

RESEARCH METHODS AND PROBLEM SOLVING

Public Policy / PUBP 3110-A
Spring 2008, Tuesday, Thursday 9:35-10:55 pm
DM Smith 11

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Chapin 203

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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 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. You will be expected to apply abstract concepts to actual problems. The best way to do this is to see yourself as a social investigator as you go about your life. 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.
- Write an original research design.

Summary of Course Requirements:

	Requirement	Percent of Grade	Date
1	Attendance / Participation	20%	
2	Labs (6)	24%	Lab #1: Thursday, January 17 Lab #2: Tuesday, January 29 Lab #3: Thursday, February 28 Lab #4: Thursday, March 13 Lab #5: Thursday, March 27 Lab #6: Thursday, April 3
3	Exams (2)	26%	Exam #1: Thursday, February 14 Exam #2: Tuesday, April 15
4	Research Design Paper	20%	Monday, April 28 by 11am
5	Presentation	5%	Last 3 class periods
6	IRB Certification	5%	Thursday, January 24 (in-class)

Detailed Descriptions of Course Requirements:

1 – Attendance and Participation

This includes attendance (on-time), participation in discussion and other class activities, and the degree to which students come to the course prepared to engage the material, their classmates, and the subject at hand.

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, on occasion, 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 instructor's permission, one or two absences from class may be forgiven for good reason. Absences beyond this or repeated non-timeliness will likely result in a lower final grade.

2 – Labs

Labs provide you with the opportunity to apply various research methods concepts to topics of interest to you. There will be six labs spaced throughout the semester. Details are provided on a sheet attached to the syllabus. Each lab is due at the start of class on the date indicated.

3 – 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 attached to this syllabus. *Note: the second exam is cumulative.*

4 – Research Design Paper

The final project for the semester will be a novel research design. You will choose a topic of interest to you early in the term and design a research project that would, if conducted, provide new insight into your specific topic. This paper will describe your project. Detailed guidelines for completing this paper are attached to the syllabus.

5 – Presentation

You will be expected to make a short presentation related to your research design 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, you may forward me a copy of the certification report or bring a print out of this form to class.

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. 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.

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. While we will brainstorm topics and discuss your research design papers in class, all writing is expected to represent your own work, completed on your own 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. Ethnography of your choice. A list of suggestions is attached.

Detailed Schedule (Subject to Change)

Week 1: Humans Studying Other Humans

Jan 8: – Introduction & syllabus review

Jan 10 –
[Reading] Chapter 1: The Uses of Social Research

Week 2: Research Topics & Theory

Jan 15 –
[Reading] Chapter 2: Theory and Research

Jan 17 –
[Reading] Chapter 4: Selecting Researchable Topics & Questions
[Assignment] Lab #1 (Research and Theory) due at beginning of class

Week 3: Extant Data & Research Ethics

Jan 22 –
[Reading] Chapter 12: Using Available Data
[Assignment] Proposal for Research Design Topic due

Jan 24 –
[Reading] Chapter 3: Ethics and Social Research
[Assignment] IRB Certification Due

Week 4: Concepts & Measurement

Jan 29 –
[Reading] Chapter 6: Measurement
[Assignment] Lab #2 (Finding Sources) due at beginning of class

Jan 31 –
[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: Study Designs

Feb 5 –
[Reading] Chapter 7: Cross-Sectional, Longitudinal and Case Study Designs

Feb 7 –
[Reading] Chapter 8: Experimental Research

Week 6: Mid-Term Exam & Exam Preparation

Feb 12 – Exam Review. Come with questions

Feb 14 –

[Exam] Exam #1 in-class

Week 7: Sampling

Feb 19 –

[Reading] Chapter 5: Sampling

Feb 21 –

[Assignment] Sampling methodology critique

Week 8: Questionnaires & Interviews

Feb 26 –

[Reading] Chapter 9: Questionnaires & Structured Interviews

Feb 28 –

[Assignment] Lab #3 (Question Design) due at beginning of class

Note: Feb 29 is the last day to drop classes with a grade of 'W'

Week 9: Qualitative Interviews & Observational Techniques

Mar 4 –

[Reading] Chapter 10: Qualitative Interviewing

Note: Lab #5 (due April 5) is based on this material

Mar 6 –

[Reading] Chapter 11: Observational Techniques

Note: Lab #4 (due March 27) is based on this material

[Assignment] Draft of Literature Review for Research Design Paper Due

Week 10: Ethnography

Mar 11 –

[Reading] TBD

Mar 13 –

[Assignment] Lab #4 (Ethnography Review) due at beginning of class

Week 11 - SPRING BREAK

Note: You may want to use this opportunity to collect the data you will need for Labs #4 and #5, which are due after break

Week 12: Qualitative Data Analysis

Mar 25 –
[Reading] Chapter 15: Quantitative & Qualitative Data Analysis [pages 453-476]

Mar 27 –
[Assignment] Lab #5 (Observational Techniques) due at beginning of class.

Week 13: Analysis

Apr 1 –
[Reading] Chapter 13: Content Analysis and Comparing Methods

Apr 3 –
[Reading] Chapter 15: Quantitative & Qualitative Data Analysis [pages 434-452]
[Assignment] Lab #6 (Family Interview) due at beginning of class.

Week 14: Policy Research & Evaluation

Apr 8 –
[Reading] Chapter 14: Applied Social Research

Apr 10 – Course review. Come with questions

Week 15: Exam & Presentation of Research Design

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

Apr 17 – Student Presentations

Week 16: Presentation of Research Design

Apr 22 – Student Presentations

Apr 24 – Student Presentations

Final Research Design Paper due no later than Monday, April 28 at 11 AM