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. 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 differences between experimental and non-experimental research.
6. Understand the principles of survey design.

7. Understand how to find and use archival data.

8. Understand and appreciate the appropriate use of case studies.

9. 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. 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.


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

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 23, the
last day of the final exam period. A short proposal summary will be due on November 9 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.

Finally, you will 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.

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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Weight</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Case study prospectus</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-class examination</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Group project</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conceptualization paper</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class participation</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prospectus proposal</td>
<td>10%</td>
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CLASS SCHEDULE

September 6: 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*, chapter 1 (available at the Sacramento State library’s reserve room; please read prior to class)

Discussion
There are a number of potential concerns about how Peters and Waterman attempted to determine the attributes of “good companies,” and at least one fundamental flaw in their methodology. Come to class prepared to discuss any concerns about the approach taken by Peters and Waterman.

September 13: Design Principles and Different Research Approaches

Readings
Babbie, chapters 1-2
Jennifer M. Jensen and Lauren Hunt, “College in the State Capital: Does it Increase the Civic Engagement of Political Science Undergraduate Majors?” *PS: Political Science and Politics* 40 (July, 2007): 563-569; instructor to make available to class

Discussion
Suppose you wanted to know if going to college in a state capital made any difference in students’ civic engagement. How should you attempt to determine if this was the case?

September 20: Thinking about Causality

Readings
Henry E. Brady, “Data-Set Observations versus Causal-Process Observations: The 2000 Presidential Election;” instructor to make available to class
Babbie, chapter 4

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 27: Conceptualization, Operationalization, and Measurement
Paper Due

Reading
Babbie, chapter 5

Discussion
Come to class prepared to discuss your assignment

October 4: 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 for downloading to be provided)
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, Forthcoming (instructor to provide manuscript with permission of Professor Green)
Babbie, chapter 8

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?

October 11: Surveys and Survey Design

Readings
Babbie, chapter 9 and Appendix G

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 18: Other Types of Quasi-Experimental Research
Groups and group project topics to be determined today

Reading
Babbie, chapter 12

October 25: 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.

November 1: Mid-Term Examination and Group Meetings

November 8: Case Studies, Part One

Prospectus proposal due

Reading
Monroe, preface, introduction, and chapters 1-5
Babbie, chapter 10

November 15: Group Meetings

November 22: No Class (Thanksgiving Holiday)

November 29: Case Studies, Part Two

Reading
Monroe, chapters 6-10

December 6: Data Analysis

Readings
Edward Lascher, “Constituency Size and Incumbent Safety: A Reexamination,” Political Research Quarterly, to be distributed prior to class
Edward Tufte, Beautiful Evidence (Cheshire, CT: Graphics Press, 2006), pp. 141-147; copies on reserve at the library
Babbie, chapters 13, 14

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?

December 13: Ethics and Key Course Themes

Readings
Tufte, *Beautiful Evidence*, pp. 156-168; copies on reserve at the library
Babbie, chapter 3

December 20: Group Presentations