

Western University
Local Government Program
Research Design and Methods in Public Administration
Public Administration 9914
Fall 2020

Instructor: Dr. Zack Taylor
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Office Hours: Online via Zoom by appointment
Dates: Fridays 5–7pm / Sept. 11–12
Saturdays 10am–2pm: Oct. 2–3
Oct. 30–31
Nov. 20–21
Location: Online via Zoom (invitation will arrive by email)

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.

TOPIC AND MEETING SCHEDULE

- The material is divided into **Modules**, within which there are bite-sized numbered **Units** that include videos, associated handouts, and sometimes exercises.
- Videos, handouts, and exercises will be made available two weeks prior to each meeting.
- Full class meetings will run from 5pm to 7pm on Fridays and extend into Saturday between 10am to 2pm *as needed*.
- We can alter the meeting time if there is consensus among the students. For example, we could start earlier and/or end later on Friday in order to avoid meeting on Saturday.

Date	Topic	Video/Handout	Exercise
Module 1: Getting started			
08/28	Common goals of public administration research	1.1	
	Inductive vs. deductive research styles	1.2	1.2
	The ladder of abstraction	1.3	1.3
	Good research questions	1.4	1.4
	Writing a literature review	1.5	
09/11	Meeting #1		
	Introduce ourselves and MRP ideas		
	Discuss goals and objectives of the course		
	Discuss MRP expectations		
	Introduce Annotated Bibliography Assignment		
	Divide into groups		
	Debrief video and exercise material		
Module 2: Research design			
09/18	Positivist vs. interpretivist research styles	2.1	2.1
	Components of a research design	2.2	2.2
	Operationalizing concepts as variables	2.3	2.3
	Variables, causal relationships, and causal inference	2.4	2.4
	Strategies for case selection and comparison	2.5	2.5
	Types of information	2.6	
	Validity, reliability, replicability	2.7	
10/02	Meeting #2		
	Debrief video and exercise material		
	Discuss assignments		
	Discuss project planning strategies		

Date	Topic	Video/Handout	Exercise
Module 3: Research with human subjects			
10/16	Qualitative vs. quantitative approaches	3.1	
	Gearing the method to the question	3.2	3.2
	Strategies for recruiting human subjects	3.3	3.3
	Interviewing: Types of human subjects and instruments	3.4	
	Interviewing: Types of questions	3.5	3.5
	Interviewing: Processing, management, and analysis	3.6	3.6
	Surveys: Distribution options	3.7	
	Surveys: Question wording	3.8	3.8
	Surveys: Types of answers	3.9	3.9
	Sources of bias in interviews and surveys	3.10	3.10
	Research ethics	3.11	3.11
10/30	Meeting #3 Debrief video and exercise material Demonstration of Qualtrics on-line survey software Discuss Western's research ethics approval process		
Module 4: Analyzing quantitative data			
11/06	Types of variables / Descriptive vs. inferential statistics	4.1	4.1
	Introduction to the Jamovi software package	4.2	
	Describing data: Crosstabs using Excel PivotTables	4.3	4.3
	Describing distributions: Measures of central tendency	4.4	4.4
	Visualizing distributions: The histogram	4.5	4.5
	Comparing distributions: Box plots	4.6	4.6
	Analysis of variance (ANOVA) – Is between-group variance greater than within-group variance?	4.7	4.7
	Visualizing bivariate relationships: Scatterplots	4.8	4.8
	Linear regression analysis (continuous DV) – What influence do independent variables have on your dependent variable?	4.9	4.9
	Logistic regression analysis (categorical DV) – What are the odds that an outcome will occur?	4.10	4.10
11/20	Meeting #4 Debrief video and exercise material Review Proposal Assignment Review MRP expectations		

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 FORMAT

Normally the course is delivered in person in a highly interactive format that alternates between instructor-led discussion of concepts and exercises performed in groups. Due to COVID-19, the course will now be delivered on-line in a hybrid format that maximizes flexibility for students, who will do much of their learning on their own time.

- Complementing the textbook, the instructor will explain key concepts and examples in pre-recorded videos. These, and accompanying handouts and exercises, will be made available at least two weeks prior to each scheduled weekend meeting.
- Exercises are for self-assessment purposes only and are not graded. Their purpose is to improve your understanding of the concepts through application. Answers will be made available through OWL's Tests and Quizzes function.
- Students will be divided into groups of 4 or 5 at the first meeting. Group members are expected to collaborate on their own time by discussing course material, work through exercises, and complete two Mini-Projects that apply course concepts.
- The weekend meetings, which will take place on-line using Zoom, will be used to discuss big issues and debrief exercises, either with everyone or in groups.
- Individuals and groups are welcome to schedule Zoom consultations with the instructor at other times.

COURSE MATERIALS

Videos, handouts, exercises, and demonstration datasets will be posted on OWL.

The textbook that is available as an e-book through the library at <https://tinyurl.com/pa9914book>.

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

Should you desire a print copy, please visit the bookstore website—<https://bookstore.uwo.ca>—for the latest information regarding book sales and delivery. While the book is unfortunately expensive, you will be able to sell it back to the bookstore in December. It can also be found on on-line new and used book retailers.

TECHNOLOGY REQUIREMENTS

Since the course is being delivered on-line, everyone must have Zoom installed and be signed in using your Western account. A number of our exercises require specific software packages. (An iPad or tablet will not work; your device must run Mac OS X or Windows.) Please ensure that the following software is 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 the Qualtrics survey platform.

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.

EVALUATION

Annotated bibliography (20%). An annotated bibliography is an important research tool and a building block of a literature review. The assignment will exercise your library research and critical reading skills and accelerate the development of your proposal.

- Submit on or before **Friday, Sep. 25.**

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.

- Submit on or before **Friday, Oct. 23.** The LGP director will email an invitation to fill out an on-line form.

MRP research proposal (50%). 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.

- Submit your draft research proposal for anonymous peer review on or before **Wednesday, Nov. 11.**
- Reviews will be returned to you on **Friday, Nov. 20.**
- Submit your final proposal, with a one-paragraph description of what you learned from the peer review on or before **Monday, Dec. 5.**

Peer review of the research proposal (pass/fail). A draft of each student's research proposal will be anonymously 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. Completing the peer review is required to pass the course.

- Receive proposal to anonymously review on **Thursday, Nov. 12.**
- Return review on or before **Thursday, Nov. 19.**

Group mini-projects (30%). After the completion of Modules 3 and 4, your group will collaborate to complete a small project designed to exercise your newfound research skills! Each assignment is worth 15%.

- Module 3: Design a short survey or interview guide with commentary on your choices. **Due Friday, Nov. 6.**
- Module 4: Analyze a provided dataset. **Due Friday, Nov. 27.**

SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS AND DUE DATES

Meeting #1 – Module 1	Sep. 11
▶ Annotated Bibliography Assignment due (20%)	Sep. 25
Meeting #2 – Module 2	Oct. 2
▶ MRP abstract due (no grade)	Oct. 23
Meeting #3 – Module 3	Oct. 30
▶ Module 3 Mini-Project due (15%)	Nov. 6
▶ Submit Draft Proposal for peer review	Nov. 11
Return peer review to instructor	Nov. 19
Student receives peer review	Nov. 20
Meeting #4 – Module 4	Nov. 20
▶ Module 4 Mini-Project due (15%)	Nov. 27
▶ Final Proposal due (50%)	Dec. 5

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 11, 2020**, 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.

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

Module 1: Getting started

van Thiel, Chapter 1, “Research in public administration.”

van Thiel, Chapter 2, “The research problem.”

van Thiel, Chapter 3, “Theoretical framework.”

Module 2: 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 3: Research with 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 4: Analyzing quantitative data

van Thiel, Chapter 10, “Analyzing quantitative data.”

van Thiel, Chapter 12, “Reporting results.”