Political Science 15

Lecture 1:
Studying Politics Scientifically
Outline for Today

- Introduction: a scientific approach to studying politics.

- Administrative details and announcements.

- Meeting for those seeking to add the class or switch sections.
Politics uses the methods of rhetoric and advocacy to persuade people to adopt a certain point of view.

Political science uses the scientific method to uncover the true state of the world.

Analogy from a courtroom: lawyers versus the jury.
Differences in Subject and Method

- Normative versus non-normative (or positive) concerns.
  - Positive: The way the world *is*.
  - Normative: The way the world *should be*.

- Rhetoric and advocacy versus the scientific method.
The Scientific Method

- Form a *hypothesis*: a specific prediction that (1) specifies a causal mechanism and (2) can be empirically verified.
- Gather data.
- Test the hypothesis.
- Reject or fail to reject the hypothesis.
“[T]he field of science is unlimited; its material is endless; every group of natural phenomena, every phase of social life, every stage of past or present development is material for science. The unity of all science consists alone in its method, not in its material.”

-Pearson, 1892
Characteristics of Scientific Knowledge

- **Empirical**: Based on observable data.

- **Replicable**: If I tell you how I collected my data and how I tested it, you should be able to get the same result as me.

- **Explanatory**: Tells us about the state of the world or how things work.

- **Probabilistic**: Tells us how strong the evidence is, never 100% certain.
Our Goal is *Inference*

- Inference is the process of using facts we do know to learn facts we didn’t know before.

- *Descriptive* inference is using these facts to learn something about the state of the world.

- *Causal* inference is using these facts to learn something about how the world works.

- Our focus will be on causal inference.
For example …

- Why did we see revolution in some Middle Eastern countries and not others?
- How could we examine this question scientifically?
- What would you need to observe to know if your hypothesis is correct?
- That is, what are the *observable implications* of your hypothesis? How would this information help you rule out competing explanations?
Administrative Details and Announcements
Course website:

http://www.polsci.ucsb.edu/faculty/glasgow/ps15/ps15.html
Section Information

- All sections start meeting next week. **NO SECTIONS THIS WEEK.**

- All sections meet in the computer labs either in Phelps or SSMS – see the syllabus for your section location.

- **WARNING:** Your section location may change week to week!
Important Dates

- Midterm is Thursday, February 13th.
- Final exam is Thursday, March 20th, 4-7pm in this room.
- Be sure you are here on the exam dates!
- 5 homework assignments, due approximately in 3rd, 5th, 7th, 9th and 10th weeks. Exact date TBA.
If you are trying to add the class or change sections, stick around.

Otherwise, see you Thursday.
Instructions for Crashers

1) Sign up on the wait list at the front of the room. I’ll check that against the online wait list.

2) I will over enroll the class by about 6 people, assuming some will drop. Priority will be given by class standing.

3) You will get an email by Wednesday evening telling you if you are in or out. After that there will be no wait list and no chance to add the class this quarter.
If You Don’t Get In

- The department will be offering PS 15 next quarter, over the summer, and every quarter next year.