

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SACRAMENTO

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

Fall, 2009

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Class meeting time and place:
Thursdays, 6-8:50 p.m., ARC 1009

Office hours: Wednesdays, 5-6 & 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, such as the critical role of theories, hypotheses, and comparisons.
3. Appreciate the importance of thinking systematically about establishing causality.
4. Understand how to proceed from a concept to a means of measuring the concept.

5. Understand the attributes, advantages, and limitations of various types of data collection methods, including: a) experiments; b) surveys; c) field research; d) accessing electronic data archives; and e) conducting historical analysis.
6. Appreciate how to use simple data analysis techniques to draw tentative conclusions.
7. Understand how to write an effective research proposal.
8. Appreciate some of the ethical considerations applicable to applied social science research.

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. Many class sessions will also use exercises, either of my own device or drawn from the main text used in class (*Approaches to Social Research*). 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.

Benjamin A. Valentino. *Final Solutions: Mass Killing and Genocide in the 20th Century*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004.

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

Additionally, a few readings will be available from the library reserve room in hard copy and on the electronic collection, or otherwise made available to students by the instructor.

SUMMARY OF ASSIGNMENTS

The most important class assignment is the development of an individual 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 18, the last day of the final exam period. A short proposal summary will be due on November 5 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. Specific topics and group composition will be determined in class. 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.

Students will also be required to take an in-class, open book examination and complete a short paper on conceptualizing an applied social science topic. Dates for these assignments are specified in the course schedule.

Class participation will be considered in your final grade. In assessing participation I will consider class attendance, quality of comments in class discussion, extent to which connections are made to course readings and concepts, and frequency of involvement.

Finally, each student will be required to submit one reading reaction paper during the course of the semester. That paper should address one of the weekly set of discussion questions or complete one of the exercises identified in the syllabus. Reading reaction papers should be no more than two double spaced pages and are due in hard copy on the day we discuss the reading.

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%
Causality paper	10%
Reading reaction paper	10%
Class participation	10%
Prospectus proposal	5%

CLASS SCHEDULE

September 3: The Crucial Importance of a Good Research Design

Readings

Thomas J. Peters and Robert H. Waterman, Jr., *In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America's Best Run Companies* (1982), chapter 1
 Steven M. Kaplan, Mark M. Klebanov, and Morten Sorensen, "Which CEO Characteristics Matter?" NBER Working Paper 14195 (2008)
 David Brooks, "Should CEO's Read Novels?" *New York Times*, May 18, 2009

Exercise and Discussion

Consider the differences between the research design used by Peters and Waterman and that used by Kaplan et al., and let us stipulate that the latter is more rigorous (the details of the Kaplan et al. study are in their article; the Brooks piece simply provides a nice, succinct overview). I want you to focus on *why* we can have more confidence in the approach used by Kaplan et al. than that the approach used by Peters and Waterman. What precisely are the key methodological differences? Note: concentrate on the *design* of the studies rather than the data analysis per se.

September 10: The Scientific Method and Critiques of that Method

Readings

Approaches to Social Research, chapters 1-2
 Carl Bereiter, "Implications of Postmodernism for Science, or, Science as Progressive Discourse," *Educational Psychologist* 29 (1994), pp. 3-12

Exercises and Discussion

Complete exercises 1-3 on pages 44-45 in *Approaches* and be prepared to discuss them in class.

What is the postmodernist critique of science? What can we learn from postmodernists? What do they get wrong?

September 17: Elements of Research Design

Today only: class meets from 7 p.m-9:50 p.m.

Readings

Approaches to Social Research, chapter 4 (but only skim the section on the nature of causal relationships; we'll come back to that on Sept. 24)
Final Solutions, introduction & chapter 1

Exercises and Discussion

Identify the unit of analysis, dependent variable, and key independent variables considered in *Final Solutions*.

- Why does Valentino focus on “mass killing” rather than “genocide”?

Complete exercise 2 on pages 112-113 in *Approaches* and be prepared to discuss them in class.

September 24: Thinking about Causality**Causal Paper Due****Readings**

Henry E. Brady, “Data-Set Observations versus Causal-Process Observations: The 2000 Presidential Election,” in Brady and David Collier, *Rethinking Social Inquiry* (2004)
Approaches to Social Research, pp. 96-107

Exercises and 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?

Be prepared to discuss your assignment in class

October 1: Measurement and Sampling**Reading**

Approaches to Social Research, chapters 5-6

Exercises and Discussion

Complete exercises 4 and 5 on page 148 in *Approaches* and be prepared to discuss them in class.

October 8: Experimental Research**Readings**

Elizabeth M. Addonizio, Donald P. Green, and James M. Glaser, “Putting the Party Back into Politics: An Experiment Testing Whether Election Day

Festivals Increase Voter Turnout," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 40 (2007), pp. 721-727
Approaches to Social Research, chapters 7-8

Exercises and Discussion

Consider the turnout experiments that Green and his colleagues conducted. What precisely do these experiments "buy them" relative to the more traditional approach of studying turnout with a quasi-experimental design?

Complete exercise 4 on pages 260-261 in *Approaches* and be prepared to discuss it in class.

October 15: Surveys and Survey Design

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
Approaches to Social Research, chapters 9-10

Exercise and 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 22: Mid-Term Exam and Group Projects

Groups and group project topics to be determined today

October 29: Field Research

Readings

David A. Snow and Leon Anderson, "Identity Work among the Homeless: The Verbal Construction and Avowal of Personal Identities," *The American Journal of Sociology*, 92 (1987), pp. 1336-1371
Approaches to Social Research, chapter 11

Exercise and Discussion

Why did Snow and Anderson need to conduct fieldwork to explore the topic

of personal identities among homeless people? How convincing are the conclusions they reached, and why?

The authors of *Approaches warn* (p. 389) that field research is “an inferior way of testing specific causal hypotheses.” How might this caution apply to the article by Snow and Anderson?

November 5: Using Existing Data, Part One- Electronic Data Archives

Prospectus proposal due

Note: the second part of this class session will be reserved for group meetings

Reading

Approaches to Social Research, pp. 393-412

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.

November 12: Using Existing Data, Part Two- Historical Analysis

Reading

Final Solutions, chapters 2-3, 5, conclusion (skim remainder)
Approaches to Social Research, pp. 413-430

Exercise and Discussion

Think carefully about how Valentino draws causal inferences about what are or are not significant in promoting mass killing, and be prepared to discuss these inferences during class

November 19: Evaluation Research and Elementary Data Analysis

Readings

Edward Lascher, “Constituency Size and Incumbent Safety: A Reexamination,”
Political Research Quarterly 58 (2005), pp. 269-278
Approaches to Social Research, chapters 14 and 15

Exercise and Discussion

Think about the relationship between Figure 1 and the regression analysis results in my article. What precisely do we get from the regression analysis that could not be obtained simply by examining the graph carefully?

November 26: No Class (Thanksgiving Holiday)

December 3: Ethics and Key Course Themes

Readings

Approaches to Social Research, chapter 3

Exercise and Discussion

Complete exercises 1a-1c on pages 75-76 in *Approaches* and be prepared to discuss them in class.

December 10: Group Presentations

Research prospectus is due at 4:00 p.m. on December 18