

**PPOL 521 (On-line)**  
**Understanding Social Research**

**Instructor:** Professor Mark Edwards  
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**Prerequisites:** Graduate standing and instructor/program 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 online learning environment will be collaborative and collegial, yet rigorous, so students are expected to engage regularly and contribute generously 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" for registered students.
2. One copy of an older, used version of Earl Babbie's *The Practice of Social Research*. These are readily available through online book dealers. There is no need to buy the newest version of the book.

**Grading:**

Grades will be based on a midterm and a final (25% each), participation/contribution (15%), and a research design proposal (35%). The weekly assignments are not numerically graded, but weekly feedback from the instructor will comment on emerging evidence of strengths and weakness in student performance. Based on the collection of these weekly assessments, the instructor will assign a score for the participation/contribution element of the class.

**Communication Issues:**

Please watch for updates, reminders, clarifications, etc. by email. Correspondence will be sent to students' onid email account. Please check it often. You may wish to have your onid emails forwarded to whatever account you normally use.

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**Content and Schedule:**

Please see the detailed calendar (with due-dates and exam dates) provided on the Canvas site. We will cover approximately one module per week. The learning outcomes and specific activities for each module appear on the Canvas site.

- Module 1     The Power of Good Research Design and Good Research Questions
- Module 2     Theory, Hypotheses, and Social Science Variables / Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches
- Module 3     Cause & Effect, Correlation & Controlling for Variables
- Module 4     Measurement (Part 1)
- Module 5     Measurement (Part 2)
- Module 6     Qualitative Analysis and Linkage to Research in Public Policy
- Module 7     Samples and the Populations They Represent
- Module 8     Surveying
- Module 9     Displaying and Assessing Findings / Statistical Significance
- Module 10    Writing in the Social Sciences: Context, Content, and Construction

**Student Conduct:**

Students are expected to conduct themselves in the course (e.g., on discussion boards, email postings) in compliance with the university's regulations regarding civility. Student conduct is governed by the university's policies, as explained in the [Student Conduct Code](#).

**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.

## **About Completing This Class Online**

### **Discussion Participation:**

Students are expected to participate in all discussions. While there is great flexibility in online courses, this is not a self-paced course. You will need to participate in our discussions within the flow of the calendar you see. Anticipate interaction with other students or the instructor at least 4 to 5 times per week on discussion board and/or email.

### **Guidelines for a Productive and Effective Online Classroom:**

Students are expected to conduct themselves in the course (e.g., on discussion boards, email) in compliance with the university's regulations regarding civility.

Civility is an essential ingredient for academic discourse. All communications for this course should be conducted constructively, civilly, and respectfully. Differences in beliefs, opinions, and approaches are to be expected. In all you say and do for this course, be professional. Please bring any communications you believe to be in violation of this class policy to the attention of your instructor.

Active interaction with peers and your instructor is essential to success in this online course, paying particular attention to the following:

- Read your posts carefully before submitting them. Remember that tone of voice (sarcasm, irony, etc.) can be hard to communicate, so be cautious assuming you have communicated it clearly and be forgiving when colleagues fail in this regard. Recall that, like in personal verbal communication, brevity and mono-syllabic responses may communicate irritation or disrespect. And, loquaciousness (wordiness) may communicate disrespect as well. So, in all things, seek to be respectful of others and their opinions, valuing diversity in backgrounds, abilities, and experiences, and being charitable when others fail at this.
- Challenging the ideas held by others is an integral aspect of critical thinking and the academic process. Please word your responses carefully, and recognize that others are expected to challenge your ideas. A positive atmosphere of healthy debate is encouraged.

### **Academic Integrity:**

Students are expected to comply with all regulations pertaining to academic honesty. For further information, visit [Student Conduct and Community Standards](#), or contact the office of Student Conduct and Mediation at 541-737-3656.

### ***OAR 576-015-0020 (2) Academic or Scholarly Dishonesty:***

- a) Academic or Scholarly Dishonesty is defined as an act of deception in which a Student seeks to claim credit for the work or effort of another person, or uses unauthorized materials or fabricated information in any academic work or research, either through the Student's own efforts or the efforts of another.
- b) It includes:
  - i) CHEATING - use or attempted use of unauthorized materials, information or study aids, or an act of deceit by which a Student attempts to misrepresent mastery of academic effort or

- information. This includes but is not limited to unauthorized copying or collaboration on a test or assignment, using prohibited materials and texts, any misuse of an electronic device, or using any deceptive means to gain academic credit.
- ii) **FABRICATION** - falsification or invention of any information including but not limited to falsifying research, inventing or exaggerating data, or listing incorrect or fictitious references.
  - iii) **ASSISTING** - helping another commit an act of academic dishonesty. This includes but is not limited to paying or bribing someone to acquire a test or assignment, changing someone's grades or academic records, taking a test/doing an assignment for someone else by any means, including misuse of an electronic device. It is a violation of Oregon state law to create and offer to sell part or all of an educational assignment to another person (ORS 165.114).
  - iv) **TAMPERING** - altering or interfering with evaluation instruments or documents.
  - v) **PLAGIARISM** - representing the words or ideas of another person or presenting someone else's words, ideas, artistry or data as one's own, or using one's own previously submitted work. Plagiarism includes but is not limited to copying another person's work (including unpublished material) without appropriate referencing, presenting someone else's opinions and theories as one's own, or working jointly on a project and then submitting it as one's own.
- c) Academic Dishonesty cases are handled initially by the academic units, following the process outlined in the University's Academic Dishonesty Report Form, and will also be referred to SCCS for action under these rules.

### **OSU Student Evaluation of Teaching:**

Course evaluation results are extremely important and are used to help the instructor improve this course and the learning experience of future students. Results from the 19 multiple choice questions are tabulated anonymously and go directly to instructors and department heads. Student comments on the open-ended questions are compiled and confidentially forwarded to each instructor, per OSU procedures. The online Student Evaluation of Teaching form will be available toward the end of each term, and you will be sent instructions via ONID by the Office of Academic Programs, Assessment, and Accreditation. You will log in to “Student Online Services” to respond to the online questionnaire. The results on the form are anonymous and are not tabulated until after grades are posted.

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