

## **POL222 Introduction to Quantitative Reasoning I**

### **Essay Assignment 1**

#### **Instructions**

**Due: 11:59pm on Monday, October 19, 2015**

Select a political phenomenon of your interest and develop a causal theory to explain it. Write an essay within 1,200 words to discuss your causal theory.

#### **Goal**

In Part I of the class, we have covered the scientific study of politics, important building blocks of causal theory and hypothesis, and potential threats to establishing the causal relationship between the variables of interest. By identifying a research question of your interest and its causal theory in this essay assignment, you will have an opportunity to apply the knowledge you have gained to a political science research question in real life. By doing so, you are expected to deepen your understanding of how to develop and assess a causal theory in political science research.

#### **Requirements**

The requirements are as follows:

1. Your essay should be within 1,200 words.
2. In your essay, you should address the followings:
  - (1) Discuss the substantive significance of your research question: e.g., Why is it important to study your dependent variable? How does your theory, if confirmed, help us better understand politics or society?
  - (2) Your dependent variable must be a political phenomenon or a public policy-related phenomenon broadly defined. You may use either political outcomes, such as election results, or economic and social outcomes, such as economic growth rate and citizen's level of education, for your dependent variable.
  - (3) Your causal theory should focus on *one* independent variable. There may be multiple causes of the dependent variable of your interest, but you should pick and focus on a single cause in the theory you develop.
  - (4) Your theory should have a credible causal mechanism that links your independent and dependent variables.
  - (5) You need to propose a testable hypothesis based on observables. You may propose only one hypothesis. (Do not propose an empirical research design for your hypothesis. It will be a topic of the next assignment.)
  - (6) You need to address whether there is any potential reverse causality or simultaneous relationships.
  - (7) You should discuss what confounding variables are to be expected and whether they might cause a problem if omitted from the analysis. If you expect multiple confounding variables for your causal theory, you should name all of them that you can conceive, but then select one that you believe would be most problematic and focus your discussion on it. If this is the case, include a brief discussion on why that variable was selected among others. For the confounding variable of your choice,

- discuss what potential problem you would expect if the variable is omitted from the analysis. Use the omitted variable bias formula to identify the direction of bias.
3. You may not use a causal theory referenced in our textbook and lectures. An important goal of this assignment is to apply the concepts and methods you learn in class, which requires *original thinking*.
  4. You should avoid a very popular, big idea in political science research, such as Democratic Peace (i.e. democracies tend not to fight with each other), Modernization theory (i.e., economic development facilitates democratization), and the SES model of political participation (i.e., higher income or more educated people participates in politics more frequently), since there is already a plethora of materials out there that would answer most of the questions for this essay. Again, the point of the essay assignment is that *you think thorough the problems by yourself* to apply the concepts and methods you learn.
  5. No additional research or readings are required or expected for this assignment. Instead, I would discourage you from looking for existing political science studies that examine the dependent variable of your interest. The reason is the same as above. Do not copy a theory of the existing studies, but come up with your own.

### **Marking Rubric**

The marking rubric of the essay assignment is posted on the class Blackboard site together with this document. In addition to the instructions in this document, read the marking rubric carefully, when you prepare your essay.

### **Format**

- Your essay should be within the word count specified above. Footnotes, references or bibliography, and titles and notes of your graphs and figures may not be included in this word count.
- Your essay should have a concise yet informative introduction and conclusion.
- Sectioning and sub-sectioning are recommended to effectively organize your essay and communicate your argument to readers. How you effectively organize your essay will be part of the evaluation.
- Your essay should use standard fonts, such as Times New Roman in 12 point font, and be double-spaced.
- Use of figures and tables is not required, but you may use them if you wish. If you do, whether they are effectively presented and integrated into your argument will be evaluated.
- Figures and tables, if any, should be placed where they are discussed. If your discussion refers to the same figure or table multiple times, you don't need to insert it every time it's referred. Placing it where it is mentioned for the first time is sufficient.
- If you use figures and tables, number them and give an informative title, such as "Figure 1. Title of the Figure" and "Table 1. Title of the Table." You should use their numbers, such as Figure 1 and Table 1, when you refer to them in your discussion.
- Use footnotes rather than endnotes, if you have something that should be stated but is not appropriate to be included in the body of your essay.
- You need to give appropriate citations and references, if you cite a passage, use ideas, or base your argument on ideas from other sources.
- You may use any citation format as long as it is consistently applied throughout the paper.

## **Discussion Board**

There will be a forum on the essay assignment on the Discussion Board of the class Blackboard site. Please post substantive questions regarding the essay assignment on that forum. The instructor will not respond to substantive questions on the essay assignment via email.

Check the Discussion Board regularly since there may be answers to important questions, which may be critical for completing this essay assignment.

Questions on the essay assignment posted on the Discussion Board will be answered on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays until the due date.

## **Tutorial**

During Tutorial Session 2, you will have an opportunity to discuss your essay ideas with your peers. There will also be an exercise to help you formulate your ideas for Essay 1, posted in advance of this tutorial session on the class Blackboard site. Complete this exercise as much as possible before Tutorial Session 2. The discussion in the tutorial session will be based on this exercise.

## **Office Hours**

In addition to the instructor's regular office hours, there will be extra office hours held by teaching assistants. If you want to discuss or seek advice on the essay assignment, stop by during these office hours. You may visit any teaching assistant's office hours regardless of who your tutorial instructor is. Schedule and location of teaching assistants' office hours will be announced in the "Office Hours" section of the class Blackboard site.

If you want to seek advice on your essay assignment yet have schedule conflicts with all available office hours, you may send an email to the following teaching assistant: Michael Gavin at [michael.gavin@mail.utoronto.ca](mailto:michael.gavin@mail.utoronto.ca). Please consider visiting office hours first, as the feedback of this kind may be best communicated in person. You should consider seeking advice via emails from Mike only when your schedule does not allow visiting the available office hours.

Please note that neither the instructor nor teaching assistants will be able to review your draft essay when you seek advice.

## **Communication with Your Classmates**

To prepare for your essay, you may discuss your research question and causal theory/hypothesis with your classmates, as long as you and your peers do not write an essay on the same topic and the same dependent variable. More specifically, the acceptable form of collaboration is that you work on a different topic and dependent variable from your peers', and mutually review and critique each other's causal theory/hypothesis. Discussion with your classmates if you both work on the same topic and dependent variable should be avoided and may be considered as a form of academic misconduct. This is because your essays may show significant similarities to each other's, such as important parts of your essay being based on someone else's idea, or the same idea being used by both students. Please note that "(w)orking too closely with another student on an individual assignment so that the end result is too similar" is considered as an example of the

academic misconduct under the University of Toronto's *Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters*.<sup>1</sup> You are asked to write an original essay of your own.

### **Assignment Submission**

Your essay should be submitted to [Turnitin.com](https://turnitin.com). If you choose not to use Turnitin.com, please let the instructor know well before the deadline to make an alternative arrangement.

To upload your essay to Turnitin.com, please refer to:

<http://teaching.utoronto.ca/ed-tech/teaching-technology/turnitin/a-guide-for-students/>

You also need the following information:

Class ID: 10781470

Password: introquant

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<sup>1</sup> The quotation is from "What is Academic Misconduct" (<http://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/osai/The-rules/what-is-academic-misconduct>) at the Office of Student Academic Integrity's website. See "Unauthorized aid or assistance."