PPA 205
Research in Public Policy and Administration
California State University, Sacramento
Fall 2010, Section 2

Class Location
Thursdays 6:00 - 8:50 pm
Tahoe Hall, Room 1004

Office Hours
4:15-5:45 pm, or by appointment
Selected Wednesdays @ CCP (9/1, 9/8, 9/22, 10/6, 10/20, 11/3, 11/17, 12/1, 12/8)
Selected Thursdays @ 3033 Tahoe Hall, (9/2, 9/9, 9/23, 10/7, 10/21, 11/4, 12/2, 12/9)

Bill Leach
Assistant Professor, Department of Public Policy and Administration
Research Director, Center for Collaborative Policy
(916) _ _ _ _ cell
wdleach@csus.edu
Rationale and Synopsis

Research plays a prominent role in the life of the modern organization. By law, regulation, and custom, organizations must routinely evaluate their performance. Legislatures, agencies, and interest groups frequently call upon researchers to predict the consequences of proposed policies or to evaluate the outcomes of existing policies. Research then can become an instrument of political advocacy, with each side touting studies that allegedly support their policy positions, while simultaneously dismissing the other’s research as unreliable "junk science."

Although "doing" policy research is often 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 to design an evaluation project or to commission a 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. However, this course 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 (i.e. statistics); 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 a study. We will also draw from real world studies that use statistics to illustrate points about research design and data collection methods. 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.
Core Learning Objectives

1. Appreciate the importance of thinking through the entire design of a study before diving in.

2. Appreciate specific design principles that are common to a number of different types of research, such as the critical role of theories and hypotheses.

3. Understand the main approaches for detecting cause-and-effect relationships in scientific research, including those based on experimental and non-experimental designs.

4. Learn how to proceed from a concept to a variable designed to measure the concept in a valid and reliable fashion.

5. Understand the advantages and limitations of various types of data collection methods, including: a) surveys; b) interviews; c) participant observation; d) content analysis, and e) secondary data.

6. Understand the differences between descriptive and inferential data analysis, and their implications for research design and data collection.

7. Learn how to write an effective research proposal.

8. Appreciate some of the ethical considerations applicable to applied social science research.

Supplemental Learning Objectives

9. Understand the strengths and limitations of various non-experimental designs including single case studies, small-n case comparisons, and large-n studies.

10. Learn the major criticisms of social science, and how to defend or critique a study from both positivist and post-positivist perspectives.

11. Become aware of the politics of research, and understand how to position a study to influence policy decisions.

Textbook


Available at Hornet Bookstore for $76 used or $45 rental.

Additional Readings

Provided on SacCT.
Hybrid Course Format: In-person and Online

Rationale. This semester I am introducing a pedagogical innovation to the PPA curriculum: online sessions. While there is a precedent in the Department for accommodating our midcareer students through night classes, weekend classes and distance-education formats such as video-recorded lectures and SacCT, this will be our first foray into standalone internet-based sessions. In addition to the added convenience for students with fulltime jobs and families, the online sessions will familiarize students with web-based collaboration technologies and provide a new skill set increasingly demanded in the workplace.

Hybrid Format. To introduce this teaching modality gradually, nine of the thirteen weeks of the semester will be conducted in the normal, in-person fashion in room 1004 Tahoe Hall, and four sessions will take place online. The online sessions will employ SacCT and its embedded suite of web conferencing tools called iMEET.

SacCT and iMEET. A SacCT Website will be created for the course. All readings, assignments, and grades will be posted to the website. During the four online sessions, we will use the University’s iMEET platform, a versatile web conferencing tool with features such as real-time audio and video, clicker-style quizzes, live chat rooms and breakout rooms with whiteboards and application-sharing. The first online class occurs in the third week of the semester. I’ll provide detailed guidance and instructions beforehand. In the meantime, you might wish to
(a) familiarize yourself with iMEET functions: http://www.csus.edu/atcs/tools/imeet/sacct-participants.stm
(b) invest in a headset (or speakers and microphone) and webcam (optional): http://www.csus.edu/atcs/tools/imeet/equipment.stm

Activities. A typical class may include lecture, discussion, and group exercises. It is imperative that all students come to class prepared to discuss the readings.

Graded Assignments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>Grading Scheme</th>
<th>Due</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance and participation</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>0,70,80,90,100</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short essays: write 2-3; keep 2 grades</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>0,70,80,90,100</td>
<td>Varies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midterm exams (2 x 10%)</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>0-100</td>
<td>Sep 30, Oct 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Speed Research&quot; group project</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>0-100</td>
<td>Nov 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Draft research proposal</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>0,100 pass/fail</td>
<td>Nov 10 or 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer-review of classmate’s draft</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>0,70,80,90,100</td>
<td>Nov 18 or 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral Presentation</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>0,100 pass/fail</td>
<td>Dec 2 or 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final research proposal</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>0-100</td>
<td>Dec 16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Short Essays (2 pages). Essay topics that reflect on the lecture and discussion will be assigned at the end of class. Completed two-page essays are due at the beginning of class the following week. Each student may submit any two or three of the available essay assignments and I will keep your best two grades.
"Speed Research" Group Project (10 pages). One of the greatest challenges of teaching research methods is that it’s difficult for students to fully appreciate any one subtopic (like survey design or data analysis) until they understand how it fits into the larger picture. This larger picture, often termed "the scientific method," refers to the holistic and iterative process of conceiving a research question, designing a study, implementing the design, interpreting the results, communicating the findings, and developing new research questions once again. To learn the scientific method, there’s nothing better than actually carrying out a study yourself. This is why all master's students are required to write a thesis and doctoral students write dissertations. To jump-start your appreciation of this process and its individual elements, the class will divide itself into groups of three to six students, and each group will carry out a mini research project from start to finish in the first ten weeks of the course.

Midterm Exams/Quizzes. Two exams will be administered online. Each will cover 4 weeks of material. Practice exams will be distributed and discussed to help you prepare.

Research Proposal (15 pages) and related assignments. This is the capstone assignment for the course. Students often choose to use this exercise to help develop a prospectus for their PPA masters project. A written draft of the research proposal is due during week 11 or 12, and will be distributed to one of your classmates. 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.

Course Policies

Missed Classes. Please tell me in advance if you will miss a class. Unexcused absences will be reflected in the class participation grade. A student who misses more than three classes for any reason should drop the course.

Missed Exams. Requests in advance for early or makeup exams will be granted only in extreme circumstances, such as a family emergency.

Missed Deadlines. Writing assignments will be docked 5 points for each day late. The penalty will be waived only in extreme circumstances.

Extra Credit: There will be no opportunities for extra credit (otherwise known as extra work). The readings and assignments described in the syllabus should keep everyone plenty busy.

Academic Honesty. When writing for this class, or any class at Sacramento State, you should understand what plagiarism is, and how plagiarism can become grounds for dismissal from the university. Details are available at the University Policy Manual: www.csus.edu/umanual/student/UMA00150.htm
Calendar

PART I. Research Design

Week 1, September 2 (in class)
Course Introduction & Overview of Scientific Method

Singleton & Straits: Preface
Singleton & Straits: Chapter 1 "Introduction"
Singleton & Straits: Chapter 2 "The Nature of Science"
Singleton & Straits: Chapter 4 "Elements of Research Design"

Week 2, September 9 (in class)
Building and Recognizing Testable Hypotheses; Principles of Valid and Reliable Measurement; Indexes and Scales, Sampling,

Singleton & Straits: Chapter 5 "Measurement"
Singleton & Straits: pp. 431-439 + Box 13.1 pp.440-441 "Indexes and Scales"
Singleton & Straits: Chapter 6 "Sampling"

Index Example:

Scales Example:

Week 3, September 16 (online)
Causality and True Experiments in the Lab

Singleton & Straits: Chapter 7 "Experimentation"
Singleton & Straits: Chapter 8 "Experimental Designs"

Laboratory Experiment Example:

Optional Reading:
Week 4, September 23 (in class)
True Experiments in the Field and Quasi-Experiments

Field Experiment Example:

Quasi-Experiment Example:

Optional Reading:

Part II. Data Collection

Week 5, September 30 (online)
Survey Design and Administration

Singleton & Straits: Chapter 9 "Survey Research"
Singleton & Straits: Chapter 10 "Survey Instrumentation"


*** Midterm Exam #1 covering material from weeks 1-4, 6:00 – 7:00 pm ***

Week 6, October 7 (in class)
Interviews, Focus Groups, Observation, Secondary Data, Content Analysis, Meta-analysis

Singleton & Straits: Chapter 11 "Field Research"
Singleton & Straits: Chapter 12 "Research Using Available Data"
Singleton & Straits: pp. 452-458 "Meta-Analysis"

Survey and Focus Group Example:

Optional Reading (Survey and Interview Examples):
PART III. Data Analysis

Week 7, October 14 (online)
Data Analysis and Implications for Research Design

Singleton & Straits: Chapter 15 "Data...Analysis" especially pp 508-532.
Singleton & Straits: Chapter 16 "Multivariate Analysis" especially pp 549-565.
Handout: Statistics Flowchart

Week 8, October 21 (in class)
Analyzing Variance Across Cases: Small-n Comparative Designs

QCA Example:

Week 9, October 28 (online)

*** Midterm Exam 2 covering material from weeks 5-8, 6:00 – 7:00 pm ***

7:50 – 8:50 pm

Week 10, November 4 (in class)
Post-positivist and Feminist Critiques of Science

* 'Speed research' reports due *
* Group presentations of ‘speed research’ projects *
  6:00 to 7:30 pm, three groups, each 15 minutes + 10 minutes Q&A

Singleton & Straits: Chapter 17 "Writing Research Reports" (scan this chapter and use as a reference for your ‘speed research’ report)

Week 11, November 11 (Veterans Day, no class)

* Draft research proposals due for Group A by email, Wednesday Nov 10, 6 pm *

PART III. Applications

Week 12, November 18 (in class)
Ethics and Politics of Research; Program Evaluation and Logic Models

Singleton & Straits: Chapter 3 "Research Ethics"
Singleton & Straits: Chapter 14 "Evaluation Research"

Politics Example:
Logic Model Example:

Optional Readings:

* Draft research proposals due for Group B*
* Group A peer-review critiques due by email at 6:00pm *

Week 13, November 25, Thanksgiving (no class)
* Group B peer-review critiques due by email at 6:00pm, Wednesday Nov 24 *

Week 14, December 2 (in class)
* Presentation of Research Proposals *
Up to 10 students, each 10 minutes + 5 minutes Q&A

Week 15, December 9 (in class)
* Presentation of Research Proposals *
Up to 10 students, each 10 minutes + 5 minutes Q&A

Week 16, December 16
* Final Research Proposals due via email at 7:15 pm *