

**PLS495: Independent Study**  
**Course Policies/Syllabus**  
**Spring 2022**

*I. Course Personnel*

Instructor/Supervisor

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*II. Course Description*

The purpose of this course is to provide you with an opportunity to gain some insight into what it means to be a “practicing” political scientist. Beyond teaching courses, one of the major things we do as faculty members is conduct research on topics of interest to us. In this independent study course, you will be providing me with research assistance on one or more of my ongoing studies about the U.S. judiciary.

*III. Course Materials*

Nearly all of the work you will be asked to do only requires access to the internet, Microsoft Excel, and Dropbox. Typically, you will use the internet to access some material and then perform data entry tasks using Excel and save the data in the university-provided Dropbox.

In each of the previous semesters that I have supervised students, I have had at least one person who lost a good portion of their work due to some type of computer hardware failure. In order to ensure that such problems do not negatively impact your progress while working for me, I now require that you use a folder on the online backup service Dropbox to store both your timesheet for the course (see below) and any/all data entry documents you are working on. Dropbox maintains an online backup of the contents of your folder in real time. That is, if you open a file in Dropbox, add a couple of words, and then save it, Dropbox will instantly upload those changes to a remote copy of the file and also copy it to my machine. In the early days of the course, you will receive an email from me (through Dropbox.com) that invites you to share a folder. This folder, which is free, will be the repository you use throughout the semester. If you do not already use some form of real time backup utility (e.g., Time Machine or Synk on a Mac), I strongly recommend that you consider adopting one for all of your work!

*IV. Course Requirements and Grading*

Your course grade will be completely determined by the quantity and quality of the research assistance you provide. The number of hours required is dependent upon how many credits you have enrolled in the course for. I expect you to complete 3 hours of work per credit per week for

each of the 15 weeks in the academic semester. Thus, if you have enrolled for 2 credits you will need to average about 6 hours of week per week to complete a total of 90 hours of work for the entire semester. Similarly, if you have enrolled for 3 or 4 credits, you will need to complete a total of 135 or 180 hours of work, respectively (with weekly averages around 9 hours and 12 hours).

Of course, I understand that you have busy lives beyond the confines of this course. As a result, there will be some weeks (e.g., during midterms) where you are not able to make your hourly average. So long as you have other weeks where you perform more work, you should have no trouble completing your hours.

To help you manage your time, I want you to track all work that you do related to this course. In addition to completing the specific assignments I give you, this also includes things like reading project codebooks, email correspondence with me regarding the project, among other things. A copy of a blank spreadsheet will be included in your Dropbox folder. You will use this single file to keep track of your working time for the entire semester.

The image below provides an example of what your record keeping should look like. Note the existence of three columns: date, minutes, and description. The “date” column should simply record the date in which you completed some type of work. Please always record your dates in MM/DD/YY format. For example, “Monday January 9<sup>th</sup>, 2012” should be entered as 1/9/12.

The “time” column should simply report the number of hours you spent doing a particular task. This should always rounded to the nearest ¼ of an hour. For example, if you worked 80 minutes on a task, this should simply be entered as “1.5”.

Finally, the “description” column is there for you to summarize what type of work you were doing. You don’t need to go into extensive detail, but the general point of this column is that it lets me learn about how long certain tasks take to complete, which helps me for planning future projects (data gathering in all forms is a good thing!).

	A	B	C
1	date	minutes	description
2	4/5/11	22	Reading codebook
3	4/6/11	45	Coding training cases
4	4/6/11	4	Email w/Ryan
5			

If you complete the required number of hours with a work product of sufficiently high quality (see below), then you will receive a 4.0 for the course. Because you have been invited to participate in this experience on account of your strong academic performance in at least one of my classes, I fully expect that everyone will earn a 4.0. However, if you are not able to complete the full number of hours required before the last day of finals week (and have not made arrangements with me), then your grade will be determined as follows:

<b>1 Credit</b>	<b>2 Credits</b>	<b>3 Credits</b>	<b>4 Credits</b>	<b>Grade</b>
45 or more	90 or more	135 or more	180 or more	4.0
40-44	80-89	120-134	160-179	3.5
34-39	67-79	100-119	133-159	3.0
27-33	53-66	80-99	107-132	2.5
20-26	40-52	60-79	80-106	2.0
14-19	27-39	40-59	53-79	1.5
10-13	20-26	30-39	40-52	1.0
9 or fewer	19 or fewer	29 or fewer	39 or fewer	0.0

In terms of quality, I will conduct periodic audits of your work to ensure that it is being performed carefully and with a high degree of accuracy. If I notice deficiencies in your work, then I will ask you to do the work necessary to improve it. This may include fixing previous work. Because the hourly totals assume that your work is excellent, any “make up” work that you perform will not count toward your final hourly totals. Failure to improve your work will result in a lower course grade, regardless of the number of hours you’ve worked. Lest this all sound unduly harsh, please note that I both acknowledge and accept that innocent mistakes will occur along the way. I simply ask that you provide a good faith effort to always do your best work.

Finally, you will likely be working on more than one task for me throughout the semester. That is, you might complete an assignment, send it to me, and then need something else to work on. In general, I try to have new assignments ready to go so that there is only a minimal lag (i.e., around a day) between projects. There will be times, however, when I am busy with other duties and am unable to get you a new assignment for a few days. It would be unfair to expect you to complete hours when you have no task to work on, so I won’t do that. Instead, if more than 24 hours have elapsed since you submitted your completed assignment, you should give yourself “credit” for having worked based on this table:

<b>Number of Credits</b>	<b>Time Earned</b>
1	40 minutes/weekday [M-Th] 80 minutes/weekend [F-Su]
2	60 minutes/weekday [M-Th] 120 minutes/weekend [F-Su]
3	80 minutes/weekday [M-Th] 160 minutes/weekend [F-Su]
4	105 minutes/day [M-Th] 210 minutes/weekend [F-Su]

For example, if you submit your assignment to me at 1AM on Wednesday morning and haven’t heard from me by 1AM on Thursday morning, then the “credit” time clock should start running. If I don’t respond with a new assignment until say 6AM Monday morning, then you would give yourself credit for Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday that you could have been working but were unable to due to a lack of an assignment. Thus, if you were taking the course for 3 credits you would enter 80 minutes for Thursday and 160 minutes for Friday, Saturday, and Sunday (please use the description of “Time Without Assignment”).