

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SACRAMENTO
PPA 205: Research in Public Policy and Administration
Fall, 2025

Professor: Dr. Shane Nordyke
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Class meeting time: Wednesday
 6-8:50 p.m., Sacramento State Downtown
 Room 104/105

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 Sacramento State Downtown, Room 226

Email is my preferred form of contact, but feel free to text or call me as needed

Course Description:

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. However, this course does aim to acquaint you with key concepts and familiarize you with the tools that will be fundamental to PPA 207 in preparation for that course. We will give some attention to the types of data analysis that may be used in the various approaches we will consider. Additionally, we will draw from real world studies that use quantitative and qualitative analysis to illustrate lessons about research design principles central to this course.

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

Statement of Respect & Inclusion

This course provides an opportunity for us all to learn from each other. We must strive to affirm and value each individual's beliefs, backgrounds, and experiences. Every member of this learning community must be treated with dignity and respect.

Land Acknowledgment

Sacramento State is proud to recognize the California Native Nations, communities, and peoples throughout the state and acknowledge the diverse Indigenous peoples connected to this territory.

Our campus operates on the traditional and ancestral homelands of the Miwok, Wintu, Maidu, Nisenan (Southern Maidu), and Patwin Native peoples.

LEARNING GOALS

The PPA faculty members have established a set of learning goals for the program as a whole and have identified particular ones that are relevant to PPA 205. Following are the primary goals for the course and how they are to be met in PPA 205.

PPA LEARNING OBJECTIVE	HOW COVERED IN PPA 205
1f. Identify, critically examine, and use relevant data to inform policy and administrative decisions.	Both readings cover this material directly and Quant worksheets provide students a chance to practice these skills.
2a. Critically use different analytical skills, processes, and tools to address policy and administration problems.	Readings, lectures, and assignments will focus on the ability 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 and using effective oral communication in presentations.
2e. Write clearly and succinctly as appropriate to various audiences.	Practice writing clearly and concisely in the research prospectus.
3c. Consider ethical dimensions of choices in public policy and administration.	Complete CITI training to understand the challenges of working with human subjects. Incorporate an understanding of ethical dimensions into research prospectus.
3d. Understand differences between analysis and advocacy including insider and outsider roles.	Draw from readings and class discussion of advocacy and analyst roles as we understand how to use data to develop, support, and critique arguments.

CONDUCT OF THE COURSE

As is the case with most PPA courses, there is a relatively heavy emphasis placed on classroom participation. While I will start each course with some amount of lecture on course content, the latter half of the course will focus on application. The concepts in this course must be used to analyze real world studies and information. It is also critical to practice research skills in order for them to take root. It is therefore imperative that you complete the readings and any homework assignment before class sessions to allow you to fully participate.

READINGS

For this course we will primarily rely on two open-source textbooks:

[Polimetrics: A Companion to Introduction to Political Science Research Methods, 1st Edition](#)

[Social Science Research: Principles, Methods and Practices \(Revised edition\) – UniSQ Open Textbooks](#)

Both are available as free downloadable PDFs.

There are no costs for books in this class, however, you will need to purchase a license for the STATA Statistical Package. Prices for students are \$48 for six months, \$94 for a year, or \$225 for a perpetual license. Keep in mind that you will also use STATA in your 207 course and may want to use it for your culminating project.

You will need a laptop, loaded with STATA and Excel from September 17th, so please purchase the basic version of STATA (STATA/BE) for your own machine before the fourth class starts. Please visit:

<https://www.stata.com/order/new/edu/profplus/student-pricing/>

If you have any questions on purchasing or installing this software, please email me.

Additionally, I may assign other readings, videos, or podcasts which will be made available in Canvas.

ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTIONS AND GRADING WEIGHTS

Citi-Training	5%
Literature Grid	10%
Quantitative Worksheets	20%
Midterm	15%
Peer Review	10%
Research Prospectus	20%
Presentation	10%
Class Participation	10%

Citi-Training – You will complete the CITI Human Subjects Research training certification. This training is required for anyone participating in research that involves human subjects but also provides a good overview of the ethics and legal requirements of working with human subjects. This is an all or nothing assignment, if you complete CITI training with a passing score, you will receive 100% for this assignment (regardless of your score), if you do not complete it, you will receive a 0. You should allow 2-3

hours to complete this certification, though it may take a bit less or more. Full instructions for registration can be found in section 2 here:

<https://www.csus.edu/compliance/research-integrity-compliance/human-subjects-research.html>

Literature Grid – As the first step in writing the literature review you will need for your research prospectus, you will complete a literature grid which summarizes the findings of the articles you are reviewing. A template will be provided and further details about this assignment will be provided in class.

Quantitative Worksheets – Students will complete two quantitative worksheets which are designed to allow you to practice utilizing STATA for basic quantitative analysis. Students are welcome to collaborate on these worksheets but are responsible for understanding the content in preparation for the midterm exam. Each worksheet will be worth 10% of the student's final grade.

Midterm – This midterm is scheduled for the first hour of class on October 22. Please make sure you are present for the exam. It will be an in-class exam covering the material from the first half of the semester with an emphasis on understanding terms and applying concepts. A review guide will be provided 2 weeks prior to the exam.

Peer review – Peer review is an important part of the academic process and reviewing the work of other is also an important part of most public sector professions. Time will be set aside in class for you to read, review, and provide suggestions on the research prospectus of another student. You will be provided with a rubric and given the opportunity to recommend substantive changes to their work. Your grade for this assignment will be based on the quality of feedback you provide. You will also receive the benefit of having your work reviewed prior to final submission.

Research Prospectus – A research prospectus includes all of the pieces of a traditional research paper except for the actual analysis and conclusion. It includes:

- An introduction to your research question
- A literature review
- A description of the research design you would use to answer the question
- Initial Hypotheses
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Further details about the expectations for each of these sections will be provided in class. **You are strongly encouraged to use this assignment to begin work on a question you might be interested in for your PPA500 Culminating Project.** The assignment allows you to explore an area of interest to you that you can build on in other courses. You will have an opportunity to receive peer-review on your initial draft of this assignment. Your final grade for this assignment will be based on the initial draft and the final draft which incorporates needed revisions.

Presentation – During the last week of scheduled class and the scheduled final exam time, students will make a 6-7 minute presentation on their research prospectus. Details about what the content and formatting of these presentations will be provided in class. Your grade will be based both on the content of the presentation as well as clear and concise delivery of the material.

Class Participation – Students are expected to be well-prepared and active participants in the course. This includes completing assigned reading materials and assignments before they are due and actively participating in course discussions and activities. See also the policy below on Missed Classes.

SPECIAL NEEDS RELATED TO DISABILITIES

Should you need assistance with portions of the class due to disabilities, please let me know as soon as possible. The University offers services to students 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>.

The department policy on the use of AI allows each individual faculty member to decide on what appropriate use looks like. It is up to the student to know and follow the policy set forth by each faculty member and for each class. In this class, you may use AI tools for the following:

- Identifying initial sources to you use in your literature review (you should always double check that they exist and are relevant to your question).
- Further explain course concepts in a reiterative manner.
- Provide basic spelling and grammar support for your writing assignments.
- Assist in writing STATA do files and commands if you are stuck.
- Assist in describing statistical output, as long as you are able to describe the substantive results in your own words.

The following uses of AI are inappropriate:

- Writing initial or final drafts of whole paper sections
- Relying on AI to summarize articles without reading them or checking their accuracy.

If you are in doubt about whether a use of is appropriate, ask in advance. In all cases, you should keep track of the prompts you ask, and the responses provided by your AI tool.

DISTRACTIONS

Please do not use cell phones or engage in distracting online activities during class unless I instruct you to do so. Regular distracting or inattentive behavior will have a negative impact on your participation grade.

MAKE-UP ASSIGNMENTS AND MISSED CLASSES

Assignment deadlines are to be taken seriously. At my discretion, a student who misses a deadline *may* be able to submit a late or make-up assignment. Whether this will be allowed, and whether a penalty will still be assessed, depends on the reason for missing a deadline (e.g., a family emergency constitutes a good reason; a competing requirement for another course does not). You should inform me prior to the session if you must miss class on a specific day. **Except under very unusual circumstances, a student who misses three classes will be penalized one entire grade (e.g., a B+ for the course will become a C+), and a student who misses more than three classes will receive a failing grade.**

CLASS SCHEDULE (subject to revisions)

All readings and assignments are to be completed BEFORE the class period for which they are scheduled.

The Franco readings often include Mini-Assignments. Unless specifically assigned, you are not required to complete these mini-assignments, HOWEVER, I strongly recommend that you watch the videos he includes in these mini-assignments. They are incredibly helpful, especially if you are new to STATA.

Date	Topic	Assigned Readings and Assignments
27-Aug	Introductions and the Basics of Research Design	Syllabus Bhattacharjee Chapter 2
3-Sep	The Language of Research	Bhattacharjee Chapters 3 & 5
10-Sep	Finding and Analyzing Available Research	Franco Chapter 2
17-Sep	Navigating STATA – Managing data, do files, and logs	Franco Chapters 3 & 4
24-Sep	Quantitative Analysis - Descriptive Stats and Pivot Tables	Bhattacharjee Chapters 6 & 14, Franco Chapter 5
1-Oct	Logic Models, Program Evaluation, and Causality	Franco Chapter 6, Bamberger and Mabry (On Canvas) <i>*Lit Grid Due</i>
8-Oct	Quantitative Analysis - Hypothesis Testing and Correlation	Bhattacharjee Chapter 15 <i>*Quant Worksheet 1 Due</i>
15-Oct	Sampling and Case Selection	Bhattacharjee Chapter 8
22-Oct	Research Ethics <i>*Midterm administered during first hour</i>	Bhattacharjee Chapter 16 <i>*CITI Training Due at beginning of class</i>
29-Oct	Survey Design	Bhattacharjee Chapter 9 <i>*Quant Worksheet 2 Due</i>
5-Nov	Qualitative Analysis	Bhattacharjee Chapters 12 & 13
12-Nov	Visualizing Data and Presentation Skills	TBD
19-Nov	Writing for multiple audiences <i>*Peer Review Workshop</i>	<i>*Research Prospectus Due</i>
26-Nov	Thanksgiving	No Class this week
3-Dec	Final presentations	<i>*Revised Research Prospectus and Presentation Slides Due</i>
10-Dec	Final presentations	

Student Services Information and Links

1. [Services to Students with Disability \(SSWD\)](#)

"Sacramento State is committed to ensuring an accessible learning environment where the course or instructional content is usable by all students and faculty. If you believe that you require disability-related academic adjustments for this class, please immediately contact Services for Students with Disabilities (SSWD) to discuss eligibility. A current accommodation letter from SSWD is required before any modifications, above and beyond what is otherwise available for all other students in this class will be provided."

2. [Student Health and Counseling Services](#)

"Your physical and mental health are important to your success as a college student. Student Health and Counseling Services (SHCS) in The WELL offers medical, counseling, and wellness services to help you get and stay healthy during your time at Sac State. SHCS offers Primary Care medical services, including sexual and reproductive healthcare, transgender care, and immunizations; urgent care for acute illness, injuries, and urgent counseling needs; pharmacy for prescriptions and over-the-counter products; mental health counseling, including individual sessions, group counseling, support groups, mindfulness training, and peer counseling; athletic training for sports injury rehabilitation; wellness services, including nutrition counseling, peer-led health education, and wellness workshops, and free safer sex supplies; violence and sexual assault support services. Most services are covered by the Health Services fee and available at no additional cost."

3. [Crisis Assistance & Resource Education Support \(CARES\)](#)

"If you are experiencing challenges with food, housing, financial or other unique circumstances that are impacting your education, help is just a phone call or email away. The CARES office provides case management support for any enrolled student"

4. [Drop and Withdrawal Policy](#)

5. [Information Resources and Technology](#)

6. [Support Centers and Programs](#)

7. [Reading & Writing Center](#)