**CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SACRAMENTO**

**PPA 205**

**Research in Public Policy and Administration**

**Fall, 2021**

Professor Ted Lascher Class meeting time: Mondays,

(530)400-5688 (cell) 6-8:50 p.m., Sacramento State Downtown,

Room 110

Office hours: 4-6 on Mondays, 5-6 on Thursdays, and by appointment

This course focuses on the design of social science research. The broad goals are to enhance students' understanding of 1) how to fashion high quality studies related to public policy and administration and 2) how to critique studies by others. Additionally, the course aims 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 lessons about research design principles central to *this* class.

This syllabus is a living document, subject to revision as the courses progresses.

SPECIFIC LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The Department of Public Policy and Administration has identified a number of learning objectives for the MPPA program as a whole; each core course addresses some of them. The following table lists the objectives applicable to PPA 205 and the way they are covered in this course.

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| **PPA LEARNING OBJECTIVE** | **HOW COVERED IN PPA 205** |
| 1f. Identify, critically examine, and use relevant data to inform policy and administrative decisions. | Use tools from *A Playbook for Research Methods* and class discussion to determine what types of data are appropriate for different contexts and research questions. |
| 2a. Critically use different analytical skills, processes, and tools to address policy and administration problems. | Use tools from *A Playbook for Research Methods* and class discussion to critique arguments about ways to address policy problems, especially causal arguments. |
| 2d. Effectively communicate with different audiences to build understanding of public problems and policy and administration strategies. | Practice writing for different audiences in research prospectus materials. |
| 2e. Write clearly and succinctly as appropriate to various audiences. | Practice writing clearly and concisely in class papers and research prospectus materials. |
| 3c. Consider ethical dimensions of choices in public policy and administration. | Draw from readings and class discussion on September 3 and December 3. |
| 3d. Understand differences between analysis and advocacy including insider and outsider roles. | Draw from readings and class discussion of advocacy and analyst roles on September 3 and December 3. |

CONDUCT OF THE COURSE

This course differs from traditional research methods courses in that a relatively heavy emphasis is placed on classroom participation. 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 will include group discussion, exercises, and the like. I will offer “mini-lectures” during some sessions when that is the most efficient way to convey key ideas, but will never lecture through the entire class. It is therefore imperative that, insofar as possible. you complete the readings—and consider their implications--*before* class sessions to allow you to fully participate.

IN-PERSON AND REMOTE ATTENDANCE

I will deliver this course in an in-person format that abides by all Pandemic Protocols in place during the meeting times. Per university rules, for fall 2021 students not comfortable with in person attendance can access courses through remote delivery. The details of this are still in process; we will provide an update when the details are clear. Nevertheless, be aware that the preferred method of attending PPA courses is in-person. I advise you to obtain the appropriate COVID-19 vaccinations and attend PPA 205 class sessions in person, if possible.

READINGS AND VIDEOS

The following book is required and may be purchased at the Hornet Bookstore.

Patricia Shields and Nandhini Rangarajan, *A Playbook for Research Methods:*

*Integrating Conceptual Frameworks and Project Management* (New Forums

Press, 2013).

Additionally, shorter readings are required and will be available on Canvas (the University’s learning management system) or otherwise provided to students. A few videos are also required and can be accessed through Canvas.

SUMMARY OF ASSIGNMENTS

The most important class assignment is the development of an individual research prospectus for a potential study. Detailed guidelines for the prospectus will be distributed during the semester, and we will devote portions of class sessions to helping you prepare for the assignment. The prospectus will be due on December 17, the last day of the final exam period. A short proposal summary will be due on November 15 and aimed at helping me determine if you are “on track.”

Students will also write two papers, one analyzing causal relationships and one using analysis of a film to consider the tools of exploratory research. Due dates are specified in the detailed class schedule that constitutes the latter part of this syllabus.

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

GRADING WEIGHTS

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

Research prospectus 40%

Causality paper 20%

Exploratory research & film paper 20%

Prospectus proposal 10%

Class participation 10%

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>.

DISTRACTIONS

Please do not use cell phones or surf the Web during class, unless I give you clear permission to do so. You are welcome to use your computer to take notes and for other purposes specified by your instructor.

LATE ASSIGNMENTS AND MISSED CLASSES

I will accept late assignments (or allow for a make-up examination) only in 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. Except under very unusual circumstances, a student who misses three classes will be penalized one entire grade (e.g. an A- for the course will become a B-), and a student who misses more than three classes will receive a failing grade.

CLASS SCHEDULE

August 30: Introduction

**Readings**

*A Playbook for Research Methods,* chapter 1

Haider J. Warraich, “Fauci’s Strategy for Effective Public Health Advocacy: You

Cannot Be Ideological,’” STAT, July 14, 2020

**Exercise and Discussion**

Please be prompt. I will break the class into groups for an in-class exercise

within the first few minutes.

[September 6: No class, Labor Day holiday]

September 13: Theory, Conceptual Frameworks, and Variables

**Readings**

*A Playbook for Research Methods*, chapter 2

Katherine Hobson, “Feeling Lonely? Too Much Time on Social Media May be

Why,” NPR, March 6, 2017

September 20: Deeper into Causality

**Readings**

Maia Szalavitz, “Does Kindergarten Lead to Crime? Fact-Checking N.H.

Legislator’s ‘Research,’” *Time*, July 6, 2012

Edward L. Lascher, Jr., “Learning about Causal Order through Analysis of

Whether Adults Have Children,” in Beth P. Skott and Masjo Ward, Eds.,

*Active Learning Exercises for Research Methods in Social Sciences*

(Sage, 2013)

September 27: Explanation and Formal Hypotheses

***Causal Paper Due before Beginning off Class***

**Readings**

*A Playbook for Research Methods*, chapter 3

Ngan L. T. Tran, Robert W. Wassmer, and Edward L. Lascher, Jr., “The

Health Insurance and Life Satisfaction Connection,” *Journal of*

*Happiness Studies* (2017)

October 4: Experiments, Natural Experiments, and Quasi--Experiments

**Readings**

Jennifer Eberhardt, *Biased: Uncovering the Hidden Prejudice That Shapes*

*What We See, Think, and Do* (Viking, 2019), selection  
Nathan Nunn, “Shackled to the Past: The Causes and Consequences of

Africa’s Slave Trade,” in, Jared Diamond and James A. Robinson, eds.,

*Natural Experiments of History* (Belknap Press, 2010).

October 11: Description, Categories, and Databases

**Readings**

*A Playbook for Research Methods*, chapter 4

Anna Kata, “Anti-vaccine activists, Web2.0, and the postmodern paradigm–An

overview of tactics and tropes used online by the anti-vaccination

movement,” *Vaccine* (2012)

W. David Bradford and Anne Mandich, “Some State Vaccination Laws Contribute

to Greater Exemption Rates and Disease Outbreaks in the United States,”

*Health Affairs* (2015)

October 18: Exploration and Working Hypotheses... and Their Dangers

**Video to Watch Before Class**

Kathryn Schultz, “On Being Wrong,” TED Talk, March 2011

* + Note: I’m not just having you watch this because it’s a *Ted* talk!

**Readings**

*A Playbook for Research Methods*, chapter 5

Christina Kersey, “What Happened to ‘Tuition Free’ College Education?

Explaining Why Fees Have Risen Sharply in the CSU System,”

MPPA thesis, 2012, selections

October 25: Deeper into Exploratory Research

***Paper on Exploratory Research and Film Due before Beginning of Class***

**Films to Watch Before Class**

Watch either “All the President’s Men” (1976, USA) or “No” (2012, Chile)… or both!

November 1: Gauging

**Readings**

*A Playbook for Research Methods*, chapter 6

Jae Ellescas, “A Case Study of EngageRoseville and the Policy Impacts of

Public Engagement,” MPPA thesis, 2020, selections

November 8 Moving Ahead on Your Research Proposal

**Reading**

*A Playbook for Research Methods*, chapters 7 & 8

November 15: Data Collection Strategies and Sampling

***Prospectus Proposal Due before Beginning of Class***

**Readings**

Terra Thorne, “Pathways to Higher Education: Perceptions from College-

Enrolled Former Foster Youth,” MPPA thesis, 2015, selections

“The Literary Digest” entry in Wikipedia

Peverill Squire, “Why the 1936 Literary Digest Poll Failed,” *Public Opinion*

*Quarterly* (1988)

Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and

Giroux, 2011), pp. 109-118

November 22: Measurement

**Readings**

Edward Lascher and John Korey, “The Myth of the Independent Voter, California

Style,” *California Journal of Politics and Policy* (2011)

Beth Dalbey, “And the Most Racist Place in America Is…Closer Than You

Think,” *Patch*, April 29, 2015

November 29: Presentations and Research Ethics

**Readings**

“Wakefield study linking MMR vaccine, autism uncovered as complete fraud,”

Healio, February 1, 2011

Arina K. Bones, “We Knew the Future All Along: Scientific Hypothesizing is

Much More Accurate Than Other Forms of Precognition—A Satire in

One Part,” *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 7 (2012): 307-309  
David Bronell, “The Public Servant as Analyst, Adviser and Analyst,” in

*Public Policy: Why Ethics Matters* (2010)

December 6: Presentations and Wrap-Up

**Reading**

*A Playbook for Research Methods*, chapter 9

***Important reminder:*** *Your research prospectus is due by 5 p.m. on December 17!*