Syllabus

California State University, Sacramento
Public Policy and Administration 205
Fall 2011

**PPA 205: Research in Public Policy and Administration**

**Dr. Su Jin Jez**
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Other ways to reach me: o 916.278.5955 | c see version on SacCT for cell phone number

**Meeting times:**
Wednesdays 6p-8:50p

**Meeting location:**
Tahoe 1027

**Office hours:**
Wednesdays 3p-5p
And by appointment
Office: Tahoe 3035

**Course goals:**
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 pitfalls.

PPA 205 is not primarily a course on data analysis; another core course, PPA 207, focuses on that topic. 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.

At the end of PPA 205, a student who successfully completes the course will be able to:

1. Appreciate the role 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; and
8. Appreciate some of the ethical considerations applicable to applied social science research.

Course requirements: 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 session will also use exercises, either of Professor Ted Lascher’s device or drawn from the main text used in class. As such, I expect all students to read the syllabus carefully, come to class having had completed the assigned reading, and spent time thinking about the concepts and ideas introduced.

During the course of the semester, you are expected to actively participate in in-class discussions and activities, put together a research prospectus, complete a group assignment, take an online exam, and write a short paper on conceptualizing an applied social science topic. You are encouraged to work together, but each assignment (except for the group project) is individual.

- Case study prospectus – 30%
- Prospectus proposal – 10%
- Examination – 20%
- Group project – 15%
- Causality paper – 15%
- Class participation – 10%

See attendance policy and the impact of missed classes on your grades in the Policies and logistics section below.

Case study prospectus: 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 by midnight on December 17, 2011. A short proposal summary will be due on November 3, 2011 and is 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.

Group project: 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. Groups will present their project on the last day of class, December 7, 2011.

Causality paper: In this paper, each student will aim to understand and explain a causal relationship, in addition to identifying confounding factors that may mask the causal relationship. This paper is due the day we focus on causality, September 28, 2011.

Class participation: In addition to merely attending class, I expect students to prepare for class and actively participate. This means having had done the assigned reading before class,
reviewed the exercises and discussion questions before class, and to engage your classmates in discussion, and ask questions.

Late and make-up assignments: 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.

Policies and logistics:

- Please complete all readings listed for the class date prior to coming to class.
- You should inform me prior to the session if you miss class on a specific day. Except under very unusual circumstances, a student who misses three classes will be penalized one entire grade (e.g. a B+ for the course will become a C+), and a student who misses more than three classes will receive a failing grade.
- If you have a disability and require accommodations, you need to provide disability documentation to SSWD, Lassen Hall 1008, (916) 278-6955. Please discuss your accommodation needs with me after class or during my office hours early in the semester.
- Please no cell phones or web surfing in class. If laptops are being abused in class, I may prohibit their use for all.

Academic Honesty:

I take plagiarism and other acts of academic dishonesty very seriously. I reserve the right to fail students that are academically dishonest and escalate the case to the University. Note that academic dishonesty can be grounds for dismissal from the university. Details are available at the University Policy Manual found at http://www.csus.edu/umanual/student/UMA00150.htm. Plagiarism is one case of academic dishonesty, and here is an excerpt from the manual on plagiarism:

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is a form of cheating. At CSUS plagiarism is the use of distinctive ideas or works belonging to another person without providing adequate acknowledgement of that person's contribution. Regardless of the means of appropriation, incorporation of another's work into one's own requires adequate identification and acknowledgement. Plagiarism is doubly unethical because it deprives the author of rightful credit and gives credit to someone who has not earned it. Acknowledgement is not necessary when the material used is common knowledge. Plagiarism at CSUS includes but is not limited to:

1. The act of incorporating into one's own work the ideas, words, sentences, paragraphs, or parts thereof, or the specific substance of another's work without giving appropriate credit thereby representing the product as entirely one's own. Examples include not only word-for-word copying, but also the "mosaic" (i.e., interspersing a few of one's own words while, in essence, copying another's work), the paraphrase (i.e., rewriting another's work while still using the other's fundamental idea or theory); fabrication (i.e., inventing or counterfeiting sources), ghost-writing (i.e., submitting another's work as one's own) and failure to include quotation marks on material that is otherwise acknowledged; and

2. Representing as one's own another's artistic or scholarly works such as musical compositions, computer programs, photographs, paintings, drawing, sculptures, or similar works.

Getting help:
It is important that you understand the material we are covering in class. If for any reason, you’re feeling fuzzy on any of the material, it is essential that you gain clarity on the topic. You can do this by speaking up in class, speaking with me privately (via email, phone, in office hours, by appointment, or during class breaks), or discussing with your classmates. I am best reached via email, and I promise I will get back to your Monday through Thursday e-mail within 24 hours.

Finding required readings and other class materials:
This course requires that you have access to the World Wide Web and SacCT. For all journal articles that are accessible via the Sac State Library, I will expect you to download them on your own from Library website. I’ve provided links in the syllabus to articles that are freely available online. For articles that the Sac State Library does not have access to and are not available online, I’ve posted on SacCT. For each article, I’ve noted in the syllabus where you can find it. I will also use SacCT to email the class (so make sure to check the email you have linked to your SacCT account) and to post the syllabus, assignments, and any other course documents. If you need to email me, I will respond more quickly if you email me directly at jez@csus.edu than if you send me an email through the SacCT system.

Required book (also on reserve at the library):

I encourage you to buy online and purchase a used, softcover version to save money. I have also asked the Sac State Bookstore to stock this title. If you wish to purchase there, please call for availability.

Course schedule

Class 1: Welcome, administrative items, and start in on why research design matters
8/31/11

**Readings for class**
Alice Park, “How Safe are Vaccines?,” *Time*, May 21, 2008
http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1808620,00.html
*Approaches to Social Research*, chapter 1

**Exercise and discussion**
Toward the beginning of today’s session, I will divide the class into small groups to work on an exercise related to the alleged connection between vaccines and autism. The exercise is self-contained and I prefer you not make an effort to familiarize yourself with the academic literature in this area prior to class. However, you should read the Park article before our session to obtain a general sense of the controversy and relevant considerations.

*Potential guest lecture 9/7/11*

Class 2: The Scientific Approach and Critiques of that Approach
Readings for class

Approaches to Social Research, chapter 2
Scott O. Lilienfeld, Steven Jay Lynn, John Ruscio, and Barry L. Beyerstein, 50 Great Myths of Popular Psychology: Shattering Widespread Myths about Human Behavior (Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, 2010), pp. 1-19 *** On reserve at the library ***

Exercise and discussion
Complete exercises 1-3 on pages 44-45 in Approaches and be prepared to discuss your answers in class.

What does the selection from Lilienfeld et al. suggest about why a scientific approach to social questions may be desirable?

Consider the postmodernist critique of science: what is it, what can we learn from postmodernists, and where do they get wrong?

In light of criticisms from postmodernists and others, what can we reasonably expect from the scientific approach?

Class 3: Elements of Research Design

Readings for class

Approaches to Social Research, chapter 4 (but only skim the section on the nature of causal relationships; we'll begin discussion of causality at the end of today’s class but will come back to it more in-depth on 9/28)

Exercise and discussion
Identify the unit of analysis, dependent variable, and key independent variables considered in Strunk’s piece.

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

Class 4: Thinking about Causality

Readings for class

Causal paper due
Exercise 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

Class 5: Ethics
10/5/11

Readings for class
Approaches to Social Research, chapter 3

Exercise and discussion
Complete exercise 1 on page 75-6 in Approaches and be prepared to discuss your answers in class.

Class 6: Measurement and Sampling
10/12/11

Readings for class
Approaches to Social Research, chapters 5-6

Exercise and discussion
Complete exercises 4 and 5 on page 148 in Approaches and be prepared to discuss your answers in class.

Class 6: Experimental Research
10/19/11

Readings for class
Approaches to Social Research, chapters 7-8

Exercise and discussion
Why is an experimental approach probably the only one that could be used to draw valid causal inferences about the impact of class size on student achievement? What are the implications of their findings for the principles of sound research we emphasize in PPA 205?

Class 7: Surveys and Survey Design
10/26/11
Readings for class
http://comm.stanford.edu/faculty/krosnick/docs/The%20uses%20and%20abuses%20of%20public%20opinion%20polls.pdf
*Approaches to Social Research*, chapters 9-10

Exercise and discussion
Consider Krosnick’s argument about the Harris Poll. Were the problems he identified the result of poor survey methodology or poor interpretation of survey results, or both?

Complete exercise 3 on p. 308 and exercise 2 on pp. 351-352 and be prepared to discuss your answers in class

Class 8: Field Research
11/2/11

Guest lecturer: Andrea Venezia, Senior Policy Associate, WestEd

Readings for class
Andrea Venezia, Michael W. Kirst, Anthony L. Antonio. “Betraying the College Dream: How Disconnected K-12 and Postsecondary Education Systems Undermine Student Aspirations”.
Andrea Venezia, Kathy Reeves Bracco, Thad Nodine. “One-Shot Deal? Students’ Perceptions of Assessment and Course Placement in California’s Community Colleges”.
http://www.wested.org/online_pubs/OneShotDeal.pdf
*Approaches to Social Research*, chapter 11

Exercise and discussion
Why did Venezia et al. choose a field work approach to examine how students understood assessment and placement? What did they learn from this approach that they probably could not have learned from statistical analysis of available data? What were the weaknesses of this approach?

Class 9: Electronic Data Archives and Historical Analysis; and Writing Research Reports
11/9/11

Readings for class
*Approaches to Social Research*, chapters 12 and 17

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. Here’s a link to their data use tutorial: http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/shared/ICPSR/help/newuser

**Exercise and discussion**
Think carefully about how Darling-Hammond et al draw causal inferences about what factors are or are not significant academic achievement, and be prepared to discuss these inferences during class.

**Class 10: Elementary Data Analysis**
11/16/11

**Tentative guest lecturer:** Nancy Shulock, Director, Institute for Higher Education Leadership & Policy

**Readings for class**
*Approaches to Social Research*, chapters 15

**Discussion**
What standards should be used to judge the success of programs such as DARE?

How convincing is the statistical evidence presented in “Rules of the Game”? Why?

**Class 11: Evaluation Research**
11/23/11

**Readings for class**

*Approaches to Social Research*, chapters 14

**Discussion**
What standards should be used to judge the success of programs such as DARE?

**Class 12: Speed research project**
11/30/11

**Readings for class**
Graduation Initiatives: Trends and Progress
Student Extracurricular Activity and Academic Performance (2009)

Finding the Bleeding Spot (2008)


Graduating Student Survey Comments Analysis (2007-08)

Student Flow Analysis: CSU Student Progress Toward Graduation
http://www.csus.edu/ihelp/PDFs/R_CSU_MOA_excerpt.pdf

Discussion
The CSU’s Graduation Initiative states: The CSU Graduation Initiative strives to raise the freshman six-year graduation rate by eight percentage points by 2015-2016, and cut in half the existing gap in degree attainment by CSU’s under-represented minority (URM) students.

After reviewing the data and reports above, think about what you would do to increase Sac State’s graduation rate and what additional information you’d like. For the additional data you’d like, how would you collect it? (In other words, think about what study you’d design.)

Class 13: Group Presentations
12/7/11