

## PPOL 524: APPLIED RESEARCH METHODS Spring 2015

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4 Credits, Course meets 3 hours 40 minutes per week in lecture

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### **CATALOGUE DESCRIPTION**

Application of sociological theory, concepts, and methods. Topics may vary but may include program evaluation, social impact assessment, policy analysis, focus group research, among others.

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

Applied social science is about putting social science methods to work collecting information about problems that people face in the everyday world and then using the resulting understanding to help ease those problems through changes in social policy or other practices. This course will explore how social science research methods can be used for effective problem solving. At the end of the course, you should be able to design a client-focused research project using multiple methods and apply those skills to many real life situations. This term we will be developing a project for an off-campus client using mostly primary data that we collect ourselves although we may do some comparison with secondary data that has been collected by others.

### **LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

MPP, OSU Graduate School and NASPA

MPP Learning Outcome # 1: The ability to conduct original policy research that extends the knowledge of both policy and other social science disciplines.

Aligns with:

OSU Graduate School Learning Outcome # 1: conduct research or produce some other form of creative work.

NASPAA Universal Required Competency # 3: to analyze, synthesize, think critically, solve problems and make decisions.

MPP Learning Outcome # 5: Skills and experience in designing and presenting in both formal and informal venues with students, practitioners, and community members.

Aligns with:

NASPAA Universal Required Competency # 1: to lead and manage in public governance.

MPP Learning Outcome # 6: High ethical standards in public policy research, teaching, and service.

Aligns with:

OSU Graduate School Learning Outcome # 3: be able to conduct scholarly or professional activities in an ethical manner.

NASPAA Universal Required Competency # 2: to participate in and contribute to the policy process.

MPP Learning Outcome # 7: The development of a public service ethic resulting in student understanding of the significance of working collectively, in collaboration with the public and prioritizing the desires of citizens, communities, and society at large.

Aligns with:

NASPAA Universal Required Competency # 4: to articulate and apply a public service perspective.

#### Course Specific

By the end of the term you will be able to:

- a. Develop a statement of work describing a client-focused problem.
- b. Know how applied researchers integrate theory, research, and practice.
- c. Use different methods to collect and analyze data.
- d. Present the results of a research project to a client through multiple media.
- e. Critically reflect on the experience of real world research to better prepare for future research endeavors.

All of these objectives will be assessed through your participation in the development and implementation of the client project.

### **COURSE STRUCTURE**

This course is designed to give you a taste of real life application of social science and methods. You will be working with a “client” this quarter (see the attached project description).

We will work closely with the client to develop a Statement of Work (SOW), conduct proposed data collection and analysis, develop a report with our findings, and present these to the client (and other interested parties) in an oral presentation. As with much applied work, we will be working in interdisciplinary teams in order to capitalize on the wide range of knowledge and experience of class members.

We will spend class time mostly planning and addressing problems that arise in the project. I will provide background material as needed, and your text also provides background material if you get stuck. Most of the actual project work will take place out of class – either on your own or with a small group. You will be working on different aspects of the project during the term, interacting with different classmates on different tasks. It is up to you to coordinate those efforts in order to meet deadlines and produce strong work. It is also up to each of us to develop a good working relationship with classmates to ensure that our results meet the client’s expectations.

***There will be no tests or exams; but there will be deadlines.*** If you absolutely cannot meet a deadline, it is your responsibility to negotiate a new due date with the instructor and/or your working group as far in advance of the deadline as possible. There is no guarantee that a deadline can be relaxed; you may be working all night to deliver a product you promised.

### **COURSE READINGS**

The required text covers basic information about applied research methods; use the text as a resource for developing data collection and analysis strategies. The required readings are much more focused on the specific problem; however, they only provide a sketchy background. You are likely to be doing a lot of reading on various topics related to the problem over the course of the term. Reading assignments are listed on the attached schedule and should be completed **prior to class**.

**Required Text:** I highly recommend you purchase a copy of this text for your own use; it is a great resource when developing applied research. I'll place a copy of the book on reserve in the Valley Library.

Robson, Colin. 2002. *Real World Research*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. Oxford: Blackledge.

**Required Readings:** available on-line, at class BlackBoard site, and/or class hand-out.

- a. Edward, Mark. 2011. *Writing for Sociology*. CA: Sage.
- b. Salant, Priscilla and Don Dillman. 1994. How Large Should a Sample Be? Pp 54-58 in *How to Conduct Your Own Survey*. NY: John Wiley and Sons.
- c. Ruane, Janet. 2005. An Informative Few: Sampling. Pp 104-122 in *Essentials of Research Methods: A Guide to Social Science Research*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
- d. See relevant readings on project description

## **COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND EVALUATION**

### **A. Individual Exercises**

There are three individual assignments due early in the quarter. The exercises are designed to help you prepare the SOW, complete the research, and make the presentation to the client. Late or incomplete assignments will be marked down one point each day past deadline. Assignment due dates are included on the class schedule.

#### **1. Human Subjects Certification and Acknowledgement of Risk and Waiver of Liability (5 points)**

OSU has a policy mandating that all people working on research projects involving the use of human or animal subjects be certified as having completed education in the ethics and legalities of such research. For this course, you will need to complete the on-line training provided at [www.citiprogram.org/default.asp](http://www.citiprogram.org/default.asp) for Group 1 (Social and Behavioral Research Investigators and Key Personnel (10 Required Modules and 1 Elective Module). Each of the sections consists of some reading and then a multiple-choice quiz. It may take you up to 4 hours to complete these sections. When you're done, print off and turn in a copy of the *Certification Report* as proof of completion.

OSU has a policy that all people completing school-based activities off-campus that may cause injury or are dangerous complete an acknowledgement of risk and waiver of liability form. The form is available for download on blackboard.

***Until you submit your signed notice of certification and waiver of liability, you will not be allowed to hand in other assignments. If you have completed this training for another class or project, please provide me with certification information.***

#### **2. Summary of meeting with client and research question (10 points)**

Develop a brief (1-2 pages) summary of the issues raised by our first meeting with the client. Note any questions that have arisen since the meeting as well as any ideas you have for how to approach the "problem" set by the client. Include at least one research question that you would like to pursue this term based on the needs expressed by the client. This question will become the basis of your literature review and will contribute to the overall research design.

#### **3. Literature Review (25 points)**

Identify and review *five* articles relating to your research question(s). At least three of the articles must be from peer-reviewed journals. Two may be from the gray literature (i.e., non-peer reviewed reports), magazines, newspapers, or other non-peer reviewed materials including the reading for the class (if relevant). If you have

any questions about your source, consult me. Review the articles as a group (check the reading material from the Sociology Writing Guide for more information about writing a literature review). Compare and/or contrast the information in the articles (e.g., how are they approaching the problem, methods they are using, what they found, etc.) *all in relation to your question(s)*. Describe how the information helps you think about your research topic and identify new questions the literature poses for you. Include a full reference for each article (using one of the formats selected by the writing team and included in Section 12 of the Sociology Writing Guide), but do not include the full articles. You **MUST** use the sociological formatting style for this report so that all of the literature reviews can be easily collated for the final report.

**4. Attendance, Participation and Research Memos (20 points)**

The attached schedule is an approximation of the topics we'll cover – topics and assignments will emerge as we work through the project. Since much of the material in this class will be discussed and developed in class, your **attendance and participation in all classes is required**. It is expected that you come to each class prepared – read the assigned material ahead of time and be ready to refer to it in our discussions.

In addition, you will be asked to turn in **two research memos** based on the prompts below during the quarter. Each memo must be at least 4 pages in length, double-spaced, 12 point font. The intent of these memos is to help you reflect on your class experience, particularly as it relates to your own research project.

**Memo 1:** Develop a scope of work for your own (potential) thesis/essay, including a problem statement, methods, budget, timeline, etc.

**Memo 2:** What methodological tools do you want to learn to use during your degree program and how do you plan to learn them (e.g., through coursework, your essay, an RAship, etc.)? How has your experience in this class shaped your choices? What lessons have you learned about implementing these tools that you want to take with you to future research projects?

**B. Group Assignments**

There are three course assignments we will work on as a group. These assignments are primarily designed around interaction with the client and data collection/analysis, which we will be doing as a group.

- 1. Statement of Work (10 points):** After we meet with the client to identify needs and expectations, we will work together as a group to develop a short statement of work (SOW) that describes what we will be doing and what products we will provide the client. A SOW is typically 2-5 pages long, and it is the “contract” you have with the client. We may need to revise the SOW after the client reviews our proposal. Each of you will be asked to help prepare a section of the SOW (e.g., the problem statement, methods, budget, timeline, etc.) or to act as an editor to compile the final version.
- 2. Data Collection and Analysis (15 points):** In the SOW, we will describe a strategy for collecting and analyzing data to help answer the client's questions. We will calculate an appropriate sample size, “pull” a sample, design and test the pilot methods, revise the methods and administer it to the sample, enter the data into a “code book” we have created, and analyze the data using descriptive statistics.
- 3. Report and Presentation to the Client (15 points):** We will present the client with a final written report that describes our research design, data collection methods, results, and conclusions. An interactive presentation with the client will allow for discussion of the findings and conclusions, as well as answer any questions that arise about how we did the study. Each of you will be responsible for some section of the report, presentation, or presentation graphics as determined by the group. One or more of you will be asked to make the oral presentation. Evaluation of this

part of the course will be based primarily on peer-review: your classmates will provide feedback on your participation, effort, and products.

Your execution of the assignments – whether individual or group – is central to the course and the success of the project. All efforts need to be well organized and researched, clearly written, and reflect original and careful work. These assignments are designed to allow you and the entire class opportunities to practice the skills we are learning while we are completing the project for the client.

### ***The Fine Print***

**Student conduct:** Students are expected to conduct themselves in compliance with the university's guidelines regarding civility. Students are expected to comply with all regulations pertaining to academic honesty. For more information, please see OSU's [Statement of Expectations for Student Conduct](#).

**Students with disabilities:** Accommodations for students with disabilities are determined and approved by Disability Access Services (DAS). If you, as a student, believe you are eligible for accommodations but have not obtained approval please contact DAS immediately at 541-737-4098 or at <http://ds.oregonstate.edu>. DAS notifies students and faculty members of approved academic accommodations and coordinates implementation of those accommodations. While not required, students and faculty members are encouraged to discuss details of the implementation of individual accommodations.

**Etiquette and electronics:** Technology impacts the norms that regulate it. In the not-so-distant past, no one would need to be told that cell phones, music players, and other electronics should be turned off in the classroom. These were generally not available. But in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, professional etiquette is not always clear on acceptable use of personal electronics in the classroom. Out of respect for everyone in the class, please turn off all your electronics devices prior to class. Students using laptop computers to take notes should sit in the back or to the side. If their use of the computer distracts others, including the teacher, then they will be asked to move or desist from using their laptops.

## Schedule

Date	Topic	Reading*	Tasks**
3/30/15	Issues in conducting applied research: relationships with the client, confidentiality, human subject review. Background about the client and problem	Robson, Ch. 1-2	
4/1/15	Project design: developing question(s) & approach	Robson, Ch. 3 & 4, pp. 399-406 Blackboard reading a re: literature reviews	Draft questions for clients
4/6/15	Meeting with the client	Relevant Readings from project description	<b>IRB certification, waiver</b>
4/8/15	Project design continued: client management, developing budgets and timelines	OSU Rates: <a href="http://oregonstate.edu/research/osp/sites/default/files/current_rates_sept2012.pdf">http://oregonstate.edu/research/osp/sites/default/files/current_rates_sept2012.pdf</a>	Draft SOW <b>Client meeting summary and research question</b>
4/13/15	Sampling designs	Robson, pp 270-277 Blackboard Reading c-d	SOW (description, methods, budget) to client
4/15/15	Collecting data: asking questions	Robson, Ch.10	Review feedback and revise SOW as necessary, Develop sampling strategy, Draft initial protocol <b>Literature Review</b>
4/20/15	Collecting other kinds of data	Robson, Ch. 11 & 14	Finalize draft for pilot  Pilot protocol
4/22/15	Data analysis: preparing the data, coding	Robson, pp 410-438 Robson, Ch.17	Practice interviewing skills Begin data collection
4/27/15	Data analysis: preparing the data – code books		<b>Submit research memo 1</b>
4/29/15	Data analysis: entering data		
5/04/15	Data analysis: computer aided analysis		
5/06/15	Exploring the data set; how to interpret qualitative data		Develop codes
5/11/15	What does it mean?		
5/13/15	Putting it all together: what goes into a compelling research report and presentation?	Robson, Ch.18	
5/18/15	Work Session: no class, draft sections of report		
5/20/15	Work party: draft presentation		<b>Submit research memo 2</b>
5/25/15	Memorial Day: No Class		
5/27/15	Presentation run-through		Practice and evaluate presentation
6/01/15	Finalizing the details (2 <sup>nd</sup> run through as needed)		Draft report Draft presentation
6/03/15	Presentation to Client Debrief and Celebration		Final report and presentation

**\*Readings to be done prior to class meeting – come to class with readings completed and any questions you have about the readings**

**\*\*Due dates for individual assignments are highlighted – printed copy due at beginning of class**