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, focuses on that topic. However, we will give some attention to the types of data analysis 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. Understand the attributes, advantages, and limitations of various types of data collection and analysis methods, including: a) experiments; b) surveys; c) field research; d) accessing electronic data archives; and e) conducting historical analysis.

3. Learn specific design principles common to a number of different types of research, such as the critical role of theories, hypotheses, and comparisons.

4. Understand how to proceed from a concept to a means of measuring the concept.
5. Understand the importance of thinking systematically about investigating causality.

6. Learn how to access relevant data and literature to inform and answer questions of public policy and administration.

7. Understand how to write an effective research proposal.

8. 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. Many class sessions will also use exercises, either of my own device or drawn from the main text used in class (Approaches to Social Research). 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, shorter readings will be available from the library reserve room in hard copy and/or through the electronic collection, or otherwise made available to students by the instructor.

SUMMARY OF ASSIGNMENTS

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 on December 14, the last day of the final exam period. A short proposal summary will be due on October 31 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 in-class group assignment. This assignment will be aimed at having you quickly identify appropriate research approaches in real time, under significant time pressure and facing considerable assignment ambiguity. The aim is in part to duplicate the types of research you might be asked to conduct as practitioners, e.g., in state government.

Students will also 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.

Class participation will be considered in your final grade. In assessing participation I will take into account class attendance, quality of comments in class discussion, extent to which connections are made to course readings and concepts, and frequency of involvement.

Finally, each student will be required to submit one reading reaction paper during the course of the semester. That paper should address one of the weekly set of discussion questions or complete one of the exercises identified in the syllabus. Reading reaction papers should be no more than two double spaced pages and are due in hard copy on the day we discuss the reading.

SPECIAL NEEDS RELATED TO DISABILITIES

Should you need assistance with portions of class due to disabilities, please let me know as soon as possible. The University offers services to student with disabilities and I would be glad to refer you to the appropriate campus unit.

ACADEMIC HONESTY

I take issues of academic honesty (including avoiding plagiarism) seriously and you should as well. If you are unfamiliar with the specifics of University policy in this area I recommend you review the appropriate section of the on-line University Policy Manual: http://www.csus.edu/umanual/AcademicHonestyPolicyandProcedures.htm.
LATE ASSIGNMENTS AND MISSED CLASSES

I will accept late assignments (or allow for a make-up examination) 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).

I expect students to attend all class sessions unless they have a compelling reason not to do so. 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

Final class grades will be determined in accordance with the following weights:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Weight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Case study prospectus</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-class examination</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Causality paper</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group project</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading reaction paper</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class participation</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prospectus proposal</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CLASS SCHEDULE

August 29: The Crucial Importance of a Good Research Design

Readings
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
While the Peters and Waterman book received enormous attention, there a number of potential concerns about how the authors attempted to determine the attributes of “good companies.” Come to class prepared to discuss the approach taken by Peters and Waterman.
September 5: The Scientific Method and Critiques of that Method

Readings

*Approaches to Social Research*, chapter 2

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

What does the article by “Professor Bones” suggest about how often scientists fool themselves about the accuracy of their conclusions? And what does this imply for us?

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?

September 12: Elements of Research Design

Readings
*Natural Experiments in History*, prologue, chapter 6
*Approaches to Social Research*, chapter 4 (but only skim the section on the nature of causal relationships; we'll come back to that on Sept. 24)

Exercises and Discussion
Identify the unit of analysis, dependent variable, and key independent variables considered in the study of the effect of land tenure in India from *Natural Experiments*. What hypotheses emerge as less and more plausible as a result of this research?
Complete exercise 2 on pages 112-113 in *Approaches* and be prepared to discuss your answers in class.

Be prepared to conduct my exercise about causal order during class.

September 19: Thinking about Causality

*Causal Paper Due*

**Readings**


*Approaches to Social Research*, pp. 96-107

**Exercises 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.

September 26: Measurement and Sampling

*Important Note: today only the class will meet from 7-9:50 p.m.*

**Readings**


*Approaches to Social Research*, chapters 5-6

**Exercises and Discussion**

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

What does Kahneman indicate about the danger of jumping to conclusions based on "small N" samples? What does this suggest about the desirability of "large N" studies?

Be prepared to conduct Jennifer Murphy’s exercise about sampling in class.
October 3: Experimental Research

Readings
_Approaches to Social Research_, chapters 7-8

Discussion
Why is an experimental approach probably the only one that could be used to draw valid causal inferences about political misperceptions of the type that Concern Nyhan and Reifler? What are the implications of their findings for the principles of sound research we emphasize in PPA 205?

October 10: Surveys and Survey Design

Readings
_Approaches to Social Research_, chapters 9-10

Exercise and Discussion
Consider the types of wording issues raised in the Fowler piece. What might these imply about how a researcher should proceed to determine the extent of television viewing among present day American teenagers?

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

October 17: Mid-Term Exam and Field Research, Part One

Film for Viewing in Second Part of Class
“All the President’s Men” (1976)

October 24: Field Research, Part Two

Readings
Approaches to Social Research, chapter 11

Discussion
Why did Yapp and Fairman need to conduct field research rather than simply rely on surveys and/or published data? What different conclusions did they likely reach as a result of doing field research?

October 31: Using Existing Data, Part One- Electronic Data Archives

Prospectus proposal due

Note: the second part of this class session will be reserved for group meetings

Reading
Approaches to Social Research, pp. 393-412

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 7: Using Existing Data, Part Two- Historical Analysis

Reading
Natural Experiments of History, chapters 3-5 (skim remainder), paying particular attention to chapter 5 on the slave trade
Approaches to Social Research, pp. 413-430

Discussion
Think carefully about how the authors draw causal inferences about 1) the effects of political institutions on banking in the New World; 2) the factors that influenced living standards and deforestation on the island of Hispaniola; and 3) the effects of the slave trade on modern prosperity in Africa. Be prepared to discuss these topics in class.

November 14: Evaluation Research and Elementary Data Analysis

Readings
Nancy Shulock and Colleen Moore, “Rules of the Game: How State Policy Creates Barriers to Completion and Impedes Student Success in the California Community Colleges” (Sacramento: Institute for Higher Education Leadership and Policy, 2007)

*Approaches to Social Research*, chapters 14 and 15

**Guest Speaker**
Nancy Shulock

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

To what extent is the Washington case study convincing? Why?

**November 21: No Class (Thanksgiving week break)**

**On-line exercise**
Details will be forthcoming

**November 28: Group Work**

Be prepared to analyze research topics and recommend research approaches in real time.

**December 5: Ethics and Key Course Themes**

**Reading**
*Approaches to Social Research*, chapter 3

**Exercise and Discussion**
Complete exercises 1a-1c on pages 75-76 in *Approaches* and be prepared to discuss them in class.

*Important reminder*: Your research prospectus is due at 4:00 p.m. on December 14!