

**POLS 578: Research Design for Public and Nonprofit Managers
Winter 2007**

Section 1, KH D3084--Thursdays, 6:10pm - 10:00 pm

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Office Hours: T 3:20 pm - 5:50 pm
W 3:20 pm - 5:00 pm

I. Course Objectives

This is a core "skills" course in the MSPA curriculum. POLS 578 introduces students to the concepts and techniques of research design. "Research design" refers to the plan for collecting, interpreting, and analyzing evidence to answer the questions the researcher (or a policy maker) has asked. The seminar is designed to give you a working knowledge of the role research design plays in policy and organizational analysis in the public and nonprofit sectors, and to begin to develop your critical analysis skills for research and analysis. To do this, we examine some of the main debates in applied research (quantitative vs. qualitative approaches, experimental vs. other designs, the benefits and drawbacks of various types of data collection strategies, and the challenges of problem definition). You will demonstrate your knowledge and skills as you: (1) complete a literature review that integrates the methodological and theoretical issues relevant to your research topic and (2) evaluate your colleagues' work along the same lines. This course is the first course in a sequence of skills courses (POLS 579, 580, and 594), and the goal of the research design course is to get you moving forward with an applied research design that guides your work through the course sequence and culminates in POLS 594, where you complete the writing of your particular applied research.

Please note that this course requires a substantial investment of your time over the next 10 weeks. If you cannot make this investment this quarter, I recommend dropping the course and retaking it at a more convenient time.

II. Course Text

Denscombe, M. 1998. *The good research guide for small scale social research projects*.

In addition to this text, you will also be handed or assigned to locate newspaper articles and/or articles in the professional literature. Further, you may find it helpful to buy a basic research design text. A list of some basic research design texts follows:

Brewer, J., and Hunter, A. 1989. *Multimethod research*.

Cook, T.D., and Campbell, D.T. 1979. *Quasi-experimentation: Design and analysis issues for field settings*.

Creswell, J.W. 2003. *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods*.

Fetterman, D.M. 1989. *Ethnography: Step by step*.

Harrison, M.I. 1987. *Diagnosing organizations*.

Neuman, W.L. 2004. *Basics of social research: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*.

O'Sullivan, E., Rassel, G.R., and Berner, M. 2003. *Research methods for public administrators*.

Patton, M.Q. 1986. *Utilization focused evaluation*.

Stewart, D.W., and Shamdasani, P. 19???. *Focus groups*.

Tufte, E. 1983. *The visual display of quantitative information*.

Yin, R.K. 2003. *Case study research*.

III. Course Requirements and Grading

Most assignments will be graded on a 100 point scale, although some of the earlier assignments, in particular, will be graded on a straight pass/fail system. Plus/Minus grades will be assigned. Course grades will be based on your class participation (5%), plus your performance on 8 class assignments.

Those assignments are:

1. preliminary essay and interview–10%
2. topic selection–5%
3. annotated bibliography–10%
4. applied research proposal template–5%
5. draft literature review–15%
6. your peer review comments to two classmates on their lit review draft, with a copy for me–15%
7. final lit review paper and one page response to the reviewers–20%
8. a portfolio comprising copies of each reference you utilized in the preparation and writing of your research design–15%

Plan to keep all of your POLS 578 course materials together, because most of it will need to be handed in to me as part of your course portfolio. I recommend that you purchase a 3-ring binder early in the quarter to file away all of your assignments and journal articles as you acquire them. If you hand it your only copy of this information, you will, of course, want to be sure to pick up your portfolio early next quarter.

Attendance is expected at every class meeting, as is active participation by all class members (you are responsible for the discussion of the week's material). Participation that is actually rooted in the week's reading assignment is, of course, highly desirable.

There are a large number of short assignments due throughout the quarter, and all must be turned in on time as shown on the course outline; failure to submit an assignment results in a "zero" for that assignment unless there is a documented reason for your missing class. Note that many assignments will require more than just one week of work to complete well. Indeed, you should be coming into this class with a pretty good idea of what your final project will look like, and you should ideally have begun locating relevant readings even before week 1 of this class. Please do **not** attempt to complete each assignment the day before they are due.

If this does not meet your expectations for the quarter, please drop the course and retake it at a time that better fits your schedule.

IV. Selected List of Journals of Interest

It is likely that you will wind up utilizing articles from these and other similar journals in the preparation of your literature review and research design:

Public Administration Review

Publius

The Bureaucrat

PA Quarterly

National Civic Review

Organizational Dynamics

Public Management

National Journal

Governing

Policy Studies Journal

Journal of Urban Affairs

American Review of PA

Administrative Sciences Quarterly

Journal of Policy Analysis & Management

International Review of Admin. Sciences

Administration & Society

International Journal of Public Administration

Intergovernmental Perspectives

California Journal

Journal of Applied Behavioral Science

Urban Affairs Review

Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly

V. Class policies

Make Up Policy. Generally speaking, missed quizzes, exams, homework or other written assignments can not be made up and will not be accepted. Exceptions to this policy will be granted only if the reason for the missed assignment was for the observance of a religious holiday or if the student can furnish compelling evidence of illness/health emergency.

In cases of religious holidays, it is your responsibility to contact the professor (me!) during the first two weeks of class to inform him of any upcoming religious holidays that might cause you to miss class. In the case of a medical emergency, get a note from a doctor, or from the student health center. If you know you are going to miss an exam, contact the professor ahead of time. To protect the integrity of the testing process, people who must take an exam at a time other than that which was scheduled for the rest of the class may be required to take a slightly test.

Attendance Policy. Missing classes will be detrimental to your grade, so consider class attendance to be mandatory. I realize that, in practice, unexpected events may arise that prevent you from coming to class. But most of what you learn in this class, you'll at least start to learn from the in-class discussions among yourselves and the instructor. There is no way to substitute for that in-class interaction.

Disabilities Policy: "Upon request, the University will consider reasonable accommodation(s) when needed to facilitate the participation of persons with protected disabilities. Reasonable accommodations will be considered to permit individuals with protected disabilities to: (a) complete the admission/employment process; (b) perform essential job functions; (c) participate in instruction, programs, services or activities; and, (d) enjoy other benefits and privileges of similarly-situated individuals without disabilities.

"Questions, concerns, complaints and requests for reasonable accommodation or additional information may be forwarded to the Office for Equity and Diversity, the campus office assigned responsibility for compliance with the ADA. The Office for Equity and Diversity is located in Administration 606 and is open Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., (323) 343-3040, or TDD: (323) 343-3670." [From the University Catalog]

Additionally, for your information, the Office of Students with Disabilities is located in SA 115. Their phone number is (323) 343-3140, TTDY (323) 343-3139.

Academic Honesty Policy: Please read your University's Academic Honesty Policy, which can be accessed at <http://www.calstatela.edu/usu/csdp/StudentRights15.html>

Cheating or plagiarizing on an exam or assignment will result in a grade of zero for the test, quiz, or assignment, without the opportunity for making up the assignment. Your conduct will also be reported to the University Judicial Affairs Officer.

VI. Assignments

The quarter's assignments are listed on the following pages, complete with due dates and assignment expectations. If the requirements are not clear in the weeks before an assignment is due, please raise the question in class or in office hours BEFORE that assignment is due, so that we can come to an understanding of what I am expecting for that assignment.

Many of these assignments are based on source materials developed by the UCSD urban studies and planning faculty for the senior capstone sequence. The original material can be read here: http://regionalworkbench.org/sequence/186_assignments.html

1. Research and You:

One of the biggest challenges to doing research is getting started. What do I want to know more about? A task for research, and the researcher, is to provide some organization to the complexity of social, political, administrative, or organizational life. Where do you fit in?

The first assignment, due in week 2, requires you to write a brief essay (no more than 500 words, or 2 typed, double-spaced pages) on your research interests/objectives. Then, you will email the essay to a classmate (who will also email you her/his essay), you will read each other's essay, and then you will meet and take turns interviewing each other about your research interests/objectives. Record the results of your interview in a short report (250 words, max) -- giving one copy to the classmate interviewed and one copy to the instructor in week 2's class meeting. NOTE: *You have to arrange a date for an email "essay swap" and follow-up meeting time with the partner selected on the first day of class.*

How do I get started? I would suggest you consider your own organization, and the major problems or issues it must address in the coming year. Is your organization developing or revising its strategic plan? Will it be seeking new sources of funding? Is there a threat to its operations? How might the context of your organization shape these challenges and opportunities?

Your goal is to think about the link between analysis and decision making, and how your research will tie them together. Among the issues you need to consider in making that link are: Who wins, who loses? What does the most good? How will we know if a program is "good"? What do we know about program effectiveness? What measures can we use to increase accountability?

Pick something that you are interested in learning more about, and let it become your subject (that is, your applied research topic). But please note: **this assignment is about YOU, not the topic.**

Part 1. Write a brief essay (500 words, max.) **discussing your research interests/ objectives**, addressing the following questions: (A) Why did you pick your particular topic? (B) Do you have certain assumptions, attitudes, or predispositions about your subject? (C) Who cares about your subject? why? and (D) What do you hope to accomplish by doing this study? NOTE: essays are **not** written in bulleted fashion (dealing with one question at a time); essays provide an integrated storyline (encompass all questions in a flowing style).

Part 2. Conduct and write up an interview with a classmate. Use the four questions spelled out in #1 above (A-D) as an interview guide. To facilitate the process, make sure you have read your classmate's essay ahead of the meeting, and jot down any questions you wish to ask (be prepared!). As the interviewer, your job is to investigate your classmate's approach to selecting a topic for their applied research. In the write-up of this interview (250 words, max.), *report back what you heard*. Specifically, outline what the student said was his or her particular topic; identify what motivates the student's intellectual curiosity in this area; what are his or her main concerns conceptually, ethically, professionally (**it's about your classmate, not his/her topic**)

Both parts of this assignment are due in week 2 (September 27), at the beginning of the class period.

2. Research Topic

Now that you've had a few weeks to think about your topic, you can start "scoping down" your project to make it manageable, given the constraints you are working under.

In a single sentence, please write out your research question. The goal is to make it as specific as possible and to keep it oriented toward a (your) public or nonprofit administration, management, or organizational issue.

This assignment is due in week 3 (October 4), at the beginning of class.

3. Source Materials—Annotated Bibliography

There is a cornucopia of source material available for doing applied research. Identifying source material to address this complexity is a critical task for applied researchers. To begin your exploration of research designs, this assignment requires you to identify 2 books, 4 academic journal articles, and one database (archival or on-line) that can be used to address your specific research question (or topic), and to briefly review these sources. The assignment: annotate these sources. First, create one list, in alphabetical order, of your six (or more) relevant sources. Use the APA style manual. Then, for **each** entry, write an annotation, approximately **150 words long**.

Your annotations should help the reader (me) determine if the source material is useful and worth pursuing for research purposes. Your annotations should contain an evaluative tone that goes beyond mere description. Specifically, each of your annotations should touch on the following (you may have more detail on one point or another):

- Complete bibliographic information in APA format
- Scope/main purpose of the work.
- The conceptual and methodological approach used.
- Gaps this reference addresses.
- A brief summary of findings.
- Questions that remain unanswered.

Also, include a cover page with your annotated bibliography. On this cover page, provide your name, a title for your collection of sources (related to your research question, of course), and a 200-250 word summary of the content of your findings. This should, very briefly, identify the major research questions and issues in your area of interest. What do the authors seem to agree about concerning your research question, and where do they diverge? Is it possible that the research methodology utilized by the authors can explain this difference?

Basically, you want to start thinking about the questions that you'll need to address in greater detail for your next two assignments.

This assignment is due in week 4 (October 18), at the beginning of the class period.

4. Your Applied Research Proposal:

Sometimes it helps to start a project by thinking about it from the end back to the beginning. Completing a Gantt Chart (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gantt_chart) may also be helpful. Either approach requires the analyst to determine each of the steps that must be performed sequentially so that a project can be completed by a specified date and meeting specified requirements.

Consider the benefits of systematically thinking about your research. Because the objective of POLS 578 is to construct a research design and do a literature review around your research question, you should think of assignments 4 and 5 as an integrated assignment that, when successfully completed, will form the front end of the applied research paper you will submit in POLS 594. You will follow up in POLS 579 and 580 with the development or application of any data analysis, and will then be prepared to complete the writing of your applied research in POLS 594. Please note that this also means that you must follow the research design that you propose in the paper you submit in this class (POLS 578) in future classes. The text template provided below can be a useful organizational guide for your thinking and writing as you begin the applied research process. Of course, completing a GANTT chart is also very helpful

This proposal outlines a research design to examine [1] in [2]. Current research on [1] suggests [3]. This raises three fundamental challenges: [4]. This proposal outlines a research strategy aimed at addressing these three challenges. Specifically, the proposed study will [5]. The applied research will contribute to the literature on [6], but it will also be shared with [7] in the hope that [8].

[1] Fill in this blank with your object of study: e.g., collaborative approaches to service delivery, the affordable housing crisis, economic development, public investment strategies, reorganization of management training, etc..

[2] Fill in this blank with your target area or unit of analysis: e.g., Los Angeles city government, LA county, a neighborhood, a school district, Burbank and Glendale, network, association, nonprofit organization.

[3] Fill in this blank with highlights that underscore the significance of your topic: e.g., Recent studies suggest that collaborative approaches offer a more proactive approach to service delivery, yet current jurisdictional arrangements remain challenges.

[4] Fill in this blank with the three specific questions/issues/problems/concerns that drive your study.

[5] Fill in this blank by listing your methods: e.g., I will do a case study of leadership training programs in LAUSD. I will also rely on archival research, interview data, and participant observation from my position as training coordinator in the district.

[6] Fill in this blank by identifying the field of literature to which your study aims to add value: e.g., This research will contribute to the literature on human resource training and the delivery of innovative leadership development education.

[7] and [8] Here you can add other objectives of your research outside the scholarly dimension (that is, if you have other objectives). For example, The results of this study will also be shared with public sector officials, such as the Los Angeles County Management Council to improve public management.

Please also include a GANTT chart, and a short discussion of the timeline you lay out in the chart.
This assignment is due in week 6 (November 1), at the beginning of the class period.

5. Getting Started on the Lit Review/Research Design

Now that you've completed a research proposal, or prospectus, it's time to take the first step in your applied research: doing an analytical literature review. The analytical review integrates a conceptual framework, or theory, and an approach to collect and analyze data consistent with that theory. The following three areas will need to be included in the literature review, and should be kept in mind as you read the literature on your topic, and organize the writing of your literature review.

A. Spells Out Your "Conceptual Framework"

- What is your research question, argument, or problem? Why is it important?
- How is the research you propose to do related to other previous and ongoing research? Is anyone else doing what you propose to do?
- What are your specific objectives? How do you expect your research to provide insight into the general topic or problem?

B. Spells Out Your "Research Design and Methods"

- How will you do the research? What strategy will you use? What methods?
- Are you especially competent to do the research? What methodological skills are required, and do you have them, or will you have them (POLS 579, 580)?
- What contributions will the research make to our understanding of public or nonprofit administration?
- What is your timetable for the research? Is there a cost to completing the research? How will it be funded?

C. Specifies Your "Outcome"

- What will be the outcome of the research (e.g., an explanation, exploratory case study, survey results).

Writing the Literature Review:

What is the purpose of a literature review? The literature review integrates and summarizes what is known in a given issue arena. It pulls together and synthesizes different results. A good review points out areas where prior studies agree as well as where they disagree, and where major questions remain. It collects what is known up to a point in time and indicates the direction for future research. Among the various functions a literature review performs, consider the following:

- *Context* reviews place your research question in “the big picture”;
- *Historical* reviews trace the development of your question over time;
- *Theoretical* reviews compare how different theories address your question;
- *Integrative* reviews summarize what is known about your question at a point in time; and
- *Methodological* reviews point out how methodology varies by how your question

has been studied.

In POLS 578, the literature review is mainly about providing context (what this really means is that the more you read on the topic, the more you will understand the context). Other foci (e.g., historical, theoretical, integrative, and methodological perspectives) can be used, if appropriate, to clarify what you feel is most important about your research question. So what should be included in your literature review?

At a minimum, consider the following points as you identify sources and think about crafting your review:

- How much do we know about your research question? Is there much published work on it?
- Why is the research question considered important? What are the most significant studies completed to date (and how do you know)?
- Can you identify trends in published studies of your research question? What are the gaps?
- Can you identify different scholarly approaches concerning your topic? What are the most relevant concepts (key terms) and theories?

The clean draft of the lit review is due in week 7 (November 8) at the beginning of the class period. Bring 3 copies of it to class. One copy will go to the instructor, and two will go to classmates.

6. Peer Review, and Response to Peer Reviews.

Last week, each student received two of your classmates' lit reviews. Over the course of the next week, you will read those two literature review, and write a critical essay that identifies the strengths and weaknesses of your peers' literature reviews.

Feel free to use items A, B, and C as a checklist) **and return them in week 8 (November 15) with a written evaluation of each of the lit reviews** (no more than 500 words, double spaced, each). Bring two copies of each evaluation: one for each of your classmates, and one for the instructor.

To reiterate, TWO peer review critiques are due at the beginning of week 8 (November 15)

7. "Final" Literature Review/Research Design

The "final" copy of the lit review is due in week 11 (December 6) in my office by 6:30 p.m. You may, of course, hand it in earlier. "Final" is in quotation marks because, in actuality, this paper will serve as the first draft of the final program project that you will complete in POLS 594. You are thus strongly encouraged to make arrangements to pick up your final course assignment as soon as practical after the end of the quarter. Utilize the comments received by your professor and your peers to accomplish the goals detailed in (5), above.

Along with the final literature review/research design, also include a one-page, single-spaced response that details how your responded to each major concern raised by your peer reviewers and professor.

8. The Project Portfolio

In the professional world, **documenting** your work can be as important as the work itself. What is the basis for your conclusion? What have you read, and who have you spoken to, that causes you to believe what you do?

Your project portfolio will be that collection of knowledge. Each professional article that you utilize, each newspaper article, each book, each web entry, and each interview that you conduct should be appropriately documented and included in your portfolio. For most items, that means including full printouts or full photocopies of the articles. For personal interviews, this would mean either a transcript or a copy of your notes from the interview. For extraordinarily large items, that will mean inclusion of sufficient information to document a claim. For example, you don't need to include a full book in your portfolio. Instead, a photocopy the title page, table of contents, and the pages that you directly utilized in preparing your research design will be sufficient. In some cases, you should photocopy the entire appropriate chapter. It really depends on how you utilized the source in your research design.

For completeness, please also include your draft literature review and your response to the peer review and instructor comments on your draft literature review. You might also find it helpful to include your notes on the articles and course readings in this portfolio (copies, of course).

For this class, I would request that the material be included in alphabetical order, just as it was listed in the reference page of your research design.

It is likely that this same portfolio (updated, of course) will be required by your POLS 594 instructor, as well.

This portfolio is due in week 11 (March 14), when you turn in your final research design.