

**The Trachtenberg School of Public Policy and Public Administration
Spring 2025**

Course Number: PPPA 8101

Course Title: Research Methods

Description: Doctoral seminar on theory and practice in research methodology. Data sources and gathering, research models and designs. Critical evaluation of research studies. Emphasis on application of research methods to policy questions.

Prerequisites: None

Professor: Dr. Kathryn Newcomer
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Office hours: Virtually anytime by appointment

Required Textbooks:

Mason, Jennifer *Qualitative Researching*, 3rd edition, Sage, 2018 (which ever edition you can purchase inexpensively.)

Pearl, Judea and Dana Mackenzie. 2018. *The Book of Why*. Basic Books. No need to buy – assigned chapters are on Blackboard.

Salganik, Matthew J. *Bit by Bit*. Princeton University Press, 2018. This entire book is free on-line at <https://www.bitbybitbook.com/en/1st-ed/preface/>

Shadish, Cook and Campbell. *Experimental and Quasi-Experimental Designs for Generalized Causal Inference*. Houghton

Mifflin, 2002. (which ever edition you can purchase inexpensively.)

Yin, Robert *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (which ever edition you can purchase inexpensively.)

Student Learning

Objectives:

Course content and requirements are designed to develop students' knowledge and skills in:

1. Articulating one's own ontological and epistemological assumptions and preferences;
2. Developing and testing theories and models;
3. Framing and developing good researchable questions;
4. Designing research to provide appropriate comparisons to address research questions;
5. Designing research using "big data;"
6. Weighing the relative advantages of different data collection techniques to address research questions;
7. Writing focused questions for interviews and surveys;
8. Recognizing ethical issues that arise in conducting and reporting research and strategies to address them; and
9. Reporting on one's own research and on studies conducted by others in a clear manner.

Classroom Expectations:

Higher education works best when it becomes a vigorous and lively marketplace of ideas in which all points of view are heard. Free expression in the classroom is an integral part of this process and works best when all of us approach the enterprise with empathy and respect for others, irrespective of their ideology, political views, or identity. We value civility because that is the kind of community we want, and we care for it because civility permits intellectual exploration and growth.

Respect for Diversity and Inclusion:

It is my intent that students from all backgrounds and perspectives be well-served by this course, that students' learning needs be addressed both in and out of class, and that

the diversity that students bring to this class be viewed as a resource, strength, and benefit. I strive to create an inclusive classroom and present materials and activities that are respectful of diversity including gender, sexuality, disability, age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, culture, and political affiliation. Your suggestions on how to help me succeed with this are encouraged and appreciated.

Acknowledging Historical Realities about GW:

GW and Slavery:

“Although additional work remains to be done, initial research into Columbian College [GW’s predecessor] clearly shows that the practice of slavery influenced the school from the president down to enslaved servants. The college was located in a slave-owning city, financed and led by slave owners and men who profited from the slave economy, educated pro-slavery students, and depended on the labor of enslaved people” (library.gwu.edu/slavery-columbian-college).

GW & Native American Lands

“George Washington University's Foggy Bottom Campus in downtown Washington, D.C. ... resides on the traditional and ancestral homelands of the Piscataway and Anacostan peoples. ... The District borders the confluence of the Anacostia and Potomac Rivers, a historic center of trade and cultural exchange between several tribal nations. For generations, the Piscataway and Anacostian Peoples have resided in this region and served as stewards of the local land and waterways” (cipp.cps.gwu.edu/land-acknowledgement).

Course

Requirements:

1. Class participation. The class is a doctoral seminar, relying on active participation by all students. I expect students to attend every class, complete all readings, and participate fully in class discussion. Students should come with at least one discussion question for the class to discuss on each reading. **Each week students are expected to bring to class at least one discussion question they want the class to discuss about the readings. AND each student will be asked to find and present the basics about a study that exemplifies one of the research designs covered in class, and discuss how it illustrates the design. S/he**

should provide a brief summary to the class on the night s/he presents with powerpoints but no written paper needed (15% of grade).

2. Written Assignments.

a. Article Critique (Due March 26): Students are asked to select an empirical research article of their choosing that has **quantitative analyses and addresses at least one impact (causal) question** and submit a written critique of approximately six pages in the following format:

- 1) An introduction to the paper;
- 2) A brief description of the focus and findings;
- 3) identification of the key research questions addressed;
- 4) a brief summary of the research design and data collection methods used; and
- 5) **a table with a systematic list of threats to the : multicultural validity, measurement validity and measurement reliability, internal validity and external validity, and statistical conclusion validity of the findings.** Note that the threats should be clearly presented, for example do not simply state “Hawthorne Effect,” but clarify how/why that threat occurred. And the threats should be labeled regarding **the extent to which the authors acknowledged and addressed each.** And please, please pay attention to threats to statistical conclusion validity. (20% of grade).

See good examples on Blackboard!

b. Research Synthesis and Design (Due May 7): Students are asked to perform a systematic analysis of a set of (at least six) empirical research articles and/or reports on a topic of their choosing and develop a brief research design that would address a set of about 3 research questions that are relevant to the literature that has been reviewed. The written report should include **a synthesis of the studies** that is summarized in a matrix with a series of columns containing pertinent information

about the studies reviewed (see a list of potential columns below).

The **design** should include: as statement of the policy issue or problem to be addressed, the research questions to be addressed, data sources, data collection methods, the type of design (in Campbell and Stanley terminology), and potential limitations to implementing the study that might be encountered (35% of grade).

Potential columns for your synthesis include:

- i) author and year
- ii) primary research questions
- iii) research design
- iv) data collection techniques
- v) type of sampling and sample size
- vi) data analytical techniques
- vii) key findings
- viii) limitations (categorize under headings of measurement validity and measurement reliability, internal and external validity, and statistical conclusion validity)

See good examples on Blackboard!

3. Final Exam. The final exam will be divided up into 5 separate brief (2-3 page double spaced) essays distributed across the semester. The exam questions will be focused on the main topics covered in the course and the pool of questions will be provided in the powerpoint slides (30% of grade). The essays will be due: March 5, April 9 and April 30. Prompts for each will be distributed at least two weeks ahead.

Class Schedule and Assignments

Session 1 (Jan. 16)

What is Science? and The Role of Theories and Models

Readings:

Chapters from Nader book on BB
Clarke and Primo on BB
Skim Gilbert et al. on BB
Skim Biden Memorandum on Indigenous Knowledge on BB

Session 2 (Jan. 23)

Addressing Racism in Research

Readings:

Chapters from Toldson on BB
Chapters on Decolonizing Methodologies by Tuhiwai-Smith on BB
White Paper on Structural Racism (by Urban Institute) on BB
White Paper on Structural Racism in Public Health (by Urban Institute) on BB

Session 3 (Jan. 30)

Introduction to Research Design.

Readings:

Shadish, Cook and Campbell (Chapters 1-3)
Newcomer and Hart Chapter 2 on Blackboard

Cartwright on Evidence on BB

Session 4 (Feb. 6)

Qualitative Researching

Readings:

Mason, (Chapters 1,2,3)
Riccucci Chapters 1,2,4,5, 7 and 8 (Blackboard)
Skim Bennett and Elman, “Qualitative Research: Recent Developments in Case Study Research.” on BB
Skim CASP Checklist on BB

Session 5 (Feb. 13)

Case Studies, Process Tracing, and QCA

Readings:

Yin (Entire book)
Mason (Chapters 4-7)
Raimondo Chapter on Process Tracing on BB
Chapter on QCA on BB
Skim Mumford paper on Q sort on BB

Session 6 (Feb. 20) Student presentations on designs.

Designing Research Continued

Readings:

Shadish, Cook and Campbell (Chapters 6-8)

Session 7 (Feb. 27) Student presentations on designs.

Designing Research Continued

Readings:

Shadish, Cook and Campbell (Chapters 9-13)

Session 8 (Mar. 5) **NOTE NEXT WEEK IS SPRING BREAK.**

Designing Research with Big Data **First Final Exam Essays Due**

Readings:

Salganik, Chapters 1-4

Session 9 (Mar. 19)

Designing Data Collection Instruments, and Ethical Concerns

Readings:

Salganik, Chapters 5 and 6

Session 10 (Mar. 26) *******ARTICLE CRITIQUE DUE*******

Synthesizing and Evaluating Rigor in Research, and Meta-Analysis

Readings:

Lipsey and Wilson chapters on BB

Cooper and Hedges, chapters 1, 2, 32 and 33 (Blackboard)

Skim Leviton reading on BB

Session 11 (April 2)

Addressing Causality

Readings:

Pearl and Mackenzie, chapters 1-4 and 9

Session 12 (April 9) **Second Final Exam Essays Due**

Informing Public Policy-making with Research

Readings:

Leamer article on BB

Cook article on BB

Shadish article on BB

Session 13 (April 16)

Rethinking Standards of Evidence and Class Overview

Readings:

Newcomer et. al. on BB

And

Please visit and assess one of the following websites, **or one of your choosing**, and be ready to discuss your evaluation of it:

1. IES What Works Clearinghouse (education)
<http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/>
2. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Programs
OJJDP Model Programs Guide
<http://ojjdp.ncjrs.gov/programs/mpg.html>
3. The Campbell Collaboration <http://campbellcollaboration.org/>
4. The Department of Labor <https://clear.dol.gov/>
5. ACF <https://www.pathwaystowork.acf.hhs.gov/>

Session 14 (April 23)

Students each present their paper through an 8 minute powerpoint presentation.

April 30 Last Final Exam Essay Due

May 7 *** Research Synthesis and Design Due*******

Policies in The Trachtenberg School Courses

1. **Incompletes:** A student must consult with the instructor to obtain a grade of I (incomplete) no later than the last day of classes in a semester. At that time, the student and instructor will both sign the CCAS contract for incompletes and submit a copy to the School Director. Please consult the TSPPPA Student Handbook or visit our website for the complete CCAS policy on incompletes.
2. **Submission of Written Work Products Outside of the Classroom:** It is the responsibility of the student to ensure that an instructor receives each written assignment. Students can submit written work electronically only with the express permission of the instructor.
3. **Submission of Written Work Products after Due Date: Policy on Late Work:** All work must be turned in by the assigned due date in order to receive full credit for that assignment, unless an exception is expressly made by the instructor.
4. **Academic Honesty:** Please consult the “policies” section of the GW student handbook for the university code of academic integrity. Note especially the definition of plagiarism: “intentionally representing the words, ideas, or sequence of ideas of another as one’s own in any academic exercise; failure to attribute any of the following: quotations, paraphrases, or borrowed information.” All examinations, papers, and other graded work products and assignments are to be completed in conformance with the George Washington University Code of Academic Integrity.
5. **Changing Grades After Completion of Course:** No changes can be made in grades after the conclusion of the semester, other than in cases of clerical error.
6. **The Syllabus:** This syllabus is a guide to the course for the student. Sound educational practice requires flexibility and the instructor may therefore, at her/his discretion, modify content and requirements during the semester but only to give students more time, not

less.

University Policies

Academic Integrity Code

Academic integrity is an essential part of the educational process, and all members of the GW community take these matters very seriously. As the instructor of record for this course, my role is to provide clear expectations and uphold them in all assessments. Violations of academic integrity occur when students fail to cite research sources properly, engage in unauthorized collaboration, falsify data, and otherwise violate the [Code of Academic Integrity](#). If you have any questions about whether particular academic practices or resources are permitted, you should ask me for clarification. If you are reported for an academic integrity violation, you should contact Conflict Education and Student Accountability (CESA), formerly known as Student Rights and Responsibilities (SRR), to learn more about your rights and options in the process. Consequences can range from failure of assignment to expulsion from the University and may include a transcript notation. For more information, refer to the CESA website at students.gwu.edu/code-academic-integrity or contact CESA by email cesa@gwu.edu or phone 202-994-6757.

University policy on observance of religious holidays

Students must notify faculty during the first week of the semester in which they are enrolled in the course, or as early as possible, but no later than three weeks prior to the absence, of their intention to be absent from class on their day(s) of religious observance. If the holiday falls within the first three weeks of class, the student must inform faculty in the first week of the semester. For details and policy, see provost.gwu.edu/policies-procedures-and-guidelines.

Use of Electronic Course Materials and Class Recordings

Students are encouraged to use electronic course materials, including recorded class sessions, for private personal use in connection with their academic program of study. Electronic course materials and recorded class sessions should not be shared or used for non-course related purposes unless express permission has been granted by the instructor. Students who impermissibly share any electronic course materials are subject to discipline under the Student Code of Conduct. Contact the instructor if you have questions regarding what constitutes permissible or impermissible use of electronic course materials and/or recorded class sessions. Contact Disability Support Services at disabilitysupport.gwu.edu if you have questions or need assistance in accessing electronic course materials.

Out of Class Learning

Average minimum amount of independent, out-of- class, learning expected per week: In a 15 week semester, including exam week, students are expected to spend a minimum of 100 minutes of out-of- class work for every 50 minutes of direct instruction, for a **minimum** total of 2.5 hours a week.

Academic support

Academic Commons

[Academic Commons](#) is the central location for academic support resources for GW students. To schedule a peer tutoring session for a variety of courses visit go.gwu.edu/tutoring. Visit academiccommons.gwu.edu for study skills tips, finding help with research, and connecting with other campus resources. For questions email academiccommons@gwu.edu.

GW Writing Center

GW Writing Center cultivates confident writers in the University community by facilitating collaborative, critical, and inclusive conversations at all stages of the writing process. Working alongside peer mentors, writers develop strategies to write independently in academic and public settings. Appointments can be booked online at gwu.mywconline.

Support for students in and outside the classroom

Disability Support Services (DSS) 202-994-8250

Any student who may need an accommodation based on the potential impact of a disability should contact Disability Support Services at disabilitysupport.gwu.edu to establish eligibility and to coordinate reasonable accommodations.

Student Health Center 202-994-5300, 24/7

The Student Health Center (SHC) offers [medical](#), [counseling/psychological](#), and [psychiatric](#) services to GW students. More information about the SHC is available at healthcenter.gwu.edu. Students experiencing a medical or mental health emergency on campus should contact GW Emergency Services at 202-994-6111, or off campus at 911.

GW Campus Emergency Information

GW Emergency Services: 202-994-6111

For situation-specific instructions, refer to [GW's Emergency Procedures guide](#).

GW Alert

GW Alert is an emergency notification system that sends alerts to the GW community. GW requests students, faculty, and staff maintain current contact information by logging on to alert.gwu.edu. Alerts are sent via email, text, social media, and other means, including the Guardian app. The Guardian app is a safety app that allows you to communicate quickly with GW Emergency Services, 911, and other resources. Learn more at safety.gwu.edu.

Protective Actions

GW prescribes four protective actions that can be issued by university officials depending on the type of emergency. All GW community members are expected to follow directions according to the specified protective action. The protective actions are Shelter, Evacuate, Secure, and Lockdown (details below). Learn more at safety.gwu.edu/gw-standard-emergency-statuses.

Shelter

- Protection from a specific hazard
- The hazard could be a tornado, earthquake, hazardous material spill, or other environmental emergency.
- Specific safety guidance will be shared on a case-by-case basis.

Action:

- Follow safety guidance for the hazard.

Evacuate

- Need to move people from one location to another.
- Students and staff should be prepared to follow specific instructions given by first responders and University officials.

Action:

- Evacuate to a designated location.
- Leave belongings behind.
- Follow additional instructions from first responders.

Secure

- Threat or hazard outside of buildings or around campus.
- Increased security, secured building perimeter, increased situational awareness, and restricted access to entry doors.

Action:

- Go inside and stay inside.
- Activities inside may continue.

Lockdown

- Threat or hazard with the potential to impact individuals inside buildings.
- Room-based protocol that requires locking interior doors, turning off lights, and staying out of sight of corridor window.

Action:

- Locks, lights, out of sight
- Consider Run, Hide, Fight

- **Classroom emergency lockdown buttons**
Some classrooms have been equipped with classroom emergency lockdown buttons. If the button is pushed, GWorld Card access to the room will be disabled, and GW Dispatch will be alerted. The door must be manually closed if it is not closed when the button is pushed. Anyone in the classroom will be able to exit, but no one will be able to get in.