PPA 205
“Research in Public Policy and Administration”
California State University, Sacramento
Fall 2008

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Office Hours
3033 Tahoe Hall
Tuesdays/Thursdays, 4:15-5:45, and by appointment

Section 1
Tuesdays 6:00PM - 8:50PM
Tahoe Hall 1002
Sept 2 – December 9
Holiday: Nov 11, Veteran's Day

Section 2
Thursdays 6:00PM - 8:50PM
Tahoe Hall 1025
Sept 4 – December 11
Holiday: Nov. 27, Thanksgiving
Synopsis

Research plays a prominent role in the life of the modern organization. By law, regulation, and custom, organizations must routinely evaluate the results of their policies, programs, and projects. Legislatures, agencies, and interest groups frequently call upon researchers to project into the future the likely consequences of proposed laws and rules. Research then can become an instrument of political advocacy, with each side touting study results that allegedly support their policy positions, while simultaneously dismissing the other’s research as unreliable “junk science.”

Although “doing” policy research is traditionally 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 on the design of an evaluation project or a commissioned 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. This course, however, 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; 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 or critiquing a study. 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. 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.
Learning Objectives

PPA 205 guides students toward developing basic proficiency in the following topics:

1. The importance of thinking through the entire design of a study before diving in.
2. The role of theories and hypotheses in applied policy research.
3. The main approaches for establishing causality in scientific research.
4. Differences between experimental and non-experimental research.
5. Strengths and limitations of various non-experimental designs including single case studies, small-n case comparisons, and large-n studies.
6. How to proceed from a concept to measuring the concept in a valid and reliable fashion.
7. Methods of data collection commonly used in the social sciences, including surveys, interviews, and textual content analysis.
8. How to find and use archival data.
9. Differences between descriptive and inferential data analysis, and their implications for research design and data collection.
10. Major ethical and legal considerations for research involving human subjects.
11. Major criticisms of social science, and how to defend or critique a study from both positivist and post-positivist perspectives.
12. The politics of research, and how to position a study to influence policy decisions.

Textbook


- Hornet Bookstore, $103.00 (Used)  
  http://www.bkstr.com/CategoryDisplay/10001-9604-13528-1?demoKey=d
- Wadsworth Cengage Publishing, $113.49 (hardcover), $66.99 (ebook)  
  http://www.cengage.com/
- Amazon, $92.82  
  http://www.amazon.com/Practice-Social-Research-Earl-Babbie/dp/0495093254/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1217880381&sr=1-1

Additional Readings

To be assigned each week, downloadable from the CSUS library.

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.

Assignments. The course is designed with a relatively large number of graded assignments distributed throughout the semester. This structure is forgiving in that no single assignment bears a huge influence on the final course grade. On the other hand, it also rewards students who consistently stay on top of the material from week to week.
The capstone assignment is a research proposal. Students may choose to use this exercise to help develop a prospectus for their PPA masters project. To accommodate oral presentations of the proposal, which will consume the last two weeks of class, students will be divided into two groups, A and B, with deadlines staggered by one week. A written draft of the research proposal is due during week 11 (Group A) or week 12 (Group B), and will be distributed to one of the classmates in the same group. 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Weight in Course Grade</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leading one week’s discussion of the reading</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>Topics 4-11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protection of human subjects certification exam</td>
<td>5% Pass/Fail</td>
<td>Self-paced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article critique (students self-select from readings assigned for class discussion)</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>At beginning of relevant class</td>
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<tr>
<td>Midterm exam</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>Topic 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Draft research proposal (written form)</td>
<td>5% Pass/Fail</td>
<td>Topic 11(A),12(B)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer-review of classmate’s draft research proposal</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>Topic 12(A),13(B)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Draft research proposal (oral presentation)</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>Topic 13(A),14(B)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final research proposal (written form)</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>Topic 15</td>
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Class participation – Boost the lowest score on your midterm, article critique, or peer-review assignment by one-third of a letter grade for good participation, or two-thirds for truly exemplary participation.

**Course Policies**

**Visiting the other section of PPA 205.** Two separate sections of PPA 205 meet on different nights of the week, Tuesdays or Thursdays. If you are unable to attend a particular day of class for your “home” section, please let me know ahead of time, and plan to attend the other section’s class that week.

**Missed classes.** Please notify 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. Visiting the other section of PPA 205 counts as full participation in that week’s class.

**Missed exams.** Requests in advance for early or makeup exams will be granted only in extreme circumstances.

**Writing Assignments.** Late work for the peer-review and research proposal assignments will be docked one-third grade per day (except in extreme circumstances, at my discretion). Late article critiques will not be accepted because they are due on the day the article will be discussed in class.
Calendar

NOTE: Because of Veterans’ Day holiday on Tuesday, November 11, Section 2 will jump ahead of Section 1 on Thursday the 13th. Section 1 will then cover the Topic 11 material the following week on November 18. Section 1 will continue to lag Section 2 until the Thanksgiving Holiday. Section 1 jumps back in front starting Tuesday, December 2.

PART I. Research Design

Topic 1, September 2 & 4
Course Introduction & Overview of Scientific Method

Babbie Chapters 1-2

Topic 2, September 9 & 11
Building and Recognizing Testable Hypotheses

Babbie Chapter 4

Topic 3, September 16 & 18
Principles of Valid and Reliable Measurement; Indexes and Scales

Babbie Chapters 5-6

Topic 4, September 23 & 25
Research Design, Sampling, Causality, and True Experiments

Babbie Chapters 7-8
Discussion: TBA

Topic 5, September 30 & October 2
Case Study Research Designs

Discussion: TBA

Topic 6, October 7 & 9
Analyzing Variance Across Cases: Small-n and Large-n Designs

Discussion: TBA

Topic 7, October 14 & 16
Data Analysis and Implications for Research Design

Babbie pp 405-415, 449-469
* Midterm Exam *
PART II. Data Collection

Topic 8, October 21 & 23
Survey Design and Administration
   Babbie Chapter 9
   Discussion: TBA

Topic 9, October 28 & 30
Interviews and Focus Groups
   Babbie Chapter 10
   Discussion: TBA

Topic 10, November 4 & 6
Content Analysis & Finding and Using Secondary Data
   Babbie Chapter 11
   Discussion: TBA

PART III. Research in the Real World

Topic 11, November 18 (Section 1) & November 13 (Section 2)
Ethics and Politics of Research; Program Evaluation
   Babbie Chapters 3 & 12
   Discussion: Shulock (1999) "The Paradox of Policy Analysis: If It Is Not Used, Why Do We Produce So Much of It?"
   * Draft research proposals due (Group A) *

Topic 12, November 25 (Section 1) & November 20 (Section 2)
Critiques of the Classic Scientific Method
   * Peer-review critiques due (Group A) *
   * Draft research proposals due (Group B) *

Topic 13, December 2 & 4
   * Presentation of Research Proposals (Group A) *
   * Peer-review critiques due (Group B) *

Topic 14, December 9 & 11
   * Presentation of Research Proposals (Group B) *

Topic 15, December 16 & 18 (5:15 – 7:15 pm)
   * Final Research Proposals Due *