

# PLSC 578 – Research Methods in Public Administration

Department of Political Science  
College of Arts & Sciences  
Eastern Michigan University  
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Class Time: 6 to 8:40 p.m., R  
419 Pray-Harrold  
Office Hours: 2 to 3:20 PM, MW (P-H, 601M)  
1 to 3:30 PM, T (P-H, 601M)  
and by appointment

*Why are some workers more motivated to complete the tasks of their jobs?  
Is workplace diversity associated with productivity?  
Why do some students score higher on standardized tests?*

## Course Description

Career success and job stability for an administrator hinges on choosing effective solutions to problems and being able to defend those choices. As you make decisions you will generate supporters and critics, many of whom will question the information you rely on to draw conclusions about the right (or wrong) direction for the organization. You may be asked how it is that you know what you claim to know. This course will help you better search for, organize and present information. In particular, the course will introduce you to the social science process and important ideas for working with data. This material may help you survive in the data driven world that administration has increasingly become.

This course is the first in a two-course sequence exploring research. In this first course you will learn key concepts in research and how to design a research project. You may not aspire to pursue research full time, but competent public and nonprofit administrators must possess sufficient analytical skills in this area to be able to review and evaluate the research of others inside and outside the organization.

## Course Objectives

Students will learn the following:

- to think in terms of a basic social science research framework;
- to identify different sources and to cite them properly;
- to distinguish between experimental and quasi-experimental research;
- to recognize ethical, privacy and security issues pertaining to the use of data;
- to distinguish among types of data;
- how samples are used to make inferences about larger populations;
- to interpret, at a basic level, the statistical findings in published research;
- and, to independently read and understand academic and professional literature.

## Course Resources

The course resources provide far more information than we will attempt to cover. I will assign readings that are most relevant to the assessments in this course. You are welcome to read further and more deeply, if you are interested and believe it will not confuse you. Listed below are a few supplemental resources that I found useful for understanding this material and the more advanced material you will encounter in PLSC 678.

### **Required**

- Nishishiba, Masami, Matthew A. Jones, and Mariah Kraner. 2013. *Research Methods and Statistics for Public and Nonprofit Administrators: A Practical Guide*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications.
- Additional readings will be provided in Adobe Acrobat (PDF) format on the course shell in Canvas, the university's learning management system (LMS). Access to Canvas is available at <http://canvas.emich.edu> using your EMU NetID and password.

### **Supplemental**

- *The Chicago Manual of Style, 16<sup>th</sup> Edition* is available online from campus computers at [http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/16/ch15/ch15\\_toc.html](http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/16/ch15/ch15_toc.html). A universally available Citation Quick Guide for the 16<sup>th</sup> Edition is available at [http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools\\_citationguide.html](http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html).
  - When using the Citation Quick Guide, remember to click on the tab for the Author-Date format, which is used by the social sciences.
- Galvan, Jose L. 2006. *Writing Literature Reviews: A Guide for Students of the Social and Behavioral Sciences, 3rd Edition*. Glendale, Calif: Pycszak Publishing.
- Harris, Robert A. 2005. *Using Sources Effectively: Strengthening Your Writing and Avoiding Plagiarism, 2nd Edition*. Glendale, Calif: Pycszak Publishing.
- Hoover, Kenneth R. and Todd Donovan. 2010. *The Elements of Social Scientific Thinking*. Boston, Mass.: Wadsworth
  - This book is in the 10<sup>th</sup> edition, but I believe any of the editions (borrowed from the library or purchased) would be useful for learning social science research.
- Meier, Kenneth J., Jeffrey L. Brudney, and John Bohte. 2009. *Applied Statistics for Public & Nonprofit Administration, 7<sup>th</sup> Edition*. Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth.
  - This book is one I have used before, too. Any of the recent editions (borrowed from the library or purchased) would give you another take on the material.
- StatSoft provides an electronic and paper version of their materials. Information can be found here: <http://www.statsoft.com/textbook/stathome.html>.

## Course Activities to Meet Objectives

The language of research design and statistics is likely to be foreign to you. Consider approaching this course as if it were a foreign language. This means you should be prepared to read and reread material and to memorize definitions and ideas, regardless of how well you understand them at first. This also means preparing to think and contribute in class and being willing to do so. The key to learning this material is to practice by applying it to examples beyond what I give you in class. So, when I explain what variables are and provide examples, you should ask yourself what variables you can identify in your own life or work.

Understanding research methods depends on your willingness to engage the material. We will approach the topics covered several ways. First, readings are assigned each week to help introduce you to the material. You are expected to have read the material prior to class. Several passes at the readings, both before and after the appropriate lecture, may be necessary for you to grasp the meaning intended. Please

note that far more material is covered in the book than will be covered in class and that you should, upon second look, pay more attention to parts of the readings that reinforce what I cover in class. Additional reading materials may be made available throughout the semester because I am always finding new and interesting material that is pertinent to this subject.

Second, class sessions have been designed to simplify and illustrate many ideas related to research design and statistics. My choices for including material or leaving it out are based upon what I think the class, on average, can internalize in the time we have together. A primary objective of the course is for you to be able to “independently read and understand academic and professional literature that includes statistics.” Courses you may have had in the past or that are available in other departments may teach this same material differently. You are encouraged to keep the objectives of this course in mind throughout the entire semester. The bulk of class time will be dedicated to discussion of course readings and topics related to them. You are expected to be in attendance for all class sessions.

Third, class discussions and small group discussions will help you to think about the material more concretely and to learn from your peers. It is here that you will be able to discern how well you grasp the ideas being presented in the readings and in the lectures, and to compare your self-assessment to the understanding of others in the class. Each class ends and begins with a call for questions. Be aware that this material can seem deceptively simple. Please do not wait for a graded assessment to attempt to figure out what you do not understand. You should be attempting to extend your thinking about the material continuously throughout the semester.

Finally, to help you reach the course objectives, there will be a series of graded assessments throughout the semester, including three short assignments, a midterm exam, a literature review and a research design. All students begin this course with a zero. It is assumed that you are entering this course with no knowledge of the subject. Your final grade will reflect your ability to demonstrate understanding of the material presented. You are to work independently when completing assignments and examinations.

#### *Short Assignments*

Short assignments are intended to be completed in a week. The writing and work involved will not be extensive, but the assignments serve the purpose of providing practice at an important skill or task that must be learned for successful completion of the literature review and research design. The first short assignment will involve searching and citing sources, as well as identifying the types of sources that have been found. The second short assignment will involve taking a single source and drawing from it basic ideas important to all social science research. The third assignment asks you to craft a problem statement. More details about these assignments will be provided on the date they are distributed. Grading of these assessments will be on a scale of A through F. The highest grade is reserved for work that shows mastery of the material assigned. Short assignments that are not completed at a level of mastery warranting a “C” grade or higher will be given the grade of “IP”, which stands for In Progress. Students who receive an “IP” on a short assignment will be given a week to redo the assignment for the maximum grade of “C”. Any assignment given an “IP” that is not returned within one week will be given a “D” or “F” grade.

#### *Midterm Exam*

Students will be provided with one week to complete a take-home midterm exam. The exam will test students on their understanding of the social science research process and its related ideas. Additionally the midterm exam will provide another opportunity for students to demonstrate mastery of the material covered in the first two short writing assignments. More details on the midterm exam will be shared closer to the assignment date. Grading of this assessment will be on a scale of A through F. The highest grade is reserved for work that shows mastery of the material assigned.

*Literature Review*

Learning to write an effective literature review is important. It will help you develop the ability to search for and to compare information and arguments being advanced in social science, at the office or in the media. As mentioned in the introduction, public and nonprofit leaders and managers face problems in need of solutions and you may find your personal success one day hinges on coming up with a defensible and successful response to a problem. Learning to read and synthesize social science research will help broaden your knowledge and thinking about a subject, which may position you to make a better decision at some point in the future. More details on the literature review will be shared on the assignment date. Grading of this assessment will be on a scale of A through F. The highest grade is reserved for work that shows mastery of the material assigned.

*Research Design*

A research design is the final work product of the course, and it will include your literature review as well as details about how you will study the problem identified in your problem statement. Important details expected as part of your research design include a summary of what is known about the problem currently (literature review), an explanation of how you will extend current knowledge, the data you would collect as part of the study, and an explanation of the unit of analysis and levels of measurement appropriate for your data. Note that in this final product you will resubmit your literature review, which means you will have the opportunity to improve on the work you did earlier in the semester. A wise student will use short assignments one, two, and three as well as the literature review to advance the research design. The last week of class is reserved for discussing your design with colleagues. Grading of this assessment will be on a scale of A through F. The highest grade is reserved for work that shows mastery of the material assigned.

*Weights and Assigned/Due Dates*

1. Short Assignment One: Citations (10 percent)
  - Assigned Jan. 14; Due: Jan. 21
2. Short Assignment Two: Research Basics (10 percent)
  - Assigned: Jan. 28; Due: Feb. 4
3. Short Assignment Three: Problem Statement (10 percent)
  - Assigned: Feb. 11; Due: Feb. 18
4. Midterm Exam (25 percent)
  - Assigned: Feb. 18; Due: Mar. 3
5. Literature Review (20 percent)
  - Assigned: Feb. 4; Due: Mar. 24
6. Research Design (25 percent)
  - Assigned: Mar. 3; Due: Apr. 14

Course Grades

Grading is on a letter scale from "A" to "F" for writing assignments Exams are graded on a numeric scale.

*Course Assessments*

- A Exceptionally High Order 97/100
- A- 92/100
- B+ 88/100
- B Distinctly Above Average 85/100
- B- 82/100
- C+ 78/100
- C Average 75/100

- C- 72/100
- D+ 68/100
- D Below Average 65/100
- D- 62/100
- F Unsatisfactory (denoting failure) 55/100

#### *Overall Course Grades*

- A Exceptionally High Order 93+
- A- 90-92
- B+ 88-89
- B Distinctly Above Average 83-87
- B- 80-82
- C+ 78-79
- C Average 73-77
- C- 70-72
- D+ 68-69
- D Below Average 63-67
- D- 60-62
- F Unsatisfactory (denoting failure) Below 60

Students who track their performance throughout the semester and wish to compute various possible final outcomes will find the following formula for Microsoft Excel helpful. Grades will be posted in Canvas for you to follow.

- Final Grade = (S.A. 1 \* 0.10) + (S.A. 2 \* .10) + (S.A. 3 \* 0.10) + (Midterm \* 0.25) + (Lit. Review \* 0.20) + (Res. Design \* 0.25)

## Course Policies

### *Classroom Conduct*

Any successful learning experience requires mutual respect. Neither instructor nor student should be subject to behavior that is rude, disruptive, intimidating, or demeaning. Views may differ on what counts as rudeness or courtesy. If you are not sure what constitutes good conduct in this classroom, ask me. The instructor has primary responsibility for and control over classroom behavior and maintenance of academic integrity.

### *Class Attendance*

Regular class attendance and active participation in classes are important elements in the learning process. Students are at the university primarily for the sake of their intellectual growth and development. Each student is personally responsible for the satisfactory completion of the coursework required. This means specifically that you are expected to attend classes regularly, and that you are responsible for the work assigned in class, the material covered in class and for participation in class activities (including discussion and listening) designed as part of the learning experience. Students who miss class regularly may have their final grade lowered by one or two full letter grades as a penalty for not being part of the learning experience in the classroom.

University practice, as per the Ombuds Office, is as follows:

1. Students are responsible for notifying and communicating directly with their instructor(s) if they miss class(es) for any reason, even in a crisis.

2. Students must work directly with their instructor(s) if they miss class for any reason and need to discuss implications of their absence(s).
3. Students are advised to email instructor(s) immediately in cases of long-term medical illness/hospitalization or the death of a loved one. Email communication will suffice until the student and their instructor(s) can meet to discuss a plan forward.
4. Excused absences, exceptions and/or academic accommodations related to absences rests at the discretion of the instructor.
5. In urgent absentee circumstances, faculty may request and/or receive University verification of a death or long-term medical illness/hospitalization. In such cases, where faculty are seeking University verification from a student, they must refer students to the Office of Student Well-Being (SWB).
6. If a student's personal circumstances and/or nonattendance issues present so significant a problem that instructors are unable to address them within the context of the course, students should be referred to the Office of the Ombuds for options related to appropriate policies and resources that can assist the student.

#### *Class Participation and the Expression of Ideas*

Class participation is expected and will add significantly to the learning environment. Please feel free to ask questions or express ideas in class that are related to course content. I ask that you be respectful of your classmates or me when disagreeing with their or my views. I also ask that you be respectful of the learning objectives for the course when raising topics not obviously related. Please do not be offended if I feel the need to draw our attention back to the course material as outlined for the semester.

#### *Late (or Missed) Assignments and Make-Up Examinations*

An important part of the university experience is professional socialization. In the professional world, employees who fail to show up are often penalized financially or in other substantive ways. You should expect the same treatment here. Therefore, exams are to be taken, and assignments are due, on the dates announced in the syllabus. Any exception to these dates is to be agreed upon by me *in advance*. The opportunity to make up an exam or to turn in a late paper will depend on the circumstances, and students should be prepared to provide documentation, if asked, that substantiates the reason for the absence or late paper. I reserve the right not to offer a make-up exam or to lower the exam grade of a student who is offered one. Likewise, I reserve the right not to accept late assignments or to lower the grade of a student whose assignment is accepted late.

#### *Penalties for Academic Dishonesty*

Plagiarism occurs when a writer deliberately passes off another's words or ideas without acknowledging the source. For example, turning in another's work as your own is plagiarism. If you plagiarize in this class, you will receive a zero on the assignment on which you are working and your case may be referred to the Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards (SCCS) for additional disciplinary action. Please be aware that plagiarism can result in suspension or permanent dismissal from the university.

Plagiarism is different from misuse of sources, occasions when a writer does not properly cite a source, misuses quotations, includes too much of an original source in a paraphrase or summary, or commits similar unintentional violations of academic protocol. If you misuse sources, we will work together on appropriately incorporating and/or citing the sources. The misuse of sources may result in work being repeated, and a penalty for late work may be imposed.

## University Services to Assist You in Learning

### *Disability Resource Center*

It is my goal that this class be an accessible and welcoming experience for all students, including those with disabilities that may impact learning in this class. Students who believe they may have trouble participating or effectively demonstrating learning in this course should meet with me (with or without a Disability Resource Center (DRC) accommodation letter) to discuss reasonable options or adjustments. During our discussion I may suggest you contact the DRC (240K Student Center; 734-487-2470; [drc@emich.edu](mailto:drc@emich.edu)) to talk about academic accommodations and the need for an accommodation letter. You are welcome to talk to me anytime during the semester about such issues, but it is always best if we can talk at least one week prior to the need for any modifications so that I can plan accordingly.

### *Writing Support*

Depending on your needs, there are several options to help you develop your writing skills. Some are available online, and some offer in-person consultation based on sample writing that you take with you.

If you have minor problems with punctuation or organizing paragraphs, or if you just want to write cleaner, more concise text, my favorite book to help with this is now offered free online at <http://www.bartleby.com/141/>. Alternatively, you can find a copy at your local library or for sale in the usual places for books. The citation is as follows: Strunk Jr., William and E.B. White. 1918. *The Elements of Style*. Ithaca, N.Y.: W.P. Humphrey. Newer editions are available than the 1918 edition. Any will work nicely for you. The book is short and cheap.

If you require more serious help, or just want to work with a human being, please consider turning to The University Writing Center, The Academic Projects Center or The Holman Success Center.

- The University Writing Center (115 Halle Library; 487-0694) accepts appointments or you may drop in during regular hours, which can be found at <http://www.emich.edu/uwc/>. The UWC also has several satellite locations across campus (in Owen, Marshall, Pray-Harrod, and Mark Jefferson).
  - The UWC can help you with the writing process, but it does not proof papers for grammar and usage errors.
- The Academic Projects Center (116 Halle Library) also offers one-to-one writing consulting for students, in addition to consulting on research and technology-related issues. Students can make appointments or drop in during regular hours, which can be found at <http://www.emich.edu/apc/>.
- The Holman Success Center offers a variety of programs to help you develop academically. Their offerings and hours can be found at <http://www.emich.edu/hsc/>.
  - The HSC will help you with proofing papers for grammar and usage errors.

### *Supplemental Instruction*

Supplemental Instruction is a free academic support service for undergraduate students enrolled in traditionally difficult courses, gateway courses, and/or general education courses. SI gives students the opportunity to discover how to learn in combination with what to learn. An SI leader, who is also a student (but not in this course), attends all lectures and is trained in group facilitation methods and in study techniques. The SI for this course is Zach Koenig. Zach will hold two, one-hour “study sessions” each week designed to help you better engage the material covered in lecture and to help prepare you for the exams.

Course Outline**Week One – Jan. 7**

Introduction

Research Design and Data Analysis

Variation and Causation

*Required Reading*

- Brooks, David. 2014. "Stairway to Wisdom." *The New York Times*, May 16.
- Leonhardt, David. 2014. "The Quiet Movement to Make Government Fail Less Often." *The New York Times*, July 15.

**Week Two – Jan. 14**

Questions

Research Design: Theories and Concepts

Using and Citing Sources Effectively

Short Assignment One Assigned

*Required Reading*

- Nishishiba
  - Chapter 1: When a Practitioner Becomes a Researcher
  - Chapter 2: Research Alignment
- Bohte, John. 2001. "School Bureaucracy and Student Performance at the Local Level." *Public Administration Review* 61:92-99.

*Recommended Reading*

- Hechter, Michael and Christine Horne. 2003. *Theories of Social Order*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press.
  - Part I: What is Theory (pg. 3-8 only)

*Recommended Reading*

- Holt, Jim. 2005. "Measure for Measure: The Strange Science of Francis Galton." *The New Yorker*, Jan. 24.
- Turabian, Kate L. 2007. *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations: Chicago Style for Students and Researchers, 7<sup>th</sup> Edition*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
  - Overview of Part I
  - Chapter 1: What Research Is and How Researchers Think About It

**Week Three – Jan. 21**

Focusing Research

Literature Reviews

Short Assignment One Due

*Required Reading*

- Nishishiba.
  - Chapter 3: Identifying the Focus of the Research
- U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board. 2011. "Making the Right Connections: Targeting the Best Competencies for Training." February.
  - Chapter 1: Background

*Recommended Reading*

- Turabian
  - Chapter 2: Moving from a Topic to a Question to a Hypothesis

**Week Four – Jan. 28**

Research Design

Last Extinction: What Killed the Mammoths? (PBS Home Video)

Short Assignment Two Assigned

*Required Reading*

- Nishishiba
  - Chapter 4: Research Design
- Powell, Jack L. and Aaron D. Drucker. 1997. "The Role of Peer Conformity in the Decision to Ride with an Intoxicated Driver." *Journal of Alcohol and Drug Education* 43:1-7.

**Week Five – Feb. 4**

Sample Selection

Short Assignment Two Due

Literature Review Assigned

*Required Reading*

- Nishishiba.
  - Chapter 5: Sample Selection
- Simonsen, Bill, Mark D. Robbins, and Lee Helgerson. 2000. "The Influence of Jurisdiction Size and Sale Type on Municipal Bond Interest Rates: An Empirical Analysis." *Public Administration Review* 61:709-17.

**Week Six – Feb. 11**

Data Collection

Short Assignment Three Assigned

*Required Reading*

- Nishishiba.
  - Chapter 6: Data Collection
- Hays, Steven W., and Richard C. Kearney. 2001. "Anticipated Changes in Human Resource Management: Views from the Field." *Public Administration Review* 61 (5):585-97.

**Week Seven – Feb. 18**

Case Study Research

Short Assignment Three Due

Midterm Exam Assigned

*Required Reading*

- Yin, Robert K. 2003. *Case Study Research: Design and Methods, Third Edition*.
  - Chapter 1: Introduction
- Fleischmann, Arnold. 2000. "Regionalism and City-County Consolidation in Small Metro Areas." *State and Local Government Review* 32: 213-226.

*Recommended Reading*

- Yin, Robert K. 2003. *Case Study Research: Design and Methods, Third Edition*.
  - Chapter 2: Designing Case Studies

**Week Eight – Feb. 25**

Winter Recess – No Class

**Week Nine – Mar. 3**

Research Design In-Class Group Exercise

Midterm Exam Due

Research Design Assigned

*Required Reading*

- None

**Week Ten – Mar. 10**

Quantitative Data Preparation and Descriptive Statistics

*Required Readings*

- Nishishiba.
  - Chapter 7: Quantitative Preparation and Descriptive Statistics
- Hays, Steven W., and Richard C. Kearney. 2001. "Anticipated Changes in Human Resource Management: Views from the Field." *Public Administration Review* 61 (5):585-97.

**Week Eleven – Mar. 17**

Literature Review and Research Design Working Session

- No In-Class Meeting

**Week Twelve – Mar. 24**

Hypothesis Testing and Statistical Significance: Logic of Inferential Statistics

Literature Review Due

*Required Reading*

- Nishishiba.
  - Chapter 8: Hypothesis Testing and Statistical Significance: Logic of Inferential Statistics
- Hassan, Shahidul, Bradley E. Wright, and Gary Yukl. 2014. "Does Ethical Leadership Matter in Government? Effects on Organizational Commitment, Absenteeism, and Willingness to Report Ethical Problems." *Public Administration Review* 74(3):333-43.

**Week Thirteen – Mar. 31**

Comparing Means between Two Groups

*Required Reading*

- Nishishiba.
  - Chapter 9: Comparing Means between Two Groups
- Hays, Steven W., and Richard C. Kearney. 2001. "Anticipated Changes in Human Resource Management: Views from the Field." *Public Administration Review* 61 (5):585-97.

**Week Fourteen – Apr. 7**

Bivariate Correlation

*Required Reading*

- Nishishiba.
  - Chapter 11: Bivariate Correlation
- Hassan, Shahidul, Bradley E. Wright, and Gary Yukl. 2014. "Does Ethical Leadership Matter in Government? Effects on Organizational Commitment, Absenteeism, and Willingness to Report Ethical Problems." *Public Administration Review* 74(3):333-43.

**Week Fifteen – Apr. 14**

Presentation and Workshop on Student Research Designs  
Research Design Due

**Exam Week – Apr. 21 to 26**

No final exam