

PUBPOL 303: Methods of Policy Inquiry Summer Quarter 2026 Syllabus

Time: A term- asynchronous/online
Instructor: Isaac Sederbaum
Class Location: online
Office Hours: by appointment- please email Dr. Sederbaum
Email: *iseder@uw.edu*

Course Description and Outcomes¹

This course introduces students to different methods of policy research inquiry. Much of our exploration of this topic will be situated around three themes: 1) how to develop public policy research questions; (2) how to match different types of evidence to different policy questions; and 3) how policy research informs the policy process. The course will provide an overview of different research methodologies, their benefits and pitfalls, and a consideration of how and when these methods can be used to inform evidence-based policy making.

The course has several primary learning objectives:

- Develop an understanding and appreciation for the interdisciplinary nature of policy research.
- Cultivate skills needed to design, defend, and implement a policy-oriented research project.
- Become a critical consumer of policy research, understanding the diverse purposes of policy research and how such research can inform the policy process.
- Appreciate how different types of empirical inquiry, through diverse methodological perspectives or ways of knowing, can create and leverage rigorous policy research evidence that is grounded in equitable practices.

This course is an opportunity for students to develop a rigorous research design toolkit of different methodologies and practices. By understanding the benefits and challenges of various forms of evidence and approaches to gathering information students will develop a more in-depth appreciation of evidence-based policy design and the policy process. Content and assignments in PUBPOL 303 will prepare students for a host of advanced courses in PUBPOL and in other units. The course also will prepare students for original research projects of their own and for a variety of different career paths.

¹ This course benefitted from the work and syllabi of Autumn Asher BlackDeer (Denver University), Grant Blume and Scott Allard (University of Washington).

Course Materials and Readings

This is a **completely asynchronous course**; all content is online and we will not meet in person. Course readings will include academic articles and book chapters, cases, and research reports. Examples and exercises are designed to give students opportunity to apply concepts to tangible real-world settings. **Please note: this course moves very quickly, you will complete 10 weeks of course content in 4.5 weeks.**

Our course has a Canvas website. Please visit the website for the course syllabus, required readings and class materials, supplemental reading lists, and information about the assignments. The Canvas site will contain a regularly updated list of optional supplemental readings that relate to the topics of the course. These readings are listed for future reference or to provide additional readings for topics of particular interest.

The class is made up of four (4) modules, one for each week of the term. Each module is, in turn, made up chapters. Each module is made up of readings, online lectures, a discussion board, a hypothesis assignment, and a research study assignment. All required course readings and multimedia content can be accessed through our Canvas website. **Modules will close at 11:59 PM on each Monday of the term (June 29th, July 6th, July 13th & July 20th). You must complete each Module before it is due to receive credit.** Outside of the modules, and due by the end of the term, is the **UW Human Subjects Research training**. This assignment can be completed at any time during the course and takes roughly 60 – 90 minutes to complete.

Assignments and Grades

There are assignments – often modest in size – due regularly throughout the term. There are no “big stakes” assignments or exams, however, and the research study project is a cumulative assignment during the term. Details about assignments will be discussed in videos each week and are available on the course Canvas site. A student’s course grade will be determined as follows:

Assignment	Total Points	Due Date
Discussion Board #0 – Introduce Yourself!	20	11:59pm – June 29 th
Discussion Board #1 – Ethics & Research	20	11:59pm – June 29 th
Discussion Board #2 – Qualitative & Quantitative Data	20	11:59pm – July 6 th
Discussion Board #3 – Real-World Qualitative Research	20	11:59pm – July 13 th
Discussion Board #4 – Question for Survey Researchers	20	11:59pm – July 20 th
Hypothesis Assignment #1 – Cognitive Interview	75	11:59pm – June 29 th
Hypothesis Assignment #2 – Assessing and Improving Measurement	75	11:59pm – July 6 th
Hypothesis Assignment #3 – Blending Qualitative & Quantitative	75	11:59pm – July 13 th
Hypothesis Assignment #4 – Insights from Program Implementation	75	11:59pm – July 20 th
Research Study Assignment #1 – Select Study for Final Project	100	11:59pm – June 29 th
Research Study Assignment #2 – Discuss Study Strengths & Insights	100	11:59pm – July 6 th
Research Study Assignment #3 – Critique the Study	100	11:59pm – July 13 th
Research Study Assignment #4 – Final Project Presentation	200	11:59pm – July 22 nd
Human Subjects Research Training	100	5:00pm – July 22 nd
Total	1,000	

Each module and its corresponding assignments—a discussion board, hypothesis assignment, and research study assignment are due at **11:59 PM each Monday throughout the term, with the exception of the final presentation, which is due July 22nd at 5pm PST**. I urge you to work through each module throughout the week and not wait until Monday night as each module is more than a single day’s worth of work.

Grading on a 4-point scale. Our course converts the 1,000 points into a 4-point scale in the following manner:

1000 - 975	4	774 - 750	3.1	399 – 375	2.2	174 – 150	1.3
974 - 950	3.9	749 - 700	3	374 – 350	2.1	149 – 125	1.2
949 - 925	3.8	699 - 585	2.9	349 – 325	2.0	124 – 100	1.1
924 - 900	3.7	584 - 540	2.8	324 – 300	1.9	99 – 75	1.0
899 - 875	3.6	539 - 500	2.7	299 – 275	1.8	74 – 50	0.9
874 - 850	3.5	499 – 475	2.6	274 - 250	1.7	50 – 25	0.8
849 - 825	3.4	474 – 450	2.5	249 – 225	1.6	24 - 0	0.7
824 - 800	3.3	449 – 425	2.4	224 – 200	1.5		
799 - 775	3.2	424 – 400	2.3	199 – 175	1.4		

Hypothesis Assignments. Students will complete **four “Hypothesis” assignments** submitted through Canvas and using the Hypothesis tool. These short assignments will invite students to apply course concepts and knowledge to real-world examples. In addition, these assignments will help students apply skills that will be relevant for the research study assignment discussed below.

Discussion Board. Throughout the quarter students will be asked to complete **five short discussion board posts** that engage the assigned readings for that day. *Discussion board posts must be completed by 11:59pm PST each Monday evening. Please note there are **two discussion posts** in Week 1.*

Research Study Final Project. The final **research study final project assignment** is the major project for this course. For the final piece of the project, students will record themselves voicing over a presentation describing and critiquing a policy research study. There are three “milestone” assignments during the term that build towards the final project.

UW Human Subjects Research Training. Human Subjects Research training is an integral part of any research project. As a final component of the course, each student will complete the intro IRB 101 Online Tutorial and upload their completed certificate. For any students who have completed this training, they will complete the Data Security Protections: Safeguarding Research Participants’ Information.

Statement of Academic Integrity

As a student in this course, you acknowledge that you are a member of a learning community at the UW and in the Evans School of Public Policy & Governance that is committed to the highest academic standards. As a member of this community, you agree to uphold the fundamental standards of honesty, respect, and integrity, and you accept the responsibility to encourage others to adhere to these standards. If you are uncertain about whether a particular action constitutes academic misconduct, please ask me for guidance before an assignment is due, or review the UW guidelines regarding what constitutes academic misconduct.² In short, you must write your own discussion questions, make unique contributions in class, not copy or paraphrase what other students have written, and turn in material for your research proposal that is authored by you. Plagiarized work will receive a grade of 0.0 and will be reported to UW administrators.

² Please see: <https://www.washington.edu/cssc/for-students/academic-misconduct/>

Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) Tools

Use of AI in this class is **forbidden**. Discussion board posts, in-class activities, and class assignments allow me to see your thoughts, understand your reasoning, and hear your voice. AI impedes this goal. Students found to use AI on an assignment will receive a grade of 0.0.

Evans School Community Commitments

At the Evans School, we value and honor the experiences and perspectives that each person brings to our community. We have a responsibility to engage each other—inside and outside of the classroom—in a manner consistent with our values of Equity, Service and Courage. We commit to:

- Acknowledge, reflect on, and examine individual and systemic power, injustice, privilege, and bias
- Work and collaborate to expand our knowledge using empirical evidence, lived experience, storytelling, and other ways of knowing
- Embrace discomfort, non-closure, and disagreement
- Be accountable for the impact of our words and actions
- Give and receive feedback in a way that encourages listening, learning, and personal growth

Academic Accommodations

Your experience in this class is important to me. If you have already established accommodations with UW DRS, please communicate your approved circumstances to me at your earliest convenience so we can discuss your needs in this course. If you have, or think you may have, a disability (including an invisible disability such as a learning disability, a chronic health problem, or a mental health condition) that may affect your performance as a student in class, please arrange support services and/or accommodations through UW DRS staff via <http://depts.washington.edu/uwdrs/> or by phone at 206-543-8924.

Religious Accommodations

Washington state law requires that UW develop a policy for accommodation of student absences or significant hardship due to reasons of faith or conscience, or for organized religious activities. The UW's policy, including more information about how to request an accommodation, is available at Religious Accommodations Policy.³ Accommodations must be requested within the first two weeks of this course using the Religious Accommodations Request form.⁴

Expectations for the Term

Complete all readings. This course moves quickly, but completing the readings is essential to mastery of course content. Assignments are based on course readings and keeping up with the reading will aid in completing assignments at a high level. All readings can be found on Canvas or through the UW library.

Please ask questions. There is a discussion board where you can ask course content-related questions and Dr. Sederbaum will answer them. Additionally, you are encouraged to comment on each other's posts each week to have an ongoing discussion. Please note that responding to another classmate's post does not count as completing that week's discussion.

³ Please see: <https://registrar.washington.edu/staffandfaculty/religious-accommodations-policy/>

⁴ Please see: <https://registrar.washington.edu/students/religious-accommodations-request/>

Course Outline

Module 1 – Starting Out as a Researcher	
Chapter 1:	Core Questions: What is a policy problem? What is policy research? Who gets to ask and answer policy research questions? Lecture Video #1 – “Introduction to PUBPOL 303” Required Readings • “What is the Question?” 2014. Gail Johnson, <i>Research Methods for Public Administrators</i>. • “Basic Research Concepts” 2014. Gail Johnson, <i>Research Methods for Public Administrators</i>. Read pp. 17-24. • “Appendix A. The Guiding Principles for Evaluators.” 2007. Michael Morris. In <i>Evaluation Ethics for Best Practice: Cases and Commentaries</i>.
Chapter 2:	Core Questions: How do scientific ways of knowing differ from other approaches to knowledge? What is our role in the research process? How might we engage community in policy research? Lecture Video #2 – “Evidence and Ethics in Policy Research” Lecture Video #3 – “Logic Models in Policy Research” Video: Positionality & Research: How Our Identities Shape Inquiry Video: Positionality & Research: Awareness Strategies Required Readings • “How does science work?” Australian Academy of Science. • “Making Their Voices Heard: Improving Research through Community Collaboration.” 2017. Somala Diby, sade adeeyo, Elsa Falkenburger, and Serena Lei. Urban Institute. Optional Supplementary Readings • “Ethics and Evaluation.” 2007. Michael Morris. In <i>Evaluation Ethics for Best Practice: Cases and Commentaries</i>.

Module 1 – Starting Out as a Researcher (continued)	
Chapter 3:	Core Questions: How should we draw samples for policy research projects? How do we match the right kind of data to the question(s) we are asking? How do we ensure our policy research studies are measuring the right concept? Lecture Video #4 - “Validity and Reliability in Policy Research” Lecture Video #5 - “Sampling” Required Readings • Revisit from Session 1: “Basic Research Concepts” 2014. Gail Johnson, <i>Research Methods for Public Administrators</i>. Read pp. 24-31. • “Sampling Demystified.” 2014. Gail Johnson, <i>Research Methods for Public Administrators</i>. • “Evidence-Based Decision Making: Programs, Practices, and Approaches.” 2018. In <i>Why Research Methods Matter</i> by Susan T. Gooden and RaJade M. Berry-James. • “Variable Definition: Are We Really Talking About the Same Thing?” 2018. In <i>Why Research Methods Matter</i> by Susan T. Gooden and RaJade M. Berry-James.
Module 2 – Gathering Qualitative & Quantitative Data	
Chapter 4:	Core Question: What is the difference between Qualitative and Quantitative approaches to research? Lecture Video #6 – “Qualitative and Quantitative Methods” Additional Videos (required) • Focus Groups: Tips for using focus groups (YouTube) • Interviews: Tips for doing interviews (YouTube) • Surveys: Tips for using surveys as a data collection method (YouTube) Required Readings • “Data Collection II: Interviews and Focus Groups.” 2014. Gail Johnson, <i>Research Methods for Public Administrators</i>. • “Data Collection III: Surveys.” 2014. Gail Johnson, <i>Research Methods for Public Administrators</i>. • “Program Evaluation Tip Sheet: Constructing Survey Questions.” 2011. Center for Disease Control Atlanta.

Module 2 – Gathering Qualitative & Quantitative Data (continued)	
Chapter 5:	Core Questions: What are policy experiments? How do we design policy experiments? Lecture Video #7 – “Experimental and Quasi-experimental Designs” Required Readings • “Designs for Research.” 2014. Gail Johnson, <i>Research Methods for Public Administrators</i>. • “Technical Note: Conducting Mixed Method Evaluations.” 2013. U.S. AID. • “Discrimination in a Low Wage Labor Market: A Field Experiment.” 2009. Devah Pager, Bart Bonikoswki, and Bruce Western. <i>American Sociological Review</i>.
Chapter 6:	Core Question: What are mixed methods research designs? Lecture Video #8: “Mixed Methods Research Designs” Required Readings • “Conclusion: Research at the intersection of politics and administration” 2014. Gail Johnson, <i>Research Methods for Public Administrators</i>. • “Utilization of Results.” 2007. Michael Morris. In <i>Evaluation Ethics for Best Practice: Cases and Commentaries</i>.

Module 3 – Engaging Real-World Research Examples	
Chapter 7:	Core Question: How do policy researchers apply different <u>secondary quantitative</u> data to real-world questions? Video – “Path of the Ballot – How Vote by Mail in Washington State Works” Required Readings • “Patterns and Trends in Rejected Mailed Ballots in Washington State: 2020 – 2024.” 2025. Scott W. Allard, Isaiah Wright, Jacob M. Grumbach, Calista Jahn, Lauren Woyczynski.
Chapter 9:	Core Question: How do policy researchers apply different <u>qualitative</u> data collection methods to real-world questions? Lecture video #9: “Using Qualitative Data for Policy Research” Required Readings • “How Well Does the “Safety Net” Work for Family Safety Nets? Economic Survival Strategies Among Grandmother Caregivers in Severe Deprivation.” 2015. LaShawnDa Pittman. <i>Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences</i>.
Chapter 10:	Core Question: How do policy researchers apply different <u>primary quantitative</u> data collection methods to real-world questions? Lecture Video #10: “Using Quantitative Data for Policy Research” Required Readings • “Employer Responses to a City-Level Minimum Wage Mandate: Early Evidence from Seattle.” 2018. Jennifer L. Romich, Scott W. Allard, Emmi E. Obara, Anne K. Althausen, and James H. Buszkiewicz. <i>Urban Affairs Review</i>.
Chapter 11:	Core Question • How do policy researchers write findings for different audiences? Lecture Video #11: “Writing for Policy Research” Required Readings • “Aligning Aid with Enrollment.” 2017. Evan Weissman, Oscar Cerna, Dan Cullinan, Amanda Baldiga. MDRC

Module 4 – Implementation Inquiry	
Chapter 12:	Core Question: Why is it important to study implementation? Online Video – “Supercharging Performance Management with Rapid-Cycle Learning” Required Readings • “Assessing Program Process and Implementation.” 2019. Peter H. Rossi, Mark W. Lipsey, and Gary T. Henry. <i>Evaluation: A Systematic Approach</i>. • “Administrative Experiments: Unlocking What Works Better and What Works for Whom.” 2015. Scott Cody, Irma Perez-Johnson, and Kristen Joyce. <i>American Journal of Evaluation</i>. • “Ten Reasons Not to Measure Impact – and What to Do Instead.” 2018. Mary Kay Gugerty and Dean Karlan. <i>Stanford Social Innovation Review</i>.
Chapter 13:	Core Question: How is implementation research used in the real-world? Online Video – “Social Innovation Speaker Series: Stefanie DeLuca – Creating Moves to Opportunity.” Required Readings • “Segregating Shelter: How Housing Policies Shape the Residential Locations of Low-Income Minority Families.” 2013. Stefanie DeLuca, Philip M. E. Garboden, and Peter Rosenblatt. <i>The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science</i>.
Chapter 14:	Core Question: How can we apply course concepts to assess a research study? Required Readings • “Assessing Homelessness Supports in Los Angeles.” 2024. Brendan Chen, Mikaela Tajo, Katie Fallon, and Will Curran-Groome. Urban Institute.