

PUBPL 6900 – Public Policy Research – Spring 2015

Class Meets: Thursday, 6 pm to 9 pm in OSH 253

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Office Hours: By Appointment

Course Summary

This course is designed to provide students with the skills needed to interpret and synthesize published research materials for the purposes of guiding public policy. An emphasis is placed on critiquing the research designs and statistical approaches used public policy.

Course Objectives

By the end of the semester, students will be able to:

- Critique research designs used in published studies.
- Develop research designs.
- Apply appropriate research literature in order to critique a research design.
- Synthesize published research materials and apply basic statistics needed for replication of public policy studies.

Learning Outcomes and Evaluation

Students will be evaluated using assignments that require the student to:

- Examine of a piece of published research and for its validity and research design.
- Create a sound research design when given a set of research study parameters.
- Apply statistical methods to data sets, showing competence in using these methods.
- Create a research synthesis that utilizes components of meta-analysis.

Most topics will be covered over a two-week period. Week one will focus on the theory of the topic, while the second week will focus on the application through assignments and/or in-class projects. This will allow students to gain a theoretical and practical knowledge of each topic.

Required Texts

This course has three required texts, in addition to articles that can be found on Canvas.

- *Applied Reference Guide to Research Designs*. Edmonds and Kennedy. 2013.

Teaching and Learning Methods

- Each class will include lecture, group discussion, and often in-class projects. Students are expected to complete the readings so they can engage in group discussions.
- Students will also help teach the class. Groups of students will be assigned to lead discussion in class each week. More details will be provided.

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Schedule

WEEK 1: January 15, 2015 Hypotheses, Questions, Theory, and CRAP

Class Activities: Introduction to Class.
 Discussion of Hypotheses, Theories, and CRAP Research

Week 2: January 22, 2015 Research Designs – Threats to Validity

Assignment 1 Due: CRAP Research

Readings: Edmonds and Kennedy, Chapter 1; Cook and Campbell, Chapter 2
Class Activities: Discussion of CRAP Assignment, scientific method, validity

Week 3: January 29, 2015 Threats to Validity – Applications with Real Cases

Readings: Death Penalty Report, Chapters 3 and 4
 Gun Control Report, Chapters 2 and 7
Class Activities: In-class analysis of other topics and threats to validity of studies

Week 4: February 5, 2015 Real Experiments – Field and Natural

Readings: All items in the Canvas Week 4 Folder
Class Activities: Groups lead discussion of various experiment types

Week 5: February 12, 2015 Experiments – Applications with Real Cases

Assignment 2 Due: Experiments in Research

Readings: All items in the Canvas Week 5 Folder
Class Activities: In-class discussion of various forms of experiments

Week 6: February 19, 2015 Quasi-Experimentation, including Case Studies

Readings: Item in Canvas Week 6 Folder; Edmonds and Kennedy, Chapters 2-10
Class Activities: Groups lead discussion of various research designs types

***** February 26, 2015 NO CLASS *****

Week 7: March 5, 2015 Quasi-Experiments – Applications with Real Cases

Assignment 3 Due: Applying Quasi-Experimentation

Readings: All items in the Canvas Week 7 Folder
Class Activities: In-class discussion of various forms of experiments

March 12, 2015 Capstone Introduction and Discussion

*****March 15th – 22nd, 2015 *** NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK *****

Week 8/9: March 26, 2015 Meta-Analysis: Discussion and Applications

Assignment 4 Due: Applying Meta-Analysis

Readings: Students do readings for Week 8/9 (see Canvas)

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Class Activities: In-class discussion of Meta-analysis projects

Week 10: April 2, 2015

Polling and Focus Groups

Readings: TBA

Class Activities: TBA

Week 11: April 9, 2015

Office hours to discuss final projects

Week 12: April 16, 2014

Presentation of preliminary final projects

Week 13: April 23, 2014

Final Project Due

Assignment 1: C.R.A.P.

You are to read the page below (and the links off it, as appropriate). You are to research the issue you were assigned (see Topics in Canvas), using a simple Google search– and find one example from each of the following three source types: (1) a journal article/report, (2) a blog, and (3) an interest group webpage. You are to apply CRAP to each of the three sources in a two to three page paper which is single spaced with a space between each paragraph. You are to explain whether the source is or is not crap.

<http://lisagoldresearch.wordpress.com/2010/09/20/the-crap-test-for-evaluating-sources/>

Assignment 2: Experiments

For this assignment, you are to identify 2 papers on a related topic – not by authors discussed in class or included in the references to articles discussed in class – that are both either field experiments or natural experiments on the same topic. You are to evaluate their efficacy as field (natural) experiments. You should include a discussion of validity as well as use the discussion from the articles from Week 4 as a jumping off point for your paper.

Assignment 3: Quasi-Experimentation

Using the report provided, you are to (1) critique the research design used in this study and (2) develop your own research design for evaluating this question. In discussing your own research design, you are to make recommendations for what is necessary for an effective evaluation of this question. Remember to include critiques of your own proposed design.

Assignment 4: Meta-Analysis

Using the Gerber and Green article we read during Week 5, find three other articles that study this same issue of voter turnout. Write a mini-meta-analysis of these four articles, following the four major steps outlined in the Berman and Parker article. I recognize that you cannot necessarily do the math necessary for writing the meta-analysis but you are to do the rest of the analysis.

Final Assignment: Research Design and Evaluation – TBA

Grade Percentiles and Grading Rubric

The grade allocations for the assignments are as follows.

Assignment	Percentage
Assignment 1	15
Assignment 2	15
Assignment 3	15
Assignment 4	15
Final Assignment:	30
In-Class Participation	10
TOTAL	100

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Communication

This class uses online communications extensively so go to the Campus Information System (CIS) and ensure that your email address is correct. Only contact me using my morgan.lyoncotti@hinckley.utah.edu email. DO NOT ASSUME I READ CANVAS EMAILS! Post all assignments AS ATTACHMENTS using the Canvas System.

Attendance

I expect you to attend class every week. If you need to miss class, please email me so that I know you will not be there. I would prefer you come 30 minutes late or leave 30 minutes early than miss class altogether.

Cell Phones & Computers

I expect that all of you own cell phones and that many of you will use computers in class. I would ask that you silence your phones (put it on vibrate) and that you use your computers for class-related activities (not for checking sports scores, updating your Facebook status, or doing work emails).

Academic Topics

We will discuss ideas and issues in this class that may express ideas that conflict with the core beliefs of some students. Public policy covers issues such as abortion, sex, drugs, immigration, climate change, and even rock-and-roll. Be prepared for that.

Reasonable Accommodation

The University of Utah seeks to provide equal access to its programs, services and activities for people with disabilities. If you will need accommodations in the class, reasonable prior notice needs to be given to the Center for Disability Services, 162 Olpin Union Building, 581-5020 (V/TDD). CDS will work with you and the instructor to make arrangements for accommodations. All information in this course can be made available in alternative format with prior notification to the Center for Disability Services. (www.hr.utah.edu/oeo/ada/guide/faculty/)

Wellness Statement

Personal concerns such as stress, anxiety, relationship difficulties, depression, cross-cultural differences, etc., can interfere with a student's ability to succeed and thrive at the University of Utah. For helpful resources contact the Center for Student Wellness - www.wellness.utah.edu; 801-581-7776.