

TEACHING A POLLING AND SURVEY SEMINAR

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Unlike countries where an honors degree requires additional work after a standard bachelors' degree, honors degrees in the United States require specialized coursework during the initial degree program. Colleges value honors programs because they attract higher-performing students and donor interest. One way colleges attract students to honors programs is through small seminar-style courses on interesting subjects. Seminar courses are unusual for statistics programs, because seminars are characterized by in-depth readings and verbal discussion, not lecture or laboratory. The author was asked to create a specialized honors seminar course for fall 2016. Since the USA was scheduled for major elections in November 2016, a course was designed to learn about polling, surveys, and political applications of polls.

The course had three goals - analyze statistical information about the 2016 US presidential election; plan and conduct a poll of campus students; and introduce a few mathematical tools related to politics and polls. Although all three goals were accomplished, class preparation was not simple. Since the campaign had high levels of discord and nastiness, including newspaper critique of polling organizations, the course had to maintain strict neutrality to prevent statistics from turning into politics. This poster will present verbal and visual highlights of the course, including a summary of recommendations for others considering a similar seminar-based offering.