

RESEARCH METHODS AND PROBLEM SOLVING

Public Policy / PUBP 3110
Spring 2009, Monday, Wednesday 9:35-10:55 am
College of Computing 102

Prof. Aaron Levine
School of Public Policy
DM Smith 216

Email: aaron.levine@pubpolicy.gatech.edu
Office phone: (404) 385-3329
Office hours: Mon, Wed 11 to 12 or by appt

Catalog Description:

Conceptual and methodological issues in policy studies, including causality, explanation, models, threats to research, data collection, and assessment of applicability to policy issues. Design of research strategies.

Expanded Description:

Social scientific inquiry requires the formulation of research questions, and the collection and analysis of data related to the questions of interest. Public policy research relies on the logic and methods of social science. In this course we will learn to theorize about and investigate social phenomena. We will consider several approaches, including field, archival, survey, and experimental research designs. You will learn to design and conduct research in several different ways, and to interpret both qualitative and quantitative data. The best way to do this is by practicing. For this reason, in addition to designing research, we will also conduct research. This class research experience is structured both to help you appreciate the importance of sound research design and with the goal of producing useful results. I will use lecture format for presenting concepts and definitions, but much of this class is discussion and application oriented.

When you finish this course, you should be able:

- Formulate explanatory theories about social behavior and outcomes.
- Collect and assess the quality of research literature, data, and sources.
- Use a variety of methods of data collection.
- Practice various qualitative and quantitative data analysis techniques.
- Design and evaluate the design of social science research projects.

Summary of Course Requirements:

	Requirement	Percent of Grade	Date
1	Attendance / Participation	15%	
2	Exams (2)	40%	Exam #1: Wednesday, February 18 Exam #2: Wednesday, April 15
3	Class Research Project	25%	Part 1: Wednesday, January 21 Part 2: Wednesday, February 4 Part 3: Wednesday, February 11 Part 4a: Wednesday, February 25 Part 4b: Wednesday, March 4 Part 5: Wednesday, March 25
4	Group Final Paper	10%	Thursday, April 30 at 5:40 pm
5	Group Presentation	5%	Monday, April 20 Wednesday, April 22
6	IRB Certification	5%	Monday, January 12

Detailed Descriptions of Course Requirements:

1 – Attendance and Participation

All students in the class will work together to learn research design and collect novel research data. Success in this endeavor requires attendance and active participation by all students and these are expected of all students. Attendance and participation will be assessed through a variety of means, including unannounced quizzes randomly distributed throughout the semester. These quizzes will focus on basic material from the day's reading assignment and key points from the previous class. You will be permitted to drop your two lowest scoring quizzes.

Enrollment for the course indicates that you agree to attend all scheduled classes on time. With the instructor's permission, one or two absences from class may be forgiven for good reason. Multiple unexcused absences or repeated non-timeliness will lower your final grade.

2 – Examinations

There will be two examinations in this class. Each exam will test your knowledge and understanding of principal concepts (from class and the textbook) and your ability to apply concepts from class to research problems. Study guides listing key concepts that you should know for the exams are posted on t-square.

Note: the second exam is cumulative.

3 – Class Research Project

As a class, we will design and conduct a mixed-methods research project. This project, which consists of several distinct components, will give you the opportunity to practice many of the methods we discuss in class. We will discuss this project extensively in class and each student will complete five parts of the project on her or his own. The data collected by individual students will be pooled to form a single dataset for the final group papers and presentations. Many components of the project assignments will be posted to t-square to facilitate collaboration and allow others to benefit from your work so please prepare your assignments in a manner suitable for public presentation. More details about the class research project will be provided in class.

4 – Group Final Paper

The final assignment for the class will be a group paper. Each group (of 3 to 4 students) will produce a social science research article focusing on a specific question from the class project. This paper will explain the research question, discuss the relevant literature, describe the research design and present a preliminary analysis of some of the data collected in the class research project. More details will be provided in class.

5 – Group Presentation

During the last week of classes, your group will make a short presentation on your final paper.

6 – IRB Certification for Human Subjects Research

You are required to complete the certification process for conducting research using human subjects. For this purpose, Georgia Tech uses the CITI Online Training Course. To complete the certification, follow these instructions. (More information is available at the following website: <http://www.compliance.gatech.edu/IRB/training.shtml>)

Instructions: Users should visit www.citiprogram.org to register for a user name and password. (Please allow at least 24 hours for this process.) Once the required modules have been completed, the grade book should be checked to ensure that all modules have been completed. Users should complete the confirmation form and submit. The Georgia Tech Office of Research Compliance will receive from CITI electronic notification of completion; however, users should print and keep the completion report just in case verification is needed.

If you have already completed this certification (for another class or research project) and this certification is currently valid, please post a copy of this certification to t-square and email or bring me a copy of the certification report.

Course Policies:

Atmosphere: To maintain a professional and collegial atmosphere, I ask that you arrive on time to class and keep disruptions during class to a minimum. For instance, I expect that cell phones and other similar devices will be turned off during class. In exchange for your timely arrival, I will strive to end class in a timely manner. You are welcome to use laptops in class to take notes or for educational classroom activities. Please refrain, however, from using your laptop for purposes not related to class. If laptop use becomes a distraction, it may become necessary to prohibit their use in class.

Communication: Email is the best way to contact me and I will try to respond promptly, usually within 24 hours. I check email less frequently on the weekend and may not be able to respond to inquiries until Monday. You are, of course, encouraged to ask questions before or after class or stop by my office hours. If my office hours are not convenient for your schedule, please email me to arrange an alternate time.

T-Square: This course will use T-Square to organize electronic materials. You should find copies of lecture outlines, review material, links to electronic versions of readings (when available), etc. In addition, many assignments will be submitted electronically via t-square.

Late Assignments: Assignments are typically due the beginning of class and the subject of class discussion on the day they are due. Because completing the assignments is crucial for preparing for and participating in class discussion, late assignments will generally not be accepted.

Students with Disabilities: Georgia Tech offers accommodations to students with disabilities. If you need a classroom accommodation, please make an appointment with the ADAPTS office or provide me with the appropriate ADAPTS paperwork in office hours.

Honor Code: You are expected to abide by the Georgia Tech Honor Code guidelines at all times (for details, see <http://www.honor.gatech.edu/>). In the context of this course, Exams should be completed on your own without any unauthorized aids. You are welcome to work together on the various components of the class research project, but each student must independently write up each assignment. For the group paper and the group project, teamwork is expected. All writing is expected to represent your own or your group's work, completed specifically for this course. This means that you cannot copy text from other papers, websites, encyclopedias, etc without quoting any copied material and fully and accurately citing your sources. In addition, if you refer to, use, or

build upon ideas from other work, even if you don't quote that work exactly, you should fully acknowledge your sources. For any questions involving these or any other Academic Honor Code issues, please consult me or see <http://www.honor.gatech.edu/>.

Required Texts

1. *How It's Done: An Invitation to Social Research* by Emily Stier Adler and Roger Clark, Wadsworth Publishing (3rd Edition, January 3, 2007)
2. Various articles. Posted on T-square.

Detailed Schedule (Subject to Change)

Week 1: Humans Studying Other Humans

- Jan 5 Introduction & syllabus review
Jan 7 [Reading] Chapter 1: The Uses of Social Research

Week 2: Research Ethics

- Jan 12 Guest Lecture: Barbara Henry, Director, Office of Research Compliance
[Reading] Chapter 3: Ethics and Social Research
[Assignment] IRB Certification Due
Jan 14 [Reading] Humphreys, Laud, "Tearoom Trade." (Available on t-square)
Skim Part A, Read Part B

Week 3: Research Topics & Theory

- Jan 19 NO CLASS [Martin Luther King Jr.'s Birthday]
Jan 21 [Reading] Chapter 2: Theory and Research
[Assignment] Project - Part 1 | Research & Theory

Week 4: Research Questions & Measurement

- Jan 26 [Reading] Chapter 4: Selecting Researchable Topics & Questions
Jan 28 [Reading] Chapter 6: Measurement
[Assignment] Go to www.politicalcompass.org and "take the test." This should take roughly 15 minutes. When your test is scored, be sure to write down your coordinates to bring to class; these can be positive or negative numbers.

Week 5: Measurement (cont'd) & Extant Data

- Feb 2 [Reading] TBA
Feb 4 [Reading] Chapter 12: Using Available Data
[Assignment] Project – Part 2 | Finding Sources

Week 6: Qualitative Interviews & Observational Techniques

- Feb 9 [Reading] Chapter 10: Qualitative Interviewing
Feb 11 [Reading] Chapter 11: Observational Techniques
[Assignment] Project – Part 3 | Available data

Week 7: Exam Preparation & Mid-Term Exam

Feb 16 Exam Review. Come with questions

Feb 18 **[Exam] Exam #1 in-class**

Week 8: Questionnaires & Interviews

Feb 23 [Reading] Chapter 9: Questionnaires & Structured Interviews

Feb 25 **[Assignment] Project – Part 4a | Qualitative interviews**

Note: Feb 27 is the last day to drop classes with a grade of 'W'

Week 9: Sampling

Mar 2 [Reading] Chapter 5: Sampling

Mar 4 **[Assignment] Project – Part 4b | Qualitative interviews**

Week 10: Study Designs

Mar 9 [Reading] Chapter 7: Cross-Sectional, Longitudinal and Case Study Designs

Mar 11 [Reading] Chapter 8: Experimental Research

Week 11: Spring Break

Week 12: Content Analysis & Mixed Methods Research

Mar 23 [Reading] Chapter 13: Content Analysis and Comparing Methods

Mar 25 [Reading] TBA

[Assignment] Project – Part 5 | Telephone Survey

Week 13: Qualitative and Quantitative Data Analysis

Mar 30 [Reading] Chapter 15: Data Analysis [pages 432-453]

Apr 1 [Reading] Chapter 15: Data Analysis [pages 453-476]

Week 14: Policy Research & Evaluation

Apr 6 [Reading] Chapter 14: Applied Social Research

Apr 8 [Reading] TBA

Week 15: Exam Preparation & Exam #2

Apr 13 Exam Review. Come with questions

Apr 15 **[Exam] Exam #2 in-class**

Week 16: Presentations

Apr 20 **[Assignment] Group Presentations**

Apr 22 **[Assignment] Group Presentations**

Group Final Paper due no later than Thursday, April 30th at 5:40 PM