

PPOL 5120: Research Methods in Public Policy

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1 Enrolment requirements

Students should have an understanding of basic concepts related to quantitative methodology (up to the idea of regression). Students without this knowledge may consider taking one of the many free online courses in basic statistical analysis, or should contact the course instructor for further advice.

NB: Statistical methods for public policy research are *not taught* in this course.

2 Course objectives and intended learning outcomes

2.1 Course objectives

1. To give an overview of some of the key issues related to research methodology in public policy
2. To introduce students to an array of research methods in public policy
3. To introduce students to key aspects of quantitative and qualitative research design
4. To equip students with the skills to choose the most effective research methods for a given area of inquiry and to critique existing studies

2.2 Intended learning outcomes

By the time the students finish the course they should be able to:

1. Understand key concepts related to the science of empirical enquiry (e.g. validity, epistemology etc.)
2. List different research methods and approaches to the empirical inquiry of public policy issues
3. Describe the characteristics of these different approaches

4. Critically appraise the pros and cons of each different approach
5. Select the most appropriate research method for a given context
6. Analyse and critique methods used in existing studies
7. Design their own research projects (or enhance their existing designs)

3 Teaching and learning activities

The course will be taught in 13 x 3 hour sessions. *Attendance at classes is mandatory.* Most sessions will broadly follow the same structure.

Firstly, we will review and discuss the weeks reading in order to clarify any issues as well as exploring its relevance for different research projects.

Then, students will be presented with half of a research article which they will read in class. This part of the article will outline the context and question of a particular research topic. Drawing on the weeks reading and the issues raised in the course prior, students will then work in a group to design an appropriate research design.

Thirdly, students will be given the rest of the article, and asked to compare their own proposed research design with that of the authors. They will then critically evaluate both their own research design and that of the study.

4 Grading type, assessment tasks and their respective weighting in the final grade

4.1 In-class assignments and portfolio: 80%

In most classes, students will be asked to work in groups to produce four MS POWERPOINT slides based on the the exercise outlined above. Each slide should be labelled as follows:

1. The main research context and questions
2. The research design they have constructed
3. The research design which the authors used
4. A comparison and critical appraisal of the two

At the end of the course, the PPT slides will be gathered together as a portfolio and graded as a group. The final mark for this component of the course will be weighted by a peer assessment exercise (which will, for example, take into account attendance, effort by all group members).

4.2 Final examination: 20%

Students will sit a three-hour final exam at the end of the course. During this time, they will be examined on some of the key features of the course. This will be an essay-type exam. Successful students will demonstrate a critical awareness of the issues raised throughout the course.

5 Weekly course topics, required and recommended readings

It is strongly recommended that you acquire the following course textbooks

- Bryman, A. 2012. *Social Research Methods* Oxford: OUP
- Shadish, W.R., Cook, T. and Campbell, D. 2002. *Experimental and Quasi-Experimental Designs for Generalized Causal Inference* Belmont: Cengage

All reading below is required.

NB: The required readings for this course have been deliberately kept to a minimum. This is to ensure that students actually do the readings before class. To be quite clear, students will be unable to participate in class activities if they have not read the required work before class. Students who repeatedly do not do the required readings will be asked to leave the course and will receive no course credit.

Recommended reading will be posted on the course Canvas site. Additional reading will be provided in class.

Week 1: Public policy research methods and social research methods. Same or different?

- Morcol, G. and Ivanova, N. 2010. Methods Taught In Public Policy Programs: Are Quantitative Methods Still Prevalent? *Journal of Public Administration Education* 16(2): 255-277
- Etzioni, A. 2008. The Unique Methodology of Policy Research in Moran, M., Rein, M. and Goodin, R.E. *The Oxford Handbook of Public Policy* Oxford: OUP, pp. 833-843.
- Bryman, pp.4-17

Week 2: Research strategies 1: Theory, epistemology and ontology

- Bryman, pp. 19-43
- Capano, G. 2009. Understanding Policy Change as an Epistemological and Theoretical Problem. *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis: Research and Practice* 11(1): 7-31

Week 3: Research strategies 2: Validity

- Shadish, Cook and Campbell, pp. 1-103

Week 4: Hypotheses, topics and questions

- Bryman, pp. 80-128

Week 5: Ethics and politics

- Bryman, pp.130-154
- Shadish, Cook and Campbell, pp. 280-292

Week 6: Comparative approaches

- Gupta, K. 2012. Comparative Public Policy: Using the Comparative Method to Advance Our Understanding of the Policy Process. *Policy Studies Journal* 40(s1): 11-26
- Young, O.R. 2008. Choosing Governance Systems: A plea for Comparative Research. in Moran, M., Rein, M. and Goodin, R.E. *The Oxford Handbook of Public Policy* Oxford: OUP, pp.844-857

Week 7: Randomized Experiments

- Shadish, Cook and Campbell, pp.246-277

Week 8: Quasi-Experimental Design 1

- Shadish, Cook and Campbell, pp.103-134

Week 9: Quasi-Experimental Design 2

- Shadish, Cook and Campbell, pp. 135-169

Week 10: Interrupted Time Series

- Shadish, Cook and Campbell, pp. 171-206

Week 11: Regression Discontinuity

- Shadish, Cook and Campbell, pp. 207-245

Week 12: Qualitative methods 1: The nature of qualitative research and sampling

- Bryman, pp. 379-429

Week 13: Qualitative methods 2: Gathering, analysing and appraising data

- Bryman, pp. 468-589

6 Contact and other information

- As first port of call, please contact me by email: sgb@ust.hk
- If it is a complex concern, then we can arrange a time to discuss the matter in person
- A CANVAS website will be created where papers can be downloaded and other supplementary information found. There will also be a space for you to share your own thoughts and papers with each other.

7 A disclaimer

- *Please note that this course only serves as an introduction to research methods. You will need to read supplementary reading and have in-depth discussions with your supervisor before choosing and executing the most appropriate methods for your work.*
- *I can only discuss general methodological questions with you as they pertain to the course. I cannot work with you to design your own research project. This is your responsibility (in tandem with your assigned supervisor).*