COURSE OBJECTIVES

This course focuses on the design of social science research. Students will be introduced to concepts in qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods research in preparation for conducting independent research. This course will enable students to critically understand research methodology and apply it appropriately to various policy issues. Course topics will include the framing of research questions, identifying data and data sources, using theory in the design process, and analyzing research data.

Important themes of this class can be captured by the following questions:

- What is research?
- What are the assumptions that underlie it?
- How do we know if it’s “good” research?
- What is the relationship between research and theory?
- How can research improve policy and practice?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

At the end of this course, it is expected that students will:

- Understand the importance of the “front end” of the research process
- Understand the strengths and weaknesses of qualitative and quantitative research methodologies
- Appreciate the use of literature in developing sound research question
- Understand the principles of survey and interview protocol design
- Appreciate the use of theory in the research design process
- Understand key methods of assessing research reliability and validity
• Understand how to find and use archival data
• Appreciate some of the ethical considerations applicable to social science research
• Develop skills for effective research presentation

COURSE FORMAT

The graduate seminar is a space of open discussion, inquiry, and discovery. The success of the seminar rests on the free and uninhibited intellectual and emotional engagement of all participants. Effective participation and learning requires that students read class material, reflect on the readings, and come to the seminar prepared to share their ideas with classmates. Therefore, I request that the class subscribe to three basic discussion rules that I find maximize learning in the classroom.

1. Utmost respect for the thoughts and words of all in the room should be given at all times.
2. Listen and be heard. Be attentive to the voices of others and share your voice with the group.
3. Be personal but don’t get personal. I request that you speak from your mind and your heart, but that you speak to issues, not individuals.

In addition to class discussions, there will analytical exercises and individual student presentations.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

Required readings:

• Course Reader. These will include current readings in qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Available for purchase, during the first week of the semester, at: University Copy & Print 446 Howe Avenue (in the Courtyard of University Village next to Safeway) (916) 929-6147
• Additional readings may be assigned and distributed throughout the semester

There are six components to students’ grades:

• Class attendance and participation – 10%
• Group project – 20%
• Article critique #1 – 10%
• Article critique #2 – 10%
• Prospectus proposal – 5%
• Final Research Prospectus & Presentation – 40% & 5%
Late Assignments and Missed Classes

Late assignments will not be accepted. At my discretion a student who misses a deadline may be given an extension. Whether or not a penalty will be assessed on the late assignment depends on the reason.

If you miss class:
- Please tell me in advance, if possible.
- To demonstrate that you have engaged the material for a particular class, write a short analytical essay that critiques one of the readings in depth. This will be due when you return.

A student with one or more 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 class.

Classroom participation

Classroom participation includes weekly class discussion, prepared questions or comments, and student-led discussions. Throughout the semester we will divide up responsibilities for leading discussion. This is your opportunity to influence the pedagogy of the class, to contribute to the learning environment beyond what I might dictate. Therefore, there are no guidelines for leading discussions. Be creative.

Group project

For this project you will be separated into small working groups. Each group will select a policy-relevant research topic from which you will:

1. Develop primary research questions that address the topic at hand;
2. Identify literature review focus areas;
3. Identify key variables;
4. Generate hypotheses;
5. Develop sample interview/survey protocol; and
6. Identify appropriate sample population(s) from which to draw your data

This assignment will be due on November 20th. Prepare to present assignment in class on this date as well. Additional details regarding this group project will be handed out during the semester.

Article critiques

You will be given 2 research articles to critique (4-6 pages, dbl-spaced). The first article critique is due on October 1. The second article critique is due on November 5. In your critiques, please consider the following questions as a guide:

1. Is the problem clearly stated?
2. Does the review of the literature adequately address the topic?
3. Is the particular methodology appropriate?
4. Are key variables described?
5. Are the results clearly presented?
6. Are conclusions drawn substantiated by the results?
7. Are policy implications addressed?

Prospectus proposal
A one-page proposal for final prospectus will be due on October 22nd. Topics for prospectus are open but should be discussed with me prior to submitting your prospectus proposal. I highly encourage you to meet with me to discuss your prospectus ideas before submitting your prospectus proposal.

Final research prospectus and presentation
Final Prospectus (12-15 pages, dbl-spaced max) are due on December 18th. Additionally, final prospectus will be presented to the class (conference style) and orally peer-reviewed by the class on December 4th and December 11th. Detailed guidelines for the prospectus will be distributed during the semester.

OUTLINE OF TOPICS AND ASSIGNMENT

Part I: Basic Principles of Social Science Research

- September 3
  No Class (Labor Day Holiday)

- September 10
  Theoretical constructs in social science research

  Required Reading:
  -Gray, chapter 1: Introduction
  -Gray, chapter 2: Theoretical perspectives and research methodologies

- September 17
  Designing research projects

  Required Reading:
  -Gray, chapter 3: Selecting and planning good research projects

Part II: Approaches to Social Science Research

- September 24
  Quantitative Research Design

  Required Reading:
  -Gray, chapter 4: Experimental and quasi-experimental research design
-Gray, chapter 5: Designing descriptive and analytical surveys

**Article to be critiqued, due next week:

- October 1
  Qualitative Research Design

  Required Reading:
  - Gray, chapter 6: Designing case studies
  - Gray, chapter 7: Designing evaluations

  [Article Critique #1 Due]

Part III: Collecting Data

- October, 8
  Quantitative data collection

  Required Reading:
  - Gray, chapter 8: Collecting primary data: questionnaires

- October 15
  Qualitative data collection

  Required Reading:
  - Gray, chapter 9: Collecting primary data: interviewing
  - Gray, chapter 10: Collecting primary data: observation

- October 22
  Locating and using secondary and archival data

  Required Reading:
  - Gray, chapter 11: Collecting primary data: unobtrusive measures

  [1-pg Prospectus Proposal Due]

Part IV: Data Analysis
October 29

**Analyzing quantitative & qualitative data**

*Required Reading:*
- Gray, chapter 12: Analyzing and presenting quantitative data
- Gray, chapter 13: Collecting and Analyzing qualitative data

November 5

*Required Reading:*

[Article Critique #2 Due]

November 12

**Translating research into policy & Presenting Effective Research**

*Required Reading:*
- Gray, chapter 15: Action research and change

November 19

**Putting the Research Prospectus Together**

*Required Reading:*
- Independent reading and research for your final prospectus

[Group Project Due]

November 26

- We will not meet formally as a class this week. Instead you will be required to meet with me individually for 20 minutes to discuss the progress of your prospectus. Individual student meetings for this session will be schedule during the semester.

*Required Reading:*
- Independent research reading for final papers

December 3: **Final Presentations of Prospectus**
• December 10: **Final Presentations of Prospectus**

• December 17: **Final Prospectus Due**