

# Statistical Methods in Political Research PS 599

*Discussion Section* Fall 2005, Thursdays 1-2pm, Haven Hall 7603

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*“Invention consists in avoiding the constructing of useless contraptions and in constructing the useful combinations which are in infinite minority. To invent is to discern, to choose.” —Henri Poincaré*

*Introduction* I am one of your guides in what might be unfamiliar territory: statistical inference. I want you to discover how to use this form of reasoning and argumentation in your own research, because I have found it to be a powerful way of going beyond the circumstantial—to systematically assess the evidence in favor of competing claims—about the social world. Further, the techniques you learn in 599 and future courses include those that will allow you to discover the non-obvious consequences of simple assumptions brought into contact with data—what you might call the “modeling” as an empirical method.

*Section* In section, I am here to listen to your questions and concerns about the material covered in class, and in the readings. I can be most helpful if you come on Thursday with questions from the assigned readings and homework.

I will also cover supplementary material from time to time in section. Some of the topics are noted on Rob’s course syllabus, but I am likely to go beyond that material as well.

*Grading* Problem sets are 60% of your grade, exams are 30%, and course involvement is 10%. Grading will be used to provide feedback on your work, to give you a goal to strive for in your learning of the material, and to give us an idea of how well we are doing.

I will be spending a lot of time each time I grade an assignment trying to provide meaningful feedback. Please worry less about the point values you (or the other students) receive and more about the feedback.

*Help* Please use the weekend to finish trying out all of the problems on the homework, and come to office hours if you have more questions. I may also be able to meet you on an as-needed basis, as time allows. I will respond to e-mail as quickly as possible, but e-mailing me the evening before an assignment is due will not give me time to give you useful feedback.