**Spring 2019**  
**IR 211 International Relations: Approaches to Research**  
**Last update: January 11, 2019**  
School of International Relations  
University of Southern California

Lectures: TTh 8:00-9:20am, THH 102

Instructor: Prof. Tyson Roberts  
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This syllabus is current as of the version date above. It is subject to change. You will be notified in class and/or by e-mail whenever the syllabus is updated. The current version of the syllabus will always be posted on Blackboard.

**Course Description and Objectives**  
This class is an introduction to social science research methodology. Our main goal is to teach you the basics of creating and consuming research in the social sciences, and international relations in particular. The course will lead you through conceptualization and theory construction, the derivation of testable hypotheses, and how to use data analysis methods to evaluate these hypotheses. We will cover causal inference, observation and measurement, ethics of social science research, and quantitative research methods. We will also discuss the way in which academic articles in the social sciences are written, and how they should be read.

This course includes some introductory statistics, and requires use of Excel for some class assignments. These include descriptive statistics, contingency tables, correlation analysis, regression analysis, and significance tests for relationships between variables from different quantitative datasets.

Students will learn and be able to demonstrate through the course requirements the following key components of quantitative reasoning:

- **Critical Thinking:** Students will use statistical and logical inference to pose and evaluate hypotheses, claims, questions and problems within social science.
- **Logical Integrity:** Students will understand the logical structure of social science inquiry to distinguish between assumptions and implications.
- **Application to social processes:** Students will be able to apply their quantitative and qualitative reasoning to engage in real world empirical analysis of international relations problems and puzzles.
After the course, you will be able to:

1. Develop theories of social science phenomena that are logically consistent, using deductive and inductive reasoning
2. Formulate hypotheses about relationships between variables that can be tested empirically under certain assumptions
3. Employ appropriate methodological techniques to test hypotheses with quantitative data
4. Estimate the magnitude of the relationship between variables using methods such as cross tabulations, correlation analysis, and differences in means
5. Measure uncertainty using confidence intervals and interpret these results building upon basic concepts in probability theory
6. Identify potential challenges to causal inference and design empirical strategies to distinguish correlation from causation.
7. Read and manipulate quantitative data in a spreadsheet format
8. Create effective visual depictions of statistical patterns in data using visualization techniques
9. Present your analysis to an audience in written, graphic, and oral media

Course Requirements and Grading

- Homework (1-7): 20%
- Research Project (HW8 & Poster): 20%
- Midterm: 20%
- Final: 20%
- Participation in Section and Lecture: 10%
- Reading quizzes and Lecture Attendance: 10%

Required Textbook:

- (All other required readings and viewings will be posted on Blackboard. There will also be online exercises assigned from Khan Academy. Students who aren’t able to answer these questions easily should watch the associated videos. Students are encouraged to donate a few dollars to Khan Academy.)

Homework and Research Project

The course will follow a "learning-by-doing" approach and will place emphasis on gaining experience in designing social science research and analyzing data through multiple short problem sets during the semester. There will be a total of 8 homework assignments, due as specified in the course outline below via Blackboard. Late assignments will be penalized with a 50% penalty if they are submitted within the same week they were due (e.g. if your grade is 80%, it will be reduced to 40%). Assignments more than one week late will not be accepted and their grade will be 0%. The lowest homework grade will be dropped.
Some assignments will be part of a semester-long course group project, which will culminate with a poster session in the final week of class. Some others will be individual submissions. In these cases, homework assignments must reflect your own work. You may (and are encouraged) to discuss individual homework assignments with other students, but if you do so, you must list the students with whom you have discussed the assignment on the top of your homework.

You must do all computer work and write all answers yourself. DO NOT hand in homework for which any of your answers are identical to your peers, even if your peers’ names are listed on your assignment. This will be considered cheating. Students who cheat on either a homework assignment or an exam will receive an F in the course and the case will be referred to the USC Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards.

All homework assignments must be submitted as a Word or PDF document with questions and pages numbered. For assignments where Excel is required, cut and paste the relevant output into your homework submission. All assignments are due via Blackboard (not in paper), unless otherwise noted.

**Midterm and Final**
There will also be a midterm and a final. The midterm exam will be administered in class on February 28 and the final exam will be Wednesday, May 8 at 8am.

You will be permitted one index card “cheat sheet” for the midterm and two index cards “cheat sheet” for the final. The final is cumulative, and both exams will cover material from lecture, section, and the required readings/viewings/listenings.

**Participation**
This course requires your active participation, particularly during the sections. Students are required to attend both lectures and sections, and to get involved in class discussions. 10% of the grade will be based on the extent to which you become an active contributor to the course. This part of the grade will be evaluated by the Teaching Assistants.

**Reading quizzes and lecture attendance**
Students are expected to complete all assigned readings and videos before the class for which they are assigned, and to arrive in class and in section prepared to discuss that material. Short reading quizzes or other class assignments may be administered during class. Some reading quizzes will be graded based on correct answers and others will be graded on completeness. You do not need to purchase a clicker for this class. Reading quizzes will be available at through PollEv.com/sir211. You can visit it from your laptop or smartphone during class. To make sure your answers are recorded, you will need to register using your USC email address so that we can record your participation. More details will be provided during the first week of class. Every time you complete a quiz, you will need to log in first. If you have any issue completing the quiz, please get in touch with your TA.
Extra Credit Opportunity

**Teaching International Relations Program (TIRP)**
I will be offering extra credit, *up to 2 percentage points half-letter grade* on your final course grade, for students who participate in TIRP. (More info available at tirp@usc.edu.) To get full credit, I'll need the following from you before the first day of Final's Week:

1. A two-page memo describing what you taught in IR, how these teachings related to IR211 (if at all), what you learned from the experience, and what you would do differently next year
2. A student performance evaluation from CALIS.

**Americans with Disabilities Act**

Students requesting accommodations based on disability are required to register with Disability Services and Programs each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP when adequate documentation is filed. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me as early in the semester as possible. DSP is open Monday-Friday 8:30-5:00. The office is in Student Union 301 and their phone number is 213-740-0776. Students must make their request in the stipulated period prior to an exam.

**Policy on Academic Ethics and Honesty**

Academic honesty is fundamental to the activities and principles of a university. All members of the academic community must be confident that each person's work has been responsibly and honorably acquired, developed and presented. Any effort to gain an advantage not given to all students is dishonest whether or not the effort is successful. The academic community regards academic dishonesty as an extremely serious matter, with serious consequences. *When in doubt about plagiarism, paraphrasing, quoting or collaboration, consult your teaching assistant.* For more information on USC policies regarding student integrity and plagiarism, see [http://dornsife.usc.edu/usc-policies/#plagiarism](http://dornsife.usc.edu/usc-policies/#plagiarism).
COURSE OUTLINE AND READINGS

Section W1  
*No section!* Get an early start on reading/viewing for next week.

Jan. 8  
**Introduction to the course**

Jan. 10  
**Types of Political Research**  
Required reading, viewing, and doing:  
- Shively, Chapter 1: Social Research, pp. 1-11  

Section W2:  
*Course introductions.*

Jan. 15  
**Ethics Issues**  
Required reading and viewing:  
- Shively, Ethics of Political Research, pp. 11-13  

Jan. 17  
**Selecting Research Topics**  
Required reading:  
- Shively, Chapter 2: Political Theories and Research Topics, pp. 14-32  

Section W3:  
**Preliminary research questions & data analysis** (HW1 due 10am Jan. 28)

Jan. 22  
**Introduction to Data Download and Analysis with Excel**  
Required reading and viewing:  
World Economics and Politics Database. How to Use the WEP Dataverse.
Skim the Codebook at: https://ncgg.princeton.edu/wep/download.html
Skim: http://www.correlatesofwar.org/data-sets

Jan. 24  
**Reviewing the Literature**

**Required reading:**

Section W4: **Preliminary data analysis and literature review.** ([HW1 due 10am Jan. 28](#))

Jan. 29  
**Political Theory**

**Required reading:**
- Re-read Shively, Chapter 2: pp. 14-32

Jan. 31  
**Theory and Hypotheses**

**Required reading:**

Section W5: **Group research topics & hypothesis development.** (HW2 due 10am Feb. 4).

Feb. 5  
**Concepts and Measures**  
Required reading and viewing:  
• Shively, Chapter 3 pp. 33-41  
• NPR Planet Money. 2011. “What is GDP?”  
• Morten Jerven. 2014. “What does Nigeria’s new GDP number actually mean?” AfricanArguments.org  

Read (or skim) **one** (or both!) of the following:  

Feb. 7  
**Problems of Measurement: Accuracy**  
Required reading:  
• Shively Chapter 4, pp. 42-56  

Recommended Reading:  
• Adcock and Collier. *Measurement Validity: A shared standard for qualitative and quantitative research.* (pp. 529-532 and p. 536-544.)

Section W6: **Hypothesis development & variable selection.** (HW3 due at start of section)

Feb. 12  
**Problems of Measurement: Precision**  
Required reading:  
• Shively Chapter 5, pp. 58-72  
• Simon Jackman’s TED talk on *The Democracy Data Revolution*  
• Nate Silver. 2017. “How we’re tracking Donald Trump’s Approval Ratings.” Fivethirtyeight.com  

Feb. 14  
**Causal Inference and Research Design**  
Required reading:
Shively Chapter 6 pp. 73-95

Section W7: Variable selection and Review. (Homework 4 due 10am March 8)

Feb. 19 Experiments, True and Natural
Required reading:

Feb. 21 Class Experiment (please bring laptop to class) and Midterm Review
Required reading:

Section W8: Experiments & Review.

Feb. 26 MIDTERM

Feb. 28 Sampling and Sampling Error
Required reading and viewing:
• Shively Chapter 7 pp. 96-103 (stop at Censored Data)
• What is sampling error?
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ugWrPFSdg
• http://rocknpoll.graphics/

Section W9: Data sampling & selection issues. (Homework 5 10am Mar. 25)

March 5 Censored Data Selection and Selection Bias
Required reading:
• Shively Chapter 7 pp. 103-110
• Re-read Selection Bias section of Branislav, Alexandrova, and Gartzke.

- Carles Boix and Susan Stokes. “Endogenous Democratization.” World Politics 55. Read The Facts, p. 521-539. (Focus on main ideas)

Suggested reading:
- “Examples of Sampling Techniques:”
- “Key Research Concepts in Politics and International Relations: Sampling.” by Harrison and Callan.

March 7

**Displaying and Analyzing Quantitative and Categorical Data**

Required reading and viewing:
- Answer questions in the Analyzing one categorical data and Displaying and comparing quantitative data sections in Khan Academy; watch lessons as necessary

March 12-16  **SPRING BREAK**

March 21

**Descriptive Statistics**

Required reading and viewing:

March 26  **Sampling Distribution and the Empirical Rule**

Required reading and viewing:
- Shively pp. 149-165
- Statistics explained to my cat. 2016. The reason casinos always win: meet the law of large numbers.
• Answer questions in the Normal distributions and the empirical rule section in Khan Academy and watch lessons as necessary.

March 28 **Hypothesis Testing**
Required reading and viewing:
• Dr. Nic's Maths and Stats. Understanding the p-value.
• Answer questions in the The idea of significance tests section in Khan Academy and watch lessons as necessary.
• Veritasium. 2016. Is most published research wrong?

Section W12: **Hypothesis testing.** (Homework 7 due 10am April 15)

April 2 **Regression Analysis: Bivariate, Interval/Continuous Data**
Required reading and viewing:
• Shively pp. 111-132
• The Correlation Coefficient - Explained in Three Steps https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ugd4k3dC_8Y
• Answer questions in the Exploring bivariate data section in https://www.khanacademy.org/math/statistics and watch lessons as necessary.

April 4 **Interpreting Regression Analysis**

Section W13: **Regression analysis.** (Homework 7 due 10am April 15)

April 9 **Analysis with Ordinal and Nominal Outcomes**
Required reading and viewing:
• Shively pp. 133-148
endowments influence economic development.” Read 4. Regression results and Conclusion sections, pp. 22-37.

- Download Real Statistics Resource Pack for Excel

April 11  Multivariate Analysis


Section W14: Group Research Project work. (Homework 8 due April 22)

April 16  Additional Topics

April 18  Preparing and Presenting Original Research

Required reading and viewing:

- [http://undergrad.usc.edu/experience/research/symposium/symposium-posters/](http://undergrad.usc.edu/experience/research/symposium/symposium-posters/)

Section W15: Group Research Project work. (Homework 8 due April 22)

April 23  Poster Session

April 25  Review

May 8  Final Exam at 8am