

USP 630: RESEARCH DESIGN

Winter 2012

Class: Monday, 4:00 - 6:30

Lab: (as needed) Wednesday, 4:00 - 5:30

INSTRUCTOR: Loren Lutzenhiser, Professor of Urban Studies and Planning.

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OVERVIEW OF THE COURSE

Our ability to create better cities requires both an understanding of a pre-existing knowledge base and ongoing research to advance knowledge of urban processes and possibilities. But as you are aware, “what we know” or “what we think we know” is often in dispute in the social sciences. Happily, disputes and controversies bring excitement to the subject matter and often stimulate the research necessary to advance knowledge in important directions. Unfortunately, in practice, urban public policy proceeds whether we know what we’re doing or not—along with the expenditure of billions of dollars, presumably intended to improve life in our urban areas.

What does this mean for you as a graduate student in urban studies or public administration and policy? One implication is that you must develop strong research skills. This is true whether your desired career requires interpreting and applying the research of others, or whether you choose to follow an academic path, in which advancing knowledge through research is a prime responsibility. Strong research skills are absolutely necessary for anyone hoping to have a successful academic career. They are also an essential foundation for being an effective public administrator or urban planner. Even an individual pursuing a career of advocacy for specific programs and policies will be far more effective if s/he develops strong research skills.

This course serves as an introduction to interdisciplinary research relevant to urban studies and public administration/policy. But it can only be an introduction. Both fields are very broad, with vast relevant literatures and research traditions that focus on everything from micro-social processes to global-scale systems. However, as an introduction we will, hopefully, be able to lay a foundation for your more intensive study of particular literatures and methodologies later in your training.

SPECIFIC COURSE OBJECTIVES

- Assist students in developing skills in research design. Cultivate a research attitude.
- Introduce students to a range of research methodologies.
- Help students develop skills in critical evaluation of research design and execution—and in particular, to see “qualitative” and “quantitative” approaches as complementary rather than competing research strategies.
- Develop an understanding of the relationship between theory and research methodologies.
- Expose students to research design issues encountered by real-world researchers.
- Provide students direction for developing expertise with methodologies appropriate to their particular areas of specialization. Developing expertise requires taking further methodology courses.

TEXTS AND OTHER READINGS

Singleton, Royce A., and Bruce C. Straits. 2010. *Approaches to Social Research* New York: Oxford University Press (Fifth Edition). Referred to below as “ASR.”

Booth, Wayne C., Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams. *The Craft of Research* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 2003 or later edition. Referred to below as “COR.”

National Academy of Sciences, National Academy of Engineering and the Institute of Medicine. 2010. *On Being a Scientist* Washington, DC: National Academies Press. Referred to below as “OBS.”

Several additional papers will also be assigned. They will be posted on the class D2L website (use your Odin login at <https://d2l.pdx.edu>). They are drawn from academic journals and other professional sources. Some are applications selected to illustrate the use of a particular methodology in a research paper. Others will be used for critical examination and discussion of research design issues. They are referred to below as “TBD” (to be distributed).

REQUIREMENTS AND GRADES

Final grades will be based on: 1) four short written assignments, 2) a final research design project, and 3) class participation.

Graded Work
1. Short Written Assignments (30% – [10% each]) a. Available Data Assignment b. Field Observation Assignment c. Survey Development Assignment
2. Research Design Project (60%) Includes in-class presentation and written final product
3. Class Participation (10%)

Participation

Participation points will be based on consistent, high quality participation. The criteria for high quality participation include:

- Shows knowledge of course material.
- Builds on prior conversation or classes - not repetitive.
- Shows increasing independence and ability to use theory, methods and evidence.
- Shows creativity in research.
- Offers new insight.

Written Assignments

*Paper copies of written assignments are due at the beginning of the class **on the day indicated**.* Grades for late assignments will be reduced. Avoid if at all possible submission of electronic versions (only accepted if related to an illness or other legitimate reason for absence). Any electronic version of assignments with unintelligible titles such as “paper.doc” “assignment.doc” “usp630.doc” “Johnson.doc” will be evaluated with a particularly critical eye.

Grades for written work will be based on evidence of the following:

- 1) Grasp of basic material.
- 2) Clear connection between text, other readings and lectures/in-class discussions.
- 3) Demonstrated increasingly sophisticated approach to research.
- 4) Ability to communicate answers to complex questions in a clear, concise way.

Grading for short assignments will be “needs more work,” “acceptable,” “very good,” or “excellent.” Letter grades will be assigned for the final project and final course grade.

LAB SESSIONS

Thursday’s lab session will be used for several purposes: introduction to important resources, discussion of assignments, hands-on working sessions, presentations by active researchers, and student research proposal presentations. Note that the lab sessions are scheduled for 1.5 hours and may be shorter, depending on the subject matter.

RESEARCH PROJECT PROPOSAL

You are required to develop a research design that satisfies several criteria:

- broad topic concerns urban areas
- proposed research puts a major emphasis on policy, and
- topic is derived from one of the following broad subject areas:

Neighborhood poverty
Energy and climate change
K-12 education
Technology
Universities
Governance
Health issues
Transportation
Sustainability
Land-use
Sprawl
Public services
Environmental quality
Housing

Other topics are possible, but must be approved by the instructor.

While learning about the topic is essential for preparing a research proposal, *the course is about research design*. One implication is that your final research proposal will devote roughly 20% of its attention to the problem/literature and about 80% to issues of research design, methodology, proposed analysis, hypotheses, sampling, etc.

Your individual research proposal should focus on a researchable sub-topic within the broad topic. In other words, if you choose energy and climate change as your broad topic, you must first identify a researchable sub-topic. For example, a researchable sub-topic might be: “Determinates of Green House Gas Emissions from Urban Transit Systems Operating at Different Regional Scales.” One part of the challenge is to narrow a topic sufficiently that it is researchable. Your aim should be to develop a researchable topic that is of thesis or dissertation quality. Keep in mind that you will not be doing the actual research—instead, you will be developing the research design that is a starting point for the research.

All of the listed topics are inherently multidisciplinary. Therefore, sub-topics can be developed for all academic disciplines (planning, sociology, economics, business, history, political science, math, etc.).

Your goal should be to identify an initial sub-topic within the first 2-3 weeks of class. The short *research concept* paper due at the end of week 3 (email format; guidelines will be provided) will serve as a *pre-proposal* on which you will receive feedback. However, you are encouraged to work on your literature review, problem statement and overall research plan well before that feedback is received.

OVERVIEW OF SCHEDULE

Date	Class/ Lab	Topic	Readings/Assignments
1/9	Class 1	Introduction to the course: Goals and strategies.	
1/11	Lab 1	Social science knowledge: Roles of theory and paradigms; what we know and how (we think) we know it.	- ASR Ch 1-3
1/16	Class 2	Martin Luther King HOLIDAY (no class)	
1/18	Lab 2	Information resources: Locating the knowledge base. (Emily Ford) [Millar Library classroom]	- ASR Ch 17
1/23	Class 3	Scoping and navigating literatures. Critical review skills, logic, argument, measurement, sampling, experimental control.	- ASR Ch 4-8 - COR Ch 1-10 - OBS
1/25	Lab 3	ORSP: Human Subjects. (Cathleen Gal) Ethics.	<i>Research Concept due (via email)</i>
1/30	Class 4	Research tools: Use of available data – for research at macro, meso and micro scales. (Lisa Bates)	- ASR Ch 12 - TBD
2/1	Lab 4	Census, demography & data access (Jason Jurjevich)	<i>Available Data Assignment due</i>

2/6	Class 5	Research tools: Field methods – ethnography, depth interviewing, case studies. (Thad Miller)	- ASR Ch 11 - Yin
2/8	Lab 5	Use of historical materials (Carl Abbott)	<i>Field Observation Assignment due</i>
2/13	Class 6	Research tools: Survey research – instrument design, administration, sampling, interviewing/ web delivery, data management (Debi Elliott/SRL staff)	- ASR Ch 9-10, 15-16
2/15	Lab 6		
2/20	Class 7	Survey research – continued. Mixed methods approaches. (Nathan McClintock) (Jennifer Dill)	<i>Survey Development Assignment due</i>
2/22	Lab 7		
2/27	Class 8	Policy and evaluation research. (Jim Strathman)	- ASR Ch 13, 14 - readings TBD
2/29	Lab 8		
3/5	Class 9	Research design sketches presented/critiqued.	
3/7	Lab 9	Research design sketches presented/critiqued.	
3/12	Class 10	Research design sketches presented/critiqued.	
3/14	Lab 10	Research design sketches presented/critiqued.	
3/19	Finals Week	No class meeting planned.	<i>Final project due by 5:00</i>