

PPA 205
Research in Public Policy and Administration
California State University, Sacramento
Fall 2009

Section 1
Tuesdays 6:00 - 8:50 pm
Douglass Hall 207
September 1 – December 15

Bill Leach
(916) 278-5591
wdleach@csus.edu

Assistant Professor, Department of Public Policy and Administration
Research Director, Center for Collaborative Policy

Office Hours
Mondays by appointment at the Center for Collaborative Policy, 815 S Street
Tuesdays and Wednesdays 4:15-5:45 pm, 3033 Tahoe Hall
Other days/times by appointment

Rationale and Synopsis

Research plays a prominent role in the life of the modern organization. By law, regulation, and custom, organizations must routinely evaluate their performance. Legislatures, agencies, and interest groups frequently call upon researchers to predict the consequences of proposed policies or to evaluate the outcomes of existing policies. Research then can become an instrument of political advocacy, with each side touting studies that allegedly support their policy positions, while simultaneously dismissing the other's research as unreliable "junk science."

Although "doing" policy research is often a realm reserved for social scientists with doctoral training, or policy analysts with masters degrees in specialized technical fields, knowledge of research methods can help all professional staff become more effective managers and leaders. That knowledge comes into play when hiring and working with research consultants to design an evaluation project or to commission a policy analysis; when writing grant proposals to funders that require performance monitoring; when using research findings to construct a policy argument; and when critiquing the dueling studies cited by various organizations in a policy debate.

The most agile agencies and businesses can be described as "learning organizations"—continually adapting to new information, circumstances, and technology. Research plays a pivotal role in helping organizations learn. In a large organization with a professional research staff, practitioners trained in research methods can become effective ambassadors between the research and practice sides of the house. Often the latest developments in a field are disseminated at the annual conferences of professional associations that attempt to bridge the gap between research and practice. A practitioner with master's-level training in research methods can bring these cutting edge developments back home to their organization.

This course provides that training. Many of the concepts are transferable to research in any subject matter, including the natural sciences. However, this course focuses on the design of social science research for applications in policy analysis and evaluation. The course begins with a brief overview of the scientific method. We then focus on research design ("What information is needed to answer a particular question?") and methods of observation ("How can this information be collected in a valid and reliable manner?").

PPA 205 is not primarily a course on data analysis (i.e. statistics); another core course, PPA 207, serves that purpose. However, we will give some attention to issues of data analysis that should be considered when designing a study. We will also draw from real world studies that use statistics to illustrate points about research design and data collection methods. Similarly, PPA 205 is not primarily a course on theory; other courses in the program provide that background. But we'll talk about how theory motivates and guides one's approach to research design.

Core Learning Objectives

1. Appreciate the importance of thinking through the entire design of a study before diving in.
2. Appreciate specific design principles that are common to a number of different types of research, such as the critical role of theories and hypotheses.
3. Understand the main approaches for detecting cause-and-effect relationships in scientific research, including those based on experimental and non-experimental designs.
4. Learn how to proceed from a concept to a variable designed to measure the concept in a valid and reliable fashion.
5. Understand the advantages and limitations of various types of data collection methods, including: a) surveys; b) interviews; c) participant observation; d) content analysis, and e) secondary data.
6. Understand the differences between descriptive and inferential data analysis, and their implications for research design and data collection.
7. Learn how to write an effective research proposal.
8. Appreciate some of the ethical considerations applicable to applied social science research.

Supplemental Learning Objectives

9. Understand the strengths and limitations of various non-experimental designs including single case studies, small-n case comparisons, and large-n studies.
10. Learn the major criticisms of social science, and how to defend or critique a study from both positivist and post-positivist perspectives.
11. Become aware of the politics of research, and understand how to position a study to influence policy decisions.

Textbook

Royce A. Singleton, Jr., and Bruce C. Straits. *Approaches to Social Research, 5th Edition*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Additional Readings

Assigned most weeks. Downloadable from the CSUS library and/or SacCT.

Course Format and Graded Assignments

Format. A typical class may include lecture, discussion, and group exercises. Most weeks, one or more students will lead the class discussion of an assigned reading. It is imperative that all students come to class prepared to discuss the readings. A website for the course will be established through SacCT by the first day of class. All readings, assignments, and grades will be posted to the website.

Leading Discussion. Each student is required to lead a discussion of one of the assigned articles. Guidelines and a sign-up sheet will be distributed during the first class.

Article Critique. Each student is required to submit a written critique of one of the empirical articles assigned in the course calendar provided below. Each student chooses which article to critique. (The articles labeled "Discussion" are not eligible.) The critique is due at the beginning of class on the day the reading is assigned. Late critiques will not be accepted because the article will be discussed in class. Detailed instructions will be distributed during the first class.

"Speed Research" Group Project. One of the greatest challenges of teaching research methods is that it's difficult for students to fully appreciate any one subtopic (like survey design or data analysis) until they understand how it fits into the larger picture. This larger picture, often termed "the scientific method," refers to the holistic process of conceiving a research question, designing a study, implementing the design, interpreting the results, and communicating the findings. To learn the scientific method, there's nothing better than actually carrying out a study yourself. This is why all master's students are required to write a thesis and doctoral students write dissertations. To jump-start your appreciation of this process and its individual elements, the class will divide itself into five groups of four students, and each group will carry out mini research project from start to finish in the first half of the course.

Research Proposal. This is the capstone assignment for the course. Students often choose to use this exercise to help develop a prospectus for their PPA masters project. A written draft of the research proposal is due during week 12, and will be distributed to one of your classmates. One week later, each student will be responsible for submitting a critique (i.e. peer review) of another student's draft proposal, and this critique will itself receive a letter grade. During the last two weeks, students will present their draft research proposals to the entire class, and will receive feedback to use in revising their final proposal, which is due at the designated final exam period.

Assignment	Weight	Grading Scheme	Due
Class participation	5%	80,90,100	Weekly
Leading discussion of one article	5%	0,80,90,100	Varies
Article critique	10%	0,75,80,85,90,95,100	Varies
"Speed Research" group project	10%	0,75,80,85,90,95,100	Oct 13
Midterm exam	20%	0-100	Oct 20
Draft research proposal	5%	0,100 pass/fail	Nov 17
Peer-review of classmate's draft	10%	0,80,90,100	Nov 24
Oral presentation of draft proposal	5%	0,80,90,100	Dec 1 & 8
Final research proposal	30%	0-100	Dec 15

Course Policies

Missed classes. Please tell me in advance if you will miss a class. Imperfect attendance will be reflected in the class participation grade. A student who misses more than three classes for any reason should drop the course.

Missed exams. Requests in advance for early or makeup exams will be granted only in extreme circumstances, such as a family emergency.

Writing Assignments. With one exception, writing assignments will not be accepted late. The exception is the final research proposal, which will be docked 5 points for each day late. The penalty will be waived only in extreme circumstances.

Extra Credit: There will be no opportunities for extra credit (otherwise known as extra work). The readings and assignments described in the syllabus should keep everyone plenty busy.

Calendar

PART I. Research Design

Week 1, September 1

Course Introduction & Overview of Scientific Method

Singleton & Straits: **Preface**

Singleton & Straits: **Chapter 1** "Introduction"

Singleton & Straits: **Chapter 2** "The Nature of Science"

Week 2, September 8

Building and Recognizing Testable Hypotheses; Principles of Valid and Reliable Measurement; Indexes and Scales

Singleton & Straits: **Chapter 4** "Elements of Research Design"

Singleton & Straits: **Chapter 5** "Measurement"

Singleton & Straits: pp. 431-439 + Box 13.1 pp.440-441 "Indexes and Scales"

Index Example: Miranda, Miller, and Jacobs (2000). "Talking trash about landfills: Using quantitative scoring schemes in landfill siting processes" *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 19(1):3-22.

Week 3, September 15

Sampling, Causality, and True Experiments

Singleton & Straits: **Chapter 6** "Sampling"

Singleton & Straits: **Chapter 7** "Experimentation"

Discussion: Bozeman and Scott (1992) "Laboratory Experiments in Public Policy and Management" *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 2(3): 293-313

Laboratory Experiment Example: Oxley et al (2008) "Political Attitudes Vary with Physiological Traits" *Science* 321:1667-1670 (and "supplementary material.")

Week 4, September 22

Experimental and Quasi-experimental Research Designs

Singleton & Straits: **Chapter 8** "Experimental Designs"

Field Experiment Example: Sikkema (2005) "HIV Prevention among Women in Low-Income Housing Developments: Issues and Intervention Outcomes in a Place-Based Randomized Controlled Trial" *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 599(1): 52-70.

Quasi-Experiment Example: Wenger and Wilkins (2009) "At the Discretion of Rogue Agents: How Automation Improves Women's Outcomes in Unemployment" *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 19(2):313-333

Discussion: Dunning (2008) "Improving Causal Inference: Strengths and Limitations of Natural Experiments" *Political Research Quarterly* 61(2):282-293.

Week 5, September 29

Data Analysis and Implications for Research Design

Singleton & Straits: **Chapter 15** "Data...Analysis" especially pp 508-532.

Singleton & Straits: **Chapter 16** "Multivariate Analysis" especially pp 549-565.

Handout: Statistics Flowchart

Week 6, October 6

Analyzing Variance Across Cases: Small-n Comparative Designs

QCA Example: Marx 2008. "Limits to non-state market regulation: A qualitative comparative analysis of the international sport footwear industry" *Regulation and Governance* 2: 253–273

Week 7, October 13

Singleton & Straits: **Chapter 17** "Writing Research Reports" (scan this chapter and use as a reference for your 'speed research' report)

* 'Speed research' reports due *

* Group presentations of 'speed research' projects *

6:00 to 7:40 pm, Five groups, each 15 minutes + 5 minutes Q&A

Review session for Midterm Exam

Week 8, October 20

* Midterm Exam * (in class)

PART II. Data Collection

Week 9, October 27

Survey Design and Administration

Singleton & Straits: **Chapter 9** "Survey Research"

Singleton & Straits: **Chapter 10** "Survey Instrumentation"

Discussion: Schaeffer and Presser. 2003. "The Science of Asking Questions" *Annual Review of Sociology*. 29:65–88.

Week 10, November 3

Interviews, Focus Groups, Observation, Secondary Data, Content Analysis, Meta-analysis

Singleton & Straits: **Chapter 11** "Field Research"

Singleton & Straits: **Chapter 12** "Research Using Available Data"

Singleton & Straits: pp. 452-458 "Meta-Analysis"

Survey and Focus Group Example: Schachter and Liu 2005 "Policy Development and New Immigrant Communities - A Case Study of Citizen Input in Defining Transit Problems" *Public Administration Review*

Survey and Interview Example: Leach and Sabatier. 2005. "To Trust an Adversary: Integrating Rational and Psychological Models of Collaborative Policymaking" *American Political Science Review*, 99(4): 491-503.

PART III. Research in the Real World

Week 11, November 10

Ethics and Politics of Research; Program Evaluation

Singleton & Straits: **Chapter 3** "Research Ethics"

Singleton & Straits: **Chapter 14** "Evaluation Research"

Policy Research Example: Shulock (1999) "The Paradox of Policy Analysis: If It Is Not Used, Why Do We Produce So Much of It?" *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 18(2): 226–244.

Week 12, November 17

Critiques of the Classic Scientific Method

Discussion: Loehle (1990) "A Guide to Increased Creativity in Research: Inspiration or Perspiration?" *BioScience* 40(2): 123-129

* Draft research proposals due *

Week 13, November 24

Guest Speaker – Scott Vince, Policy Intern, California Research Bureau

Foster and Vince (2009) "California's Women Veterans: The Challenges and Needs of Those Who Served" California Research Bureau.

* Peer-review critiques due *

Week 14, December 1

* Presentation of Research Proposals *
Ten students, each 10 minutes + 5 minutes Q&A

Week 15, December 8

* Presentation of Research Proposals *
Ten students, each 10 minutes + 5 minutes Q&A

Week 16, December 15

* Final Research Proposals due via email at 7:15 pm *