

PAD/EPS 688
Research and Program Evaluation
Dr. Gregory Saxton
Fall 2006

Class Hours: Wed. 5:30 – 8:30pm, Metro Center
Instructor's Office: Faculty Office Building, Room 241
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Overview of the Course

PAD 688 is designed to be a graduate-level introduction to the scope and methods of applied research for the public sector. The focus is on research aimed at addressing practical problems facing public managers and policymakers. This course stresses problem structuring through logical methods, exploring problems through observation and other methods of data collection, and analyzing results using both qualitative and quantitative methods.

Course Objectives and Outcomes

By the end of the term, students who attend class regularly, participate in class discussions, and complete the assigned readings and exercises should be able to:

- Map the process of applied research.
- Formulate research questions and testable hypotheses.
- Translate concepts into measurable variables.
- Understand the logic of random probability sampling and be able to draw their own samples.
- Apply the principles of quasi-experimental design to critique research conducted for public agencies.
- Compare, contrast and evaluate alternative applied research designs.
- Understand and critique specific data collection methods.
- Access computerized sources of documents and data that are regularly used in the public sector.

The material in this course reflects the MPA program's mission to combine the conceptual and practical application of administrative knowledge and skills (Mission element #1A) and to improve skills in information technology (Mission element #2B).

Course Materials

- Babbie, Earl. *The Practice of Social Research*. 10th edition. Wadsworth. ISBN: 0534574742

Course Web Page <http://www.itss.brockport.edu/~gsaxton/pad688.htm>

This page contains an electronic version of the syllabus. All updates and a host of research tools are also available at this site.

Assignments & Grading

Participation

Active participation in the classroom is an essential element of all graduate classes. For optimal discussion to occur, it is imperative that you develop ideas and ask questions that are relevant to

the subject matter. Such participation is difficult, however, unless you come to class prepared. In order to do well, you must complete all assigned readings and come to class ready to participate.

Memorandum Assignments

Throughout the semester you will be asked to conduct five short assignments (2-3 pages) designed to develop your skills in specific areas. Detailed instructions will be provided for each of these assignments.

Practical Research Project

Each of you will be engaged in a practical research project during the second half of the semester. These projects will both enhance and showcase the skills you will have learned in the course. All students will be assigned to a project later in the semester; presentation of results will be on the 7th of December.

- 25% Class Participation
- 25% Culminating Projects
 - Reflective Analysis (15%)
 - Practical Research Project (10%)
- 50% Memorandum Assignments

Grading Scale

- 95% - 100% = A
- 90% - 94.9% = A-
- 85% - 89.9% = B+
- 80% - 84.9% = B
- 70% - 79.9% = C
- Below 70% = E

Late Papers

Assignments are due *at the start* of class on the due date. Papers that are turned in after this will receive an immediate penalty of 5%, with an additional 5% penalty per day.

Disability Statement

Students with documented disabilities may be entitled to specific accommodations. SUNY Brockport's Office for Student with Disabilities makes this determination. Please contact the Office for Students with Disabilities at (585) 395-5409 or osdoffic@brockport.edu to inquire about obtaining an official letter to the course instructor detailing any approved accommodations. The student is responsible for providing the course instructor with an official letter. Faculty work as a team with the Office for Students with Disabilities to meet the needs of students with disabilities.

Schedule of Topics

August 31: No Class Meeting (APSA 2006 Conference)

- Via the course web page, review the syllabus, schedule of assignments, and course expectations.
 - Conduct brief online assignment.
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September 7: Introduction to Research: Theory, Politics, Ethics, and Design

- Introduction to the course and to each other. Review syllabus, schedule of assignments, and expectations for the course.
- An introduction to human inquiry, the scientific method, and the research process.
- Overview of the "language" of public administration research.
- The various ethical and political dilemmas that impact the evaluator.

Required Readings:

- Babbie, Chapters 1-3
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September 14: Research Design, Hypotheses and Causal Relationships

- This week we'll continue our exploration of the nature of hypotheses and causal relationships through the exploration of case studies.

Required Readings:

- Babbie, Chapters 4, 17
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September 21: Conceptualization, Measurement, and Quantification

- Turning your concepts into measurable variables.
- Creating quantifiable variables.
- Overview of reliability and validity

******Assignment #1 due at beginning of class***

Required Readings:

- Babbie, Chapter 5, 14
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September 28: Creating and Using Indexes and Scales

- Aggregating variables into indexes and scales.

******Assignment #2 due at beginning of class***

Required Readings:

- Babbie, Chapter 6
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October 5: Measuring Outcomes and Performance

- The role of performance measurement systems in public service organizations.
- How to devise and implement a system of performance measures for your own organization.

Required Readings:

- *Performance Measurement Basics*. Read this presentation first. [access via course web page]
 - *Rochester Area Logic Model*. Rochester Grantmakers Forum. [access via course web page]
 - *A Brief Guide for Performance Measurement In Local Government*. National Center For Public Productivity, Rutgers University [access via course web page]
 - Margaret Plantz, Martha Greenway, and Michael Hendricks. *Showing Results in the Nonprofit Sector*. United Way of America. [access via course web page]
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October 12: Practical Research Project Workshop

- In this session we will work as a class to set the framework for the group research projects that are due on the 7th of December.

*****Assignment #3 due at beginning of class**

October 19: Needs Assessments

- The importance of assessing community needs before beginning to plan and fund public and nonprofit programs cannot be overstated; in this class session we will examine in-depth the techniques and uses of needs assessment in the public and nonprofit sectors.

Required Readings:

- Babbie, Chapter 11 (especially pp. 324-331); Appendix A
 - *Coping with Growth - Community Needs Assessment Techniques* [access via course web page]
 - *Assessing Community Needs* [access via course web page]
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October 26: Survey Research & Sampling

- The fundamentals of evaluating and designing appropriate surveys and questionnaires.

- Constructing your own customer satisfaction survey.
- Evaluating existing surveys and questionnaires.

*****Assignment #4 due at beginning of class**

Required Readings:

- Babbie, Chapters 7,9; Appendix G
 - Statpac, “Qualities of a Good Question” [access via course web page]
 - Statpac, “Guidelines for customer satisfaction surveys and employee opinion surveys” [access via course web page]
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November 2: Evaluation Research Designs

- An introduction to program evaluation.
- The importance of selecting the proper research design.
- Overview of types of design strategies.
- Case study of an evaluation of a typical nonprofit program.

*****Assignment #5 due at beginning of class**

Required Readings:

- Babbie, Chapters 8, 12
 - “Team Read (A)” [access via course web page]
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November 9: Use of Available Data; Team Read (B)

- A more in-depth look at various evaluation design issues and approaches.
- Continued examination of project *Team Read*.

Required Readings:

- “Team Read (B)” [access via course web page]
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November 16: Group Meetings

- This week I'll be in Chicago attending the annual conference of ARNOVA, the Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action. In lieu of this class session, I'd like you to meet with the rest of your group to continue your preparations for your final presentations on December 7th.
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November 23: Thanksgiving Recess—Classes Cancelled

November 30: Practical Research Project Workshops

- As a group, we will address problems encountered in your practical research projects.

Required Readings:

- Organization-specific materials to be distributed in class
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December 7: Group Presentations

- Student presentations of their research findings.