JLS 680  
Introduction to Justice Research  
Fall 2011  
School of Public Affairs  
Department of Justice, Law, & Society  
American University

1  My Information

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2  Course Description

This course is the first half of a two part sequence intended to help students develop the skills necessary to design, critique and execute social science research. Each week, we discuss a set of readings and also discuss a portion of the research process with an eye towards developing an original research project. In the final two weeks of the course, we will have mock panels and simulate an academic conference experience. At these panels, students will present their research design, receive feedback from a discussant, and field questions from the audience.

3  Course Objectives

Upon completion of this course, I expect that you will be able to understand the elements of research design. In practice, this means that you should be able to identify strengths and weaknesses in the design choices of articles developed by your peers as well as those published in scholarly journals. Most importantly, you will develop a research design that will serve as a basis for a future project. To accomplish these tasks, you will understand how to: generate a theory, test hypotheses derived from the theory, collect data, and identify and mitigate threats to valid inference.

4  Course Format

Each week we discuss a series of readings. You are responsible for each reading. Most weeks you will write a one page paper that fulfills the assigned task. All of these papers serve as a basis for your larger research proposal. Each addresses a particular issue relevant to producing a solid work of social science. I will look over these papers each week and assign a grade. Save these papers and collect them in a single binder as they help with writing the final paper (you will us turn them all in again with your final paper).

I firmly believe in democracy and will solicit your opinions regarding the course generally, and the success or failure of certain aspects of the course specifically. This course will require a great deal of reading and participation on your part. If you are not prepared each day and do not engage in the discussions, debates, and other activities, you will not be successful.
5 Requirements

Required Books


The book is available at the bookstore and online. You can find it on Amazon.com or Addall.com at a reduced price.

Many of the articles for the class will be on reserve. You can also find most of the journal articles on JSTOR (www.jstor.org). I will also place readings on blackboard that are not available on JSTOR.

Assessment

1. Attendance and Participation (10%)—I expect that you will be prepared to discuss all of the readings each week. I will assign a grade for the participation each week based on the following scale:

   A (outstanding) your comments were insightful and contributed to collective understanding of the material across the readings

   A- (strong) your comments were sometimes insightful and sometimes average but were not consistent across the readings

   B+ (good) your comments demonstrated that you understood the material but did not extend the discussion or offer new insights

   B (average) you participated but did not seem to fully grasp the material

   B- (poor) you spoke, but your comments were not germane to the material

   C (unacceptable) you didn’t say anything...

2. Short Papers (10%)—The short papers serve two purposes. First, they provide another way for me to evaluate your engagement with the material. Second, they serve as a basis for the final paper. Papers are scored based on a similar rubric as above. They should be mistake-free and a single page per assignment.

3. Conference Presentation (10%)—At the end of the term, you will give a 10-15 minute presentation on your research design. You will be on a panel of 3-4 papers with a chair and discussant. The presentation must include a powerpoint (or equivalent program) presentation. Later in the term, we will discuss how to present your research design effectively. You will also be graded on how well you respond to questions from the discussant and audience.

4. Exams (30%)—The midterm and final exam will include a series of essay questions designed to have you demonstrate and apply the course material to questions posed from each week’s readings.

5. Research Design Paper (40%)—The research design paper must be 15-25 pages (including references, tables, graphs, etc). The quality of the paper, however, is more important than the quantity. The paper should have the format as outlined by Barry Weingast here:
http://www.stanford.edu/~weingast/caltech_rules.html

While this is not the only way to write a great paper in the social sciences, it is a great way.

These papers also makes useful suggestions for writing a graduate paper that is potentially publishable:


6 Course Policies

Late Assignments

I DO NOT accept any late papers. The paper is due in hard copy on the date assigned by the time the class begins or you will earn a 0 for the assignment. Since you are presenting your research and receiving feedback from a discussant, you have to be ready by the date of the “conference.”

Short papers are due at the beginning of each class. I will not accept e-mail copies or papers placed under my door. If you miss a class, response papers (single page papers per reading summarizing and analyzing the weeks readings) serve as your participation grade and are due the next time you attend.

Syllabus Change Policy

This syllabus is a guide for the course and is subject to change with advanced notice.

7 Tentative Course Schedule

Building Blocks of Research

Wed. Aug. 31—What is science? What is social science? How can we use science to understand human interaction?

-Introductions
-Discussion: What is Science?
-Readings

1. Babbie, Chapter 1 (Human Inquiry and Science)


Wed. Sept. 7—What is a paradigm/research program? How does it relate to theory? What are the implications for research?

-Readings

1. Babbie, Chapter 2 (Paradigms, Theory, and Research)

-BRING SOME CONCEPTS—Bring a list of concepts that are of interest to you. For example, you may be interested in the relationship between gender and terrorism or the death penalty and deterrence. Bring a typed copy to turn in at the end of class.

**Research Design**

Wed. Sept. 14—Asking the Right Question: How do I develop a good research question?

-Readings

1. Babbie, Chapter 4 (Research Design)

-BRING A RESEARCH QUESTION—We will discuss each person’s question and offer suggestions and potential readings. Turn in a typed copy at the end of class.

Wed. Sept. 21—Conceptualizing, Operationalizing, and Measuring: How do I turn my ideas into a feasible project?

-Readings

1. Babbie, Chapter 5 (Conceptualization, Operationalization, and Measurement)
2. Babbie, Chapter 6 (Indexes, Scales, and Typologies)


-BRING IDEAS ABOUT MEASURING CONCEPTS—We will discuss each person’s concepts/measures and offer suggestions. Bring in a typed copy and turn in at the end of class.

Selecting Cases

Wed. Sept. 28—Selecting cases and sampling: How do I choose the cases to investigate?

-Readings:

1. Babbie, Chapter 7 (The Logic of Sampling)


-BRING CASE SELECTION CHOICES—We will discuss each person’s cases and help decide which cases would be appropriate for addressing the question/puzzle. Turn in at the end of class.

Wed. Oct. 5—Case Selection Errors: Why is this design faulty?

-Readings


-BRING ANALYSIS OF SELECTION BIAS IN YOUR AREA OF RESEARCH—Identify potential selection problems from previous studies in your research area. You don’t need to do outside research. Just discuss in a single page potential problems, and how you plan to avoid them. Turn in typed sheet at the end of class.
Exam #1
Wed. Oct. 12—MIDTERM EXAM

Surveys and Experiments
Wed. Oct. 19—Experiments: What are the costs and benefits?

-Readings

1. Babbie, Chapter 8 (Experiments)

-BRING A DEFENSE AND CRITIQUE OF THIS METHOD OF RESEARCH—This should be a single page that evaluates the merits and drawbacks of this approach. Pay special attention to incorporating this into your final paper if you decide to use this methodology.

Wed. Oct. 26—Survey Research: How can it help or hinder the acquisition of knowledge?

-Readings

1. Babbie, Chapter 9 (Survey Research)

-BRING A DEFENSE AND CRITIQUE OF THIS METHOD OF RESEARCH—This should be a single page that evaluates the merits and drawbacks of this approach. Pay special attention to incorporating this into your final paper if you decide to use this methodology.
Qualitative and Quantitative Observational Research

Wed. Nov. 2—Qualitative Field Research: Why should I use this research approach?

-Readings

1. Babbie Chapters 10 (Qualitative Field Research) and 11 (Unobtrusive Research)

-BRING A DEFENSE AND CRITIQUE OF THIS METHOD OF RESEARCH—This should be a single page that evaluates the merits and drawbacks of this approach. Pay special attention to incorporating this into your final paper if you decide to use this methodology.

Wed. Nov. 9—Quantitative Research: Why should I use that research approach?

-Readings

1. Babbie, Chapter 14 (Quantitative Data Analysis)

-BRING A DEFENSE AND CRITIQUE OF THIS METHOD OF RESEARCH—This should be a single page that evaluates the merits and drawbacks of this approach. Pay special attention to incorporating this into your final paper if you decide to use this methodology.

Wed. Nov. 16—Ethics of Social Science Research: What (not) to do with your research subjects?

-Readings

1. Babbie, Chapter 3 (The Ethics and Politics of Social Research)


Nov. 23 – Nov. 27.—NO SCHOOL—THANKSGIVING BREAK

**Conferences and Final Exam**

Wed. Nov. 30—Conference #1

Wed. Dec. 7—Conference #2

Mon. Dec. 19—FINAL EXAM