

**PPOL 521**  
**Understanding Social Research**

**Instructor:** Mark Edwards  
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**Office hours:** By appointment. Please send email request.

**Prerequisites:** Graduate standing and instructor permission.

**Credits:** 4

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Graduate education in the social sciences should help students join their professors as colleagues. Hence, this class is designed to show students how social science researchers think, how to analyze social science argument-making, and how to evaluate the substance and rhetoric of studies we encounter. Through weekly readings and assignments, as well as through exams and a short, well-crafted study design proposal, students will have the chance to work out these skills. The classroom environment (online) will be collaborative and collegial, yet rigorous, so students are expected to come to class prepared to contribute to the education of their professor and fellow students.

**Official Catalog Description:**

Study of basic concepts and principles of qualitative and quantitative social research, including selection of general strategies and specific designs, conceptual and operational measurement, sample selection, data collection, data processing and analysis techniques, interpretation and reporting. Utilizes reports of social research in scholarly journals, popular media, and agency documents. Emphasis on critical evaluation and interpretation.

**Learning Outcomes:**

Students successfully completing this class will know how to:

- a) critically analyze social science arguments,
- b) evaluate a study's research design, measurement decisions, data collection, and applicability to social policy and academic questions, and
- c) produce professional quality social science writing, and evaluate the writing strengths and weaknesses of social science analyses.

This course assists students in achieving the MPP Learning Outcome focused on research methods and critical thinking.

**Required Readings:**

1. Articles and chapter excerpts available online on "Canvas".
2. Older version of Earl Babbie's *The Practice of Social Research*. Copies available for purchase on line. Please do not buy the new copies in the bookstore if you can just find a used copy.

**Course Delivery During the COVID Crisis of 2020:**

The class will take place via Zoom, accessed through Canvas. Classes are scheduled for Tuesdays and Thursdays, 12:00pm – 1:50pm. We will take some breaks within that 2 hour period, and will rarely use the full time. Sometimes class time will be replaced with some asynchronous work, or with flexibly scheduled meetings at other times with the instructor or fellow students.

You are not required to have your video or audio on during class meetings, but you are encouraged to do so if you are comfortable with it. Class discussions will use several of the available functions on Zoom. Class sessions will be recorded and made available only to people enrolled in the course. We will learn together how to operate well as a class.

**Grading:**

Grades will be based on homework assignments (15% total), two exams (20% and 20%, respectively), an in-class presentation (10%), and a research design proposal (35%). The assignments, exams, and proposal will be described in class and in online materials. Homework assignments should be turned in by the due dates indicated on Canvas, or for those who are absent, emailed prior to class. They will usually be discussed during class.

**Communication Issues:**

Please watch for updates, reminders, clarifications, etc. by email. Correspondence will be sent to your Canvas email account or your ONID email on file with the university. Please check it often, or have your emails forwarded to whatever account you normally use.

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**Calendar:** *(Note: All items available on Canvas except for Babbie text.)*

Reading assignments indicated should be completed prior to the date on which they are listed.

\*\*\*\*\* **Week 0.5** \*\*\*\*\*

9/24 **Introduction to the Course / Overview**

\*\*\*\*\* **Week 1** \*\*\*\*\*

9/29 **Research Design and Patterning after Experiments**  
**The Social Nature of Social Research**

Read (prior to class): 1) Conley (“Harder than Rocket Science”)  
2) Maynard (“Evidence Based Decision Making . . .”)

*Homework Assignment #1a: Post your response by Monday night, 9/28. Read one another’s comments prior to class and then we will discuss them.*

10/1 **Types of Questions and Question Selection**

Read: Babbie Chapters 1 & 2

Read: Collection of MPP Essays // See Homework Assignment 1b for details.

*Have Homework #1b with you at class discussion.*

\*\*\*\*\* **Week 2** \*\*\*\*\*

10/6 **Theory, Hypotheses, and Social Science Variables**  
**Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches**

Watch induction/deduction tutorial.

Quick Read: Olson (“Food Fight.....”)

Quick Read: Hickman (“Getting Through the Winter...”)

Read: “Rural Job Volatility”

Read: Writing in Sociology “Developing Ideas Into Research Questions”

*Assignment #2 Part A Due 10/6 before class. Please have with you the homework you uploaded before class. Also, make sure to start Part B early this week.*

*To prepare for this class, examine the following tutorial:*

[https://courses.ecampus.oregonstate.edu/ppol521/hypotheses\\_hypothesizing/](https://courses.ecampus.oregonstate.edu/ppol521/hypotheses_hypothesizing/)

10/8 **Causation and Causal Diagrams**

Read: Davis (“Logic of Causal Order”) *[notes available on Canvas]*

Read: Rein & Winship (“Dangers of Strong Causal Reasoning”)  
*[notes available on Canvas]*

Read: Akins (“Racial Segregation and Property Crime...”)  
*[notes available on Canvas]*

*Assignment #2 Part B Due 10/8 Please complete your online work prior to class.*

*To prepare for this class, examine the following tutorials:*

[https://courses.ecampus.oregonstate.edu/ppol521/independent\\_dependent/](https://courses.ecampus.oregonstate.edu/ppol521/independent_dependent/)

<https://courses.ecampus.oregonstate.edu/ppol521/3criteria/>

[https://courses.ecampus.oregonstate.edu/ppol521/causal\\_diagrams/](https://courses.ecampus.oregonstate.edu/ppol521/causal_diagrams/)

\*\*\*\*\* **Week 3** \*\*\*\*\*

10/13 **Controlling for Variables**

Read: Anderson et.al. (“Turbulence”) *[notes available on Canvas]*

Read: Wright et.al. (“Causation/Correlation”) *[notes available on Canvas]*

Read: Hernán (“The C-Word: Scientific Euphemisms . . .”)

*Assignment #3a due before class.*

*Assignment #3b due on Wednesday, October 14.*

To prepare for this week's classes examine the following tutorials:

[https://courses.ecampus.oregonstate.edu/ppol521/reading\\_tables/](https://courses.ecampus.oregonstate.edu/ppol521/reading_tables/)

[https://courses.ecampus.oregonstate.edu/ppol521/tutorial\\_intervening\\_antecedent/](https://courses.ecampus.oregonstate.edu/ppol521/tutorial_intervening_antecedent/)

[https://courses.ecampus.oregonstate.edu/ppol521/tutorial\\_reading\\_tables/](https://courses.ecampus.oregonstate.edu/ppol521/tutorial_reading_tables/)

### 10/15 **Elaboration Model for Comprehending Control Variables**

Read: Babbie Chapter "The Elaboration Paradigm"

Read: Campbell, Gerdes & Steinver ("Instructor Appearance & Student Evaluations...")  
[notes available on Canvas]

Read: TBA

\*\*\*\*\* **Week 4** \*\*\*\*\*

### 10/20 **Measurement in the Social Sciences**

Read: Babbie Chapters 5 & 6

To prepare for this classe examine the following tutorials:

[https://courses.ecampus.oregonstate.edu/ppol521/level\\_of\\_measurement/](https://courses.ecampus.oregonstate.edu/ppol521/level_of_measurement/)

[https://courses.ecampus.oregonstate.edu/ppol521/tutorial\\_reliability\\_validity/](https://courses.ecampus.oregonstate.edu/ppol521/tutorial_reliability_validity/)

Read: Edwards & Jabs ("Safety Culture")

Read: Measuring "Rural" (see two small items on Canvas)

*Assignment #4 Due (Answer key will be available right after class.)*

### 10/22 **EXAM 1**

(See review sheet posted on-line one week prior to exam. Exam covers material through 10/20.)

\*\*\*\*\* **Week 5** \*\*\*\*\*

### 10/27 **Measurement: Units of Analysis**

Read: Edwards/Weber ("Hunger in Oregon")

Read: Tapogna, et.al. ("State Rates of Food Insecurity") [notes available on Canvas]

Quick Read: Schafft, et.al. ("Food Deserts & Overweight...")

Read: Writing in Sociology 2 chapters about literature reviews

To prepare for this class examine the following tutorial:

[https://courses.ecampus.oregonstate.edu/ppol521/tutorial\\_units\\_analysis/](https://courses.ecampus.oregonstate.edu/ppol521/tutorial_units_analysis/)

### 10/29 **Ecological Fallacy and Other Errors in Reasoning**

Read: Charles ("Socioeconomic Determinants of Hunger...")

Read: Krauthammer ("Prevention Myth") good example

Read: Dunier ("Ethnography, the Ecological Fallacy, and the....")

Read: Writing in Sociology chapter on "Data & Methods Section of a Paper"

To prepare for this class examine the following tutorial:  
[https://courses.ecampus.oregonstate.edu/ppol521/tutorial\\_ecological\\_fallacy/](https://courses.ecampus.oregonstate.edu/ppol521/tutorial_ecological_fallacy/)

\*\*\*\*\* **Week 6** \*\*\*\*\*

- 11/3 **Samples and the Populations They Represent**  
Read: Henry Chapters 1 & 2 (“Practical Sampling”)  
Read/Skim: Babbie chapter “The Logic of Sampling”  
Read: “Iraq Mortality Study” and “Appendices” (2 files on Canvas)  
View: Online tutorial about sampling (that reviews these concepts)
- 11/5 **Qualitative Research: Inference, Measurement, Sampling**  
Read: “Coping with Compassion”  
Read: “Collaboration in Providing Social Services”  
Read: Small collection of article abstracts // TBA

\*\*\*\*\* **Week 7** \*\*\*\*\*

- 11/10 **Practical Issues and Concerns in a Multi-Method Project**  
Details TBA  
Read: Writing in Sociology chapter on “Citing Sources”
- 11/12 **More on Sampling, Inference, Measurement in Qualitative Research**  
Read: NY Times article about systematic errors  
Read: Pregnancy Discrimination Litigation  
Read: Relational Power article

\*\*\*\*\* **Week 8** \*\*\*\*\*

- 11/16 ***Draft due for peer review. Details to be announced.***
- 11/17 **Survey Data Collection**  
Read: Babbie chapter on “Survey Research”.  
Read: Other readings to be announced.

To prepare for this class, examine the following tutorial:  
[https://courses.ecampus.oregonstate.edu/ppol521/tutorial\\_survey\\_questions/](https://courses.ecampus.oregonstate.edu/ppol521/tutorial_survey_questions/)

- 11/19 **Survey Data Collection (part II)**  
A contemporary case discussion OR Qualtrics workshop - tba

*Assignment #5 Due by Friday night, 11/20*

\*\*\*\*\* **Week 9** \*\*\*\*\*

11/24 **EXAM 2** (see review sheet to be posted online)

\*\*\*\*\* **Week 10** \*\*\*\*\*

12/1                      Class Presentations (Details to be announced.)  
12/3                      Class Presentations (Details to be announced.)  
12/6 (11:59pm)        Final draft of research proposal due. Submit electronically via Canvas

\*\*\*\*\* **Finals Week** \*\*\*\*\*

**NO FINAL EXAM**

**Note:** Modest changes in this syllabus may be necessary as the pace of the course becomes clear. However, the overall work load will not exceed that which is communicated here.

**Student Conduct**

To fully understand student conduct expectations (definitions and consequences of plagiarism, cheating, etc.) see: <http://studentlife.oregonstate.edu/studentconduct/offenses-0>. There will be zero-tolerance of plagiarism and cheating. Please ask the professor for clarification if you are not sure about these expectations.

**OSU Basic Needs Statement**

Any student who has difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat every day, or who lacks a safe and stable place to live, and believes this may affect their performance in the course, is urged to contact the Human Services Resource Center (HSRC) for support ([hsrc@oregonstate.edu](mailto:hsrc@oregonstate.edu), 541-737-3747). The HSRC (<http://studentlife.oregonstate.edu/hsrc>) has a food pantry, a textbook lending program and other resources to help. Furthermore, please notify the professor if you are comfortable in doing so. This will enable them to provide any resources that they may possess.

**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.

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