

Occidental College

2025 Fall General Course Evaluations

Course: POLS300_1: Research Meth/Pols & Pub Pol

Instructor: Isaac Hale *

1 - 1. How would you describe your level of engagement in this course? How did you engage in class? For example: Did you come to class prepared? Did you seek help from the instructor, peers, or other supports when needed?

Response Rate	18/24 (75%)
<p>• I engaged actively throughout the semester. I completed the readings and problem sets before class and came prepared to discuss them. Because the course built cumulatively, I made sure to practice each week's Stata commands so I wouldn't fall behind. When I hit roadblocks—especially with do-file organization, debugging syntax, or interpreting regression output—I asked questions in class or worked with peers to figure it out. I also attended office hours a few times to get feedback on my research design decisions for the final project. The in-class exercises were helpful for confirming whether I actually understood the methods we were learning.</p> <p>• I feel that I was extremely engaged in class; however, I felt that doing the readings that were assigned was not helpful for understanding the class better.</p> <p>• I felt very engaged in the course through the instruction. I feel like the support through office hours was very helpful as well as support from Evan in class and during office hours. I thought the readings were applicable and helpful and not too much.</p> <p>• I enjoyed going to class- Professor Hale somehow made this course very interesting and manageable.</p> <p>• I came to class prepared, participated, and attended office hours with Hale or Evan weekly and sometimes twice a week.</p> <p>• I think I engaged with this class. I came to class prepared and sought help when needed.</p> <p>• I came to every class having done the readings and emailed Professor Hale with relevant questions. I participated frequently in class.</p> <p>• Pretty heavily engaged, I regularly went to office hours with the peer educator Evan, and also Professor Hale. I met with Professor Hale for feedback on my research question and outline multiple times. I did some of the readings at the start of the year and later stopped doing them, but still stayed engaged in class and asked questions to learn more.</p> <p>• I was very engaged throughout the class. I came prepared and ready to learn when it came to coding. I sought help from the TA frequently.</p> <p>• This course was very engaging, I was always able to seek help whenever I needed it.</p> <p>• My level of engagement was good, I came to class prepared and helped my peers. I answered questions in class.</p> <p>• I would describe myself as very engaged in this course. I came to class having completed the readings and ready to participate. I turned in my assignments on time and sought help from the professor when I needed it.</p> <p>• I believe that Professor Hale makes a classroom setting that is highly engaging. I'm always the most engaged in his classes than in any other course at Oxy. The lectures are straight to the point, aren't repetitive and boring, and always have highly relevant and useful information for reviewing a concept and completing work later on. By creating slides that are always on point, I know that my time is well spent engaging with the material in class. His highly effective teaching, combined with his no-computer policy, creates an environment where not only do I feel engaged, but so do my peers, creating a more welcoming and productive classroom.</p> <p>• I think my engagement in the course was good. Sometimes I felt a little inhibited by needing to raise my hand even to answer the most simple questions. I think this was a personal thing for me but there were times where I felt there was an additional roadblock to overcome when I wanted to share in class. But I understand that keeping order in the classroom is important, but for the most simple question I felt as though a little leeway on the hands up rule was warranted.</p> <p>• I attended all classes (I think I missed one) and did the readings before class. I also attended office hours many many times, both Professor Hale's office hours and Evan's office hours.</p> <p>• I was not as engaged as I could have been in this class, but I participated in class. Many times, it would be hard to pay attention to all of the slide shows. I did not go to office hours as much as I should have and feel that really set me back. When I finally did make time for office hours, Professor Hale and Evan were extremely helpful.</p> <p>• My level of engagement in this course was good, I came to class prepared and when I needed help Professor Hale was always helpful.</p> <p>• I engaged fairly well in the class through in class verbal participation, as well as by visiting the class office hours</p>	

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2 - 2. How did this course influence, change, or help shape your understanding of the subject matter?

Response Rate	18/24 (75%)
<p>• This course significantly reshaped how I understand political science research. Before taking POLS 300, I had a general sense of how empirical research looked, but I didn't really grasp how scholars establish causal relationships or evaluate the strength of evidence. This course helped me understand the logic behind causal inference, the differences between research designs (experiments, natural experiments, observational studies, surveys), and the assumptions each one relies on. It made me much more critical when reading quantitative research, especially regarding identification strategies, omitted variables, and whether conclusions actually follow from the data.</p> <p>• The course was extremely helpful in shaping my interest in political research. Hale did a great job of introducing, expanding, and teaching how to do political research.</p> <p>• This course really helped me understand Stata and data research through a politics lens which I really appreciated. I learned also a lot about how to be skeptical of research and data which is incredibly helpful.</p> <p>• It gave me a guideline for how to do research that I had lacked prior.</p> <p>• I knew nothing about coding and minimum info on political research before taking this class but I walked away being able to code data and analyze political research. Hale's slides were very thorough.</p> <p>• This course was highly influential in my understanding of statistics. I now know what a p value is, and how to make stata give me one, which is not something I could do before taking this course.</p> <p>• This course deepened my understanding of research methods in politics, building on the knowledge I gained in my empirical methods course for cognitive science. It reinforced in me the importance of statistical significance, internal and external validity, including the reliability of data and where it is sourced from. More importantly, I learned the basics of how to code in Stata, including how to clean data, run statistical tests, and create data visualizations.</p> <p>• It taught me an entirely new way of understanding surveys and data. I learned so much actual skill development with how to code, how to use Stata, how to understand the outcomes, and how to download datasets and recode them. I have never coded before so this class was instrumental for me.</p> <p>• This course helped me increase my understanding of research and data methods to a point where I feel confident in it.</p> <p>• I gained a better understanding of different types of research methods and the complexity and challenges that come with doing original work.</p> <p>• This class was very useful in teaching me how to use stata, and on research design. Learning about survey design and gaining an understanding of the broad statistical concepts is very useful.</p> <p>• This course fundamentally shaped my understanding of research methods in politics. I had very little prior knowledge and this course gave a comprehensive and easy to understand overview of statistics and research methods.</p> <p>• I came to this course with no prior knowledge whatsoever. Prof's approach cut straight to the chase and didn't leave me doing unnecessary work. By making all the work feel like useful and real work, I was able to actually engage and apply myself because I was interested. This course could have gotten overly technical and bogged down in the weeds, but prof made sure we covered the most relevant and actually relevant material that has left me feeling ready to get more into the subject because I started off in such a good way. After this course, I believe I have a good understanding and work to prove that understanding.</p> <p>• I think the course was incredibly helpful in allowing me to understand the way that research is conducted in the world of political academia.</p> <p>• I knew absolutely nothing about coding or research methods going into this class. Professor Hale structured the class in a way that made it possible to follow along and learn as a first time coder. I definitely know more than I did at the start of the semester.</p> <p>• This course changed my understanding of how data can be manipulated and used to provide misinformation when taken advantage of and misinterpreted. It also helped me understand how thorough political research is and why it is important. This course taught me more about quantitative research methods, information I most likely would not have known if I had not taken it.</p> <p>• At the beginning of the class I didn't really understand Political Science research methods and this class helped a great deal. I had taken statistics in high school, so this was a great continuation of that but adding the specifics related to Political Science research.</p> <p>• this course significantly enhanced my understanding of political science research and data collection/analysis, and was overall very informative</p>	

3 - 3. What skills or capacities did you expect to gain from this course? How and to what extent did the course help you to develop those skills or capacities?

Response Rate	18/24 (75%)
<p>• I expected to gain skills in Stata, a deeper understanding of research design, and practice interpreting statistical analyses. The course definitely helped me develop all of these. The Stata labs and problem sets walked me through everything from data cleaning and descriptive statistics to running regressions, creating visualizations, and diagnosing model issues. The repetition across assignments helped these skills stick. The final project pushed me to put everything together: formulate a question, select a credible design, justify identification, and analyze real data. By the end of the semester, I felt much more confident navigating empirical research and running analyses independently.</p> <p>• I gained the ability to use Parallels and Stata. Being able to code sufficiently to do research.</p> <p>• I expected to learn Stata and generally data analysis and I think this class did a good job of helping me develop those skills. I now am capable of doing projects in Stata independently and generally better at data analysis.</p> <p>• Organization, time management, STATA, and vibes :)</p> <p>• I didn't have any expectations walking in honestly. It's a requirement for my major. I now feel way more confident walking into my comps if I have to do research.</p> <p>• I expected to learn statistical concepts and how to use stata. I think that this occurred.</p> <p>• I expected to become proficient in Stata as well as deepen my understanding of research methods in the social sciences — this class enabled me to do both.</p> <p>• I learned how to use Stata, Parallels, download datasets, recode data, and interpret the results through different forms of data analysis including regressions and ttests with multiple variables. This class helped me entirely to understand these, because I have no previous experience with any kind of data analysis.</p> <p>• I gained a good understanding of Stata from not knowing any coding at the beginning of the semester. This course gave me everything I needed and more when it came to teaching me how to use it.</p> <p>• I expected the gain skills on how to conduct my own research and learning about the different processes that is required.</p> <p>• I expected to learn about research methods and how to use stata, this course successfully did that.</p> <p>• I expected to gain the skills to design and complete my own research process as well as an understanding of political research methods as a whole. This course helped me develop these skills through clear and engaging lectures, informative readings, and assignments that solidified my learning.</p> <p>• I hoped to be able to analyze data in Stata, and I'm happy to say I can now do so. By having problem sets that lead up to the final project, he prepared us to be successful in the final project because we had done prior work leading up to it.</p> <p>• Learning stata was pretty big. It's a marketable skill that I can put on a resume. I felt that the programming days were extremely helpful paired with TA office hours.</p> <p>• I expected to learn about some basic coding and the details of completing a research project. I defiantly feel this course helped me gain these skills.</p> <p>• Never in my life did I think I would be able to code, but here I am. I now know I am capable. The class helped me understand computers better and the world of tech. I am not a techy person, and all the material was tricky at times, it made me feel empowered once I completed it.</p> <p>• I gained skills in coding through Stata which I never thought I would be able to do. Professor Hale did a phenomenal job walking students through the program and just the class in general.</p> <p>• I gained data analysis, collection, and visualization skills, as well as stata proficiency and more coding/number heavy reading comprehension.</p>	

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4 - 4. What aspects/features of the instruction were particularly effective or ineffective? What aspects/features of the course facilitated or impeded your learning? For example: How well did the professor structure class periods (e.g., discussion facilitation, group work, in-class exercises, lectures, handouts, etc), reading questions, assignments, exams, community-based work, field work, laboratory work, studio work, etc.?

Response Rate 18/24 (75%)

- Professor Hale explained complex concepts clearly and in a step-by-step way that made the material more approachable. His lectures were structured so it was easy to follow how concepts connected...for example, how omitted variable bias leads into discussions of identification and model selection. The Stata demos in class were especially helpful because he worked through code slowly, explained why each command was used, and openly showed how to interpret the output. The problem sets were challenging but reinforced the main ideas well. My only challenge was that some weeks introduced both a dense statistical concept and completely new Stata commands at the same time, which could feel overwhelming. Slightly separating the conceptual-heavy weeks from the code-heavy weeks, or providing one additional worked example before each problem set, would help smooth the learning curve.
- I think that Hale's teaching style is extremely efficient and that the work is very manageable and does not sneak up on you. I felt the readings were ineffective to learning.
- I really liked programming days as well as having examples in class that we worked through together.
- Professor Hale provides a clear structure for his class that makes it easy to do assignments, know how you're doing, consult him or the TA, and so forth. I think that his teaching style is so conducive to being a good student.
- I think everything was done very well. Nothing was done badly that would hinder my learning. The office hours that Hale and Evan had were extremely helpful and given at accessible and flexible times. Having one day a week to do a coding lab was also great. Hale made instruction time that could've been otherwise boring, fun.
- I thought the coding days were very useful. They were both useful because they helped me learn the actual code but they were also useful to refer back to.
- I thought the weekly structure (two lecture days, one Stata programming day) was really effective. I appreciated Professor Hale and his assistant Evan Lieber's accessibility, and they were really helpful in working with me on the Stata problem sets, which were the hardest aspect of the course. The readings were also helpful, though I wish Professor Hale addressed them more in class.
- The weekly programming days were SUPER effective. It was less effective to have the actual course taught in a way that wasn't specific to your research, but still good to have the larger picture when understanding the research concepts. The only thing is that I would try to do something so that we can apply those concepts to the specific research questions we were focusing on, like variables, measurement type, etc. in class. The problem sets were also super helpful.
- I found the overall structure to be very intuitive and comprehensive yet not tiring. The problem sets were very helpful in learning the skills I need to know in Stata.
- The slides were very engaging, and the demonstrations were helpful. I think drawing on the whiteboard when talking through some concepts would be helpful to help process when breaking concepts down. I think this would help more visual learners, especially when taking in a new concept.
- I really found the Stata labs to be effective. I also think that the problem set structure was good, the instructions were clear.
- Professor Hale is one of the best professors at Occidental College. He is able to lecture in a way that is very informative and very engaging at the same time. I was nervous coming into this class because math is not my strong suit, but Professor Hale made the subject approachable. His office hours are always extremely helpful and make me feel better when I am stressed. I also found the problem sets very helpful for bolstering my skills independently. The class was very well organized and conducive to my learning.
- Lectures are highly effective, so are his office hours, and the teacher assistants. Prof is always clear, direct, engaged, and has just enough of a sense of humor to feel at ease around.
- I think that finding a better way to integrate the readings would be worthwhile, as most of what we went over in class summarized what was covered in the readings. I eventually stopped doing them so I could prioritize other work.
- Professor Hale structured the class in a very helpful way to follow along as a first timer. We would spend time discussing the theory of an idea so that we theoretically knew what we would be coding, and then learn how to actually code it on "coding days". I appreciated all of the outside of class time we had to seek help, having Evan as a TA was beyond helpful! He held extra office hours when we had problem sets due and for our final poster project. Professor Hale also made himself very available outside of class which I found incredibly helpful as well. This class feels very unique in terms of politics classes so having extra time to talk about our specific projects was helpful. I wonder if there is a way to start looking at the actual data for our poster projects earlier. I know this is something we could figure out on our own but actually opening an outside data set was a little tricky and I would have loved to do this in class easier on as I found it sort of difficult to wrap my head around the project conceptually.
- The problem sets help with learning, but they are a lot harder when it's tricky to pay attention in class. Office hours are very beneficial and have helped me understand the material better. I was also lucky to have fantastic classmates who could help answer questions when I could not make it to office hours.
- I thought the problem sets and programming days were really helpful because even though they seemed difficult at the time it ended up being really helpful for the final poster project. All of the material covered really helped me learn about statistics and the Political field of research as well. I was really worried at the start of the semester about how my project was going to come together and I credit Professor Hale with making things digestible and manageable throughout the semester.
- Including class engagement through questions and opportunities to discuss and ask prompting questions about the material was very helpful for me.

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5 - 5. What aspects of the course or instruction helped or hindered the creation of an inclusive learning environment that is responsive to, and promotes the success of, a diverse group of students?

Response Rate	17/24 (70.83%)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Professor Hale fostered an inclusive environment by encouraging all types of questions and treating them seriously, basic Stata syntax questions and advanced conceptual questions were both welcomed. He also regularly checked in about the pace and made adjustments when needed. Group activities helped level differences between students who came in with prior data experience and those who didn't. One challenge was that some students were much more comfortable with statistical software than others; structured mixed-experience groups might help even more in future semesters.Professor Hale always creates a welcoming environment in his class; he and his TA make sure that everyone is comfortable asking questions inside and out of class.I think the course was inclusive to everyone.N/AOffice hours, lab days, thorough explanations on slides. I think that Hale and Evan both take the "there are no dumb questions" approach rather than getting upset with a student that hasn't grasped the concept yet. Very non-judgmental environment.I thought there was an inclusive environment.Professor Hale welcomed participation from all students and was successful in giving us ample time to complete assignments and ask for help.It was all really inclusive.Nothing hindered the creation of an inclusive learning environment, in fact, many of us got the assistance we need when it came to the coding even though we had no prior experience.The class had a good environment. Professor Hale is relatable, kind, and wants everyone to do well.This course and its instruction fostered an inclusive learning environment that was responsive to the needs of a diverse group of students.Prof almost always calls on anyone who raises their hand, treats all students equally, and never holds a grudge, regardless of their performance. Even if I got a bad grade on a previous assignment, I never felt ashamed in talking to him about it or asking questions about the next project.I think professor Hale did a good job of including the entire class in the conversation, frequently bouncing to people who had not spoken yet or at all.I feel that professor Hale does a wonderful job making students feel welcome and heard in classes. He is patient which is very crucial for someone teaching a bunch of humanities students how to code. I have always appreciated how professor Hale runs his classrooms in a way that is both fun and educational. He creates open dialogue in class lecture and discussion and gives room for all students voices to be heard.I think if the class were more collaborative with in-class activities, it would help students get to know one another more and build a healthier class environment. Students would also be more comfortable with the professor that way. Professor Hale does a wonderful job connecting with his students one-on-one and being understanding. I think forcing students to bond more and work together inside of class may be beneficial.Professor Hale went out of his way to promote the success of all students especially in a class like this that has high expectations.None.	

6 - 6. What other suggestions (if any) do you have for the next time the course is taught?

Response Rate	11/24 (45.83%)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">LESS/no readings.n/aHe did great. Repeat the process.None!I would have liked more problem sets that were shorter and also an option to use regular Stata that wasn't on parallels.I think the overall structure to the class is good, but perhaps take out (or modify) some of the readings. There were also some videos you linked that seemed like extra fluff—include them only if they will help us better understand the material, but if not, I would suggest taking them out.I think it would be nice to have another research design/progress worksheet to get continuous feedback, leading up to working with our own data in STATA.Professor Hale's office hours are often extremely busy (a sign of how popular and helpful he is!), but this can often be difficult as a student with many other commitments. Therefore, one suggestion I have is that Professor Hale offer office hours by appointment, so that students could have a guaranteed spot without waiting for close to an hour.I think adopting a slightly more popcorn style of participation would be good, but other than that I was very satisfied with how the course was taught.My one big suggestion for Professor Hale is that I think his classes should have scheduled appointments for office hours. He is a wonderful person and it makes sense that his office hours are busy, especially with Research Methods students who require more help. However, I think it was tough to know whether office hours was going to be busy or how long the wait would be with a class right after office hours ended. I also feel making appointments only go for a certain amount of time would help students keep their visits concise and let students who knew they were going to need help schedule them in advance.None, I enjoyed the class	

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7 - 7. What else (if anything) would you like to share about the course or the instruction?

Response Rate	11/24 (45.83%)
<p>• This was one of the most demanding but rewarding courses I've taken at Oxy. The steady workload and the need to practice regularly made the class challenging, but Professor Hale's teaching style made the material manageable and meaningful. I feel significantly better prepared for upper-division courses, comps, and any future empirical research. I'm very grateful for how much I learned.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• N/a• Thank you!• I <3 Evan Lieber• None!• I am sorry I waited so long to take a class from Professor Hale—he is a super engaging professor and is clearly passionate about his work. I learned a lot in this class.• Fantastic professor. He teaches in a super easy-to-understand way about a topic that is extremely difficult for me to grasp as someone who has never coded before. The step by step instruction during the programming days as well as the opportunity for "try it yourself" on those days is super helpful.• This course was, overall, well taught, engaging, and had many ways to seek help.• Prof Hale is the absolute best. Kind, smart, thoughtful, engaged, brutally yet entirely and perfectly fair (work hard and do good work and you'll earn a good grade, slack off and he'll know). Couldn't recommend another prof. more.• All around my experience in POLS 300 was great and I learned a lot about statistics. I wish the course could delve a little more into qualitative research, but I also understand why it does not. All around Professor Hale is a fabulous professor and deeply cares about his students.• NA	