

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SACRAMENTO
PPA 205: Research in Public Policy and Administration
Fall 2019

Professor Andrea Venezia
Classroom: TBA downtown
Day/time: Thursdays from 6-8:50pm

DRAFT

This is a “living document;” I will modify it as needed over the course of the semester.

The best ways to reach me are to come to office hours on Thursdays from 4:30-5:50pm in my Sacramento State Downtown office or by appointment on campus 8-9am Tuesday/Thursday, email me at venezia@csus.edu, or schedule a time to talk with me outside of office hours.

OVERVIEW

Welcome to PPA 205! This course focuses on the kinds of thinking that goes on behind the scenes in order to do rigorous social science research—and in order to determine if the research you’re using is rigorous and sound. While many of you are not researchers, understanding how good research is done will help you determine whether the information you read – from academic journals to mainstream media sources – is sound enough to use for public policy purposes. This is particularly important in an era in which many people get their information from social media. The main goals of this course are to enhance your understanding of how to develop high quality studies related to public policy and administration, and how to “consume” or use them as part of your work. This includes having an understanding of a number of different, common, research approaches, including their potential pitfalls. This course will help prepare you for your thesis, and will hopefully provide you with new analytical lenses for your professional lives as well. Being able to understand what goes into creating instruments that gather data will help you assess whether the data you see online and elsewhere are sound. Another way that I hope you will connect the readings and class discussions to your out-of-school lives is to have you make components of a toolkit throughout the semester.

PPA 205 is not primarily a course on data analysis; another core course, PPA 207, focuses on that topic. Since PPA 207 is focused on quantitative methods, this class focuses on a) the research design decisions and implications that then lead to a decision about which methods to use (qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods) and b) qualitative methods. Often, quantitative data come from surveys, so it is important to know where the data you consume come from. ***A critical underpinning of this course is that methods are just strategies that are used to collect data; the critical decisions that affect the rigor and generalizability of research come both prior to data collection (during the research design phase)***

and during data collection. You might not understand what this means when you read this syllabus for the first time, but make sure you understand this thoroughly before you finish this course!

Some of the readings in the textbook might seem abstract, although the authors do a great job of providing research-based examples throughout. To help you connect your classroom-based understandings to your world outside of school, I will supplement your textbook readings with articles from newspapers and podcasts. I very much welcome you bringing such resources to the class' attention throughout the course. If you notice a newspaper article that discusses causation, for example, please send me the link or bring the article to class. Let me know if you find an article you wish to share with the class.

SPECIFIC LEARNING GOALS

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|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 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 using different ways to collect data, such as via experiments, surveys, interviews, and focus groups. |
| Work effectively in groups. |
| Frame and present problems effectively to different audiences. |
| Write effectively for different audiences. |
| Understand the difference between analysis and advocacy. |

From a big picture perspective, when you finish this course, I hope you will be able to be excellent and ethical consumers and/or on a path to being good producers of research. This class will help you understand how to identify issues that you might want to study, how to ask the right questions to study the issues, how to design a way to answer the questions, and how to gather data to answer those questions. On the flip side, understanding those issues will help you ask the right questions about information that you use on a daily basis—to question biases and to understand limitations. You will hopefully leave the course with a new perspective about the power and limitations of research, and of information in the public domain. You should understand how and why people design research and the importance of the “front end” (design) of research, the effects each stage of the research process has on the data we collect, and how we can interpret and use the information generated by the research. You should understand the basic principles that all kinds of methods — how we go about collecting and analyzing data — have in common and how to think systematically about investigating social science issues.

CONDUCT OF THE COURSE AND COURSE POLICIES

This course differs from traditional research methods courses in that a relatively heavy emphasis is placed on applying what you learn and on classroom discussion. Simply listening to a lecture will not help you engage with and learn the concepts. Accordingly, a typical class will include discussion topics that are specified in the syllabus. Many class sessions will also use exercises; I will create some exercises, borrow some from previous PPA instructors, and use exercises from Approaches to Social Research (called simply “Approaches” throughout this syllabus). It is therefore imperative that you read the syllabus carefully to be prepared for class and to complete the readings and assignments before class.

Getting help. It is important that you understand the material we are covering in class. The class is structured as a series of building blocks. You don’t want to miss a foundational piece. If for any reason, you do not understand the readings, it is essential that you gain clarity on the topic *during the time in which we are covering those topics*. You can speak up in class to ask for clarification or you can speak with me privately (via email, phone, in office hours, by appointment, or during class breaks). I also encourage to seek help from your classmates. I am best reached via email, and I will get back to emails sent between Monday and Thursday within 48 hours.

Basic Needs Support

If you are experiencing challenges in the area of food and/or stable housing—Sacramento State offers basic needs support for students who are experiencing challenges in these areas. Please visit the Basic Needs website to learn more about your options and resources available: <https://www.csus.edu/basicneeds/>

Students with 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.

Missing class. 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., a A- for the course will become a B-), and a student who misses more than three classes will receive a failing grade.

Late assignments. I will not accept late assignments (or allow for a make-up) unless a student experiences a highly unusual circumstance (and talks with me ahead of time, unless missing an assignment was due to an unforeseen emergency; a competing requirement for another class is **not** a compelling reason). At my discretion, I might allow a student who misses a deadline to make up an assignment. Whether a student who does a make-up could still earn full credit for the assignment depends on the situation. If there is not a compelling reason, I will not accept late assignments. Unless otherwise specified, homework is due by 5pm on

the assigned class day and must be time stamped as such (via email). **Please use Microsoft Word for all assignments so that I can edit them electronically.**

Re-writes. I encourage you to come to office hours and/or email me to get advice about homework assignments. I hope that you will learn the material well and demonstrate that by doing well on the assignments, and I am here to help you. My goal is for you to meet or exceed the class objectives and I understand that that sometimes requires re-doing work. I cannot let everyone re-write every assignment; that takes a lot of work to grade and I would then not be prompt in returning anyone's papers. Since I created the class as a series of building blocks, it is important for you to receive timely feedback. Therefore, I will decide upon re-writes on a case-by-case basis and will limit those opportunities, so please do your best the first time around.

Distractions. Please do not use cell phones or surf the web in class. I know that some people take notes electronically so that you can access them easily later. I trust that you will not quickly check email or social media during class. But I know that life happens 24/7 and many of us are juggling a lot. If you are experiencing a family emergency and you are awaiting a phone call, please step into the hall if a text or call comes in during class.

Academic Honesty. I take plagiarism and other acts of academic dishonesty very seriously. I reserve the right to fail students who are academically dishonest. 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/ummanual/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.

If you are unclear about what constitutes plagiarism, it is your responsibility to educate yourself at the beginning of the semester and/or come talk with me.

READINGS

The following book is required: Royce A. Singleton, Jr., and Bruce C. Straits. Approaches to Social Research, 5th Edition. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. **The 6th edition is available and you are welcome to get it, but it's much more expensive than the 5th edition and that's not worth it.** I will use the 5th edition and all the references I made to exercises and page numbers will be from that edition.

Additionally, I will make shorter readings available via hard copy or SacCT, or I will hand them out in class.

SUMMARY OF ASSIGNMENTS

Please note: I am assigning readings and a paper before the first day of class.

Completing some reading before class starts will jump start the class into a productive discussion, and it will leave more time in the middle and end of the course for applied exercises and discussions. Writing a short paper prior to calls allows me to understand a bit about each of you so that I can meet you each where you are and then help move your understandings/thinking forward. (This is called formative assessment and is a research method.)

I redesigned the course significantly recently. It used to have a very academic focus. Given that most of you likely do not want to become academic researchers, I want to make sure that you each will leave this class with the ability to develop practically-oriented instruments that you can use for your thesis and at work. It is surprisingly difficult to do that – to make sure that it is free of biases, people will engage with it, and you can make sense of the information you get from it. I believe that we learn by doing, and that creating instruments will help you get a better understanding of critical issues related to the use of sound evidence than will reading information in a textbook.

Please use double-spaced pages with 12 point font for all assignments. The class assignments are:

- **A glossary of terms.** This will not be graded. To ensure that you are ready to succeed in 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. You will not turn it in for a grade, but I highly suggest that you check it weekly and fill out the terms as you learn them. Please bring it to each class.
- **A running chart of pros, cons, uses, and challenges/limitations of each method discussed in class.** This will not be graded. This chart will be a “cheat sheet” for you next semester when you are thinking about which methods to use for your theses and how to discuss the pros and cons of the method(s) you select. Please bring it to each class.
- **A list of research questions that you are interested in exploring, along with your thoughts about hypotheses connected to those questions.** Since rigorous and sound instruments depend upon a thorough understanding of the literature, you will hopefully have ideas that connect to things you have read—but writing a sound literature review is not part of this class. You could do a very cursory search of the literature to generate ideas about what you want to explore via surveys and interviews.
- **Survey instrument.** You will develop a survey instrument to gather data to answer your research question. You will need to create a list of themes (sections) for an outline of the instrument. Your questions should be unbiased, not leading, not multi-faceted (no double or triple barreled questions!), tailored for the right audience(s), etc., and they should yield answers that should be fairly easy to analyze. This means you will have to have sparing use of open-ended questions—but I want each survey to have at least one open-ended question so that you gain the experience of coding (analyzing) that information. Pay attention to how long the survey would like take someone to complete; aim for no longer than 15 minutes. You will then be responsible for administering the survey to at least five other people (I'll revisit this number once I see how many people are enrolled in the class; last year, this was a group project and I don't think that went very well, so I am changing it to an individual project for this year. Your experiences in groups will be during class. My understanding is that there can be so many group projects across all the classes in one semester that it can be hard on you all logistically. At the same time, there's a group learning objective for this class that we need to meet.).
- **An interview protocol** (list of questions). You will need to create a list of themes (sections) for an outline of the instrument and then create questions to address each theme. Your questions should be unbiased, not leading, not

multi-faceted (no double or triple barreled questions!), tailored for the right audience(s), etc. Your protocol should flow in such a way that it will be engaging for the interviewees—so that it creates a narrative through the discussion of the questions. Pay attention to how long it would likely take to use the interview protocol; aim for no longer than 45 minutes. You will then be responsible for administering the interview protocol to at least five other people (I will revisit this number once we see how many people are enrolled in the class).

- **A coding template** (to make sense of the qualitative data).
- **Individual paper based on your findings from the research.** It is a bit mind numbing to make sense of qualitative data and it takes time. This will help you understand what you consume better, and it will help you decide if you want to include qualitative methods in your thesis. You will analyze the survey results and analyze the data from the interviews. Since the analysis part is the focal point of this assignment, it does not need to be long. The paper needs to be in two parts: one with the findings framed for policymakers and one with the findings reframed for another audience of your choosing. Please keep the paper to 4-6 or fewer pages in total (for both parts). Finally, add a paragraph, on a separate page, reflecting on what it was like to reframe the findings for another audience.
- **Toolkit.** Please make a short list (or a piece of art or whatever strikes your fancy) of the main topics/issues/tools from this class that resonated for you – that you think you will use for your thesis/project and/or for work. This assignment will serve a secondary objective—to help me see what resonated for people.

I will also consider your class participation 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.

LIST OF ALL ASSIGNMENTS, DUE DATES, AND GRADING WEIGHTS

Final class grades will be determined in accordance with the following weights (remember, there are other, ungraded, assignments, so this is not an exhaustive list of assignments):

- Individual “pre-class” paper 10% **due August 26 by 10am**
- Research questions, hypotheses, and audience(s) 10% **due on September 12 by 5pm**
- Survey 20% **due by October 10 (draft) by 5pm and October 17 (final) by 5pm**

- Interview protocol 20% **due by October 17 (draft) by 5pm and October 24 (final) by 5pm**
- Toolkit 10% **due by December 5 by 5pm**
- Paper based on findings from research 20% **due by December 12 by 5pm**
- Class participation 10% (this includes completing exercises from Approaches to be discussed and sometimes turned in during class)

I use a 100 point scale, so each assignment is worth the number of points as its weight (the survey is 20% of your grade and worth 20 points); here is the grading table:

| Letter Grade | Percent Grade |
|---------------------|----------------------|
| A | 93-96 |
| A- | 90-92 |
| B+ | 87-89 |
| B | 83-86 |
| B- | 80-82 |
| C+ | 77-79 |
| C | 73-76 |
| C- | 70-72 |
| D+ | 67-69 |
| D | 65-66 |
| E/F | Below 65 |

CLASS SCHEDULE

August 29

Part I: Introduction to the course and to each other

Part II: Why Does Good Research Design Matter in Our Lives?

Readings:

Read Chapters 1 and 2 of Approaches prior to the first day of class.

Homework:

Write **1-2 double-spaced pages** about the following: what you hope to learn in terms of being a good *consumer* of research and what you hope to learn to become a good *producer* of research. Describe any experience you have being a consumer and/or producer of research, and discuss your policy area(s) of interest. Finally, please read the Table of Contents in Approaches and, in your paper, include any questions you have for me about the issues we will

discuss over the course of the semester. There is no grade for this assignment. Your paper will help me understand where you are each starting from with regard to your understanding of the broad issues and concepts discussed in the textbook, and it will help you become grounded in some of the key introductory issues for this class. **Please email your paper to me by 10am on August 26.**

Exercises and Discussion:

Introductions, etc.

Be prepared to discuss exercises 1 and 3 from Chapter 2 in class.

September 5 Scientific Approaches and Ethics

Readings:

1) re-read/skim Chapter 2; 2) Chapter 3 in Approaches; and 3) an article on vaccines and autism located at:

<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/life/health-and-fitness/from-the-2011-archive-medical-fraud-revealed-in-discredited-vaccine-autism-study/article621543/>

Exercises and Discussion:

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

September 12 Designing Research: What Do You Need to Think About First?

Readings:

1) Chapters 4, 5 (skim 134-140 but read the rest), and 6 (skim pages 159-177, but read the rest) in Approaches, 2) "Does This Ad Make Me Fat?" New York Times article available at:

http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/10/opinion/sunday/does-this-ad-make-me-fat.html?_r=0, and 3) article on medical diagnostics available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2013/03/24/magazine/diagnosis-wobbly-walk.html#/#possible>.

Homework:

Research questions, hypotheses, and intended audience(s) due.

In-class:

You will complete an in-class assignment about causation. We'll also talk about problem definition.

SEPTEMBER 19: THERE WILL LIKELY BE NO CLASS BECAUSE ANDREA HAS WORK TRAVEL, OR THERE WILL BE A GUEST SPEAKER.

September 26 Understanding causality and the thinking behind “gold star” research (randomized trials)

Reading:

Chapters 7 and 8 in Approaches. 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).

Article:

https://www.theatlantic.com/family/archive/2018/06/marshmallow-test/561779/?utm_source=atfb

Homework, Exercises, and Discussion:

Think carefully about Brady’s 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?

October 3 Survey research

Readings:

1) Chapters 9-10 in Approaches and 2) Floyd Jackson Fowler, Jr., “How Unclear Terms Affect Survey Data,” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 56 (1992): 218-231.

Exercises and Discussion:

Andrea to hand out anonymized examples of interview protocols (with and without edits).

Complete exercise 3 on page 308 and 4 on 352 (both are in Approaches) and be prepared to talk about them in class.

October 10 Interviews

Readings:

Chapter 11 in Approaches.

Homework:

Survey instrument draft due. Bring copies/have online so that you can administer it as a pilot tonight.

Exercises and Discussion:

Pilot your surveys and get feedback.

October 17 Guest speaker: how do people in state policy use research/evidence?

Readings:

[Speaker to provide reading.]

Homework:

Revised and final survey due. Draft interview protocol due. Bring copies/have online so that you can administer it as a pilot tonight.

Exercises and Discussion:

Pilot your interview protocol tonight and get feedback. Half the class will be for this and half will be for the speaker.

October 24 Review, integration of concepts (mixed methods), possible movie night using movie that demonstrates good research

Readings:

For this class, there is no reading. Listen to the following This American Life podcast: <http://thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/490/trends-with-benefits>. Think about the issues we have discussed so far in class related to this story (such as the role of theory in trying to understand public policy issues, the impact of public policies, collecting information to answer social policy issues) and be prepared to talk about them in class.

Homework:

Final interview protocol due.

In-class:

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

We will watch about half of the film in class.

OCTOBER 31 – HALLOWEEN, NO CLASS

November 7 Consuming information and applying what you've learned

Readings:

1) Chapters 13 and 17 in Approaches, 2) *One Shot Deal*, and 3) *Betraying the College Dream*

In-class:

Why do you think my colleagues and I chose a field work approach to examine how community college students understood assessment and placement? What did we learn from this approach that we probably could not have learned from statistical analysis of available data? What were the weaknesses of this approach?

Why do you think we selected the methods we used in *Betraying the College Dream*? What strengths did each method bring? What are the limitations of each method?

Do you look at research differently now than you did prior to starting this class? If so, how so?

November 14 Administer your instruments

You will spend this night administering your instruments.

November 21 Making sense of qualitative data

Tonight, we will talk about the rigorous processes you should use to make sense of the data you collected. You will make coding templates.

NOVEMBER 28 – THANKSGIVING – NO CLASS

December 5 Evaluation—guest speaker

Readings:

Chapter 14 from Approaches

Homework:

Toolkits due. Part of class will be spent on people sharing toolkits.

December 12

*****LAST DAY OF CLASS*****

Revisiting research ethics in light of everything you have learned, course wrap-up. Possibly ask current students to visit to talk about thesis process.

Homework:

Final papers due.

Time for student evaluations.