

**PLCY 581: RESEARCH DESIGN**  
**DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC POLICY**  
**UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA, CHAPEL HILL**

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Fall 2016 / 3 Units

Professor Brigitte A. Seim (Zimmerman)

Office Hours: Th 1:45-3:45 PM and by appointment

TTh 9:30-10:45 am / Graham Memorial 35

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**TEACHING ASSISTANTS**

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**DESCRIPTION**

Research Design for Public Policy will equip students with tools for conducting research on policy programs and interventions. Research in the social sciences, especially public policy, informs debates that affect our day-to-day lives. Yet, these debates are often awash in normative or ideological shouting matches. We have the opportunity to inject such debates with reliable evidence based on well-designed, carefully executed, rigorous research. In this course, we will learn tools for designing and executing research that meets this standard. We will learn the nuts and bolts of applying the scientific method to questions of policy significance – and focus on the critical use of analytic tools to uncover cause-and-effect relationships.

Policy research is broadly concerned with effectiveness (i.e., did the policy/program have the intended outcome(s)?), efficiency (i.e., was the outcome achieved at an acceptable benefit-cost ratio?), or equity (i.e., were the benefits and costs of the policy/program justly distributed across individuals?). Generally, one piece of policy research does not (and cannot) tackle all of these domains at once. While we will touch on all three, our focus will be on using research methods to evaluate the effect of policies, programs, or interventions on outcomes of interest.

This section of PLCY 581 will focus on a global context, though the tools could be applied to evaluate domestic policies as well. The course will take the organizational structure of a workshop. We will learn approaches for evaluating policy programs and interventions and put them into practice by analyzing applications and completing course assignments drawn from real world scenarios and organizations.

**OBJECTIVES**

There are three primary goals of the course:

- 1) Students will develop an understanding of research design as applied to questions of policy significance.
- 2) Students will become responsible consumers of research output, able to comprehend, critique, and build on research produced by both academics and policy organizations. Ultimately, students will be able to judge whether the methods and evidence employed by others constitutes a firm, evidentiary basis for policymaking, program scale-up, or widespread organizational endorsement.
- 3) Students will learn concrete, marketable, practical and multi-method skills for research- or evaluation-based careers.

## READING

### Academic Texts

The required book for this class is available in the bookstore.

- Remler, D. K., & Van Ryzin, G. G. 2015. *Research Methods in Practice: Strategies for Description and Causation* (second edition). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications (Referred to in course schedule as "R&VR")

A substantial amount of the required reading for this course is from articles, policy briefs, and isolated chapters from books. Any reading that is not in the R&VR book will be posted on Sakai in PDF form at <https://sakai.unc.edu/portal/site/plcy581globalfall16>. Outside of class, you should expect to spend approximately six hours per week reading, taking notes on the reading, reviewing your notes from lecture each week, and working on the research paper. All of the assigned reading for the day should be completed before attending lecture.

## COURSE COMMUNICATION

Assignments, readings, links to resources, announcements, and your grades can all be accessed on Sakai. You need regular access to the internet to successfully complete this course. To ensure that you receive my emails, have them forwarded to an account you check regularly.

## EVALUATION

### Summary

Final grades will be determined as follows:

30%	Practicum Assignments
20%	Research Design Paper
20%	Research Design Presentation
10%	Discussant Role
20%	Participation

### Practicum Assignments

Students will complete three scheduled practicum assignments over the course of the semester. These assignments will focus on the material covered in the related one-third of the course, will include questions drawn from actual research or evaluation scenarios, and must be completed independently. The schedule for these assignments is as follows:

**Assignment 1:** Posted on Sakai by 9 AM on September 19, Due on Sakai at 9 AM on September 26

**Assignment 2:** Posted on Sakai by 9 AM on October 24, Due on Sakai at 9 AM on October 31

**Assignment 3:** Posted on Sakai by 9 AM on November 23, Due on Sakai at 9 AM on November 30

### Research Design Paper

After completing an interest and experience questionnaire on the first day of class, students will be assigned into groups of three. Over the course of the semester, your group will develop a research design and write it up in a 10-page paper in the style of a "pre-analysis plan" (examples posted on Sakai). This research design can focus on any research question and employ any research approach. The only requirements are that the research question must have

significant policy implications, the design must draw on the skills developed in the course, and the context for the research must be in a non-U.S. setting. Design papers must be submitted by one group member on Sakai by 9 AM on December 5, 2016. Papers turned in after this time will incur a grade penalty of 10% immediately and 5% each additional day after the deadline. I do not accept late assignments more than one week after the original deadline.

### **Research Design Presentation**

In the final exam time slot for this course, currently scheduled by the UNC Registrar for December 13 from 8 to 11 AM, each group will give a 10-minute presentation on their design. This presentation will mimic similar presentations given at the end of a policymaker research workshop (examples on Sakai). All group members must present for at least two minutes and the material must be split up logically and seamlessly. After the presentation, the discussant will provide comments (see below) and then there will be approximately five minutes for questions from the audience.

### **Discussant Role**

Also in the final exam time slot for this course, currently scheduled by the UNC Registrar for December 13 from 8 to 11 AM, each student will be assigned to be a discussant for another group. You will receive the paper from this other group in advance of the presentation, and you will read the paper and prepare some comments and questions. A guide to assist you in this preparation is available on Sakai. After the group has given their presentation, each discussant assigned to that group will have two minutes to give comments, which allows for approximately 4-6 succinct, direct, and specific comments on diverse components of the research design.

### **Participation**

You are expected to attend all course sessions. This is your opportunity to ask questions, discuss readings and other course material, and engage in activities that will deepen your understanding of course topics in a small group setting. Your participation grade will be based on: 1) attendance; and 2) participation quality, which means coming to lecture prepared, participating thoughtfully and respectfully in course discussion, and engaging with peers productively in group work. The course sessions provide *additional* course content, not merely clarify it. The final piece of the participation grade will be determined based on the questions asked of peers during the final presentations.

#### Three Guidelines for In-Class Time:

*Be present.* By choosing this course, you are making a commitment to your classmates, yourself, and me to be an active and engaged participant in our academic community. You have something unique to contribute; class can go on without you, but everyone's learning will suffer from your absence. That said, I understand that other things are happening in your life besides this class. If you cannot come to lecture or section or cannot come to lecture or section sufficiently prepared, you should let me or your TA know *prior* to our class session (either by email or a quick comment upon entering class). Per university policy, only some absences will be counted as "excused," which means that we will work with you to make up what you missed.

*Be punctual.* I am fully aware of the fact that this class begins quite early in the morning, but as part of your commitment, you are expected to arrive in class on time. If you arrive late to class, you may miss a quiz (which can not be made up) or announcement. If you are more than 20 minutes late without an

acceptable excuse, you will be asked to leave for the day. If you must leave class early for some reason, you must notify me or your TA beforehand.

*Be prepared.* I expect you to arrive at class prepared and without technological distractions. You should read the assigned readings prior to coming to class and be willing and able to contribute your thoughts about them to discussion. I may call on you for a contribution to discussion at any time.

## CLASS POLICIES

### Honor Code

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill has had a student-led honor system for over 100 years. Academic integrity is at the heart of Carolina and we all are responsible for upholding the ideals of honor and integrity. The student-led Honor System is responsible for adjudicating any suspected violations of the Honor Code and all suspected instances of academic dishonesty will be reported to the honor system. Information, including your responsibilities as a student, is outlined in the Instrument of Student Judicial Governance. Your full participation and observance of the Honor Code is expected (see <http://honor.unc.edu/>).

In order to ensure effective functioning of the Honor System at Carolina, students are expected to:

- a. Conduct all academic work within the letter and spirit of the Honor Code, which prohibits the giving or receiving of unauthorized aid in all academic processes. If unsure about the limits of group work versus individual work on papers and projects, ask the instructor. Do not guess.
- b. Consult with faculty and other sources to clarify the meaning of plagiarism; to learn the recognized techniques of proper attribution of sources used in written work; and to identify allowable resource materials or aids to be used during completion of any graded work.
- c. Sign a pledge on all graded academic work certifying that no unauthorized assistance has been received or given in the completion of the work.
- d. Treat all members of the University community with respect and fairness.
- e. Report any instance in which reasonable grounds exist to believe that a student has given or received unauthorized aid in graded work or in other respects violated the Honor Code. Reports should be made to the office of the Student Attorney General.

The Instrument of Student Judicial Governance requires that you sign a pledge on all written work. Please type the following on ALL your work and sign your name next to it: **"On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid on this assignment."**

### Plagiarism

You are encouraged to form study groups to review course material and discuss general approaches for assignments. However, you are expected to write papers and take quizzes and exams entirely independently. Plagiarism of published work is a violation of the honor code. Any two papers or exams that are submitted containing the same sentences will be considered a breach of the honor code. In written work (including overheads or handouts used in presentations), words drawn from others should be indicated by quotation marks and ideas drawn from others should refer to their source. If you are unsure about what needs to be cited, please talk with me or ask for assistance from the writing center. Plagiarism is a serious

offense, which can result in failure of the course and suspension from the University. To make sure that you understand what plagiarism is, please read

<http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/plagiarism/>. Also see the following link for an engaging animated tutorial on plagiarism: <http://www2.lib.unc.edu/instruct/plagiarism/>.

### Grade Determination

Writing and public speaking are essential to success in public policy and in many other careers. Students will be held to professional standards in the field of public policy. Students should not submit first drafts and should carefully proof read all work. The following factors will be considered in evaluating student assignments:

- **Content:** Responds to the assignment's questions. Develops and supports a central thesis. Provides a focused argument throughout the essay/talk.
- **Clarity and Presentation:** Writes/speaks clearly by: developing a coherent, well-organized argument; arranging sentences in a logical and coherent manner; using correct punctuation, spelling, and grammar; and providing correct citations in the APA format.
- **Comprehensiveness:** Reviews the relevant literature and material, shows an in-depth understanding of the topic, and critiques differing points of view on the topic.
- **Creativity:** Draws the reader/listener in and engages him/her in the topic. Makes an original contribution to the topic. Presents material in an interesting and unique way that elucidates the ideas.
- **Accuracy:** Free of obvious errors. All facts are derived from assigned course material and properly cited.

### Grade Definitions

The following definitions of grades were adopted by the University Faculty and are the official basis for assigning and interpreting undergraduate grades. Note that they are based on performance, not on effort or individual improvement.

- A - *Mastery* of course content at the *highest* level of attainment that can reasonably be expected of students at a given stage of development
- B - *Strong* performance demonstrating a *high* level of attainment for a student at a given stage of development
- C - A totally *acceptable* performance demonstrating an *adequate* level of attainment for a student at a given stage of development
- D - A *marginal* performance demonstrating a *minimal passing* level of attainment for a student at a given stage of development
- F - For whatever reasons, an unacceptable performance. The F grade indicates that the student's performance in the required exercises has revealed almost no understanding of the course content

### Grade Appeals

I take the evaluation and grading of your exams very seriously because I know that most of you take the preparation and writing of your exams very seriously. If you think you deserve a higher grade on a paper or exam, you may write a letter and explain why you would like to appeal the grade. Before making an appeal, you should review your work and course material. After I receive your letter, I will re-read your paper or exam within 1-2 class periods. Depending on my re-reading, your grade may stay the same, be raised, or be lowered. This

system is designed to minimize frivolous grade appeals and to ensure that you have carefully examined and reflected on the quality of your work before deciding to initiate a grade appeal.

### Communication<sup>1</sup>

- **Mind Your Manners:** Think of the basic rules you learned growing up, like saying please and thank you. Only address someone by first name if they imply it is acceptable to do so. You should address me as Professor or Dr. Seim in your emails, just as you would in person.
- **Watch Your Tone:** Merriam-Webster defines tone as an "accent or inflection expressive of a mood or emotion." It is very difficult to express tone in writing. Please attempt to come across as respectful, friendly, and approachable. Please avoid coming across as curt or demanding.
- **Be Concise but Complete:** Get to the point of your e-mail as quickly as possible, but don't leave out important details that will help your recipient answer your query. Be sure to include your full name and the course name in every email.
- **Be Professional:** Stay away from abbreviations and don't use emoticons. Don't use a cute or suggestive e-mail address for professional communication.
- **Use Correct Spelling and Proper Grammar:** Use a dictionary or a spell checker. While you can write in a conversational tone (contractions are okay), pay attention to basic rules of grammar and use complete sentences. This means that you totes can't brb or lol.
- **Be Prompt:** Bring an issue to my attention or the TAs' attention as soon as it becomes an issue. This includes conflicts with assignments and last minute illnesses.
- **Don't Make Excuses:** Everyone (including professors and TAs) knows what it is like to procrastinate or to prioritize other things before school assignments. We also know what it is like to try to invent an acceptable reason to have done so. Further, we read many, many emails from students in a semester. To top it off, I study corruption, which is fundamentally about skirting procedures and towing the line of acceptability to serve one's own interests. In brief, we can detect any fudging or lying a mile away. If you have a conflict or need to admit that you made a mistake, be up front and honest.
- **Ask Reasonable and Appropriate Questions:** Attempt to evaluate whether your question or request is reasonable and appropriate before you send me an email. Check the syllabus and Google for an answer first. For example, it is not reasonable to ask me the definition of genocide. It is reasonable to ask how the definition of genocide I've been using in class might differ from that in a reading. Also, please feel free to email me to set up an appointment to meet if the topic is too sensitive to raise in an email.

*I reserve the right to delete any emails or refuse to speak to individuals that do not follow these guidelines.*

### Discrimination and Harassment

Any form of violence or harassment, including sexual assault, relationship violence, and stalking is unwelcome at the University. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, you can find the appropriate UNC resources at <http://sexualassaultanddiscriminationpolicy.unc.edu/>. See [this blog post](#) for a discussion regarding one form of prevalent in-classroom discrimination to which I will be particularly

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<sup>1</sup> See also: <http://www.wikihow.com/Email-a-Professor> and <http://chrisblattman.com/2010/11/08/students-how-to-email-to-your-professor-employer-and-professional-peers/>

sensitive.

### **Accessibility Resources and Services**

The Office of Accessibility Resources & Services provides services and reasonable accommodations to currently enrolled students with disabilities. Their mission is to provide students with disabilities equal access to the services, programs and activities of University so that they may, as independently as possible, meet the demands of University life. For more information, see <https://accessibility.unc.edu/>. Students with disabilities who require individualized testing or other accommodations should discuss this with me within as soon as possible.

### **Other Resources**

Need help with writing? See a tutor at The Writing Center - [writingcenter.unc.edu](http://writingcenter.unc.edu)

Need help with structuring study time or taking tests? Learning Center - [learningcenter.unc.edu](http://learningcenter.unc.edu)

### **Other Policies**

- Computer, tablet, and cell phone use is strongly discouraged in class. . Please plan on taking notes by hand or on a tablet that doesn't allow multitasking. Cell phones should be silenced (and vibrate is *not* silent) and put away when class begins. This policy will ensure the best possible learning environment, encourage active participation by all students, and minimize distractions.<sup>2</sup> However, if you strongly prefer using a computer or have a medical reason that necessitates it, you are allowed to do so. Please note that if I see a computer, phone, or tablet, I will assume you are ready to be called on to participate in discussion.
- Students should keep copies of the assignments they turn in and retain graded quizzes and papers until they receive their final course grade.
- If any problems that will affect your performance in this class arise during the course of the semester, please come see me as soon as possible. I can do more to help you if you let me know what is happening before you miss a test or deadline.
- Twenty-four hours before the paper is due or the final exam occurs, I reserve the right to stop responding to emails with questions or concerns. Please prepare in advance of this window. I have informed the TA that she has the right to stop responding at this point as well.
- Be respectful of the TA. She is attempting to help you learn the material and succeed in the course. Please keep respect and courtesy in mind when you make requests of her.
- Be respectful of others' points of view. You are encouraged to disagree with one another, but do not make personal attacks.

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<sup>2</sup> Sana, Faria, Tina Weston, and Nicholas J. Cepeda. 2013. "[Laptop multitasking hinders classroom learning for both users and nearby peers.](#)" *Computers & Education*. 62:24-31. There are dozens of other research articles that find the same thing.

## SCHEDULE

DATE	TOPIC	THEORY READING	APPLIED READING
August 23	Introduction	R&VR Ch. 1	
August 25	Research Questions	R&VR Ch. 2	Grossman 2014
August 30	Causal Inference	Gertler et al. 2011 Ch. 3	Chattopadhyay and Duflo 2004
September 1	Internal / External Validity	Shadish, Cook, Campbell 2002	Olken 2007
September 6	Randomized Experiments	Gertler et al. 2011 Ch. 4	Cohen and Dupas 2010
September 8	Natural Experiments	R&VR Ch. 15	Hyde 2007
September 13	Regression Discontinuity Design	Gertler et al. 2011 Ch. 5	Chen et al. 2013
September 15	Laboratory Experiments	Camerer 2003	HHPW 2007
September 20	Differences-in-Differences	Gertler et al. 2011 Ch. 6	Malesky et al. 2014
September 22	Matching	Gertler et al. 2011 Ch. 7	Gilligan and Sergenti 2008
September 27	Observational Studies	R&VR Ch. 12	Fearon and Laitin 2003
September 29	Sampling	R&VR Ch. 5	Scacco 2008
October 4	Measurement	R&VR Ch. 4	Kaufmann et al. 2011
October 6	Survey Design	Fowler 2008 Ch. 1	Kerwin 2016
October 11	<i>NO CLASS - UNIVERSITY DAY</i>		
October 13	<b>PROJECT WORKSHOP</b>		
October 18	Survey Experiments	Gaines et al. 2007	Winters and Weitz-Shapiro 2013
October 20	<i>NO CLASS - FALL BREAK</i>		
October 25	Survey Implementation	Gertler et al. 2011 Ch. 12	Adida et al. 2016
October 27	Participant Observation	Mack et al. 2005 Module I and II	Wyrod 2008
November 1	Interviews	Mack et al. 2005 Module III	Koter 2013
November 3	Focus Group Discussions	Mack et al. 2005 Module IV	Wolff et al. 2005
November 8	Case Studies	Gerring 2004	Tsai 2007
November 10	Ethnographic Methods	Fetterman 2010 Ch. 3	Roy et al. 2014
November 15	Content Analysis	Wilson and Herrera 2016	McClendon and Riedl 2016
November 17	Secondary Data	R&VR Ch. 6	Ferree 2006
November 22	Regression	R&VR Ch. 13	Faye and Niehaus 2011
November 24	<i>NO CLASS - THANKSGIVING</i>		
November 29	Contamination (Compliance, Spillover, Attrition)	Gertler et al. 2011 Ch. 8 Fowler 2008 Ch. 2	Miguel and Kremer 2004
December 1	Sensitive Data	Rosenfeld et al. 2016	Malesky et al. 2015
December 6	Research Ethics	R&VR Ch. 16	McClendon 2016, Two Blog Posts
December 13	<b>FINAL EXAM, 8-11 AM</b>		

\* This course syllabus is a general plan for the course. The course outline and assignments will be revised and updated regularly. The most up-to-date syllabus will always be posted on Sakai. Please check Sakai each week for additional assigned readings posted in article form.