

UNDERGRADUATE LEARNING ASSISTANTSHIP¹

POLI 291, Fall 2021

Meeting time: Scheduled as needed

Instructor: Simon Hoellebauer; hoellers@unc.edu

Office hours: TBD, provided UNC has classes (and by appointment)

This section of POLI 291 is an opportunity for students to become Undergraduate Learning Assistants for POLI 281: *Data in Politics I: An Introduction*.² There are two main learning objectives:

- 1) To deepen understanding of the topics covered in POLI 281, such that students will be better prepared for further study and application of quantitative social science. This objective will be accomplished by learning the material with an eye toward explaining it to other less-experienced students.
- 2) To develop pedagogical skills. In particular, ULAs will learn how to develop a rapport with learners, engage in clear oral and written communication, take the perspective of less-experienced students.

In a broad perspective, the role of a ULA is to serve as experienced peer mentors to students currently taking POLI 281. ULA will contribute to a positive and encouraging—but also rigorous—learning environment in which all students can succeed.

This course fulfills the Experiential Education (EE) general education requirement.

Course Texts

There is one required textbook, and you probably already have it:

1. Imai, Kosuke. 2017. *Quantitative Social Science: An Introduction*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Prerequisites

In general, enrollees should have excelled in POLI 281, though equivalent experience with statistics, data management, and the R programming language can satisfy this prerequisite on the discretion of the instructor.

Requirements

Requirements for this course are as follows:

¹ Text and content of this syllabus are very lightly adapted from the version written by Tim Ryan.

² POLI 281 was previously titled *Quantitative Political Science*.

- ULAs will attend most meetings of their assigned section of POLI 281. The instructor will excuse all ULAs from some class meetings where their presence would not enhance POLI 281 (such as exam days), but the default is to attend. Absences due to special circumstances (e.g. a trip for another course, a job interview, and things of this sort) should be agreed to as far in advance as feasible.
- ULAs will occasionally meet as a team outside of class to prepare for instructional time. These meetings will be scheduled as needed, but will average out to one hour per week over the course of the semester.
- ULAs will hold drop-in “workshopping hours” during which students can receive help on course homework assignments. Each ULA should schedule one 75-minute session per assignment. There are six homework assignments, so this amounts to a 7.5 hour commitment over the course of the semester.
- ULAs will answer questions submitted via POLI 281’s message board (Piazza or Sakai – the exact platform is up in the air). In our initial meetings, we will agree on a scheme to ensure that this requirement does not average out to more than 60 minutes per week.

To manage the time commitment associated with this independent study—teaching responsibilities have the potential to expand—ULAs are expressly prohibited from the actions below. (This is to protect you and your time.)

- Answering students’ substantive questions by email. Email is fine to answer short logistical questions (e.g. “Where do your workshop hours meet?”) but should not be used for more than that. A guideline is that if an email to a POLI 281 student will require more than two sentences, the communication should occur on Piazza, or should be referred to the course instructor.
- Having extra meetings. ULAs should not schedule meetings outside of the scheme above. Additionally, all meetings should take place in public locations on campus, and between the hours of 8am and 9pm. Let me know if you encounter difficulties arranging an appropriate space.
- Grading. Grading could create a problematic power dynamic between ULAs and regular POLI 281 students. Hence, ULAs will not be permitted to grade any assignments. Your role is to support students, not to evaluate them.

Evaluation

There are two written assignments. The first is a 1-2 page (single spaced) mid-semester reflection on your ULA experience: what is going well, and what are the areas for improvement? This assignment is due October 4. The second is a 1-2 page (single spaced) end-of-semester reflection on the ULA experience: what did you learn from it, and how did it influence your professional aspirations? This reflection is due within 72 hours of the last day of class. Both written assignments are graded on a pass/fail basis. Their primary purpose is to induce some reflection on your part, and to make sure that we have a constructive conversation about how the experience is working for you.

The letter grade for POLI 291 is based entirely on the extent to which ULAs increase their mastery of POLI 281 material and enhance the learning environment for current POLI 281 students. While this is a subjective criterion, I am committed to providing feedback via our regular meetings and mid-semester reflection. In particular, if you ever appear to be in peril of receiving a grade lower than A-, I will communicate this to you in writing along with specific steps you can take to earn a higher grade. More generally, bear in mind that you were invited to this course because you excelled in a previous course and because I have every expectation that you will do the same in POLI 291. As such, I do not expect grades to be a source of friction.

Other policies

Technology in the classroom. As you can see in my regular course syllabi, I think that technology has many appropriate classroom uses. It also introduces a lot of tempting distractions. I allow technology in the classroom, but ask that it be used only for things directly relevant to class. No Facebook, Twitter, email, Instagram, ESPN, and so forth. **I think it is especially important that ULAs set a good example for regular students by adhering to this policy unwaveringly.**

Students with disabilities. (I include this in all my syllabi.) If you think you need an accommodation for a disability, please let me know. Some aspects of the course and its assignments may be modified to facilitate your success. I will work with the Office of Accessibility Resources and Services to determine appropriate accommodations. I will treat any information you provide as confidential. Barring unusual circumstances, I require notice of a need for accommodation within the *first two weeks* of the semester.