POLS 206: Political Science Methods of Inquiry Spring 2026

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Scope and Purpose:

- ✓ Why do some political or religious groups choose to employ violent methods and terrorism to get their point across while most groups choose more peaceful and non-violent methods? What kind of data can we use to examine this issue?

- ✓ What can public opinion polls (surveys) tell us about America views on the economy in 2026? Are public opinion polls a useful tool to predict elections, especially for the upcoming 2026 midterm elections?

- ✓ Why do some Americans vote while others stay at home on Election Day?

- ✓ How come 1 in 10 Kansans face food insecurity in "America's breadbasket"? Where does this statistic come from? What factors contribute to this outcome?

The above questions are some examples of issues that social scientists ask and try to answer. This course will introduce students to the basic approaches and evaluation that political scientists employ to answer these questions. In this class, we will cover the basics of social science research focusing on research design and descriptive analysis including analysis of opinion surveys, census data and data collected by government agencies as well as non-government organizations. The goal of this course is to help students better evaluate the "popular" statistics presented in newspapers and reports as well as professional policy reports and academic journal articles.

Grading: Grading is based on two mid-terms, discussion section (lab) assignments, one research paper and a final—study guides will be provided for the mid-term and final

Discussion / Lab Assignments	30%	Paper (due 5/6)	20%
Mid-Term #1 (2/25)	15%	Final (5/14)	20%
Mid-Term #2 (4/1)	15%		

Readings: In addition, the required reading there will also be a few handouts given in discussion section.

Class Participation: Students are encouraged to ask questions and participate during lectures. Reading assignments should be done before class.

Discussion sections: Attendance in discussion sections/lab is required. Lab assignment is 25% and attendance is 5% (total is 30% for lab sections). In most of the lab sessions, you will use *Copilot*, Excel and Word.doc. Assignments will be made and discussed in these sessions, so they should not be missed. Grading of the Lab Assignments are based on the rubric. So, *follow the directions for each assignment*. Each lab assignment will be due within one week in the following discussion section. The lab assignments are designed to help you construct your research paper over the course of the semester. **Lab assignments will not be accepted after due date.** This means that you cannot turn in 10 late assignments on the last day of class. **Remember to bring a USB device and save all the work you do in the computer lab*.

Paper: The paper is research design/descriptive analysis. This paper will use information from existing data sets that you will use in the computer lab/sections. An "A" paper will incorporate all the concepts introduced in the class such as a clear theory, research question, hypotheses, measures and variables as well as a descriptive statistic (data tables and figures/graphs). There will be a paper outline/rubric, and we will go over the paper assignment in detail in class and discussion sections. The paper is due May 6th.

Make-up Exams: Students with a valid reason such as illness and documentation that satisfies the instructor can schedule a make up exam. The make-up exam will be different from the one given in class. No make-up exams will be given *two weeks* after the exam date.

Disabilities: Any student who has a disability that may influence class participation or test taking should contact the instructor at the earliest possible date so that accommodation can be made**.**

Sports or University Competitions: Any student who is on a sports team or academic team, such as the debate team or the men's or women's basketball teams, that may influence class participation or test taking should contact the instructor at the earliest possible date so accommodation can be made**.**

Class Conduct: *Turn off all cell phones*: Each time a cell phone rings during class, *everyone* will **lose one point** from their final *total* class grade points, but if the professor's cell phone rings, then everyone will *receive an extra two points* on their final grade. The reason for the cell phone rule is that in-class disturbances waste your classmates' time and money (tuition). Also, please do not read the newspaper, use class time to sleep, do work for other classes, listen to music or check e-mail/text messages via cell phone. Sleeping or conducting other business within the 50-minute time period is disruptive and disrespectful to the whole class. Therefore, if you are observed sleeping or behavior unrelated to the class, then I must stop the lecture to wake you up or ask you to please stop.

Computers in Class: No computers in class. The *lecture outlines* are posted on Canvas a week before the class. All you need to do is print out the lecture outlines and bring them to class or use a notebook. The outlines are in word format and follow the in-class Power Point presentation. I also provide a *study guide* for each exam and the final. The study guide is posted one week before the exam.

E-Mail: I will communicate with you through e-mail to answer questions regarding class assignments and exams. However, all e-mails will receive a response within 24 hours. Regarding exams, we (the GTAs and I) will *not* give exact answers for possible exam questions, but rather we will provide information to help you find the answers. Finally, professional e-mail communication is an important skill that will last beyond class and college experience. Remember, e-mail is a public record. So, keep in mind how you want to present yourself through e-mail. For more information about professional e-mails see http://www.albion.com/netiquette/.

Canvas: This course will use Canvas. I will post the lecture outlines, readings, study guides, lab assignments and related materials on Canvas. If you are not familiar with this web site or need more information, then feel free to contact the professor or your GTA.

AI Textbook: There is no textbook for this class. Instead, we will be using *Microsoft Copilot*. This is an AI program and will serve as an interactive textbook. The initial questions you need to ask for each lecture are provided in the lab assignments.

AI and Lab Assignments: We will use Copilot to complete assignments and analysis. See "POLS 206 Policy on Use of AI in Assignments and Final Research Design"

Week 1: Introduction to the Class

1/19 No Class

1/21 Lecture 1: Introduction—class goals and outline

Discussion (Lab): Introduction to Lab and discussion on the use of *Copilot* as textbook

Week 2: Social Science Research and Theory

1/26 Lecture 2: Human Inquiry and Social Science

1/28 Lecture 3: Theory, Research Question and Hypotheses

Discussion (Lab): Theories, Research Question and Literature Review
Assignment #1 Theory and Research Question

Week 3: Types of Theories and Levels of Measurement

2/2 Lecture 4: Types of Theories (Deductive versus Inductive) and Literature Review

2/4 Lecture 5: Concepts, Measures, Reliability and Validity

Discussion (Lab): Assignment #2: Hypothesis→Concept →Measure (Assignment #1 Due)

Week 4: Graphs/Charts and Distributions

2/9 Lecture 6: Types of Charts and Graphs

2/11 Lecture 7: Distributions

Discussion (Lab): Assignment #3— Histograms, Plots and Charts (Assignment #2 due)

Week 5: Mean, Median and Mode and Control Variables

2/16 Lecture 8: Mean, median and mode

2/18 Lecture 9: Control Variables and Tables

Discussion (Lab): Assignment #4—Mean, Median & Mode (Assignment #3 due)

*Week 6: Statistical Significance and Mid-Term I

2/23 Lecture 10: Chi-Square and Significance

2/25: Mid-Term I

Discussion (Lab): Assignment #5—Bivariate Analysis and Table Construction using Word (Assignment #4 due)

Week 7: Correlation and Causation

3/2 Lecture 11: Correlation

3/4 Lecture 12: Interpreting Statistical Tests (Regression, Correlation and Distribution)

Discussion (Lab): Assignment #6 Multivariate Analysis (Assignment #5 due)

Week 8: Time, Unit of Analysis and Research Design Review

3/9 Lecture 13: Time, Causation and Unit of Analysis

3/11 Lecture 14: Research Design and Literature Review

Discussion (Lab): Assignment #7 Theory →Question →Literature Review (Assignment #6 due)

Week 9: Spring Break (No Classes)

3/16 No Class

3/18 No Class

Week 10: Qualitative Research

4/20 Lecture 15: Qualitative Methods—Case Studies

4/22 Lecture 16: Qualitative Methods—Interviews

Discussion (Lab): Assignment #8 (Assignment #7 Due) Write a Research Design Outline

**Week 11: Qualitative Methods Continued and Mid-term II

3/30 Lecture 17: Qualitative Methods continued

4/1: Mid-Term II

Discussion (Lab): Assignment #9— (Assignment #8 due)

Week 12: Questionnaire and Types of Surveys

3/23 Lecture 18: Questionnaire construction

3/25 Lecture 19: Type of Surveys

Discussion (Lab): Assignment #10— (Assignment #9 due)

Week 13: Sampling

4/6 Lecture 20: Types of Sampling

4/8 Lecture 21: Sampling Theory

Discussion (Lab): Assignment #11—Survey Analysis (Assignment #10 due)
Readings:

Week 14: RCT and Survey Experiments

4/13 Lecture 22: Random Control Trials

4/15 Lecture 23: Ethics and Human Subjects Reports

Discussion (Lab): Assignment #12 Ethical problems and Human Subjects report

Week 15: Ethics and Research

4/27 No Class (Professor attending Conference)

4/29 Lecture 24: Survey experiments

Discussion (Lab): No Assignment (Assignment #12 due)

**Week 16: In Class Survey Analysis, Paper Due (5/6):

5/4 Lecture 25: In Class Survey and Analysis

5/6 Lecture 26: Final Overview

No Discussion (Lab) Stop Day (5/8)

5/14 Final Exam (Thursday)
Time: 7:30 – 10:00 am
Same Room

POLS 206 Policy on Use of AI in Assignments and Final Research Design

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidelines for the responsible use of Copilot/Artificial Intelligence (AI) tool in POLS 206 coursework. The goal is to provide an enhanced learning tool, while preserving academic integrity and the learning goals for this class such as developing critical thinking and analytical skills. In addition, it is important for students to become AI literate in academic and professional settings.

This policy applies to: Written assignments (lab assignments, research design paper); Take-home projects and assignments; Data analysis tasks; and any other coursework submitted for course credit.

I. Accepted AI Usage for Students

(a) Generating ideas/topics: Brainstorming topics, such as identifying general thesis topics as well as narrowing down research ideas.

(b) Language Support: checking grammar, spelling, and clarity without changing substantive arguments.

(c) Research Assistance: Summarizing academic sources or identifying relevant literature. In addition, students must verify accuracy of citations, such as incorporating Goggle Scholar or KU Libraries to verify citations.

(d) Data Analysis: organizing qualitative data or performing basic statistical tasks such as the AI lab assignments. For example, follow the lab assignment instructions on when and when not to use AI (Copilot) assistance.

II. Unaccepted Uses of AI: The following uses are strictly prohibited.

(a) Submitting AI-generated text as original work. This is any AI generated work that is used and not citied and/or clearly cut and paste from AI (Copilot) output.

(b) Using AI to fabricate citations, data, or sources. Sometimes, AL including Copilot, will create their own sources and data. It is up to the student to verify output and resources used in assignments.

(c) Using AI to provide critical analysis. Students must do their own work regarding analysis and interpretation of statistical results, qualitative data and/or literary critiques. For example, students can use Copilot summaries and citations but cannot use AI to write up the literature review.

(d) In-Class Exams and Assignments. Students cannot use AI during exams or in-class assessments unless explicitly authorized.

III. Students must Disclose and/or document AI use:
(a) Identify the AI tool used (e.g., ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot).

(b) Describe how the tool was used (e.g., drafting, editing, summarizing).

(c) Keep a record of prompts and output used in assignments, so this information can be provided upon request by the instructor. This will protect the student and avoid any violations of academic integrity.

IV. Academic Misconduct

Misuse of Copilot of other AI tools will be treated as academic misconduct and are subject to penalties under the university's academic integrity policy. Examples of violations include unaccepted AI use such as passing off AI-generated work as original, using AI to fabricate or falsify information and failure to disclose AI assistance.

Penalties for AI violations of KU's Academic Misconduct Policy may include assignment or paper grade reduction or failure, failing the course and/or report to the College Undergraduate Academic Services office, additional sanctions as determined by university policy.

V. Students are Expected to:

(a) Maintain academic integrity and acceptable use of AI

(b) Critically evaluate AI outputs for accuracy, bias, and relevance. There are AI "hallucinations" and social bias in some AI tools and output that students need to be aware and evaluate.

(c) Students should always avoid sharing sensitive or personal data with AI tools including Copilot.

(d) Students need to contact the professor if they have any problems with technology availability and access to AI tools.

Examples of Copilot (AI tool) citations and reference.

When the output has no other citation (completely GPT generated)

Prompted with "Are pocketbook issues the most important concern for American voters?" the Copilot-generated text is as follow, "Yes—'pocketbook' concerns (inflation, prices, jobs, and the broader economy) typically top the list for American voters—but they're not the *only* decisive issues. Their primacy varies by party, gender, age, and election context, and in recent cycles issues like abortion, immigration, and the health of democracy have also driven turnout and vote choice" (Copilot, 2026).

Reference
Copilot, Microsoft. (2065). (GPT-4) [Large Language Model] Accessed January 5, 2026, https://m365.cloud.microsoft/chat/?internalredirect=CCM&auth=2

When the output provides citations

When prompted with "Are pocketbook issues the most important concern for American voters?" the Copilot-generated text is as follow, "Pocketbook issues are usually the most important concern for American voters—especially when prices feel high and economic confidence is shaky. At the same time, abortion policy, immigration, and concerns about democracy can rival (or surpass) pocketbook issues for specific constituencies and can be the key motivators that push people to the polls or swing close races." (Pew Research, 2024).

Reference
Pew Research (2024) "Issues and the 2024 election," (https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2024/09/09/issues-and-the-2024-election/)

Copilot, Accessed January 5, 2026, https://m365.cloud.microsoft/chat/?internalredirect=CCM&auth=2

If you use Copilot to find general citations and references, then you do not need to cite Copilot. For example, prompt: "Provide the core studies on pocketbook issues and American voters" will generate citations and a single sentence description. If you are using the reference to research the topic and/or as a citation for your written assignment, then there is no need to cite Copilot. This is the same as using KU Libraries online search. If you find published articles through KU Libraries, then you do not need to cite KU Libraries.