**CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SACRAMENTO**

**PPA 205**

**Research in Public Policy and Administration**

**Section 1 (Monday Section)**

**Fall, 2024**

Professor Ted Lascher Class meeting time: Mondays,

tedl@csus.edu 6-8:50 p.m., Sacramento State Downtown,

Room 108

Office hours: 4-5:45 on Mondays and

Wednesdays, Sacramento State Downtown, Room 230

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, this course does aim to acquaint you with key concepts that will be fundamental to PPA 207 to help prepare you 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 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.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **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 and using effective oral communication in group presentations. |
| 2e. Write clearly and succinctly as appropriate to various audiences. | Practice writing clearly and concisely in class papers & the research prospectus. |
| 3c. Consider ethical dimensions of choices in public policy and administration. | Draw from readings and class discussion on the first and second to last day of classes. |
| 3d. Understand differences between analysis and advocacy including insider and outsider roles. | Draw from readings and class discussion of advocacy and analyst roles on the first and second to last day of classes. |

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. It is also critical to *apply* ideas to policy and administrative problems. 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 throughout 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.

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 or by other means.

SUMMARY OF ASSIGNMENTS

The most important class assignment is the development of an individual research prospectus for a potential study. I presume that this could also be used as an artifact for your culminating project, to be developed further in PPA 500. 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 13, the last day of the final exam period. A short proposal summary will be due in mid-November and aimed at helping me determine if you are “on track.”

Students will also write two papers, one analyzing causal relationships and one offering survey and interview questions to be used for a possible research project research. Additionally, students will make a group presentation aimed at quickly determining an appropriate research approach for a specific topic. Due dates for all assignments are specified in the detailed class schedule that constitutes the latter part of this syllabus. I will provide assignment guidelines later.

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. I will also consider responses to specific questions about the week’s reading posed prior to class.

GRADING WEIGHTS

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

Research prospectus 35%

Causality paper 20%

Survey and interview questions paper 20%

Group presentation 10%

Class participation 10%

Prospectus proposal 5%

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 26: Introduction

**Video to Watch Before Class**

“Behind the Curve”

**Readings**

*A Playbook for Research Methods,* chapter 1

Liv Boeree, “How an 18th-century priest gave us the tools to make better

decisions,” *Vox*, November 30, 2018

**Exercise and Discussion**

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

within the first few minutes.

September 2: No class, Labor Day holiday

September 9: Theory, Conceptual Frameworks, Hypotheses, and Variables

**Videos to Watch Before Class**

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

Julia Galef, “A visual guide to Bayesian thinking”

**Readings**

*A Playbook for Research Methods*, chapter 2

Marshall Shepherd, “Theory, Hypothesis, and Law—Debunking a Climate

Change Contrarian Tactic,” *Forbes*, June 15, 2019

September 16: Deeper into Causality

**Readings**

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

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

Shawn Grover and John F. Helliwell, “How’s Life at Home? New Evidence on

Marriage and the Set Point for Happiness,” *Journal of Happiness Studies*

(2019)

September 23: 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)

September 30: Experiments, Natural Experiments, and Quasi—Experiments

**Readings**

Daniel Masterson and Vasil Yasenov, “Does Halting Refugee Resettlement

Reduce Crime? Evidence from the US Refugee Ban,” *American*

*Political Science Review* (2021)

Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, “Natural Experiments Help Answer

Important Questions,” 2021

October 7: 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)

Grace Garner et. al., “The Relationship Between Antisemitism and COVID-19

Conspiracy on Twitter,” 2023

October 14: Exploration and Working Hypotheses

**Readings**

*A Playbook for Research Methods*, chapter 5

Hanna Stelmakhovych, Edward Lascher, and Sarah Rubin, “Does the Type of

Public Engagement Matter for Support of Housing Infill Projects?

A Comparative Case Study,” 2023

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

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

Sacramento State MPPA Thesis, 2012, selections

Amal Kumar, “The origins and evolution of academic drift at the California

State University, 1960-2005,” *Higher Education* (2023)

October 21: Deeper into Good Interview and Survey Questions

***Survey and Interview Questions Paper Due***

**Readings**

Floyd Jackson Fowler, Jr., “How Unclear Terms Affect Survey Data,”

*Public Opinion Quarterly* 56 (1992): 218-231

“Strategies for Qualitative Interviews,” Harvard Department of Sociology

October 28: a) Gauging; and b) The Peer Review Process

**Readings**

*A Playbook for Research Methods*, chapter 6

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

Public Engagement,” Sacramento State MPPA thesis, 2020, selections

Peter Simons, “Psychology’s ‘Winning Streak’ Is a Failure of Science, Not

Success,” *Mad in America*, July 4, 2022

Anonymous article and review

November 4: Data Collection Strategies and Sampling

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

**Readings**

“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 10 (date tentative): Preparing for Your Research Proposal and Group Assignment

**Note**

The campus is closed on November 11 for Veterans Day. We will meet by

Zoom either that evening or the prior Sunday, depending on student

preferences.

**Reading**

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

November 18: Measurement

**Readings**

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

Think,” *Patch*, April 29, 2015

Allison Harell, “The Limits of Tolerance in Diverse Societies: Hate Speech and

Political Tolerance Norms Among Youth,” *Canadian Journal of Political*

*Science*, 2010

November 25: Research Ethics

**Readings**

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

*Healio*, February 1, 2011

Michael Hiltzik, “Did Sweden Beat the Pandemic by Refusing to Lock Down?

No, Its Record Is Disastrous,” *Los Angeles Times,* March 31, 2022

Note: If you are interested in more detailed information on the Swedish

case see Nele Brusselaers et al., “Evaluation of Science Advice During

the COVID-19 Pandemic in Sweden,” *Nature*, March 22, 2022

December 2: Group Presentations and Course Wrap-Up

***Group Assignment Presentations***

**Reading**

*A Playbook for Research Methods*, chapter 9

***Important reminder:*** *Your research prospectus is due by 5 p.m. on December 13!*

**Student Services Information and Links**

1. [Services to Students with Disability (SSWD)](https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/centers-programs/services-students-disabilities/)  
   *“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](https://www.csus.edu/student-life/health-counseling/)  
   *“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)](https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/crisis-assistance-resource-education-support/)  
   *“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](https://www.csus.edu/academic-affairs/internal/_internal/_documents/drop-and-withdrawal-policy.pdf)
5. [Grading Policy](https://www.csus.edu/umanual/acad/umg05150.htm)
6. [Academic Advising](https://www.csus.edu/student-life/academic-advising/)

[Information Resources and Technology](https://www.csus.edu/information-resources-technology/)

[Support Centers and Programs](https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/centers-programs/services-students-disabilities/)

[Reading & Writing Center](https://www.csus.edu/undergraduate-studies/writing-program/reading-writing-center.html)

[Student Rights and Responsibilities](https://www.csus.edu/umanual/student/stu-0119.htm)