MMSS 211-3: Institutions, Rules, & Models in Social Science

Spring 2018 Schedule: MoWe 2:00PM - 3:20PM, 555 Clark B01

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Course Overview

How is a forest fire relevant to bank failures? What can an urn tell us about constitutional change? In this course we will learn about and apply many different models to a broad range of social science phenomena. Social science problems often have so many details and moving parts that it can be difficult for researchers to gain traction. By using models, we can think abstractly about the core mechanics of a problem – like Brexit, sharing articles on social media or water conservation – and generate expectations for outcomes. This is a class that moves quickly and covers a lot of ground. Each class we'll discuss a different model and its application to social science, looking at how we can apply the model’s insights to existing and ongoing questions in social science.

This is also a class that involves a fair bit of writing – to be a successful social scientist, you will need to not only have interesting ideas but you will need to convey those ideas to others effectively. This course will help you on both fronts: we will explore the mathematics of different models and develop our skills to communicate about these models to a broader audience.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the course, students will be able to
• Identify and apply relevant social science models to real-world situations
• Describe models clearly to an broad audience
• Develop skills to edit and improve written work
• Convey ideas in written format to broad audience

General Policies Academic Integrity

University education is predicated on original work and the intellectual integrity of the persons engaged in creative discovery. Northwestern University is committed to maintaining a cooperative, open intellectual climate in which those who search for knowledge and understanding receive credit for their personal contributions. Accordingly, all students in this course are expected to abide by scholarly norms and University policies regarding academic integrity. These policies, and resources about best practices to employ in order to abide by them, are available through the WCAS website. Violations of these standards, even if "unintentional," may result in serious sanctions. It may be required to turn in written work for this course through TurnItIn on the course’s Canvas site a plagiarism prevention system that identifies "matched text" that is used without proper citation. You will also have the opportunity to submit your papers to TurnItIn to check that all sources you have used are properly acknowledged and cited. Note that all submitted papers will be included as source documents in the TurnItIn reference database, solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of such papers.
**Attendance**

Regular attendance in class is vital for learning and academic success. I will not take daily attendance for each lecture meeting. However, there will be activities in both lecture and discussion to build on points and incentivize attendance. These points are arbitrary and cannot be made up if you miss class. Students should contact me if they are unable to attend lecture.

**Access & Inclusion**

Difference enhances both the teaching and learning experiences. The classroom is a space where all students are welcome, regardless of age, dis/ability, ethnicity, gender identity and/or expression, national origin, race, religious non/belief, sex, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, religious non/belief, and alignment with other identities or contexts. Furthermore, if any student has a particular consideration, including learning and participation style, that affects their ability to meet course expectations, please see me as soon as possible. I am personally committed to creating and maintaining an inclusive learning environment for each and every student. Please, do not hesitate to contact me with specific needs or concerns, and the sooner the better. Maintaining transparency (and communication in general) with your instructor is not only a good professional skill, but also a good way to develop a more one-on-one relationship. Furthermore, accommodations are far easier and effective to arrange when planned than when rushed. In short, I will make every effort to ensure students equal access. Please let me know how I can help make this class work for you.

My classroom is intended to be a constructive and critical space, wherein all students feel comfortable engaging openly with the material, each other, and oneself. However, this is only possible when everyone commits to this endeavor. I expect you to do so, and to help your peers (and me) to do the same. While I very much encourage (and celebrate) dissent and/or debate, I will not tolerate disrespect in my classroom. Please let me know if you feel the principles expressed in this syllabus are not being upheld so that I can address it as soon as possible.

**Communication**

I am generally available via email at the address above, and will do my best to respond within 24 hours of contact during the week and 48 hours on weekends. In addition to the office hours above, there will likely be time at the end of each class meeting to discuss individual issues. Please do not hesitate to be in touch with any questions or concerns. It’s helpful for me if you put ‘MMSS 211-3’ in the heading. I do ask that you check the syllabus before contacting me because the answer you seek is most likely there already.

**Writing**

While the main objective of the course is to encourage students to think critically and constructively about research—their own and others’—students should also aim to clearly express their ideas in writing. This is seldom straightforward or easy, but good writing allows the reader to understand the argument at hand, while bad writing often reveals muddled thinking. Flawless grammar and correct spelling are minimum requirements for acceptable writing, and written work in this course will be evaluated not only for the ideas but for clarity of expression. For outside resources, consult [http://www.weinberg.northwestern.edu/advising/degree/writing.html “Standard Formatting.”](http://www.weinberg.northwestern.edu/advising/degree/writing.html) Unless otherwise specified, written work submitted for this course should use 12 point font, double-spaced, with 1-inch margins. Most work will be turned in on Canvas. Should I ask for a physical copy, please be sure you print double-sided, and number the pages, stapling at the upper left corner.

**Late Assignments**

Late assignments will receive a 5% point reduction each day they are late (e.g. 0.5 point off a 10 point assignment for each day late). Deductions will begin after the beginning of class on the due date, and
will accumulate with each 24 hour period after that. No assignments will be accepted more than 5 days after the deadline.

**Religious Observances**

Northwestern University recognizes the need for students, faculty, and staff to observe religious holidays during the academic year. In cases of religious observance, I follow the guidelines set forth by the Provost here: www.northwestern.edu/religious-life/religious-living/religious-holidays/accomodations.html In brief, please notify me early in the course if you have a conflict during the term, and appropriate accommodations will be made. Note that you must notify me before the date, not after.

**Student Accommodations**

Any student requesting accommodations related to a disability or other condition is required to register with AccessibleNU (accessiblenu@northwestern.edu; 847-467-5530) and provide professors with an accommodation notification from AccessibleNU, preferably within the first two weeks of class. All information will remain confidential. Accessible NU is responsible for providing, coordinating, and facilitating reasonable accommodations and services to ensure that all Northwestern students with disabilities have the opportunity to fully participate in academic programming and all other facets of University life. You are also welcome to contact me privately to discuss your academic needs, although I cannot arrange for disability-related accommodations.

**Electronic Devices**

In order to foster a respectful, mindful, and engaged classroom environment, the use of electronic devices, including laptops and tablets, is allowed in class at the instructor’s sole discretion. Cell phones and similar devices should be silenced and put away throughout class time. The Internet, in its magnificent glory has transformed our consciousnesses, but it has also eroded our concentration. Typically, I ban technology in the classroom as research demonstrates that it distracts and detracts from learning and engagement. However, this quarter, we'll use it on a previsionary basis as the readings are online.

**Assignments**

Your grade will come from assignments (42% of your grade), your engagement in class (coming to class, being engaged in discussion, and generally contributing positively and productively to the conversation) (15%), and writing a final paper (model summaries (8%) plus the paper and drafts (35%)).

This course is designed to both cover the substance of models, but also provide an opportunity to practice and hone your writing skills when discussing social science applications. As such, there is a fair amount of writing designed to help you build these skills.

**Assignments**

There are several assignments that are intended to reinforce concepts from class and/or provide the opportunity to apply the concepts from class. These assignments should be written up completely -- meaning, you should read them over, edit them, and check them for flow, etc. **Writing is a portion of how you will be evaluated on these assignments.**

**Final paper**
Ideally, you will expand on one of your model summaries (assignment due later in the course) to form the body of this longer and more in-depth paper. More details will be given on the final paper as we move through the course. A draft will be due the last week of class.

For a summary of all the assignments and dates, you can look to the bottom of this page or see the 'assignments' list in Canvas (this also includes details on the assignment itself).

Textbook

The textbook for the course is The Model Thinker by Scott Page. This is a draft of a forthcoming textbook and it is available on Canvas. We have permission to use the text for our course. Please do not circulate it beyond than for your use in this course.

Course Schedule

The course schedule can be seen in the Canvas Modules Page -- we'll typically spend about one week per model. See the individual page for the relevant information and content.