

Research Seminar in American Politics
(Political Science 569)

The main goal of this graduate seminar is to introduce the student to the research process within a specific field of study: American politics. The student will prepare an original research paper from the data set provided by Professor Rusk in class. This research paper should be of the quality usually required for delivery at a professional political science conference or convention. Hopefully, the work on this paper will lay the foundation for a possible dissertation topic in the future or for possible publication in a political science journal.

The data set to be used in the class was prepared by Professor Rusk from materials he has collected over the past 30 years. Much of this data set is published in the following book which is a required text for this course: Jerrold G. Rusk, A Statistical History of the American Electorate (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2001, 708 pp.). As shown in the book, this data set consists of election law data, suffrage data, vote participation data (turnout, mobilization, eligibility), vote choice data (for President, House, Senate, and Governor), and vote competition data at the state level for the period, 1788-1999.

This data set also has a series of socioeconomic and demographic variables taken from the U.S. Census and other sources for the state level for the period, 1788-1999. Typical examples of such variables include population size, population density, urbanization, education, ethnicity, race, income, occupation, etc. at the state level. Also included are indicators of a state's economic base in terms of the amount of manufacturing, agriculture, and other pursuits engaged in by the residents of each state.

The state is the unit of analysis throughout this data set. However, students can manipulate state data to obtain regional and national values for the variables they wish to use in their research projects. The required text cited above also contains, in printed form, regional and national values for many of the political variables in the data set. With the instructor's approval, a student can add data to the existing data set if it is useful for a particular research project.

The instructor will provide a series of background lectures in the class to acquaint the student with the general theories and literature in the field of American historical voting behavior, which is the basic area covered by the data set the students will use for this class. Students will also do a series of readings to acquaint themselves with the literature and research in this area of study. Lecture topics and readings will be provided in separate handouts to the class. Reading the introductory essays in the Rusk text will also be useful to acquaint the student with some of the major controversies and research findings in the area of historical voting behavior.

The one prerequisite for this class is for each student to take Political Science 502, Time Series Analysis for Political Science, which is being offered by Professor Ruhil this semester. This course will introduce the student to important methodological techniques which will be useful in analyzing data from the data set provided in class. Professor Ruhil will acquaint the student with time-series models and other techniques useful to analyzing the longitudinal data in the Rusk data set.

Time deadlines for the student's research prospectus and final research paper will be announced in class. All papers must be finished by the end of the class. Students will not be allowed to take an "incomplete" in the class.