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Western University

Local Government Program

Research Design and Methods in Public Administration

Public Administration 9914

Fall 2018

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Instructor:	Dr. Zack Taylor
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Office:	SSC 4166
Office Hours:	Fridays, 1–2pm, or by appointment
Dates:	Fridays 3–7pm, Saturdays 9am–4pm
	Sept. 13–14, Oct. 18–19, Nov. 15–16
Location:	University Community Centre – UCC 66

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Public administrators in local government produce "research" all the time. They routinely evaluate the effectiveness of public policies and processes, learn about experiences of policy client groups, and compare performance across jurisdictions. They also consume research by consultants, other public administrators, and academics. This is an intensive, interactive crash course on the process of conducting and presenting original research on public administration and policy. The emphasis is on practical applications and skills development.

Full- and part-time MPA students come from a variety of backgrounds and possess a diverse range of skills and experience. This course will provide everyone with a common structure and vocabulary as you continue with other course work and undertake your MRP. As you plan your Major Research Paper, you are encouraged to build on the foundation provided by this course by seeking additional advice and assistance from faculty who are specialists in particular approaches. The course content is also transferrable to other class assignments and your professional work, and you will also be able to use it to critically interpret and evaluate academic and professional research products.

The creation of your MRP research proposal is fully integrated with this course. By the end of the course you will have developed a fully worked-out research proposal and been assigned a supervisor.

Note that the class will be held in the state-of-the-art Western Active Learning Space (WALS) in the basement of the University Community Centre (UCC), room 66.

SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND ASSIGNMENTS

Date	Time	Topic
Module 1		**Getting started**
09/13	3–5:30pm	Introduce ourselves and MRP ideas Discuss goals and objectives of the course and MRPs What are typical goals of PA research?
Module 2		**Developing a grounded research question**
09/13 (cont'd)	5:30–7pm	How do you know you have a good research question? *Exercise:* Brainstorm and critique research question ideas
09/14	9–10am	What is already known? Making a literature review
Module 3		**Answering your question: Research design**
09/14 (cont'd)	10am–3:30pm (lunch in middle)	**What is research design?** Operationalizing your question Overview of common PA research designs Case selection / sampling Overview of common information types and sources Planning your research project: A shopping list approach
	3:30–4pm	Introduce assignments
Module 4		**Methods: Collecting information from human subjects**
10/18	3–3:30pm	**Review:** Connecting your design to the question
	3:30–7pm	**Collecting data from human subjects** Choosing whether to interview or survey Good and bad questions Recruiting subjects **Surveys** Types of questions and answers Fielding your survey: Paper, phone, or internet? Demonstration of Qualtrics on-line survey software
10/19	9am–2pm (lunch in middle)	**Interviews** Structured, semi-structured, and open-ended formats **Post-processing collected information** *Exercise:* Coding techniques for content analysis *Exercise:* Using PivotTables to summarize survey responses (Using Excel)
	2pm–4pm	**Ethical considerations** for research involving human subjects Navigating the university ethics review process

Module 5		Methods: Collecting and interpreting quantitative data
11/15	3–5pm	Using descriptive statistics to understand your data: mean, median, standard deviation (Using Excel and Jamovi) *Exercise:* Presenting survey responses in tables
	5–7pm	Using variation and multiple regression analysis to investigate significance, correlation, and causation (Using Excel and Jamovi) *Exercises:* Analysis of municipal fiscal and other data TBA
11/16	9am–12pm	… Continued
	12:45pm–2:30pm	Using graphs to interpret and represent your data: What types and when? (Using Excel and Jamovi) *Exercise:* Graph interpretation
Module 6		**Writing it up**
11/16 (cont'd)	2:30–4pm	Good practices for paper organization, formatting, citation, and bibliography (Using Word)

Time ranges are approximate.
Ten-minute breaks will occur every 60–90 minutes.
Lunch is 45 minutes.

COURSE WEBSITE

This course makes use of OWL. Please refer to the course website regularly for announcements and course information: https://owl.uwo.ca/portal.

COURSE MATERIALS

We will use a textbook that can be purchased at the campus bookstore or from on-line retailers:

> van Thiel, Sandra. 2014. *Research Methods in Public Administration and Public Management: An Introduction*. London: Routledge.

While the book is unfortunately expensive, you will be able to sell it back to the bookstore in December. In addition, the instructor will distribute handouts and other materials that include how-to guides for particular procedures. Demonstration datasets will be posted on OWL.

TECHNOLOGY REQUIREMENTS

In addition, we will undertake a number of in-class exercises that require the use of a computer. All students are asked to bring to class a laptop computer (not a tablet) with the following software installed:

- **Microsoft Excel.** For consistency of experience, version 2016 is preferred. Excel should also have the Analysis ToolPak add-in installed. For more information on the Analysis ToolPak, see: https://support.office.com/en-us/article/Load-the-Analysis-ToolPak-305C260E-224F-4739-9777-2D86F1A5BD89
- **Microsoft Word.** For consistency of experience, version 2016 is preferred.
- **Jamovi.** Jamovi is a free, easy to install, cross-platform, user-friendly graphic user interface for the R statistical package. Download at: https://www.jamovi.org
- **A web browser.** We will access data from websites and use browser-based software, including Qualtrics survey software.

Open-source and commercially available alternatives to Microsoft Office possess many of the same features, however for the purposes of this course, Word and Excel will be used to demonstrate concepts and methods. Note that Western graduate students are entitled to a free installation of Microsoft Office 2016 (Windows or Mac). See: http://www.uwo.ca/its/sitelicense/microsoft/homeuse.html

If you are unable to meet these requirements, please let the instructor know as soon as possible before the class begins so that we can make alternative arrangements.

One unique feature of the Western Active Learning Classroom is the ability to wirelessly mirror your screen to wall-mounted whiteboards using a simple app. We will make use of this in the group work.

EVALUATION

Annotated bibliography (15%). An annotated bibliography is an important research tool and a building block of a literature review. This will exercise your library research and critical reading skills.

- You will submit your annotated bibliography, by midnight on Thursday, Oct. 10.

MRP abstract (no grade). To help the LGP Program Director assign an MRP Supervisor, you will submit an abstract, or description, of what you expect to study. This will not be a fully developed proposal. It will include your name, the project title, a brief description of the research question, method, and anticipated findings or goals (maximum 300 words), whether you expect that information will be gathered from human subjects, and subject keywords.

- You will submit this information through an on-line form on or before Friday, Oct. 25.

MRP research proposal (40%). This will include a research question and description of a research design. While you will not be held to this proposal as you move forward with your MRP, it is an opportunity to systematically think through the research process and your project. As you will have been matched to your supervisor on the basis of the abstract, you will have the opportunity to consult with him or her as you prepare the proposal.

- You will submit your draft research proposal for anonymous peer review by midnight on Wednesday, Nov. 6. Reviews will be returned on Friday, Nov. 15.
- You will submit your final proposal, with a one-paragraph description of what you learned from the peer review, by midnight on Friday, Nov. 22.

Peer review of the research proposal (10%). A draft of each student's research proposal will be <u>anonymously</u> reviewed by at least one peer. The review will take the form of a brief commentary on the most and least successful or persuasive aspects of the proposal and propose one substantive improvement.

- You will receive a draft proposal to review on Thursday, Nov. 7.
- The review must be completed by midnight on Thursday, Nov. 14.

On-line tests (25%). After the completion of Modules 3, 4, and 5, you will also complete short on-line tests designed to evaluate your understanding of core concepts. The tests are to be done on your own time on the OWL platform. Tests must be completed by midnight on:

- Module 3: Tuesday, Sept. 17 (5%)
- Module 4: Tuesday, Oct. 22 (10%)
- Module 5: Tuesday, Nov. 19 (10%)

Participation (10%). Finally, you be evaluated on your active and constructive contribution to class discussion and group exercises.

COURSE POLICIES

E-mail policy: All Western University students are required to have an @uwo.ca e-mail account. The instructor will *only* respond to e-mails sent from a Western University account, that clearly identify the sender, and have "PA9914" in the subject line. The instructor will ***not*** accept assignments by e-mail.

Late assignments: The penalty for late assignments is two percentage points per day (including weekend days). A grade of 80% on an assignment therefore becomes 72% in four days. Assignments more than 10 days late will not be accepted. Extensions due to illness require a medical certificate. If you foresee problems meeting submission deadlines please consult the instructor early; accommodations can always be made with adequate advance notice. This means *at least one week before the deadline*, not the night before the work is due! The last day for submission of term assignments is **December 6, 2019**, after which they cannot be accepted.

Academic integrity: Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site:
https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf

If you are unclear about what constitutes plagiarism or how to reference sources, please visit the Writing Support Centre http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/writing/ or review information at:
http://www.lib.uwo.ca/tutorials/plagiarism/.

ASSISTANCE

If you are having trouble with the course material or are falling behind in your work, please contact the course instructor as soon as possible. We can only help you if the lines of communication are open.

Help with writing: Learning to express ideas clearly is a central goal of the university experience. If academic writing does not come easily to you, you are strongly encouraged to make use of the Writing Support Centre: http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/writing/.

If you are having trouble with the course material or are falling behind in your work, please contact the course instructor as soon as possible. We can only help you if the lines of communication are open.

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western http://www.health.uwo.ca/mental_health/ for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

Learning to express ideas clearly is a central goal of the university experience. If academic writing does not come easily to you, you are strongly encouraged to make use of the Writing Support Centre: http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/writing/.

READING SCHEDULE

In addition to these textbook readings, the instructor will distribute handouts and other materials before or in class. Please complete all readings before the start of each weekend class.

Module 1   Getting started

van Thiel, Chapter 1, "Research in Public Administration."

Module 2   Developing a grounded research question

van Thiel, Chapter 2, "The research problem."

van Thiel, Chapter 3, "Theoretical framework."

Module 3   Answering your question: Research design

van Thiel, Chapter 5, "Research design."

van Thiel, Chapter 4, "Operationalization."

van Thiel, Chapter 8, "The case study," beginning of chapter to the end of section 8.3.

Module 4   Methods: Collecting data from human subjects

Interviews and surveys

van Thiel, Chapter 8, "The case study," section 8.4 to the end of the chapter (on interviewing).

van Thiel, Chapter 7, "The survey."

Smith, Scott M. n.d. "7 Tips for Writing Great Questions: Details, details, details. Follow these simple tips to make sure you get the little things right in your next survey." Qualtrics. (PDF on OWL)

Koop, Royce. 2016. "Institutional- and Individual-Level Influences on Service Representation and Casework in Canadian Cities." *Urban Affairs Review* 52(5): 808–831. (PDF on OWL)

Doberstein, Carey. "Whom Do Bureaucrats Believe? A Randomized Controlled Experiment Testing Perceptions of Credibility of Policy Research." *Policy Studies Journal* 45(2): 384–405. (PDF on OWL)

van Thiel, Chapter 11, "Analyzing qualitative data."

Research ethics

van Thiel, Chapter 12, "Reporting results," pp. 154–155 (on research ethics).

UWO Research Ethics Guidelines for LGP MRPs (PDF on OWL)

Module 5   Methods: Collecting and interpreting quantitative data

van Thiel, Chapter 10, "Analyzing quantitative data."

Gary Smith, *Standard Deviations: Flawed Assumptions, Tortured Data, and Other Ways to Lie with Statistics* (New York: Overlook Press, 2014), **Chapter 5, "Graphical Gaffes"** (PDF on OWL)

Module 6   Writing it up

van Thiel, Chapter 12, "Reporting results."

**** Additional short readings will be posted on OWL with ample notice.