RESEARCH COLLOQUIUM

RED STATES, BLUE STATES: CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN VOTERS AND PARTIES

This research colloquium engages questions at the heart of an ongoing research project and which animate debate on contemporary American politics. In brief, the research colloquium will address two major questions. First, why have we not seen stronger support for the policies and politicians of the left, and for greater redistribution, as economic inequality has climbed? Second, why is it that poorer states, that are more reliant on Federal support, are also more likely to vote for Republican candidates?

Those questions are linked together in a book manuscript being written by the professor. The research for that book focuses on the labor market, connecting people’s skills and earning power to their attitudes towards government spending and services. The goal of this colloquium is to connect that research with your study of political science. We will explore the literature that relates to the research questions outlined above, consider and appraise different hypotheses, introduce you to research methods and data sources, and guide you through an independent research project related to the overall research agenda. Class sessions on the scholarly literature will be followed by sessions on research methods so that you have the tools necessary to undertake that research. Because the colloquium is so research-oriented, the learning goals and assignments are outlined below. Materials on research applications are highlighted following relevant class sessions on this syllabus in a separate box. Because grading and interaction for the colloquium is expected to be relatively intensive, the class size will be capped at twenty.

Learning Goals: The course is designed to achieve the following objectives.

1) Facilitating students’ ability to understand and evaluate alternative theories about contemporary, American attitudes to redistribution and voting behavior.
2) Fostering confidence and developing skills related to public speaking and presenting, including the ability to lead academic discussions.
3) Strengthening students’ ability to engage in independent research, with a focus on developing theoretically informed research questions and conducting simple, quantitative and qualitative analysis from primary sources.

NB: POL 119A is a Four-Credit Course (with three hours of class-time per week). Success in this four credit hour course is based on the expectation that students will spend a minimum of nine hours of study per week in preparation for class including readings, preparation for leading class, research assignments etc. Because this is the first time that the course has been taught, you will be asked to review class material and assignments at the end of the course.
Course Requirements and Assignments:

The assignments are designed, first, to ensure that you practice critical reading and scholarly debate and, second, to replicate the different stages of an academic research project. The percent of the final grade that is linked to each activity is shown in parentheses in each section below.

**Participation (ten percent):** Active participation in weekly sessions is required. Even when you do not introduce the material, you are expected to read and contribute to the discussion. The professor may include brief class exercises that test your knowledge and which contribute to your overall participation grade. The participation grade is cumulative through the semester.

**Oral Introduction to the Readings (Fifteen percent):** Students are required to lead the discussion on the literature in one of five class sessions in groups of three. Sign-up sheets for the different sessions will be available on Latte at the start of the semester. A guide to leading the class session will be posted on Latte. Students are required to consult with the professor on their presentation and to submit discussion questions to the professor on the Friday prior to class.

**Formulating the Research Question (ten percent):** In Week Five, you will submit your research question. You will also present your question using a powerpoint presentation that displays your question and proposed explanation graphically, as text boxes with arrows.

**Identifying and Describing a Data Source (ten percent):** In Week Seven, you will submit one to two paragraphs, for a maximum of 500 words, describing a data source that you have identified with help from the professor and/or Brandeis University research librarians. You should indicate the value of the data in analyzing your research question and how it will be used.

**Mastering a Research Tool (15 percent):** In Week Nine, you will show proficiency in describing your data using graphs and basic statistics. You do not have to come into the course with any statistical or research background. I will offer training in simple statistical analysis using Stata. This component will be satisfied when you have completed a brief test exercise.

**Empirical Analysis (25 percent):** In Week Twelve you will complete your empirical analysis, which you will then present in one of three class sessions. For that class presentation, you will present data and results using tables and graphs.

**Formal Write-Up (15 percent):** After feedback on your final presentation in week 13, you will submit the formal write-up of your question, research analysis and conclusion, as a final paper of approximately 10-12 pages.

**Required Texts:**


Additional assigned material will be made available online via Latte. Books marked “(L)” are on Latte and those marked “(CR)” can also be viewed in hard copy as a course reserve.

**Academic Integrity:** You are expected to follow the University's policies on academic integrity: [http://www.brandeis.edu/studentaffairs/srcs/ai/top10students.html](http://www.brandeis.edu/studentaffairs/srcs/ai/top10students.html). Suspected instances of dishonesty will be referred to the Office of Student Development and Conduct. During the course you will be asked to work together on empirical research, but are expected to write up that research separately and independently.
Use of cell phones and laptops in the classroom: Use of cell phones in class is prohibited. If you wish to leave your cell phone on in 'silent' mode because of a specific emergency, please alert the professor at the beginning of class. You are permitted to use laptop computers for taking notes if the computer is used for academic purposes. If your laptop use appears to distract you, or other students, you will no longer be allowed to use your computer in class.

Latte Course Website: Nearly all the material for this course can also be found on the class website on Latte, but you are strongly advised to print readings and bring them to class. Readings have been copied with two pages per page for greater efficiency in printing.

If you are a student who needs academic accommodations because of a documented disability, please contact me and present your letter of accommodation as soon as possible.

COURSE OUTLINE

Week Zero: Introduction

Goodhart, Lucy, 2015, Introduction from Becoming Red and Blue: Economic Sources of our Political Disunity (L).

Week One: Setting the Scene


Research Application: Use David Leip’s Electoral Atlas, http://uselectionatlas.org/RESULTS/ and the US Census Bureau page for state median household income at http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/income/data/statemedian/. Using the historical data series, download the data on state median income and percentage vote for the Democratic presidential election candidate for one presidential election year from 1984 to 2012 into Excel. Either compute the correlation between income and voting using the Excel command “=CORREL” or graph voting against income as a scatter plot. Bring the estimated correlation coefficient or the graph to the second class session.
Week Two: Should Income Matter for Voting?  

September 8th & 17th

Journal of Political Economy, 89(5), 914-927. (L)

McCarty, Poole and Rosenthal, 2006, Polarized America: The Dance of Ideology and Unequal Riches, Chapter Three. (L)

OECD Overview of Inequality Cross-nationally: http://www.oecd.org/social/inequality.htm


Research Application: Read Chapter One of Kellstedt and Whitten. Identify the research question in McCarty et al. Is there a research question in either Frank’s book or Brooks? Could there be a research question and what do you think it should be?

NB: September 10th is a Brandeis Monday. No class on September 15th for Rosh Hashannah.

Week Three: Do People Care about Inequality?  

September 22nd & 24th

Benjamin Page and Lawrence Jacobs, 2009, Class War? What Americans Really Think about Economic Inequality, Preface, Chapters One and Two. (L)


Research Application: Read Chapter Two of Kellstedt and Whitten. What theory is Page and Jacobs using? What about contemporary political life supports or contradicts the theory? How might you amend their theory? Is your amended theory testable and falsifiable?
Week Four: Thinking Differently about Redistribution  
October 1st


NB: A Brandeis Monday is in effect on Tuesday, September 29th

**Research Application:** Read Chapter Three of Kellstedt and Whitten. What is Philip Rehm’s explanation for who wants more public spending and/or who wants to vote Democrat? Is this explanation causal? Write down an example of a causal explanation for some aspect of American political behavior that you know about and an example of a non-causal explanation. Bring both to class.

Week Five: Outside Forces – Class and Morals  
October 6th & 8th


**Research Application:** Submit your research question as a sentence plus one to two paragraphs that explain the motivation for your analysis and your argument. Write up your question as a diagram in powerpoint and bring it to the second session to present.

Week Six: Outside Forces – Racism and Ignorance  
October 13th & 15th


Bartels, Larry, 2008, Chapters Six and Seven in *Unequal Democracy*. (L)
Week Seven: Reconciling State and Individual Voting Patterns October 20th & 22nd

Gelman, Andrew et al. 2008, Red State, Blue State, Rich State, Poor State: Why Americans Vote the Way they Do, Chapters One through Six, ten. (L, CR)

Bishop, Bill, 2008, The Big Sort: Why the Clustering of Like-minded America is Tearing us Apart, Chapters One to Three, Ten to Twelve. (L)

| Research Application: Read Chapter Five of Kellstedt and Whitten to page 114. Meet with the Professor and/or with a research librarian at Brandeis to discuss a data source that would enable you to test your research question. Write up one to two paragraphs on your data source and explain why it would be valuable for testing your research question. Bring your data description to the second session. |

Week Eight: Research Design October 27th & 29th

The goal this week will be to understand research design, which is how we use research to test particular hypotheses. In addition, I will present to the class two “ready-made” research modules that you could pursue. The first is a case study of changing voting patterns in California or Virginia. The second is a quantitative analysis of public attitudes to the minimum wage. You may also pursue your own research question, but the research modules allow you to undertake research within an existing structure.


Kellstedt and Whitten, 2013, Chapter Four. (CR)

George and Bennett, 2005, Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences, Chapter Four. (L)

Cresswell, 2014, Research Design, Chapter Seven. (L,CR)

Todd, Chuck and Sheldon Gawiser, 2009, How Barack Obama Won: A State by State Guide to the 2008 Election. Read the introduction and then pick three states to read about. (CR)

| Research Application: Read the Gerring article and the chapter from George and Bennett. Be prepared to discuss which states would make good case studies and why. |
Week Nine: Describing your Data

In class, and using data on the minimum wage from iPoll, from the Acock textbook and your own data, we will work through brief exercises that can tell us what the data look like, how to describe it and how to visualize it. At the end of the second session, you will conduct a short, empirical analysis to test your competence in using descriptive statistics and graphics.

Howard Acock, *A Gentle Introduction to Stata*, Fourth Edition. Chapters 1-5. Read Chapter Five especially. The remaining chapters should be used as background. (L, CR)

Kellstedt and Whitten, Chapter Five, pp 114-126. (CR)

Kellstedt and Whitten, “Using Stata with the Fundamentals of Political Science Research” (L)

Goodhart, Lucy, 2015, “A Stata Review.” (L)

Research Application: Competency Test following Acock’s Chapter Five.

Week Ten: Statistics in Case Studies and “Mixed Methods”

In class, we will discuss how we could enrich the case studies of individual states with quantitative analysis. This is known as “mixed methods.” Working in teams, you will first compile secondary material on each state. Then we will discuss what empirical data to add to these sources and perhaps perform some of this analysis.


Research Application: Working in teams, compile an annotated bibliography of the work on economic, social, demographic and voting trends in the state and/or a list of proposed interview subjects. Bring this bibliography to the second session and be prepared to speak for up to five minutes on what quantitative data might enrich (or directly test) the ideas and theories presented in the secondary data.

Week Eleven: Using Quantitative Data to Test Hypotheses

In class, we will discuss how to use quantitative data to test our hypotheses and how that analysis might help us to answer the questions posed in the literature. Working jointly in class, we will perform empirical analysis in the form of bivariate hypothesis tests.

Kellstedt and Whitten, Chapters Six and Seven. (CR)

Acock, Chapters Six and Seven. (L, CR)
Goodhart, Lucy, 2010, Understanding the Presentation of Regression Results in Political Science. (L)

**Research Application:** Working in small teams, use the data that we have explored to start on the empirical analysis of your research questions. Explain to the group as a whole what analysis you did, why, and with what results.

**Week Twelve A: A Workshop Reassessment**  
November 24th

We will use the Tuesday before Thanksgiving for a workshop session in which we re-evaluate both our research question and the research design for answering our question.

**Research Application:** Come to class with your original research question and any revisions that you want to make to it. Also, bring a list of the three most important things you think you need to do to make headway on the empirical analysis. Each person will speak for 3-5 minutes with the same time for comments and suggestions.

**Week Twelve: Presenting the Empirical Analysis**  
December 1st and 3rd

Based on the work done earlier in teams, and on your earlier research question and data description, you will complete a significant part of your own empirical analysis and present it to the group as a whole.

**Research Application:** Come to class with your empirical analysis written up as a table and graphs in powerpoint (or just circulate a log file or summary of the data). Be prepared to present your results for approximately ten minutes. Half the class will present their empirical analysis each session.

**Week Thirteen: From Results to Final Paper**  
December 8th

In the final week, we will either conclude the empirical presentations or we will discuss, in workshop style, how to advance from the presentation of the empirical results to a final paper.

**Research Application:** Come to class with an outline of your final paper in powerpoint. Be prepared to discuss your project for five minutes.