

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SACRAMENTO
PPA 205: Research in Public Policy and Administration
Fall, 2013
Professor Andrea Venezia
Class meeting time and place: ARC 1007
Wednesdays, 6-8:50pm

The best ways to reach me are to come to office hours on Wednesdays from 3pm-5:45pm at Tahoe 3040, to email me at venezia@csus.edu, or to schedule a time to meet with me outside of office hours. My office phone number is 916/278-4944, but I prefer emails.

OVERVIEW

Welcome to PPA 205! This course focuses on the design of social science research. The main goals 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 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. PPA 205 will set you up for PPA 207, in that you will learn about the power and limitations of a variety of research methods from a conceptual level; that kind of understanding is necessary if you are to conduct rigorous statistical analyses, and if you are to consume research effectively and responsibly.

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 readings with articles from newspapers and podcasts. There is a great deal of information in our daily lives that touches upon using social science research to make policy decisions that affect our lives. 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. Feel free to contact me on Mondays or Tuesdays if you find an article you wish to share with the class.

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. The different pieces of the toolkit will help you prepare for 207 and for your thesis, and could likely help you at work as well. Even if you do not end up using, for example, the survey or interview protocol that you developed, the act of creating the tools will help ground you in the literature that we will read – especially in the main textbook ([Approaches to Social Research](#)), and it will help you think about social science topics that interest you. The components of the toolkit are listed in the course assignments section of this syllabus.

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 using different ways to collect data, such as experiments, surveys, field research, and secondary data sets.
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 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 to study the issues, and how to gather data to answer those questions. You will hopefully leave the course with a new perspective about the power and limitations of research. 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 classroom discussion. Simply listening to a lecture will not help you engage with, and consequently learn, the concepts. Accordingly, a typical class will include discussion topics, some of which 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 before class.

Getting help. It is important that you understand the material we are covering in class. 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). You are also

welcome 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 24 hours.

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 B+ for the course will become a C+), and a student who misses more than three classes will receive a failing grade.

Late assignments. 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).

Distractions. Please do not use cell phones or web surfing in class. If laptops are being abused in class, I may prohibit their use for all.

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/umannual/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 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 will be available from the library reserve room in hard copy and/or through the electronic collection, available via SacCT, or handed 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.

The most important class assignment is the development of an individual research prospectus for a potential study. Such a prospectus could potentially be developed into a PPA thesis/project. Detailed guidelines for the prospectus will be distributed during the semester. The prospectus will be due on December 20, the last day of the final exam period. A short draft prospectus will be due on October 30, 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. The prospectus will be part of your toolkit, described below.

While there will be many group discussions during class, there will also be one in-class group assignment. This assignment will be aimed at having you quickly identify appropriate research approaches in real time, under significant time pressure and facing considerable assignment ambiguity. The aim is in part to

duplicate the types of research you might be asked to conduct as practitioners, e.g., in state government.

I will often ask you to complete short exercises, such as selected exercises from the textbook, or ones that Dr. Ted Lascher or I construct. Those are noted below, under each relevant class day.

Your toolkit will be comprised of:

- **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.
- **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.
- **A list of research questions that you might be interested in exploring, along with your thoughts about hypotheses connected to those questions.** These questions could help you jump into your thesis, they could be connected to your current or future work, or they could just be issues that you’re interested in exploring.
- **Survey and interview protocol** (list of questions). 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, that can provide the desired data.
- **Final prospectus.** (Described above)

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.

GRADING WEIGHTS

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

- Research questions for toolkit 10% (September 18)
- Causal paper 15% (September 25)

- Survey/interview protocol for toolkit 15% (October 16)
- Prospectus proposal 10% (October 30)
- Group in-class project 10% (December 4)
- Final prospectus 30% (December 11)
- Class participation 10% (this includes completing exercises from Approaches to be discussed and sometimes turned in during class)

CLASS SCHEDULE

Class 1: September 4, 2013 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 single-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 September 4.**

Exercises and Discussion:

Introductions, etc.

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

Class 2: September 11, 2013 Scientific Approaches and Ethics

Readings:

1) re-read/skim Chapter 2; 2) 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; 3) Chapter 3 in Approaches; and 4) 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.

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?

Class 3: September 18, 2013 Designing Research: What Do You Need to Think About First?

Readings:

1) Chapter 4 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:

Bring to class 2-5 research questions that you are interested in, along with hypotheses you want to test for each research question. This will become part of your toolkit and is 10% of your class grade.

In-class:

You will complete an in-class assignment about causation, and I will hand out the assignment for the causality paper (due September 25).

Class 4: September 25, 2013 Digging Deeper into Causality

Reading:

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).

Exercises and Discussion:

Causality papers are due at the beginning of class and are 15% of your grade. The first half of the class will be reserved for each of you to talk briefly about your paper.

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?

Class 5: October 2, 2013 Measurement and Sampling

Readings:

1) Chapters 5 and 6 in Approaches; 2) Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2011), pp. 109-118; and 3) an article about Nate Silver predicting the 2012 election available at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/science/grrlscientist/2012/nov/08/nate-silver-predict-us-election>

Exercises and Discussion:

Complete exercise 5 on page 148 and exercise 4 on page 190 and be prepared to talk about them in class. From the Kahneman article: 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?

Class 6: October 9, 2013 Experimentation

Readings:

1) Chapter 7 in Approaches; 2) McDermott, Rose. (July 2013). "The Ten Commandments of Experiments," *Political Science & Politics*, Vol. 46, Issue 3, American Political Science Association, pp. 605-610; and 3) Listen to 30 minutes of Forum on KQED from July 12, 2013 about cholesterol available at: <http://www.kqed.org/a/forum/R201307120900>.

Exercises and Discussion:

Be prepared to talk about exercises 2, 3, and 4 from pages 228-229 in Approaches.

Class 7: October 16, 2013 Surveys and Interviews

Readings:

1) Chapters 9-10 in Approaches; 2) Gina Walejko, "Online Survey: Instant Publication, Instant Mistake, All of the Above," in Eszter Hargittai, Editor, *Research Confidential: Solutions to Problems Most Social Scientists Pretend They Never Have* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009), pp. 101-121; and 3) Floyd Jackson Fowler, Jr., "How Unclear Terms Affect Survey Data," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 56 (1992): 218-231.

Homework:

Go back to your list of research questions that you might want to answer (that you created for September 18). Choose one that would allow for the use of a survey and interview protocol (a protocol is a list of interview questions). Decide whom you would need to survey and whom you would need to interview. Decide upon some themes for the survey and the interview protocol. For example, if you were conducting interviews and wanted to learn about whether community college students think they were prepared to take placement tests, you could have categories such as: prior educational experiences, preparation activities, knowledge of the exam, etc., and then you could have questions within each thematic area. Create questions for each area – in other words, create a survey and interview protocol that you might want to use later for your thesis or work. You will turn them in during class. These will become part of your toolkit and are worth 15% of your grade.

Exercises and Discussion:

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

Class 8: October 23, 2013 Mid-semester check-in, applying and reviewing concepts, and movie night

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.

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.

Class 9: October 30, 2013 Field Research and Multiple Methods

Prospectus proposal due. This is worth 10% of your grade.

Readings:

1) Chapter 11 in Approaches, 2) Chapter 13 in Approaches, 3) *One Shot Deal*, and 4) *Betraying the College Dream*

Discussion:

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?

Please bring your laptop to the next class.

Class 10: November 6, 2013 Research Using Available Data

Don’t forget to bring your laptop to class.

Readings:

1) Chapter 12 in Approaches, 2) an article about using data from social media: <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/23/opinion/sunday/theres-a-fly-in-my-tweets.html>, and 3) an article about using Google search queries: <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/14/opinion/sunday/how-googling-unmasks-child-abuse.html?pagewanted=all>

Website 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. Here's a link to their data use tutorial: <http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/shared/ICPSR/help/newuser>

Class 11: November 13, 2013 Historical Analyses

Reading:

Natural Experiments of History, Chapter 5.

Discussion:

Think carefully about how the authors draw causal inferences about 1) the effects of political institutions on banking in the New World; 2) the factors that influenced living standards and deforestation on the island of Hispaniola; and 3) the effects of the slave trade on modern prosperity in Africa. Be prepared to discuss these topics in class.

Class 12: November 20, 2013 Policy, Evaluation, and Elementary Data Analysis

Both sections of PPA 205 will meet together at the Center for Collaborative Policy, 815 S. Street, in the first floor conference room

Readings:

1) Chapter 14 in Approaches; 2) 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) available at: http://www.csus.edu/ihelp/PDFs/R_Rules_of_the_Game_02-07.pdf; and 3) Mary Kirlin 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).

Guest Speaker:

Nancy Shulock

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 27, 2013 No class *THANKSGIVING BREAK*****

There will be no class this week, but you will be responsible for meeting, in person, or online (via email, Skype, etc.) with your group some time this week to prepare for the group project on December 4.

Class 13: December 4, 2013 Group Work and Putting the Pieces Together

Both classes will meet together in the ARC, Room 1007

Be prepared to work in groups to analyze research topics and recommend research approaches in real time. This is 10% of your grade.

Class 14: December 11, 2013 *LAST DAY OF CLASS*****

Revisiting research ethics in light of everything you have learned, course wrap-up

Time for student evaluations

Important reminder: Your research prospectus is due by 10am on December 20. This is 30% of your grade.