Empirical Analysis of American Politics
Spring 2011

Professor Paul Wahlbeck
Office: Monroe 477 (wahlbeck@gwu.edu; 202-994-4872)
Office Hours: Wednesday 1:30-3:00

Political Science 8286
Classroom: Monroe 352
Class Time: Thursday 4:00-5:50

Course Description: My belief is that an important component of graduate school education is your training in conducting original research. In our substantive seminars, students learn to dissect published research. In our methods courses, students learn how to use methodological tools. We do not spend considerable time training students to complete their own research projects or even teach students practical research skills. That is the primary objective of this course. Students will conduct primary research projects in three units (Congress, Judicial Politics, and Presidency/Voting Behavior). We will also discuss practical skills that will facilitate research projects.

Learning Outcomes: First, students will hone their ability to form and evaluate testable hypotheses. Over the course of the semester, students will develop hypotheses about American political behavior from the extant literature. Moreover, students will evaluate and critique one another’s work. Second, students will become familiar with a range of data sources. To this end, there are four books available in the campus bookstore -- books that present data on Congress, the presidency, the Supreme Court, and American politics more generally. We will also discuss other sources of data, including the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR), from time to time during the semester. Third, students will develop their skills in manipulating and handling data. There are many steps between gathering the data that are needed to test a proposition and the execution of the statistical techniques. These range from entering data in a form readable by the statistical package, to creating valid measures from data that you have collected, and so on. Fourth, students will apply the knowledge of empirical analysis that they have gained in the department’s methodology sequence. Students will develop and test models using the appropriate econometric estimators.

Readings. There is one required book:


The following books are books that contain data on American politics, which you might find to be a helpful addition to your library:


These books are not required for this course. These books (or earlier editions of them) should be available at the reference section of Gelman Library if you do not want to purchase them.

**Requirements.** In each unit of the course (i.e., Congress, Supreme Court, and elections/presidency), I have assigned representative readings. We will discuss the readings the first week of each component. The primary objective of this reading is to present a variety of questions that have been addressed by scholars in that subfield. The purpose is not to provide an in-depth analysis of that subfield, but to give you a base from which you can generate further questions. I want to emphasize that the reading list is not, and should not be viewed by you, as the exclusive list of readings. If you find a question that intrigues you, pursue other related articles and materials. The first class session of each unit will be used to discuss the questions that have been explored by scholars in this subfield, but our discussion will focus on the propositions put forward by these scholars, the data that have been used, and directions for further examination. It is absolutely critical to the success of this course that you come to class prepared to discuss potential direction of research in each subfield.

For the second week of a unit, you will prepare a proposed paper topic. This proposal will follow the typical format of conference paper proposals: research question, theoretical relevance, major hypotheses, data sources, and modeling strategy. It should be no longer than one page. We will discuss these proposals in class. To facilitate discussion by all class members, these paper proposals are due at noon on the Wednesday before class. You should distribute them to the class via Blackboard’s Discussion Board.

The core of the graded assignments will be papers written for each unit of the course. These papers will be 5-8 pages in length. They should include a brief section outlining the hypotheses to be tested (of course, you should discuss the existing literature in justifying your hypotheses, but the relatively short paper length precludes a full-blown theory section), the data and methods (i.e., what measures you use to test the hypotheses, your data sources, and the brief discussion of your method of analysis), your findings, and a brief discussion and conclusion.

In addition to submitting a paper to me, you will also distribute a copy of your paper to the other students via Blackboard’s Discussion Board by noon on the Wednesday before our discussion. The last week of each unit will be devoted to a discussion of your papers. We will use the normal conference panel format – students will be assigned the honor of presenting their papers, while another student will be the designated discussant for that paper. The specific format will be finalized the week before each discussion session.

**Grading.** We will discuss three areas of American politics this semester. Each of these units will be worth 1/3 of the final grade. Your unit grade will be based on your paper proposal, class participation, and your research paper. The unit grade will be weighted heavily toward your paper (70%) with 20% from the proposal and 10% from participation. Since we will all benefit
from your paper proposals and research papers, I will assess a penalty for late work.

**Academic Integrity.** The GW Code of Academic Integrity states: “Academic dishonesty is defined as cheating of any kind, including misrepresenting one's own work, taking credit for the work of others without crediting them and without appropriate authorization, and the fabrication of information.” For the remainder of the code, see: [http://www.gwu.edu/~ntegrity/code.html](http://www.gwu.edu/~ntegrity/code.html)

**Support for Students Outside the Classroom**

*Disability Support Services (DSS)*
Any student who may need an accommodation based on the potential impact of a disability should contact the Disability Support Services office at 202-994-8250 in the Marvin Center, Suite 242, to establish eligibility and to coordinate reasonable accommodations. For additional information please refer to: [http://gwired.gwu.edu/dss/](http://gwired.gwu.edu/dss/)

*University Counseling Center (UCC) 202-994-5300*
The University Counseling Center (UCC) offers 24/7 assistance and referral to address students' personal, social, career, and study skills problems. Services for students include:
- crisis and emergency mental health consultations
- confidential assessment, counseling services (individual and small group), and referrals [http://gwired.gwu.edu/counsel/CounselingServices/AcademicSupportServices](http://gwired.gwu.edu/counsel/CounselingServices/AcademicSupportServices)

**Security.** In the case of an emergency, if at all possible, the class should shelter in place. If the building that the class is in is affected, follow the evacuation procedures for the building. After evacuation, seek shelter at a predetermined rendezvous location.

**Class Schedule.** Next to each major topic, I have placed a date -- this is a tentative schedule that I have provided to give you an idea of our schedule. This class, more than most other courses, will be tailored to fit the needs of the students. As we progress through the semester, I will add topics that are relevant to your projects. Thus, this schedule is truly tentative, and I have left one week open.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic and Readings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January 13</td>
<td>Introduction to Course</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 20</td>
<td><strong>Congress</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>


January 27
Discuss Paper Topics

February 3
Planning, Organizing, and Documenting Data (Long, Chapters 1-2, 5-6)

February 10
Congress Paper Discussion

February 17
**Judiciary**


February 24
Discuss Paper Topics

March 3
Manipulating Data (Long, Chapter 3-4)

March 10
Supreme Court Paper Discussion

March 17
*Spring Break*

March 24
Elections and Presidency


April 1 No Class (Midwest Political Science Association Annual Meeting)

April 7 Discuss Paper Topics

April 14 Presenting Results (Long, Chapter 7)


April 21 Data Topic

April 26 * Presidency Discussion

University Make-Up Day
### Sample ICPSR Datasets

#### Congress

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<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9822</td>
<td>United States Congressional Roll Call Voting Records, 1789-1987: Reformatted Data</td>
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<tr>
<td>7645</td>
<td>Voting Scores for Members of the United States Congress, 1945-1982</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7803</td>
<td>Roster of United States Congressional Officeholders and Biographical Characteristics of Members of the United States Congress, 1789-1993: Merged Data</td>
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<tr>
<td>6029</td>
<td>Federal Outlays, 1976-1980: [United States]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8082</td>
<td>Federal Outlays, County and City Master Files, Fiscal Year 1980</td>
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#### Supreme Court

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<tr>
<td>6557</td>
<td>Expanded United States Supreme Court Judicial Database, 1946-1968 Terms</td>
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<tr>
<td>9422</td>
<td>United States Supreme Court Judicial Database, 1953-1993 Terms</td>
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<tr>
<td>7611</td>
<td>Supreme Court Certiorari Study, 1947-1956</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6525</td>
<td>Crime and Justice Data (CD0003)</td>
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<tr>
<td>6495</td>
<td>Violence Research Data (CD0009)</td>
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#### Elections and Public Opinion

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<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>State-Level Presidential Election Data for the United States, 1824-1972</td>
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<tr>
<td>75</td>
<td>State-Level Congressional, Gubernatorial and Senatorial Election Data for the United States, 1824-1972</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9405</td>
<td>Voter Registration in the United States, 1968-1988</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7757</td>
<td>Candidate and Constituency Statistics of Elections in the United States, 1788-1990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8611</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Electoral Data for Counties in the United States: Presidential and Congressional Races, 1840-1972


6335 Campaign Expenditures in the United States, 1978-1992: Longitudinal Political Action Committee (PAC) Data


8238 Campaign Expenditures in the United States, 1981-1982


9601 Activities and Maintenance Strategies of Interest Groups in the United States, 1980-1985

8635 ABC News/Washington Post Poll, June 1986


8849 ABC News/Washington Post Poll, August 1987

8891 ABC News/Washington Post Poll, September 1987

8888 ABC News/Washington Post Poll Bork Vote Poll, October 1987

8885 ABC News Ginsburg Poll, November 1987


ABC News Poll, July 1991
ABC News/Washington Post Clarence Thomas Vote Delay Polls, October 1991
ABC News/Washington Post Poll #1 October 1991
ABC News/Washington Post Poll, December 1992
National Health Interview Survey, 1990: AIDS Knowledge and Attitudes Supplement