Assignment:** Written summary and group discussion of data collection efforts so far [10 pts]. **DUE 04-14-25.** Assignment details are [\[here\]](#).

Week 14: Writing about Academic Work for the General Public (04-15-25, 04-17-25)

- **Reading Assignment:** Style guides and “tricks of the trade” documents provided by the instructor (via D2L).
- **Homework Assignment:** Individual blog post about data collection [10 pts] (**DUE 04-21-25 11:59 PM**). Assignment details are [\[here\]](#). Preparing in-class presentation about data collection.

Week 15: Presenting Academic Research (04-22-25, 04-24-25)

- **Reading Assignment:** Style guides and “tricks of the trade” documents provided by the instructor (via D2L).
- **Homework Assignment:** Blog post assessment worksheet [10 pts] (**DUE 04-28-25 11:59 PM**); Preparing in-class presentation about data collection. Presentation structure is [\[here\]](#).

Week 16: In-class Presentations about Data Collection Findings (04-29-25, 05-01-25)

- **“In-class” Assignment:** In-person Presentations [10 pts].

Week 17: Wrap-up (05-06-25)

Final in-class presentations about data collection findings (if necessary) & final overview wrap-up.