

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SACRAMENTO

PPA 205, Section 2: Research in Public Policy and Administration

Fall, 2005

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Class meeting time and place:
Thursday, 6-8:50 p.m., Alpine 205

Office hours: Tuesdays/Thursdays
4:30-5:45, and by appointment

OVERVIEW

This course focuses on the design of social science research. The main goal is to enhance students' understanding of how to fashion high quality studies related to public policy and administration. A secondary goal is to familiarize students with a number of different research approaches, including their potential pitfalls.

PPA 205 is *not* primarily a course on data analysis; another core course, PPA 207, serves that purpose. However, we will give some attention to the types of data that may be used in the various approaches we will consider. We will also draw from real world studies that use quantitative and qualitative analysis to illustrate points about research design principles central to *this* class.

SPECIFIC LEARNING GOALS

At the end of PPA 205 it is expected that students will:

1. Appreciate the importance of the "front end" of research (i.e., research design).
2. Appreciate specific design principles that are common to a number of different types of research.
3. Understand the differences between experimental and non-experimental research.
4. Appreciate the importance of thinking systematically about the logic of causal order.

5. Understand the principles of survey and interview design.
6. Understand and appreciate the appropriate use of case studies as well as some features of well designed case study research.
7. Understand how to find and use archival data.
8. Appreciate some of the ethical considerations applicable to applied social science research.
9. Understand some of the challenges of using research to effect change.
10. Develop skills for effective research presentation.

CONDUCT OF THE COURSE

This course differs from traditional research methods courses in that a relatively heavy emphasis is placed on classroom discussion. In my judgment it is not enough for students to listen carefully to a lecture; instead, the concepts must be *used* to analyze real world studies and information. Accordingly, a typical class may include discussion topics, some of which are specified in the syllabus. Other classes will use exercises drawing from the readings. It is therefore imperative that you read the syllabus carefully to be prepared for class and that to the extent possible you complete the readings *before* class.

READINGS

The following books are required and may be purchased at the Hornet Bookstore.

James A. Davis, *The Logic of Causal Order*, Sage University Paper series on Quantitative Applications in the Social Sciences, 07-055 (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1985).

David E. Gray, *Doing Research in the Real World* (London: Sage Publications, 2004).

Kristen Renwick Monroe, *The Heart of Altruism: Perceptions of a Common Humanity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

Additionally, a few readings will be made available at the library reserve room, may be downloaded from an electronic database, or will be distributed in class.

SUMMARY OF ASSIGNMENTS

The most important class assignment is the development of a research prospectus for a potential study. Such a prospectus might later be developed into a PPA thesis/project, at the student's option. Detailed guidelines for the prospectus will be distributed during the semester. The prospectus will be due on December 16, the last day of the final exam period. A short proposal summary will be due on October 26 and aimed at helping me determine if you are "on track." However, I strongly urge you to set up an appointment to discuss your prospectus before the proposal summary is due.

Additionally, there will be one group assignment. The class will be divided into about four groups and each group will be assigned a research topic. Further guidelines for that assignment will be provided in the course of the semester. It is expected that reflection on the group assignment will help students to develop an individual prospectus.

Finally, you will be required to complete a short paper applying the logic of causal order and take an in-class examination addressing the material in the first two parts of the class. The exam will be intended to ensure that you understand and can use key course concepts.

LATE ASSIGNMENTS AND MISSED CLASSES

Late assignments will be accepted only in highly unusual circumstances. At my discretion, a student who misses a deadline may be given a make-up assignment. Whether or not a penalty will be assessed depends on the reason (e.g., a family emergency constitutes a good reason; a competing requirement for another course does not).

You should notify me in advance if you need to miss a class. A student with more than one unexcused absence from class will be penalized one full class participation grade. A student who misses more than three classes *for any reason* should drop the course.

GRADING WEIGHTS

Grading will be determined as follows:

Case study prospectus	30%
In-class examination	20%
Group project	15%

Causal order paper	15%
Class participation	10%
Prospectus proposal	10%

CLASS SCHEDULE

PART I: OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH PRINCIPLES AND APPROACHES

- September 1: The Crucial Importance of a Good Research Design

Reading

Thomas J. Peters and Robert H. Waterman, Jr., *In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America's Best Run Companies*, ch. 1 (available at the Sacramento State library's reserve room; **please read prior to class**)

Discussion

There is a fundamental flaw in the way Peters and Waterman approached the question of determining the attributes of "good companies." Come to class prepared to discuss what this flaw might be.

- September 8: Design Principles and Different Research Approaches

Reading

Gray, chapters 1-3

PART II: CLOSER EXAMINATION OF DIFFERENT RESEARCH APPROACHES

- September 15: Experimental Research

Readings

Alan S. Gerber and Donald P. Green, "The Effects of Canvassing, Telephone Calls, and Direct Mail on Voter Turnout: A Field Experiment," *American Political Science Review* 94 (September, 2000), pp. 653-663, download from the electronic database "J-Stor" (instructions to be provided in prior class)

Gray, chapter 4

Discussion

Consider the turnout experiment that Gerber and Green conducted. What precisely did the experiment "buy them" relative to the more traditional approach of studying turnout with a quasi-experimental design?

- September 22: Quasi-Experimental Research and the Logic of Causal Order, Part One

Readings

Henry E. Brady, "Data-Set Observations versus Causal-Process Observations: The 2000 Presidential Election," to be distributed in class
Davis, pp. 5-39

Discussion

Think carefully about Brady's short article about the Florida results in the 2000 presidential election. What may we miss by moving right to regression analysis and ignoring the logic of causal processes?

· September 29: Quasi-Experimental Research and the Logic of Causal Order, Part Two

Causal order paper due**Reading**

Davis, pp. 39-end

· October 6: Surveys

Readings

Diane Binson and Joseph A. Catania, "Respondents' Understanding of the Words Used in Sexual Behavior Questions," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 62 (1998), pp. 190-208 to be downloaded from J-Stor
Gray, chapters 5, 8

Discussion

Consider the article by Binson and Catania. In a nutshell, what did they determine about group differences with regard to understanding of sexual behavior terms? Why should these differences *matter* to policy makers and program administrators?

· October 13: Finding Existing Surveys and Other Archival Data

Web Site to Visit

Come to class having perused the Web site for the Inter-University Consortium on Political and Social Research (ICPSR) at the University of Michigan: www.icpsr.umich.edu. I will be expecting you to be able to conduct searches and access data from this site.

Reading

Gray, chapter 11

- October 20: Case Studies, Part One

Reading

Monroe, preface, introduction, and chapters 1-5
Gray, chapter 6

- October 27: Case Studies, Part Two

Prospectus proposal due

Reading

Monroe, chapters 6-10
Gray, chapters 9, 10

PART III: APPLICATIONS

- November 3: Mid-Term Exam and Group Project Work

In-class examination during the first half of class

Reading

Independent reading for your group project and individual prospectus

- November 10: Group and Individual Project Work

Reading

Independent reading for your group project and individual prospectus

- November 17: Data Analysis

Readings

Edward Lascher, "Constituency Size and Incumbent Safety: A Reexamination,"
(to be distributed prior to class)
Gray, chapters 12, 13

Discussion

Think about the relationship between Figure 1 and the regression analysis results in my article. What precisely do the regression analysis results offer that one could not obtain simply by examining the graph carefully?

[November 24: No Class (Thanksgiving Holiday)]

- December 1: Ethics and the Translation of Research into Practice

Reading

Gray, chapter 15

- December 8: Group Presentations and Course Wrap-Up