

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SACRAMENTO

PPA 205 Research in Public Policy and Administration

Fall, 2020

Online, Via Zoom

Professor Ted Lascher
(530)400-5688 (cell)

Class meeting time: Thursdays,
6-8:50 p.m.

Office hours: 4-6 on Tuesdays & Wednesdays
& 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.

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.

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 <i>A Playbook for Research Methods</i> 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	Use tools from <i>A Playbook for Research Methods</i> and class discussion to critique

and administration problems.	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 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 will include group discussion, exercises, and the like. It is therefore imperative that insofar as possible you complete the readings—and consider their implications--*before* class sessions.

Since the fall 2020 version of this course will be conducted entirely online, it is also helpful to share standards and expectations for that mode of delivery. I will do so in a separate document to be provided students prior to the initial class session.

READINGS

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 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. 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 18, the last day of the final exam period. A short proposal summary will be due on November 12 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/umannual/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 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.

CLASS SCHEDULE

September 3: 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 10: 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 17: 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 24: Explanation and Formal Hypotheses

Causal Paper Due before Beginning of 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 1: 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 8: Description and Categories

Readings

A Playbook for Research Methods, chapter 4

Justin W. Marlin, "Bicycle Transportation Issues: Describing the Attitudes and Opinions of Cyclists in Austin, Texas," Applied Research Project, Texas State University, 2008, selections

October 15: 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 22: 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!

October 29: 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 5: Moving Ahead on Your Research Proposal**Reading**

A Playbook for Research Methods, chapters 7 & 8

November 12: Data Collection Strategies***Prospectus Proposal Due before Beginning of Class*****Reading**

Terra Thorne, "Pathways to Higher Education: Perceptions from College-Enrolled Former Foster Youth," MPPA thesis, 2014, selections

November 19: Sampling and Measurement**Readings**

"The Literary Digest" entry in Wikipedia

Peeverill 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

Beth Dalbey, "And the Most Racist Place in America Is...Closer Than You Think," *Patch*, April 29, 2015

[November 26: No Class, Thanksgiving Holiday]

December 3: 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 10: 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 18!*