

**Methods for Public Opinion/Social Science Research**  
**PLSC 372 – Professor Rick Mayes**  
Spring 2007

Class, 1:35-2:25 MWF (Weinstein 303)

office hours: Monday and Friday 4-4:45 p.m.

*or* by appointment if these times are not convenient

homepage: <http://www.richmond.edu/~bmayes/>

Lab, 3:45-5:00 W (Jepson G23)

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Ever wondered why supermarkets put milk in the back of the store? Why male teenagers pay more for automobile insurance than female teenagers? Why women are more likely than men to suffer from depression and boys from ADHD than girls? Have you even noticed these things? Do you care? You should, because—as one crass observer put it—the people who know “what” in life, more often than not, work for the people who know “why.” Hence, this course is principally designed to teach you how to become a “why” person: one who can scientifically describe, investigate, and explain human behavior and other phenomena (political, social, economic, cultural, psychological, epidemiological, or otherwise). In the process, you will learn how to both evaluate the original research of others and conduct your own. Learning research methods is akin to learning a foreign language—it takes sustained concentration and a disciplined commitment. Once you get around the learning curve, however, knowing how to read and perform empirically-based research becomes a pleasurable and intellectually engaging experience. It is also a skill that employers increasingly desire. So “rejoice and be glad,” for the day of your initiation into the world of social science research is upon you. This syllabus is your map. Use it to guide your time management and use me as a resource.

The first half of the course focuses on how researchers look at the world around us and then design strategies to investigate things they find particularly interesting. For example, we will examine how others have examined various subjects ranging from: the science of shopping, to Influenza 1918, ADHD & Ritalin, Dockers pants and male psychology, automobile engineering and highway safety, game theory and college admissions, weather patterns and syphilis outbreaks, the crack cocaine and bagel businesses, cheating on standardized tests, the SAT’s predictive ability, Blue’s Clues and Sesame Street, survey sampling and athlete drug testing, ethnographic field research and teen fashion, terrorism and investment strategies, parenting and childhood development, race and sports and more. The second half of the course focuses on what all these things have in common, which is that they can be systematically studied and potentially explained to varying degrees once you employ the **scientific method**: forming hypotheses, creating variables, designing measurements, and collecting and analyzing data. Along the way, you will learn the tradeoffs that researchers invariably face when studying human behavior and other phenomena, as well as the potential abuses of empirical research.

### Course Materials

- Malcolm Gladwell’s *The Tipping Point* (Little, Brown & Company, 2002)
- Steven Levitt & Stephen Dubner’s *Freakonomics* (HarperCollins Publishers, 2005)
- Philip Pollock’s *The Essentials of Political Analysis Pkg. (Text & Workbook w/ CD-Rom)* (C.Q. Press, 2005)
- \* recommended – A. Dixit & S. Skeath, *Games of Strategy* (W.W. Norton, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 2004)

### Class Attendance, Preparation, & Participation

Class attendance is not technically mandatory, but given the complexity and demands of the material, missing class greatly increases the likelihood that your grade will suffer (perhaps dramatically). There may be days when this risk may seem like a necessary one for you to take, but I urge you to seriously weigh the opportunity costs and hedge your exposure to potential GPA damage.

**Honor Code:** Every assignment and exam must be submitted with your signature next to the full written pledge:

*“I pledge that I have neither received nor given unauthorized assistance during the completion of this work.”*

Failure to do this will result in your work not being graded or accepted for credit.

## Assignments and Grading

Class Participation/Discussion	5%
Mid-Term Exam (February)	25%
Lab Reports (six total, your 1 <sup>st</sup> lab on 2/16 is for practice only *)	30%
2/16 1 <sup>st</sup> Lab Report: Ch. 2 “Descriptive Statistics”	*
2/23 2 <sup>nd</sup> Lab Report: Ch. 3 “Making Comparisons”	5%
3/16 3 <sup>rd</sup> Lab Report: Ch. 5 “Making Controlled Comparisons”	5%
3/23 4 <sup>th</sup> Lab Report: Ch. 6 “Making Inferences”	5%
3/30 5 <sup>th</sup> Lab Report: Ch. 7 “Chi-Square/Measures of Association”	5%
4/6 6 <sup>th</sup> Lab Report: Ch. 8 “Correlation and Regression”	5%
4/13 7 <sup>th</sup> Lab Report: Ch. 4 “Transforming Variables”	5%
Team Research Project	20%
Final Exam	20%
Total	100%

## Grades

*"Abandon hope, all ye who have become accustomed to grade inflation."*

This class is, by virtue of the subject matter and inherent learning curve, something of a grade-deflator. Keep your grade expectations modest and you are less likely to be disappointed. Everyone begins the class with zero (0) points. Through exams, class participation, lab reports, and the survey research project you earn points over the course of the semester. The number of points you earn determines the grade you receive. D/F is representative of work that is poor/incomplete; C, adequate; B, excellent; and A, perfect or near-perfect (and rare).

<b>Scoring:</b>	A= 100-96	A-= 95-91	B+= 90-88
	B= 87-83	B-= 82-81	C+= 80-78
	C= 77-73	C-= 72-71	D+= 70-68
	D= 67-63	D-= 62-61	F= 60-0

Please be aware that under no circumstances will extra credit be available. Consequently, it is imperative that you do your best on each and every assignment. I am available outside of class to help you, so please consider me a resource. That's fundamentally why I am here as your professor – to help you.

## Late Policy

My policy is firm but fair. I don't expect to use this policy, but if it has to go into effect it will. In brief, paper and lab projects will be automatically reduced one full grade for every day late. Any paper submitted more than 2 days late will receive an automatic “F.” Those with genuine emergencies will be given extensions, but they must be cleared with me *in advance*.

## ASSIGNMENTS

### **I. INTRODUCTION TO THINKING EMPIRICALLY and EXPLAINING HUMAN & ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOR**

- Monday, January 15
- Overview of the course
- Epidemics, Hush Puppies & Retail Anthropology**
- Gladwell, *The Tipping Point*, Introduction (pp. 3-14)
  - M. Gladwell, "The Science of Shopping," *The New Yorker*  
[http://www.richmond.edu/~bmayer/pdf/Gladwell\\_Science\\_of\\_Shopping.pdf](http://www.richmond.edu/~bmayer/pdf/Gladwell_Science_of_Shopping.pdf)
- Wednesday, January 17
- Probability Primer, Khakis & the Tricky "Science" of Male Fashion**
- Gladwell, *The Tipping Point*, Chapter 1 (pp. 15-29)
  - M. Gladwell, "Listening to Khakis: What America's most popular pants tell us about the way guys think," *The New Yorker*  
[http://www.richmond.edu/~bmayer/pdf/Gladwell\\_Khakis.pdf](http://www.richmond.edu/~bmayer/pdf/Gladwell_Khakis.pdf)
- Lab Session for Week 1 (1/17)
- Ethnography Studies, Focus Groups & Corporate/Market Research**
- PBS Frontline's, "The Merchants of Cool"  
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/cool/view/> (watch)
- Friday, January 19
- The Law of the Few, Biological Determinism & ADHD**
- Gladwell, *The Tipping Point*, Chapter 2 (pp. 30-53)
  - M. Eberstadt, "Why Ritalin Rules," *PolicyReview* (April 1999)  
[http://www.richmond.edu/~bmayer/pdf/Eberstadt\\_WhyRitalinRules.pdf](http://www.richmond.edu/~bmayer/pdf/Eberstadt_WhyRitalinRules.pdf)
  - PBS Frontline's "Medicating Kids" [watch this entire documentary online]  
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/medicating/adhd/>
- Monday, January 22
- Acquaintance Networks, Predictive Validity I & Profiling/Risk Assessment**
- Gladwell, *The Tipping Point*, Chapter 2 (pp. 53-74)
  - L. Menand, "Everybody's an Expert: Putting Predictions to the Test," *The New Yorker* (2005)  
[http://www.newyorker.com/printables/critics/051205crbo\\_books1](http://www.newyorker.com/printables/critics/051205crbo_books1)
  - M. Gladwell, "Troublemakers: What Pit Bulls Can Teach Us about Profiling," *New Yorker*  
[http://www.richmond.edu/~bmayer/pdf/Gladwell\\_pitbulls\\_profiling.pdf](http://www.richmond.edu/~bmayer/pdf/Gladwell_pitbulls_profiling.pdf)
- Wednesday, January 24
- Utility, Persuasion & Scientists in the Crib**
- Gladwell, *The Tipping Point*, Chapter 2 (pp. 74-88)
  - M. Gladwell, "Baby Steps: Do our first three years of life determine how we will turn out?"  
<http://www.gladwell.com/pdf/babysteps.pdf>
  - M. Gladwell, "Do Parents Matter?" *The New Yorker* (August 1998)  
[http://www.richmond.edu/~bmayer/pdf/Gladwell\\_Parenting.pdf](http://www.richmond.edu/~bmayer/pdf/Gladwell_Parenting.pdf)
  - R. Walker, "The Hidden (in Plain Sight) Persuaders," *New York Times Magazine* (2005)  
[http://www.richmond.edu/~bmayer/pdf/RWalker\\_Persuaders.pdf](http://www.richmond.edu/~bmayer/pdf/RWalker_Persuaders.pdf)
- Lab Session for Week 2 (1/24)
- Ethnography Studies II, Focus Groups II & Corporate/Market Research II**
- PBS Frontline's "The Persuaders," read the following introduction:  
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/persuaders/etc/synopsis.html>
- Friday, January 26
- Happiness, Psychological Immune Systems & Sesame Street**
- Gladwell, *The Tipping Point*, Chapter 3 (pp. 89-110)
  - J. Gertner, "The Futile Pursuit of Happiness," *New York Times* (September 2003)  
<http://www.richmond.edu/~bmayer/pdf/Futile%20Pursuit%20of%20Happiness.pdf>
  - C. Caldwell, "Can You Have Too Many Choices?" *The New Yorker* (March 2004)  
[http://www.newyorker.com/printable/?critics/040301crbo\\_books](http://www.newyorker.com/printable/?critics/040301crbo_books)

Monday, January 29

### **Blues Clues and the Facial Action Coding System (FACS)**

- Gladwell, *The Tipping Point*, Chapter 3 (pp. 110-132)
- M. Gladwell, "The Naked Face: Can you read people's thoughts just by looking at them?" *The New Yorker* (August 2002)  
<http://www.gladwell.com/pdf/nakedface.pdf>

Wednesday, January 31

### **Personality Tests, Predictive Validity II & Failure**

- M. Gladwell, "Personality Plus," *The New Yorker* (September 2004)  
<http://www.gladwell.com/pdf/personality.pdf>
- M. Gladwell, "The Art of Failure: Why Some People Choke and Others Panic" (2000)  
<http://www.gladwell.com/pdf/choking.pdf>
- M. Gladwell, "Connecting the Dots: The Paradoxes of Intelligence Reform" (2003)  
<http://www.gladwell.com/pdf/dots.pdf>

Lab Session for Week 3 (1/31)

### **Behavioral Prediction, Standardized Tests & Case Studies**

- M. Gladwell, "Examined Life: What Stanley H. Kaplan taught us about the S.A.T.," *The New Yorker* (December 2001)  
<http://www.gladwell.com/pdf/kaplan.pdf>
- T. Egan, "Little Asia on the Hill: U.C. Berkeley," *New York Times* (January 2007)  
[http://www.richmond.edu/~bmayer/pdf/Little\\_Asia\\_onthe\\_Hill\\_NYT.pdf](http://www.richmond.edu/~bmayer/pdf/Little_Asia_onthe_Hill_NYT.pdf)

## **II. RESEARCH DESIGN and THE MEASUREMENT & OPERATIONALIZATION OF VARIABLES**

Friday, February 2

### **The Power of Context, Crime Reduction & How to Define a Concept**

- Gladwell, *The Tipping Point*, Chapter 4 (pp. 133-169)
- Pollock, *The Essentials of Political Analysis*, Chapter 1 (pp. 1-12)

Monday, February 5

### **Game Theory, College Admissions & the Early-Decision Dilemma**

- D. Brooks, "The Organization Kid," *The Atlantic Monthly* (April 2001)  
[http://www.richmond.edu/~bmayer/pdf/The\\_Organization\\_Kid.pdf](http://www.richmond.edu/~bmayer/pdf/The_Organization_Kid.pdf)
- J. Fallows, "The Early-Decision Racket," *The Atlantic Monthly* (September 2001)  
[http://www.richmond.edu/~bmayer/pdf/The\\_Early\\_Decision\\_Racket.pdf](http://www.richmond.edu/~bmayer/pdf/The_Early_Decision_Racket.pdf)

Wednesday, February 7

### **Operational Definitions, the Rule of 150 & Why We Worry Wrongly**

- Gladwell, *The Tipping Point*, Chapter 5 (pp. 169-181)
- Pollock, *The Essentials of Political Analysis*, Chapter 1 (pp. 13-20)
- J. Kluger, "Why We Worry Wrongly," *TIME* (November 2006)  
[http://www.richmond.edu/~bmayer/pdf/TIME\\_Worrying\\_Wrongly.pdf](http://www.richmond.edu/~bmayer/pdf/TIME_Worrying_Wrongly.pdf)

Lab Session for Week 4 (2/7)

### **Predictive Validity III and Case Studies II**

- L. Belkin, "The Opt-Out Revolution," *New York Times Magazine* (October 2003)  
<http://www.richmond.edu/~bmayer/pdf/The%20Opt-Out%20Revolution.pdf>

Friday, February 9

### **Variables, Transactive Memory & the Challenges of Survey Research**

- Gladwell, *The Tipping Point*, Chapter 5 (pp. 182-192)
- B. Carey, "Long After Kinsey, Only the Brave Study Sex," *New York Times*  
[http://www.richmond.edu/~bmayer/pdf/Long%20After%20Kinsey\\_Nov2004.pdf](http://www.richmond.edu/~bmayer/pdf/Long%20After%20Kinsey_Nov2004.pdf)
- NPR's Talk of the Nation, "Kinsey Report, 50 Years Later" [listen to this program]  
<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4161159>
- Pollock, *The Essentials of Political Analysis*, Chapter 1 (pp. 20-25)

Monday, February 12

### **Average/Mean vs. Outlier/Tail Differences & from Variable to Explanation**

- Gladwell, *The Tipping Point*, Chapter 6 (pp. 193-215)
- M. Gladwell, "The Sports Taboo: Why blacks are like boys and whites are like girls,"  
[http://www.richmond.edu/~bmayer/pdf/Gladwell\\_Drug%20Testing.pdf](http://www.richmond.edu/~bmayer/pdf/Gladwell_Drug%20Testing.pdf)
- Pollock, *The Essentials of Political Analysis*, Chapter 2 (pp. 28-33)

Wednesday, February 14

### **Predictive Validity IV, Teen Smoking & from Explanation to Hypothesis to Test**

- Gladwell, *The Tipping Point*, Chapter 6 (pp. 216-252)
- M. Gladwell, "Blowing Up: How Nassim Taleb turned the inevitability of disaster into an investment strategy," *The New Yorker* (April 2002)  
<http://www.gladwell.com/pdf/blowingup.pdf>
- Pollock, *The Essentials of Political Analysis*, Chapter 2 (pp. 34-47)

### **III. DATA ANALYSIS**

Lab Session for Week 5 (2/14)

### **Introduction to SPSS, Univariate Analysis & Descriptive Statistics**

- Pollock, *An SPSS Companion...*, Introduction, Getting Started et al. (pp. 1-23)

Friday, February 16

**Due \*\* 1<sup>st</sup> LAB REPORT: *An SPSS Companion*, Ch. 2, Exercises 1-5 (pp. 23-29) \*\***  
- (meetings with me to discuss your survey research projects)

Monday, February 19

### **Variables II, Comparisons & the Epidemiology of Traffic Safety**

- M. Gladwell, "Wrong Turn: How the fight to make America's highways safer went offcourse," *The New Yorker* (June 2001)  
<http://www.gladwell.com/pdf/wrongturn.pdf>
- M. Gladwell, "Big and Bad: How the SUV Ran Over Automotive Safety" *New Yorker* (2005)  
<http://www.gladwell.com/pdf/suv.pdf>
- Pollock, *The Essentials of Political Analysis*, Chapter 3 (pp. 51-74)

Wednesday, February 21

### **Making Comparisons, the Pill & Risk Factors for Teen Suicide**

- M. Gladwell, "John Rock's Error: What the co-inventor of the Pill didn't know: menstruation can endanger women's health," *New York Times* (March 2000)  
<http://www.gladwell.com/pdf/johnrock.pdf>
- J. Mahler, "The Antidepressant Dilemma," *New York Times Magazine* (November 2004)  
[http://www.richmond.edu/~bmayer/pdf/The%20Antidepressant%20Dilemma\\_NYT.pdf](http://www.richmond.edu/~bmayer/pdf/The%20Antidepressant%20Dilemma_NYT.pdf)

Lab Session for Week 6 (2/21)

### **Bivariate Analysis I**

- Pollock, *An SPSS Companion...*, Ch. 3 "Making Comparisons" (pp. 31-46)

Friday, February 23

**Due \*\* 2<sup>nd</sup> LAB REPORT: *An SPSS Companion*, Ch. 3, Exercises 1-9 (pp. 46-57) \*\***  
- (meetings with me to discuss your survey research projects)

Monday, February 26

study day

Wednesday, February 28

**\*\* MID-TERM EXAM (Part I) \*\***

Lab Session for Week 7 (2/28)

**\*\* MID-TERM EXAM (Part II) \*\***

Friday, March 2

work on the design of your research project

### ***SPRING BREAK***

Monday, March 12

### **Making Controlled Comparisons, Pima Indians & Class 3 Obesity**

- Pollock, *The Essentials of Political Analysis*, Chapter 4 (pp. 77-100)
- M. Gladwell, "The Pima Paradox: Can we learn how to lose weight from one of the most obese people in the world?" *The New Yorker* (February 1998)  
[http://www.richmond.edu/~bmayer/pdf/Pima%20Paradox\\_Gladwell.doc](http://www.richmond.edu/~bmayer/pdf/Pima%20Paradox_Gladwell.doc)

Wednesday, March 14

### **Sampling, Drug Tests & the Misery of Being "Average"**

- M. Gladwell, "Drugstore Athlete," *The New Yorker* (September 2001)  
<http://www.gladwell.com/pdf/doping.pdf>
- A. Gawande, "The Bell Curve," *The New Yorker* (December 2004)  
[http://www.richmond.edu/~bmayer/pdf/Atul\\_Gawande\\_The%20Bell%20Curve.pdf](http://www.richmond.edu/~bmayer/pdf/Atul_Gawande_The%20Bell%20Curve.pdf)
- Pollock, *The Essentials of Political Analysis*, Chapter 5 (pp. 102-107, 112-114)

Lab Session for Week 8 (3/14)	<p><b>Bivariate Analysis II</b> - Pollock, <i>An SPSS Companion...</i>, Ch. 5 “Controlled Comparisons” (pp. 75-95)</p>
Friday, March 16	<p><b>Due ** 3<sup>rd</sup> LAB REPORT: <i>An SPSS Companion</i>, Ch. 5, Exercises 1-4 (p. 96-102) **</b> - (meetings with me regarding your project &amp; time for you to do your field research)</p>
Monday, March 19	<p><b>Making Inferences, Schoolteachers &amp; Sumo Wrestlers</b> - Pollock, <i>The Essentials of Political Analysis</i>, Chapter 5 (pp. 116-124) - Levitt &amp; Dubner, <i>Freakonomics</i>, pp. 3-51</p>
Wednesday, March 21	<p><b>Tests of Significance, the Ku Klux Klan &amp; Real Estate Agents</b> - Pollock, <i>The Essentials of Political Analysis</i>, Chapter 5 (pp. 130-138) - Levitt &amp; Dubner, <i>Freakonomics</i>, pp. 55-85</p>
Lab Session for Week 9 (3/21)	<p><b>Inference</b> - Pollock, <i>An SPSS Companion...</i>, Ch. 6 “Making Inferences” (pp. 103-115)</p>
Friday, March 23	<p><b>Due ** 4<sup>th</sup> LAB REPORT: <i>An SPSS Companion</i>, Ch. 6, Exercises 1-3 (pp. 115-116) **</b> - (meetings with me regarding your project &amp; time for you to do your field research)</p>
Monday, March 26	<p><b>Chi-square, Tests of Significance II, Why Drug Dealers Still Live with their Moms &amp; Power-Law Distributions</b> - Levitt &amp; Dubner, <i>Freakonomics</i>, pp. 89-114 - M. Gladwell, “Million-Dollar Murray,” <i>The New Yorker</i> <a href="http://www.richmond.edu/~bmayer/pdf/Gladwell_MillionDollar.pdf">http://www.richmond.edu/~bmayer/pdf/Gladwell_MillionDollar.pdf</a> - Pollock, <i>The Essentials of Political Analysis</i>, Chapter 6 (pp. 139-144)</p>
Wednesday, March 28	<p><b>Measures of Association, Abortion &amp; Where Have All the Criminals Gone?</b> - Levitt &amp; Dubner, <i>Freakonomics</i>, pp. 117-144 - Pollock, <i>The Essentials of Political Analysis</i>, Chapter 6 (pp. 144-150)</p>
Lab Session for Week 10 (3/28)	<p><b>Chi-square and Measures of Association</b> - <i>An SPSS Companion...</i>, Ch. 7 “Chi-Square/Measures of Association” (pp. 119-127)</p>
Friday, March 30	<p><b>Due ** 5<sup>th</sup> LAB REPORT: <i>An SPSS Companion</i>, Ch. 7, Exercises 1-4 (pp. 127-132) **</b></p>
Monday, April 2	<p><b>Correlation, What Makes a Perfect Parent &amp; a Perfect Spouse?</b> - Levitt &amp; Dubner, <i>Freakonomics</i>, pp. 145-204 - A. Sutherland, “Modern Love: What Shamu Taught Me about a Happy Marriage,” <i>New York Times</i> <a href="http://www.richmond.edu/~bmayer/pdf/Shamu_ModernLove_NYT.pdf">http://www.richmond.edu/~bmayer/pdf/Shamu_ModernLove_NYT.pdf</a> - Pollock, <i>The Essentials of Political Analysis</i>, Chapter 7 (pp. 154-157)</p>
Wednesday, April 4	<p><b>Regression, Bias, Why Decisions Disappoint &amp; the Mismeasure of Poverty</b> - Levitt &amp; Dubner, <i>Freakonomics</i>, pp. 205-207 - B. Gilbert, “I’m O.K., You’re Biased,” <i>New York Times</i> (2006) <a href="http://www.richmond.edu/~bmayer/pdf/ImOK_YoureBiased_NYT.pdf">http://www.richmond.edu/~bmayer/pdf/ImOK_YoureBiased_NYT.pdf</a> - Pollock, <i>The Essentials of Political Analysis</i>, Chapter 7 (pp. 157-165, 168-170) - N. Eberstadt, “The Mismeasure of Poverty,” <i>PolicyReview</i> (August/September 2006) <a href="http://www.richmond.edu/~bmayer/pdf/Poverty_PolicyReview_2006.pdf">http://www.richmond.edu/~bmayer/pdf/Poverty_PolicyReview_2006.pdf</a></p>
Lab Session for Week 11 (4/4)	<p><b>Correlation and Regression</b> - Pollock, <i>An SPSS Companion...</i>, Ch. 8 “Correlation &amp; Regression” (pp. 133-148)</p>

Friday, April 6 **Due \*\* 6<sup>th</sup> LAB REPORT: *An SPSS Companion*, Ch. 8, Exercises 1-5 (pp. 148-153) \*\***

Monday, April 9 work on your research projects and meet with me to discuss your progress

Wednesday, April 11 work on your research projects and meet with me to discuss your progress

Lab Session for Week 12 (4/11) **Transforming Variables in SPSS**  
- Pollock, *An SPSS Companion...*, Ch. 4 “Transforming Variables in SPSS” (pp. 59-71)

Friday, April 13 **Due \*\* 7<sup>th</sup> LAB REPORT: *An SPSS Companion*, Ch. 4, Exercises 1-2 (pp. 71-74) \*\***

Mon., April 16 – Wed., April 25 **\*\* Team Research Presentations \*\***

Friday, April 27 **Conclusion and Review**  
- Gladwell, *The Tipping Point*, Afterword: “The Rise of Immunity” (pp. 253-280)  
- Francis Collins: Director, National Human Genome Research Institute,  
“Seek A Balanced Life,” University of Virginia Commencement Address  
<http://www.virginia.edu/majorevents/speeches/01speech.html>

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**FINAL EXAM** TBA