

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SACRAMENTO

PPA 205

Research in Public Policy and Administration

Fall, 2015

Professor Ted Lascher
3029 Tahoe Hall
(916)278-4864 (voice)
(530)400-5688 (cell)
tedl@csus.edu

Class meeting time and place:
Thursdays, 6-8:50 p.m., Center for
Collaborative Policy (CCP), 815 S Street
Office hours: Mondays 4-6 p.m. & Thursdays
5-6 p.m. at CCP; and by appointment in
my Tahoe Hall office

OVERVIEW

This course focuses on the design of social science research. The main 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. 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 lessons about research design principles central to *this* class.

SPECIFIC LEARNING GOALS

At the end of PPA 205 it is expected that students will:

- Understand the importance of thinking systematically about how to answer social science questions, including understanding the advantages and limitations of different research designs and methods.
- Understand the advantages and limitations of experiments, surveys, field research, secondary data sets and other approaches to data collection.
- Work effectively in groups.
- Frame and present problems effectively to different audiences.
- Write effectively for different audiences.
- Understand the difference between analysis and advocacy.

More generally, when you finish this course, I hope you will be able to be excellent consumers and/or producers of research—including producing and using research ethically. This class will help you understand how to identify issues that you might want to study, how to ask the right questions, and how to gather data to answer those questions. You should understand how and why people design research and the importance of the “front end” (design) of studies, the effects each stage of the research process has on the data we collect, and how we can interpret and use the information generated. You should also understand the basic principles that all kinds of methods have in common and how to think systematically about investigating social issues.

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 of my own device, drawn from the main text used in class (*Approaches to Social Research*), or drawn from others. It is therefore imperative that you read the syllabus carefully to be well prepared and that to the extent possible you complete the readings *before* class.

READINGS

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

Royce A. Singleton, Jr., and Bruce C. Straits. *Approaches to Social Research*, 5th Edition. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Additionally, shorter readings are required and will be available on SacCT or otherwise provided to students.

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 18, the last day of the final exam period. A short proposal summary will be due on November 5 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 under significant time pressure and facing considerable assignment ambiguity. The intention 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 develop protocols for a survey and interviews, complete a short causal analysis paper, and develop a set of possible questions to research. Dates for these assignments are specified in the course schedule; more detailed guidelines for each will be provided.

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.

TOOL KIT

I expect that you will leave PPA 205 with a “tool kit” of documents that should be helpful for you in the remainder of your academic career, including in PPA 207 (Quantitative Methods) if you take that class. The elements of the tool kit consist of the following:

- **A glossary of terms (not graded).** For subsequent work you will need to be proficient with many of the terms used in PPA 205 and *Approaches to Social Research*. Therefore, to ensure you are better prepared in venues such as PPA 207, I will hand out a glossary template with terms that you will need to know for the spring semester. This is for your reference but I suggest that you check it weekly and fill out the terms as you learn them.
- **A running chart of pros, cons, uses, and challenges/limitations of each method discussed in class (not graded).** This chart will be a “cheat sheet” for use when you are thinking about which methods to use for your theses or other research projects.
- **A list of research questions that you might be interested in exploring, along with your thoughts about hypotheses connected to those questions (graded).** These questions could help you get a head start on a thesis or simply be issues that you’re interested in exploring.
- **Survey and interview protocols, i.e., list of questions (graded).** Constructing these tools will help you apply what you learning from the readings about how to

create unbiased instruments, developed with the appropriate respondents in mind.

- **Final research prospectus (graded).**

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/um anual/AcademicHonestyPolicyandProcedures.htm>.

DISTRACTIONS

Please do not use cell phones or surf the Web during class. You are welcome to bring a laptop computer to take notes or for other purposes specified by your instructor, but I may prohibit laptops if they are being used inappropriately.

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. 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.

GRADING WEIGHTS

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

Case study prospectus	30%
Causality paper	15%
Survey and interview protocols	15%
Group project	10%
Research questions for toolkit	10%
Prospectus proposal	10%
Class participation	10%

CLASS SCHEDULE

September 3: Introduction & the Importance of Good Research Design

Readings

Approaches to Social Research, chapters 1 & 2

Exercises and Discussion

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

Additionally, complete exercises 1 and 3 on pages 44-45 in *Approaches* and be prepared to discuss your answers in class.

September 10: A Scientific Approach, an Ethical Inclination

Readings

André Picard, "Medical Fraud Revealed in Discredited Vaccine-Autism Study," *The Globe and Mail [Toronto]*, January 6, 2011, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/life/health-and-fitness/from-the-2011-archive-medical-fraud-revealed-in-discredited-vaccine-autism-study/article621543/>

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

Matthew C. Makel and Jonathan A. Plucker, "Facts Are More Important Than Novelty: Replication in the Education Sciences," *Educational Researcher* published online 13 August 2014 (skim)

Approaches to Social Research, chapter 3

Discussion

Consider *why* people might be inclined to engage in scientific fraud and *what* might discourage them from doing so.

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?

September 17: Elements of Research Design

Research Questions and Hypotheses Due

Readings

Christopher F. Chabris and Daniel J. Simons, "Does This Ad Make Me Fat?"
The New York Times, March 8, 2013
http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/10/opinion/sunday/does-this-ad-make-me-fat.html?_r=0

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. 25)

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)

Exercises and Discussion

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 24: Thinking about Causality

Causal Paper Due

Readings

Henry E. Brady, "Data-Set Observations versus Causal-Process Observations: The 2000 Presidential Election," in Brady and David Collier, *Rethinking Social Inquiry* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2004)

Sandeep Jauhar, "Giving Doctors Grades" (blog), July 22, 2015
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.

October 1: Measurement

Readings

Edward L. Lascher, Jr. and John L. Korey, "The Myth of the Independent Voter, California Style," *The California Journal of Politics & Policy* 3 (2011): Iss. 1, Article 2

John B. McConahay, Betty B. Hardee, and Valerie Batts, "Has Racism Declined in America? It Depends on Who Is Asking and What Is Asked?" *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 25 (1981): 563-579

Beth Dalbey, "And the Most Racist Place in America Is... Closer Than You Think," *Northville Patch*, May 1, 2015

Sendhil Mullainathan, "Racial Bias, Even When We Have Good Intentions," *The New York Times*, January 3, 2015

Approaches to Social Research, chapter 5

Discussion

Think about how you might measure three concepts regarding individual American adults: 1) how *educated* they are; 2) whether they *identify with a political party*; and 3) the extent to which they hold *racist attitudes*. Which is most difficult to measure? Why?

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

October 8: Sampling

Readings

Don A. Dilman, Jolene D. Smith, and Leah Melani Christian, *Internet, Phone, Mail, and Mixed-Mode Surveys: The Tailored Design Method*, 4th Ed. (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2014), pp. 1-12

Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (New York: Farrar, Straus, And Giroux, 2011), pp. 109-118

Approaches to Social Research, chapter 6 (skim; in this case I think the selection from Dilman et al. is more useful)

Guest Speaker

Guest speaker from the Institute of Social Research

Discussion

What are the various types of error that pose challenges to someone trying to draw lessons from a survey sample?

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?

October 15: Experimental Research

Readings

Brendan Nyhan and Jason Reifler, "When Perceptions Fail: The Persistence of Political Misperceptions," *Political Behavior* 32 (2010): 303-330
 Rose McDermott, "The 10 Commandments of Experiments," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 46 (2013), pp. 605-610
Approaches to Social Research, chapters 7-8

Discussion

Why is an experimental approach likely the only one that could be used to draw valid causal inferences about the political misperceptions that concern Nyhan and Reifler? What are the implications of their findings for the extent to which we can expect people to respect principles of sound research?

October 22: Surveys and Survey Design

Survey and Interview Protocols Due

Readings

Floyd Jackson Fowler, Jr., "How Unclear Terms Affect Survey Data," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 56 (1992): 218-231
 Gina Walejko, "Online Survey: Instant Publication, Instant Mistake, All of the Above," in Eszter Hargittai, Ed., *Research Confidential: Solutions to Problems Most Social Scientists Pretend They Never Have* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009), pp. 101-121
Approaches to Social Research, chapters 9-10

Exercise and Discussion

Be prepared to discuss your interview protocol in class.

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 29: Field Research and Multi-Methods

Audio

This American Life, episode 490, "Trends with Benefits," March 22, 2013

Readings

Venezia, A., M. Kirst, and A. Antonio. March 2003. "Betraying the College Dream: How Disconnected Systems Undermine Student Aspirations," the

final policy report and brief of the Bridge Project, Stanford, CA: Stanford Institute for Higher Education Research.
Approaches to Social Research, chapter 11, 13

Guest Speaker: To be announced

Discussion

What did NPR reporter Chana Joffe-Walt get out of a field work approach to examining the disability program that she could not have obtained from another approach?

Why did Professor Venezia choose a field work approach to examine how community college 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?

November 5: Using Existing Data, Part One- Electronic Data Archives

Prospectus proposal due

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 12: A) Using Existing Data, Part Two- Historical Analysis; B) Writing for Different Audiences

To Do Before Class

Visit the California Legislative Information Web site, <http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/>. Search for AB 333 from 2009 (Fuentes). Read the bill analyses by the Assembly Local Government Committee and Senate Local Government Committee.

Readings

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).
Approaches to Social Research, pp. 413-430

Jane E. Miller, *The Chicago Guide to Writing about Numbers* (University of Chicago Press, 2004), ch. 11

Discussion

Think carefully about how the authors draw causal inferences about the effects of the slave trade on modern prosperity in Africa. Be prepared to discuss this topic in class.

Imagine that the lawmakers reading the AB 333 bill analyses were trying to assess causal claims about what the effects of the bill would be. Which analysis is written in such a way as to better prepare the legislators to evaluate such claims? Why?

November 19: 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)

Mary Kirilin and Nancy Shulock, "On Balance: Lessons in Effective Coordination from the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges- An Organizational Perspective " (Sacramento: Institute for Higher Education Leadership and Policy, 2012)

Approaches to Social Research, chapters 14 and 15

Guest Speaker

Nancy Shulock, former Director, Institute for Higher Education Leadership and Policy (now Education Insights Center)

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 26: No Class, Thanksgiving

Group Work

You should make plans to meet in your small groups in preparation for the December 3 group exercise

December 3: Group Exercise

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

December 10: Revisiting Ethical Obligations and Key Course Themes

Readings

Jesse Singal, "The Case of the Amazing Gay-Marriage Data: How a Graduate Student Reluctantly Uncovered a Huge Scientific Fraud," *New York Magazine*, May 29, 2015

Felicia B. LeClere, "Data Are Always the Smoking Gun," *Inside Higher Education* June 25, 2015

Review *Approaches to Social Research*, chapter 3

Discussion and Exercises

What if any lessons should we take from the Michael LaCour scandal regarding how to promote ethical research?

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 to my in electronic form by 10:00 a.m. on December 18!*