

Public Administration 9914
RESEARCH METHODS
Fall 2015

Instructor: Laura Stephenson

E-mail: lstephe8@uwo.ca

Dates: October 2-3, 16-17, November 13-14

Office: SSC 4228

Phone: (519) 661-2111 x85164

Location: SSC 4255

Objectives

This course is designed to introduce students to the research process. The principles and techniques covered here will be useful both for academic work (such as the MPA Research Report) and for applied administrative and policy research. As well, it is designed to help students critically evaluate research encountered in academia and on the job.

Required Text

Elizabethann O'Sullivan, Gary R. Rassel and Maureen Berner. 2008. *Research Methods for Public Administrators*, 5th ed. New York: Pearson Longman.

Evaluation

Participation 20%

All students are expected to be active participants in class. This means being prepared, paying attention, taking part in group activities, and contributing to discussion.

Assignment 20% **DUE OCTOBER 16**

Students will find an academic journal article on a topic of interest. Students are encouraged to choose an article that relates to their anticipated research topic. The assignment is to summarize and critique the work. First, a summary of the author's topic/research question, theoretical approach, conceptualization and operationalization of the main concepts, and data source must be provided. Then, students are required to critique the appropriateness of the design. The assignment is expected to be 5-7 double-spaced pages in length (approximately 1250-1750 words), the majority of which should be taken up by the critique.

Research Design 20%
- Peer Critique & Presentation
- Final **DUE NOVEMBER 27** 40%

Students will draft research designs for their anticipated research projects. The final product should be 10-15 double-spaced pages in length (2500-3750 words). The design must address all aspects of research covered in the course, including a plan for analyzing the data.

A draft of the research design, *without the data analysis section*, must be submitted for peer critique on Friday, November 13. Students will be assigned another student's work that they must present and critique the next

day (expected length: 5 minutes). A total of 12 minutes will be allotted for each research design, to allow for response from the author and discussion. A written version of the critique must be submitted at 9am on November 14 (at least 2 double-spaced pages, 500 words).

The final draft of the research design is due on Friday, November 27 by 4pm (emailed to the instructor). It is expected that students will have revised their drafts in light of the peer critiques and completed their data analysis sections.

Topic Outline:

Friday, October 2 – 3-7pm **READ: Ch 1**

- 3-4pm: Introduction
MRP Expectations – Dr. Martin Horak
Discussion of Research Goals
- 4-5pm: The Scientific Process
The Importance of Literature Reviews
- 5:15-7pm: Choosing Questions
Developing Theories
Designing Hypotheses

Saturday, October 3 – 9-4pm **READ: Ch 2-5, 9**

- 9-10:30am: Research Designs – Description vs. Explanation (ch. 2-3)
Causation
The Merits of Comparison
- 10:45am-12pm: Choosing an Approach
Discussion of Research Projects - Which approach is best?
- LUNCH
- 1-2:15pm: Conceptualization and Operationalization
Measuring Variables (ch. 4)
- 2:30-4pm: Sampling (ch. 5)
Gathering Data - Existing Data (ch. 9)

Friday, October 16 – 3-7pm **READ: Ch. 6-8** **ASSIGNMENT DUE**

- 3-4pm: Ethics – Guest Speaker: Dr. Cameron Anderson (ch. 8, Review NMREB process: www.uwo.ca/research/services/ethics/nonmedical_reb/submission.html)
- 4-5pm: Gathering Data – Surveys (ch. 6-7)
- 5:15-7pm: Gathering Data – Surveys (cont'd), Experiments

Saturday, October 17 – 9-4pm **READ: Ch. 10-13**

- 9-10:30am: Gathering Data - Focus Groups
- 10:45am-12pm: Analyzing Data – Descriptives (ch. 11)
- LUNCH

1-1:30pm: Analyzing Data – Indices (ch. 10)
1:45-3pm: Gathering Data - Interviews – Guest Speaker: Zack Taylor
3:15-5pm: Analyzing Data – Relationships and Significance (ch. 12-13)

Friday, November 13 – 3-7pm **READ: Ch. 14** **DRAFT RESEARCH DESIGN DUE**

3-5pm: Analyzing Data - Regression Analysis (ch. 14)
5:15-7pm: Analyzing Data – Regression Analysis (cont'd)

Saturday, November 14 - 9-4pm

9-10:30am: Presentations
10:45am-12pm: Presentations
LUNCH
1-2:30pm: Presentations
2:45-4pm: Presentations

Optional Resources

The amount of reading in this course is limited, but there are numerous articles that can be very helpful as one plans a research project. Below is a list of some that may be of use as you proceed through the course and approach your MRP project.

- Roger M. Smith, 2007, "Systematizing the Ineffable: A Perestroikan's Method for Finding a Good Research Topic," *Qualitative & Multi-Method Research: Newsletter of the American Political Science Association Organized Section for Qualitative and Multi-Method Research* 5(1): 6-8.
- James Mahoney, 2008, "Toward a Unified Theory of Causality," *Comparative Political Studies* 41(4/5): 412-36.
- King, Gary, Michael Tomz, and Jason Wittenberg, "Making the Most of Statistical Analyses: Improving Interpretation and Presentation," *American Journal of Political Science* 2000 44(2):341-355. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2669316>
- John Gerring, 2012, *Social Science Methodology: A Unified Framework*, (New York: Cambridge University Press).
- Giovanni Sartori, 1970, "Concept Misformation in Comparative Politics," *American Political Science Review* 64(4): 1003-53.
- Yvonna Lincoln, 1995, "Emerging Criteria for Quality in Qualitative and Interpretive Research," *Qualitative Inquiry* 1(3): 275-289.
- Zachary Elkins, 2000, "Gradations of Democracy: Empirical Tests of Alternative Conceptualizations," *American Journal of Political Science* 44(2): 287-94.
- Arend Lijphart, 1971, "Comparative Politics and the Comparative Method," *American Political Science Review* 65(3): 682-693.
- Barbara Geddes, 1990, "How the Cases You Choose Affect the Answers You Get: Selection Bias in Comparative Politics," *Political Analysis* 2(1): 131-150.
- John Gerring, 2004, "What is a Case Study and What is it Good for?" *American Political Science Review* 98(2): 341-354.

- David Collier and James Mahoney, 1996, "Insights and Pitfalls: Selection Bias in Qualitative Research," *World Politics* 49(1): 56-91.