

Rubrics and Student Learning in Political Science

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Abstract:

Rubrics were designed for student learning and as preparation to engage in class discussion on the role of interest groups in American politics. The rubrics enabled students hands-on to learn and generate qualitative and quantitative data, as well as convert the qualitative data into quantitative scales in lower division political science classes. Empirical evidence based on students' learning outcomes indicated a higher order engaged learning in introductory American Government classes. The experience enhanced civic literacy for students regarding how citizens influence public policy through interest group politics.

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Introduction

This paper describes how “**rubrics and checklists**” were designed to enable students engage in empirical data analysis in lower division American government class as a response to the challenges of not having face-to-face class meetings during the Covid-19 global lockdown. The process, rubrics and checklists, was particularly effective for student learning and indicated acceptable **data literacy** in introductory American government course. Consequently, I have incorporated the practice in Post-Covid classroom face-to-face and online classes.

The process draws from **social sciences methodology literature** in qualitative and quantitative data analysis. It simplifies and adapts the methodological nuances and teaches students hands-on about qualitative and quantitative data as well as how to convert qualitative data into quantitative scales to comprehend introductory American politics. In addition, the process draws from **holistic and analytic rubrics literature** to engage student learning in aspects of citizen politics in lower division American Government courses at the College of Central Florida. Students are able to use the simplified process to generate empirical data and participate in interactive discussion forum. I describe one such application of the method to the analysis of interest group politics and how the learning outcome enhances both civic engagement in interest group politics as well as data (qualitative and quantitate) literacy.

THE DESIGN:

Checklists and Rubrics to prepare for Interest Group Discussion Forum~

Primary Practice: I created a rubric to use as a grading tool for Discussion Forum presentation

(students used the rubric to prepare and effectively participate in the discussion forum on interest group politics)

Secondary Practice: I used data from the rubrics to inform instruction (students learned **hands-on applied political thinking** on interest groups politics and were able to demonstrate different learning outcomes on interest groups)

Goals: To foster hands-on applied political thinking on interest groups, Pluralism.

Students will learn the **various dimensions and role of Pluralism** (interest group politics and influence) in American politics. Then students **will find and analyze data** (qualitative and quantitative data) on the various dimensions of Interest Group theory based on current issues in American Politics. In the process, students will also learn **how to convert qualitative data into quantitative data**. Following, students will present their respective learning outcomes in the **Discussion Forum** and have their peers' critique or affirm their presentations.

Description of the Practice: a four steps implementation

Step-1: (**checklist**)~ Learning outcome #1

Students will learn three types of interest groups and why Americans join interest groups. Why

Do Americans Join Interest Groups? **Due to:**

- ***Solidary Incentives/ qualities*** (such as ethnic, race, gender identities)
- ***Material Incentives/ qualities*** (such as profit/ economics reasons)
- ***Purposive Incentives/ qualities*** (such as ideals, ideology reasons)

Step-2: (**Checklist on qualitative data**)~ Learning outcome #2

Students will explore these [supplementary internet site](#) and ([opensecrets.org](https://www.opensecrets.org)) and identify three interest groups that respectively show Solidary, Material, and Purposive qualities (How and why?). These hands-on exercises will enable students to find and generate **qualitative data** on interest groups.

Step-3: (**rubrics on quantitative data**) ~ Learning outcomes #3

Next, students will **convert and translate** the qualitative data into **quantitative data**. (How?)

Rubrics are provided on how to accomplish the task.

Rubrics: comprise numeric weighted scores based on ratio scales of 0 thru 5 (with 0 lowest and 5 highest scores). Students will utilize the **rubrics grid to learn and to demonstrate the skill-set** of converting qualitative data into quantitative data for interest group analysis. That is, students will code quantitatively the three Interest Groups selected in step 2.

1. Solidary Qualities (SQ-- 0 thru 5)
2. Material Qualities (MQ-- 0 thru 5)
3. Purposive Qualities (PQ-- 0 thru 5)

(students should be prepared to defend their coding decisions)

[that is, for each of the three interest groups you selected: what degree of SQ, MQ, PQ

does it contain? How and why? -]

A 3 by 3 Table/ Matrix on the Rubrics

TASK DESCRIPTION:

Interest groups are organized groups that have policy goals and actively seek to influence public policy on their respective interests. Citizens will join an interest group for multiple reasons such as solidary incentives, material incentives, and purposive incentives. Students will **select three groups** and code them by reasons of joining and/or interest group activities.

Interest Groups	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
Solidary Qualities/ Incentives, SQ (0-5)	Quantitative numerical scoring & Qualitative Descriptions	Quantitative numerical scoring & Qualitative Descriptions	Quantitative numerical scoring & Qualitative Descriptions
Material Qualities/ Incentives, MQ (0-5)	Quantitative numerical scoring & Qualitative Descriptions	Quantitative numerical scoring & Qualitative Descriptions	Quantitative numerical scoring & Qualitative Descriptions
Purposive Qualities/ Incentives, PQ (0-5)	Quantitative numerical scoring & Qualitative Descriptions	Quantitative numerical scoring & Qualitative Descriptions	Quantitative numerical scoring & Qualitative Descriptions

Step-4: Discussion Forum presentation ~ Learning outcome #4

Applied Political Thinking on Interest Groups:

First students review carefully the three steps on "**Interest Groups Checklist and Rubrics.**" (students use the review to prepare to participate in interactive discussion forum.)

Second: students engage in the discussion forum. What were the three interest groups you identified? and how did each of them score on **Solidary, Material, and Purposive qualities or incentives** [please state the numeric quantitative data and the descriptive information (qualitative data) you assigned to each and the reasons for your decision].

Third: comment on at least two of the postings from your peers to challenge (that is critique) or affirm their decisions on their respective interest groups.

Data Analysis and Data Literacy: [about here~](#)

Conclusion: Impact on Students:

The use of “Rubrics and Checklists” were very effective on students learning regarding Interest Groups politics and data literacy in political science. The four steps of the practice enabled students to achieve specific learning outcomes. Students were able to identify and explain **various dimensions and role of interest groups** (Pluralism) in American politics. In addition, students **generated qualitative and quantitative data** on interest group politics and used the data to analyze the role of pluralism in American politics. Also, students learned, hands-on, a **technical skill-set on how to convert qualitative data into quantitative scales** which they could use in other fields of the social sciences. Finally, the **Discussion Forum** enabled students to present their know-how as well as **learn from peer critique** which adds to their academic normative formation. I have incorporated the learning practice in Post-Covid classroom face-to-face and online classes.

Data Analysis and Data Literacy:

A sample compilation of students’ learning engagement on interest group politics posted in the **Discussion Forum** empirically showed the impact of the “**Rubrics and Checklists**” for students’ learning in data literacy to comprehend aspects of interest group politics in the United States.

A students’ example:

There are two main differentiations of interest groups: Economic vs. non-economic. Economic groups have more pull and generally more success than non-economic groups because there

are more organized and have a way to fund their lobbying. Non-interest groups tend to be less organized and unable to support their lobbying financially.

Interest groups	Health Professionals	Pro-Abortion Rights	General Contractors
Solidarity Qualities	3	5	5
Material Qualities	4	2	5
Purposive Qualities	5	5	2

For Health Professionals, I rated the Solidarity Qualities of the interest groups as a 3. With every growing diversity in the medical field, I believe that those who were to join a Health Professionals group would be able to advocate more for their race, gender, and ethnic identities. The medical field is still largely dominated by male medical professionals in the higher fields, largely white males at that; I think that minorities would want to join these interest groups to encourage the growth of diversity in this field. For Material Qualities, I rated a 4 due to the possible benefits of being in a Health Professionals interest group; one could receive better insurance and more financial opportunities while in the interest group. For Purposive Qualities, I rated a 5 because many of the specific interest groups involving medical professionals bring awareness to a specific disease or represent the importance of mental and physical health. I believe those who would join this interest group would do so to advocate on the behalf of the betterment of health care for all Americans and the importance of doing so. I believe this group would fall into the Economic Interest Group category as those who tend to join are in the health care profession themselves and are able to help keep the interest group financially supported.

In my rating for Pro-Abortion Rights, I chose a 5 for solidarity because those in this interest group are speaking up about women's right and advocating for the right of the mother. Women have long been underrepresented and compensated in all aspects of life. Equal pay and equal representation are still an issue that is being fought today; those joining this interest group would be doing so to represent women and their freedom of choice. For Material Qualities I chose 2 because I do not see a monetary gain as the reasoning for joining this group. For Purposive Qualities I chose 5 because the whole reasoning someone may join the Pro-Abortion Rights interest group is because it represents their beliefs and ideology on this particular topic. I would define this interest group as Non-economic as it is mainly driven by solitary and purposive qualities and there is not as much financial support for this type of group.

My rating for Solidarity Qualities for the General Contractors interest group is a 5; my reasoning behind this that the make-up of the workforce behind general contractors is largely foreigners. Those in this interest group would advocate for changes on immigration policies so as not to limit their abilities to hire and employ foreigners who tend to work for lower rates. I rate Material Qualities at a 5 as well because those in this group would want to advocate for a

reform on tax bills and the like to allot themselves more profit and also to readjust labor regulations and the like for the same reasoning. For Purposive Qualities, I only rated it as a 2 because I feel that this interest group would largely be run off of the need to make a profit and increase their ability to accrue more income. This group would definitely be an Economic group as those who are a part of this group would be able to financially support their group and because they also have a large impact on how America functions.

Another Students' example:

Interest Groups	Airline industry	Savings & Loans	Casino/Gambling
Solidary	2	4	0
Material	5	5	5
Purposive	0	5	5

Reasons for scoring for each group:

Costs for the airline industry went up because they lost revenue due to the fear of terrorist attacks so this industry tried to improve by raising prices and charging for baggage. The embattled industry still faces numerous challenges, including still tighter security after an attempted Christmas Day 2009 terrorist attack.

The airline industry donated nearly \$3.6 million at the federal level during the 2014 election cycle and spent nearly \$26.5 million on lobbying efforts in 2014.

The Savings/Loans industry tries to persuade officials to view community banks as being worthy of exemption from most federal banking regs. That argument is likely to come into play as debate heats up over repealing parts of the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection, as many Republican members of Congress and President Trump have said they want to do.

The Casino/Gambling industry desires to minimize federal regulations that will impede the industry's growth on a national scale. This industry wants to influence legislation in an attempt to stem the rise of Internet gambling.

Another students' example:

Interest Groups	retail services	LGBTQIA rights & issues	Clergy & Religious Organizations
Solidary	2	5	4

Material	5	3	2
Purposive	0	4	5

Reasons for scoring for each group:

Retail sales—it is deprived of corporations and people in retail services. I gave it a 5 in material because it is for people with a job in which the focus is monetary gain but it does not have much in ideology and only a 2 for gender or race.

LGBTQIA rights & issues – receive a 5 on the scale for solidary because it is the only interest group that deals with gender equality. A 3 for Material because there is not much incentive value unless you belong in this group because of discrimination.

Clergy & Religious Organizations – receive a 5 on the scale for purpose qualities because it gives people with religious beliefs a collective representation in legislation. A 3 for material because unless you are a religious person most would not receive any gain. a 4 for solidary because for religious groups can be comprised of many different races and ethnic groups.

Another students' example:

The three interest groups I identified on the supplementary internet site were LGBTQ rights & issues, business services, and gun rights.

SQ- LGBTQ rights and issues scored a 5. Groups spent \$6.9 million supporting democrats and only \$79,800 to support republicans. Out of all the money, \$1.8 million was used to support Biden during his election.

MQ- Business and services scored a 5. This interest group best related to material incentives. This included advertising firms and management consultants. Business firms are the best organized, other examples are Microsoft, General Motors, and the American Petroleum Institute.

PQ- Gun rights scored a 5. This has been a huge topic lately, especially due to the more recent mass shootings around the world. The National Rifle Association has always been a huge advocate in supporting gun rights/laws.

Another students' example:

For my first interest group I picked LGBTQIA rights and issues to represent solidary incentives. The LGBTQIA group tries to include everyone and believes in equal rights for everyone. For the 2020 election the LGBTQIA community spent a total of 7.7 million dollars, this money went to support their interest groups and candidates.

My second interest group representing material incentives is casinos/gambling. Gambling has always been a quick and easy way to earn a profit, with its highly addictive and persuasive

games. With the help of online gambling casinos can now reach all audiences, but that did not stop them. Casinos now have reached out to the Indian community and began to involve them in their games with a subcategory. In 2020 casinos made over 112.4 million dollars.

And lastly, for my third interest group I picked representing purposive incentives is abortion policy/ pro-abortion rights. Throughout 2020-2021 planned parenthood received a total of 3,063,162 dollars. After the #MeToo movement took off abortion and women's rights became the center of the national stage.

LGBTQIA rights and issues - SQ 3, MQ 2, PQ 2

Casinos/gambling - SQ 3, MQ 1, PQ 3

Abortion policy/ pro-abortion rights - SQ 4, MQ 3, PQ 2

Another students' example:

People join Interest Groups for all sorts of reasons. Two of the main reasons is for fairness ethnically and financially.

The three interest groups I identified are:

- Women's Issues SQ--3/5 MQ--1/5 PQ--4/5

People would join this interest group because of the main goal it is meant to achieve (Purposive Qualities).

- Accountants SQ--2/5 MQ--5/5 PQ--1/5

I think the main reason people would join this group is for the "Material Qualities."

- Abortion Policy/Pro-Abortion Rights SQ--2/5 MQ--1/5 PQ--5/5

Though it's possible some people may join this group to fit in, I believe the main reason for joining is its final goal.

Another Students' example:

Upon reviewing, I discovered that an interest group is an organization that actively seeks to influence public policy. Citizens will join an interest group for multiple reasons such as solidary incentives, material incentives, purposive incentives.

National Right to Life

SQ3 – I believe ethnicity and race to be diverse when it comes to being pro-life. One reason I gave it a 3 is because this seems to be an issue that men stay out of thinking it is a woman's choice alone. I also scored a 3 because one solidary incentive is a sense of community, and I

don't feel as though the anti-abortion groups hold enough events that bring that community together and make their voices heard.

MQ1 – There are no material benefits for joining an anti-abortion group. This caused is based on a personal belief and not an economic gain.

PQ5 – Being anti-abortion is a strong belief for those who believe that all babies have a right to life. The commitment to this belief, in my opinion, is often one of the strongest commitments of any other issue because they are literally fighting for the lives of those who cannot be heard.

National Rifle Association

SQ3 – All ethnicities, races, and genders are NRA members, and they are very proud of that membership and what they stand for. The only reason I didn't score higher is because I feel like members could come together more than once a year to show their solidarity and to spread their message so they can combat the lies that are told about them.

MQ4 – The NRA offers magazine subscriptions, discounts, and sends gifts to members every year. They also award scholarships to the youth and provide career opportunities to eligible candidates. Their stance on the 2nd Amendment and powerful influence also keeps gun makers and sellers in business, so in a way they do protect some jobs and businesses.

PQ5 – I score them a 5 because they have a strong commitment to the 2nd Amendment, but it's not just the 2nd Amendment they value, it's the Constitution as a whole. Most law abiding, Constitution loving gun owners are willing to defend the Constitution using their 2nd Amendment right if there is ever a threat.

The Federalist Society

SQ3 – The events the Federalist Society have seem to be diverse and they have events monthly which I think is necessary when you are trying to make a difference. I score them down the middle only because it is specifically seeming to target lawyers, law schools and students.

MQ1 – Federalist society members receive subscriptions to a few publications, but the group itself is about bringing forth constructive legal debate and ideas. The main purpose is protecting the Constitution and does not seem to have an economic impact on any outside businesses.

PQ5 – The Federalist Society has a personal commitment to advocating for an originalist interpretation of the Constitution. Their belief is that education at law schools and the legal profession in general are moving towards a centralized and uniform society. This organization is dedicated to bringing awareness to what is happening and to keep law students knowledgeable of the Constitution.

Another students' example:

Interest groups are groups that are in the pursuit of policy goals and have organized members. For this assignment, I chose the following interest groups:

Americans United for Separation of Church & State—The group states that separation of church and state guarantees religious freedom, a fundamental right. American United shields our shared laws from the influence of any one religion so we can be free to come together as equals and build a stronger democracy.

SQ—1 of 5: Can be any ethnic, race or gender; but united by American

MQ—1 of 5: Not specifically designed for profit or economics

PQ—5 of 5: This is a purposive incentive interest group joining people from various sectors of religious and non-religious groups that are interested in keeping the government and church separate and therefore free from influence from any one religion.

National Rifle Association—Tireless defenders of the Second Amendment rights. The NRA seems to have a hand in any and all gun and ammo related areas from gun laws to promoting shooting competitions to defending our rights protected by the second amendment.

SQ—1 of 5: Not specific to any ethnic, race or gender

MQ—5 of 5: While designed specifically to “protect our 2nd Amendment Rights” the NRA also promotes the profits and economic interests of gun, ammo and related industries.

PQ—4 of 5: Gun rights vs gun laws have become a huge interest in American politics, while the NRA promotes the industry, it also connects citizens that are “pro-gun”.

American Association of Retired Persons—AARP is a large group of Americans—specifically older Americans. It has become a source for many older people to gain information, stay informed, receive discounts and other services. AARP’s mission is to empower people to choose how they live as they age.

SQ—4 of 5: while Race, ethnicity and gender are not specific to the group, Age is. AARP is designed for people 50 and older.

MQ—3 of 5: while not specifically designed for economic benefit, the sheer size of the group membership invites a lot of companies to offer discounts to AARP members.

PQ—2 of 5: not specifically a shared ideology, but a shared interest in protecting, educating and promoting savings for older Americans.

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