

Center for Public Administration and Policy

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION & POLICY INQUIRY

PAPA 6514 – FALL 2010

Wednesdays 6:45-9:30

Professor Matthew Dull (mdull@vt.edu)
Tel. 703-706-8117 (office) 202-821-3807 (cell)
Office Hours: Tuesdays-Thursdays by appointment

Saunji Fyffe (saunjifyffe@yahoo.com)
Graduate/Teaching Assistant

Course Description

This class is about applying knowledge to policy and administration. What do I know and what do I need to know? How confident am I? Basic stuff – but also complicated, uncertain, time-consuming, controversial, and full of good reasons for bad inference. Our purpose this semester is to think carefully about the hazards of information and inference in order to improve how we bring knowledge to bear on pressing problems. The course has three basic objectives:

- 1) Examine problems of evidence and causation in social research of any kind, and in policy and public administration research in particular.
- 2) Build common understandings of concepts in quantitative research methodology including variables and distributions, statistical significance, hypothesis testing, linear regression.
- 3) Prepare students for the creative, pragmatic application of information and analytical thinking to problems common in public policy and public administration.

Required Texts

The following texts will be required for all students taking the course. Please make arrangements to purchase both:

- Joseph S Wholey, Harry P. Hatry and Kathryn E. Newcomer, 2004. *Handbook of Practical Program Evaluation*, second edition, Jossey-Bass, A Wiley Imprint, San Francisco,.
- Joel Best. 2001. *Damned Lies and Statistics: Untangling Numbers from the Media, Politicians, and Activists*. University of California Press. ISBN: 0520219783.
- Jane E. Miller, 2005. *The Chicago guide to writing about multivariate analysis*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press. ISBN: 0226527832.

Other course readings will be made available in electronic copy on Scholar. Completion of an introductory statistics course is required for this course. Please plan to review a basic statistics text. This one is available cheap online:

Robert M. Kaplan, 1986. *Basic Statistics for the Behavioral Sciences*. Allyn and Bacon, Inc.

To make sure everyone has the basics, part of this course is dedicated in part to review. Among other sources, we'll be using a number of chapters from:

Kenneth J. Meier, Jeffrey L. Brudney, John Bohte, 2005. *Applied Statistics for Public and Nonprofit Administration*, 6th edition. Wadsworth.

Course Elements

The table below briefly summarizes course elements.

Coursework	% of Grade
Course Contribution	
→ Discussant on four (4) readings	35%
→ Online contribution	
Problem Sets	
→ Six (6), dropping the lowest one (1)	30%
Research Project	
→ Regular Participation	35%
→ Research Updates	

Course Contribution

Regular attendance and informed contributions to class are both a part of your grade and essential to learning. This requires: 1) Regular attendance; 2) Informed contributions based on a close reading of course materials; 3) Reading and offering feedback on other participants' work; 4) Regularly posting research updates, questions, feedback – anything – to Scholar. At the conclusion of the course a confidential peer-assessment will be administered, will include the following questions:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Q1: Participant contributed to classroom discussion.	1	2	3	4	5
Q2: Participant provided constructive feedback to others.	1	2	3	4	5

Peer assessments will not factor directly, but will serve to inform the overall participation grade.

Reading Discussant

Each course participant will assume responsibility for acting as discussant on **four (4) course readings** during the semester. We will assign these in class. Discussants are expected to post a short summary and response to the reading under **Chat Room** on Scholar no later than the **Sunday** night prior to class and prepare a 10 minute presentation identifying the key ideas and issues covered in the material. Please consult me in advance if there is material covered that you feel you need some help understanding.

Problem Sets

Six problem sets applying material covered in class are due on the **Friday immediately following the class date designated on the course schedule**. Each student's **top four Problem Sets** will make up their grade, dropping the lower scoring two Problem Sets. Problem sets should be submitted in electronic format under **Assignments** on Scholar. Ten (10) percentage points will be deducted for each day a problem set is late. You are welcome to work together on problem sets. If you have questions you are encouraged to post questions to the Scholar Chat, ask Saunji, ask anyone – but the work should ultimately be your own.

Research Project

Participants will develop or contribute to an original research project, which they will identify no later than **9/16**. Participants may identify their own project (please consult with me beforehand) or contribute either individually or as a team to one of the following projects:

- **Project #1: Community Engagement** – Support the **Project for a Healthier Alexandria Community Indicators Initiative** (<http://www.alexhealth.org/partnership>) by assisting in the collection and interpretation of group interview data.
- **Project #2: Mapping the Public Service** – Explore creative ways to describe or represent the size, composition, structure, and influence of the government's workforce.
- **Project #3: Remembering Alexandria's Samuel W. Tucker** – Learn about and contribute to the memory of Alexandria-native and civil rights pioneer Samuel Tucker.

Again, participants may select one of the above **or another project of their choosing**. Once a topic has been selected (again later than 9/16), participants should provide regular research updates. Research updates may include article summaries, research notes, interview schedules and summaries, and other materials related to the project.

Research updates may summarize thoughts and activities, research interviews, observations or anything else related to the research project. Research updates may also respond to questions, like: What articles and other resources do you believe are important for understanding the project? Why? What types of observations does existing research use? What makes you confident (or not confident) that they valid and reliable?

As a benchmark, each participant should post at least **eight (8) substantial research updates on Scholar before 12/1**.

Projects will be evaluated at the conclusion of the semester based on review of the participants' research updates. Also at the conclusion of the course a confidential peer-assessment will be administered, which will include the following questions:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Q1: Participant clearly articulated project question and/or purpose.	1	2	3	4	5
Q2: Participant's research updates indicate he/she made substantial progress on the project during the semester.	1	2	3	4	5

Community Indicators: Project for a Healthier Alexandria

In addition to the research updates identified above, participants will contribute to the Project for a Healthier Alexandria's Community Indicators Initiative (<http://www.alexhealth.org/partnership>) and will write **one research update** about their contribution to the project. We will discuss this further in class.

Week	Topics & Reading	Discussants	Turn in
Week 1 8/25	Introduction		Reality Check
Week 2 9/1	Models and Data Tufte, "Visualization & Explanation" Gladwell, "Dangerous Minds"		
Week 3 9/8	Description & Explanation Best Ch. 1; O'Sullivan Ch. 1-3; Ch. 1. Using Logic Models (McLaughlin Jordan); Miller Ch. 1-4.	1. O'Sullivan Ch. 1-2 – 2. O'Sullivan Ch. 3 – 3. Logic Models –	PS #1
Week 4 9/15	Group Interviews Ch. 12. Using Focus Groups (Goldenkoff); Ch. 15. Qualitative Data Analysis (Caudle); David L. Morgan, "Focus Groups," <i>Annual Review of Sociology</i> .	4. Goldenkoff – 5. Caudle – 6. Morgan –	
Week 5 9/22	So Many Observations! Ch. 13. Collecting Data in the Field (Nightingale, Rossman); Ch. 14. Using Agency Records (Hatry); Ch. 10. Using Expert Judgment (Averch);	7. Nightingale, Rossman – 8. Hatry – 9. Avech –	PS #2
Week 7 9/29	Measurement Finish Best; Robinson, <i>Story of Measurement</i> (selections); Frankfort- Nachmias, "Measurement," Meier, Brudney, Bohte Ch. 2, "Measurement," Miller Ch. 5-7.	10. Best – 11. Best – 12. FN & Meier & Miller – 13. FN & Meier & Miller –	
Week 8 10/6	Sampling and Selection O'Sullivan Ch. 5, "Sampling" Meier, Brudney, Bohte Ch. 8, 11 "The Normal Distribution and "Introduction To Inference."	14. O'Sullivan – 15. Meier –	PS #3

Week	Topics & Reading	Discussants	Turn in
Week 9 10/13	The Logic of Evaluation Ch. 2. Evaluability Assessment (Wholey); Ch. 3. Implementation Evaluation (Arnold Love); Paul F. Steinberg. 2007. "Causal Assessment in Small-N Policy Studies." <i>Policy Studies Journal</i> .	16. Wholey – 17. Love – 18. Steinberg –	
Week 10 10/20	Logic of Evaluation II: Data and Design Meier, Brudney, Bohte. Ch. 3; Ch. 5. Quasi-Experimentation (Reichardt, Mark); Ch. 6. Randomized Experiments (St. Pierre).	19. Meier, Brudney – 20. Reichardt, Mark – 21. St. Pierre –	PS#4
Week 11 10/27	Quantitative Evidence & Hypothesis Testing Meier, Brudney, Bohte Ch. Ch. 12-13; Ch. 16. Using Statistics in Evaluation (Newcomer, Wirtz); Miller Ch. 8-9.	22. Meier 12-13 – 23. Newcomer, Wirtz –	
Week 12 11/3	Contingency Tables Ch. 9. Using Surveys (Newcomer, Triplett) Meier, Brudney, Bohte Ch.14-16	24. Newcomer & Triplett – 25. Meier 15-16 – 26. Meier 15-16 –	PS #5
Week 13 11/10	Regression Meier, Brudney, Bohte Ch. 18-19; Ch. 17. Using Regression Analysis (Berger); Miller Ch. 10, 13-14,	27. Berger – 28. Meier – 29. Meier –	
Week 14 11/17	Measuring Performance Ch. 4. Performance Monitoring (Poister); Shingler et al. 2008. "The Importance of Subjective Data for Public Agency Performance Evaluation." <i>PAR</i>	30. Poister – 31. Shingler et al. –	PS #6
Week 15 12/1	Wrapping-Up TBD		
December 8	Final Paper Due		