

POJS 841: Research Methods

Winter 2009, T 7:30pm-10:20pm, D34093, 3 credit hours

INSTRUCTOR: Dr. Daniel Cortese (cor-TAY-zee)
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OFFICE HOURS: Mondays 1–3pm and Tuesdays 6:30–7:30pm; also by appointment

Course Texts:

1. John Creswell, *Research Design, 3rd Edition* (Sage, 2009).
2. Michael Bamberger, Jim Rugh, and Linda Mabry, *Real World Evaluation* (Sage, 2006).

Catalogue Description:

POJS 841 explores in depth the fundamental and current trends in empirical social scientific research methodologies. This graduate level course emphasizes qualitative and mixed-method approaches using real-life examples so that students can directly apply learned methods in their fields.

Rationale:

POJS 841 is a graduate level course that, unlike other research methods courses, is designed with the working student in mind; the research methods learned are applicable to professional careers where budget, time, data, and political constraints are prevalent. In this course, we learn the fundamental and current trends in empirical social scientific methodologies that are necessary for a graduate program, all while learning how to follow step-by-step approaches in quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods in order to solve many of the day-to-day research needs in corporations, non-profits, and governmental agencies. Students are NOT required to actually *conduct* the research for this course but, rather, should be prepared to develop a research *proposal* relevant to their current or future career objectives that situates the research problem in salient academic literature and theoretical models, their planned methodological approach(es) to understand this problem, possible research pitfalls or hindrances that should be anticipated, and their proposed timeline for data collection and research completion. Students will also be required to present their proposal in an oral presentation to the class. The course is particularly helpful for advanced graduate students who are in the developmental stages for their Masters thesis or Doctoral capstone research.

Prerequisites/Restrictions:

SOSC 450, advanced graduate level experience, or Prof. Cortese's Permission

Intended Audience:

POJS 841 is a required course for graduate students in the Political and Justice Studies sequence. The class may also be of interest to graduate students in business administration, public administration, health administration, addictions studies, nursing, education, social work, communications, psychology, media studies, and other disciplines where social scientific methodologies that are attuned to the budget, time, data, and political constraints of many professional careers.

Course Objectives:

At the completion of this course, you should be confident in your abilities to:

1. Understand and explain how to utilize the research method process to conduct scientific research.

2. Develop and sharpen a research question and devise a specific plan to answer your question scientifically.
3. Sharpen your writing, editing, computer, and oral presentation skills by writing and editing drafts of your research proposal and presenting your proposal to the class with a brief 15-minute Powerpoint presentation.

Instructional Activities:

The mode of instruction in this seminar will be based on lecture and collaborative discussion, emphasizing student participation. The expectation for all class periods will be that you have both read and contemplated (i.e., have notes on the readings that will be used to facilitate discussion) the assigned readings in preparation for an active discussion. Students enrolled in this course must overcome their reticence (shyness) of both writing and orally presenting their work; In nearly every position for which a graduate degree is necessary, these skills are utilized every day. It is important for students to be cognizant (aware) of this course requirement, recognize its necessity in future employment, work toward being articulate in professional forums, and overcome any fears of public speaking. Remember, your power is in your words, and you ought not silence your abilities with fear!

Course Policies & Procedures:

Classroom Climate:

As a group, we must establish a foundation of mutual respect and trust. When discussing issues in this class, *all opinions will be respected* as long as they are argued courteously and intelligently, and I ask that you respect the thoughts expressed by me as well as your classmates. It is also expected that we will present our own opinions and thoughts in ways that are tactful and not offensive to others.

Mobile Phones:

Please set all phones to vibrate while in class, and refrain from holding private conversations, sleeping, or reading during the lectures. If your behavior is a distraction to the class, including me, you will be asked to leave and counted as absent, regardless of the time spent in class.

Preparation:

Significant reading is a requirement in all graduate courses. You should expect to take thorough notes from at least 75 – 100 pages of academic literature per week. It is unlikely that you will succeed in this course if you fail to thoroughly read and adequately prepare notes on information and questions that you gleaned (gathered) from the readings. Schedule ample time to prepare for the course free of distractions. Busses or the “El” are not free from distractions, and poor places to study.

All students are required to take plentiful notes for every single day of class (including what is orally emphasized but isn’t written down on the board). Any additional material provided should be considered supplementary to the notes that you take in class. I reserve the right to modify any supplementary material.

Professor-Student Communication:

“Grade haggling” is vehemently discouraged. Asking for *individualized* “extra work” or “bonus points” are not only unethical, but against policy and will not be honored under any circumstances.

Use email *sparingly* as one form of communication with the professor. Please abstain from sending email regarding course policies, graded work, and/or course grades. Utilize a more appropriate, personal method for these issues.

Students should be familiar with WebCT, and comfortable with using it as a learning tool and form of communication with the professor and each other. Use it as a source for obtaining the required

readings and assignments for the course. If you need assistance understanding how to use WebCT, please let me know as soon as possible so that I can refer you to the appropriate resources.

I expect that all students who receive less than a 70 points (a “C”) on any exam, or less than a “C” on any work to speak with me within two weeks of the exam or due date. It is my policy not to review any graded work with students past two weeks from their due date.

I will accept written rebuttals up to one week following the return of any assignment. A persuasive rebuttal includes a summary of the question or task involved, a copy of your original response, and a clear statement delineating the reasons why you think you deserve more credit than you were given. I encourage you to take advantage of this opportunity to participate in the process of your own evaluation. This is your chance to make a case for yourself. Use it if you think you have just cause.

Coursework:

The course grade will be determined by your performance on the following: Two in-class examinations, pop quizzes, research proposal development, an oral presentation of your proposal, and course participation.

In this course, there are two exams during class periods. Examination #1 will be administered during class and will cover the material from the first half of the course. Examination #2 is cumulative and will mostly cover the material from the second half of the course. Since topics in this course build on each other, some material from earlier in the semester will be present on the second examination.

NOTE: If you arrive late to an exam, you may take the exam in the remaining time if no one has finished the test. If you arrive after the first person left the examination, you are unable to take the exam at that time.

Make-up exams are NOT automatically given. Extraordinary circumstances are required and must include necessary documentation before I will even consider permitting them. For example, illness that does not require immediate hospitalization is not a valid excuse. Any permitted make-up examinations will occur at my convenience and cannot be rescheduled. In other words, don't miss an exam.

Pop quizzes are an excellent way to get you to come to class and to keep up with the course material. Because we all have situations that prevent us from arriving to class on-time, or just have “bad days,” an additional “extra credit” quiz may be assigned in the semester to “replace” a low or missing quiz grade. Pop quizzes are given at the start of the class and last no more than 30 minutes, so be certain to arrive to class on time. Quizzes are worth 25 points each, comprising of brief short answer questions and occur at the start of the class, covering the readings since the last quiz or exam. Therefore, I encourage you to be prepared before each class day.

The course is made to encourage the development of a viable empirical research proposal on a topic that is of interest to you, and grounded in salient social scientific literature. Early in the semester, students are expected to submit a one- to two-page research proposal topic that grounds a particular research question in salient academic literature, and will be reviewed by the professor for its relevance and “do-ability.” For this first part of the proposal, you should already have conducted preliminary literature searches before submission (which may have been readings lists from other courses that help shape your research question), and a brief discussion of what theoretical model(s) best explain your question, and where you would like to go with the proposal. I will provide feedback to help guide your thoughts. Your first draft should be “near-finished” with most of your proposal and evidence present already. I will review this draft and provide you feedback, as well as alert you to issues that you should consider resolving before the final submission. Your oral presentation will be in

Powerpoint (Windows/Mac) or Keynote (Mac only) format, presented during the final weeks of class, and limited to no more than 15 minutes. I will provide more information on how to approach this assignment, and provide instructions and helpful tips, closer to the date.

Learning is an interactive process. A large portion of the material for this course will be covered in class and will emerge from group discussion. The success or failure of any class hinges to a large extent on the combination of the participants and their preparation and enthusiasm. Therefore, I strongly encourage thoughtful preparation (on my part as well as yours), regular attendance and active classroom participation. Completion of a "Getting to Know You Card" within the first three class meetings is required. Failure to do so results in a substantial grade penalty.

Attendance:

Your attendance is paramount to grasping the material and helping you develop the necessary skills for academic and professional success. Attendance and course participation is quantified throughout the semester through a variety of formats. It is my policy that students must be present in class for at least 90 minutes to be considered present. Students who do not participate and/or are absent more than three class meetings should not expect to receive full credit for the course, regardless of the quality of their academic work. You should expect at least a one-letter grade reduction in your final course grade for three or more absences, and either a failing course grade or no course credit received for excessive absences.

Late Work:

Although I expect all work to be submitted by the due date, submitting late work is better than submitting no work at all. Any late work that I accept for credit will receive 10% deduction per business day for no more than seven calendar days after the due date; after seven calendar days any assignment not submitted will receive a zero. A calendar day ends at 11:59pm CST. All late submissions must display valid third-party date verification. The best way to ensure that the third-party date verification is valid is to submit work electronically.

Grading and Evaluation:

<i>Course Assignments</i>	<i>Points</i>
Exam #1	100
Exam #2	100
Intended Research Topic	50
Proposal Draft	100
Final Research Proposal	200
15-min Oral Presentation	100
Pop Quizzes	100 total, 25 points each
<u>Course Participation</u>	<u>50</u>
Total	800

General Format: Every assignment that you hand in (unless otherwise noted) should follow APA style with a title page and references. See: http://www.govst.edu/sas/t_stu_dev.aspx?id=16116

Grading Scale:

716-800 = A 636-715 = B 556-635 = C 476-555 = D 475 or below = F

A = *Mastery of the Material:* Sharply focused paper topic with clear and accurate description of evidence and course material. Outstanding written and oral work. Reliably active, but not monopolizing, involvement in class discussions.

- B =** *Proficiency in the Material:* Generally clear paper topic with acceptable description of evidence and successful incorporation of course material. Good written and oral work with minimal grammatical errors. Active involvement in class discussions.
- C =** *Basic Understanding of the Material:* Shallow, unclear, or unfocused paper topic with weak structure and coursework demonstrates a basic and/or general understanding of and linkages to course material. Solid effort to complete written and oral work, but with grammatical errors. Activities in class discussions indicate a basic and/or general understanding of course material.
- D =** *Poor Understanding of the Material:* Weak attempt at a paper topic, with little, no, primarily incorrect, or inappropriate evidence and support from course material. Poor writing style and grammar. Below average work, usually indicative of missed assignments or poor attendance.
- F =** *No Effort/Violates Requirements:* No attempt to formulate a paper topic, and evidence is mostly inappropriate, incorrect and/or presented as a garbled story. Plagiarization or Fraud in authorship. Failure to meet and/or violates the course requirements.

Accessibility:

GSU is committed to providing all students equal access to all university programs and facilities. Students who have a documented physical, psychological, or learning disability and need academic accommodations, must register with Access Services for Students with Disabilities (ASSD). Please contact the Coordinator of ASSD in Room B1201 in person; by e-mail, assd@govst.edu; or by calling 708.235.3968. If you are already registered, please contact your instructor privately regarding your academic accommodations.

Ethical Behavior:

Each student is expected to follow the University's requirements as published in the University Catalog, 1997-99 for Academic Honesty (page 34) and the University Policy on Academic Honesty which appears in the Student Handbook. Students are expected to fulfill academic requirements in an ethical and honest manner. This expectation pertains to the following elements: use and acknowledgement of the ideas and work of others, submission of work to fulfill course requirements, sharing of work with other students, and appropriate behavior during examinations.

TENTATIVE TOPICAL OUTLINE:

This is a *brief* overview of our anticipated journey. A detailed list of required readings for each class day will be posted online on WebCT. Anticipate a minimum of 75 – 100 pages of reading per week, with an additional 50 pages from recommended readings.

- Jan 6 Course Introduction, Overview, and “Getting to Know You” card
- Jan 13 Spotting the Research Problem
- Jan 20 Approaching Research Ethically and within Financial and Temporal Means
- Jan 27 Ensuring a Smooth, Reliable, and Valid Data Collection
- Feb 3 Developing and Writing the Proposal for Particular Audiences
Paper Topic Due

Feb 10	Exam #1
Feb 17	Designing the Research Project: Quantitative
Feb 24	Designing the Research Project: Qualitative
Mar 3	Designing the Research Project: Qualitative (Con't)
Mar 10	Designing the Research Project: Mixed Methods
Mar 17	Designing the Research Project: Mixed Methods (Con't) Paper Draft Due
Mar 24	Disseminating Your Research and Applying Findings for Good
Mar 31	Exam #2
Apr 7	Presentations
Apr 14	Presentations Final Proposal Due