

Western University
Local Government Program
Research Design and Methods in Public Administration
Public Administration 9914
Fall 2021

Instructor: Dr. Zack Taylor
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Phone: 519-661-2111 ext. 85169
Office Hours: Online via Zoom by appointment
Dates: Fridays 4–7pm / Saturdays 9am–3pm: Sept. 10–11 (in-person)
Oct. 1–2 (in-person)
Oct. 29–30 (in-person)
Nov. 27 (on-line, 9am–12pm)
Location: University Community Centre WAL5 66
with on-line components using Zoom – see the schedule!

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

Public administrators in local government produce “research” all the time. They routinely evaluate the effectiveness of public policies and processes, learn about experiences of policy client groups, and compare performance across jurisdictions. They also consume research by consultants, other public administrators, and academics. This is an intensive, interactive crash course on the process of conducting and presenting original research on public administration and policy. The emphasis is on practical applications and skills development.

Full- and part-time MPA students come from a variety of backgrounds and possess a diverse range of skills and experience. This course will provide everyone with a common structure and vocabulary as you continue with other course work and undertake your MRP. As you plan your Major Research Paper, you are encouraged to build on the foundation provided by this course by seeking additional advice and assistance from faculty who are specialists in particular approaches. The course content is also transferrable to other class assignments and your professional work, and you will also be able to use it to critically interpret and evaluate academic and professional research products. The creation of your MRP research proposal is fully integrated with this course. By the end of the course you will have developed a fully worked-out research proposal and been assigned a supervisor.

Enrollment in this course is restricted to graduate students in the Local Government Program’s Master of Public Administration stream, as well as any student that has obtained special permission to enroll in this course from the course instructor as well as the Graduate Chair (or equivalent) from the student’s home program.

<p>Concerned about COVID-19? Please consult the university’s policies and updates regularly at https://www.uwo.ca/coronavirus/.</p>
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TOPIC AND MEETING SCHEDULE

The material is divided into **Modules**, which are subdivided into **Units**. Each unit has its own handouts and exercises. The handouts and exercises will be made available prior to each meeting. Be prepared to work on the exercises collaboratively during class time.

Date	Topic	Handout	Exercise
Module 1: Getting started			
Sept. 10–11	Common goals of public administration research	1.1	1.1
	Inductive vs. deductive research styles	1.2	1.2
	The ladder of abstraction	1.3	1.3
	Good research questions	1.4	1.4
	Writing a literature review	1.5	
	How to find good journal articles	1.6	
Goals:			
Introduce ourselves and MRP ideas			
Discuss goals and objectives of the course			
Discuss MRP expectations			
Discuss material and do collaborative exercises			
Introduce Annotated Bibliography Assignment			
Demonstrate library search tools (Handout 1.6)			
Module 2: Research design			
Sept. 10–11	Research ontology	2.1	2.1
	Components of a research design	2.2	2.2
	Strategies for case selection and comparison	2.3	2.3
	Operationalizing concepts as variables	2.4	2.4
	Variables, causal relationships, and causal inference	2.5	2.5
	Types of information	2.6	
	Validity, reliability, replicability	2.7	
Goals:			
Discuss material and do collaborative exercises			
Discuss assignments			
Discuss project planning strategies			

Date	Topic	Handout	Exercise
Module 3: Research with human subjects			
Oct. 1–2	Qualitative vs. quantitative approaches	3.1	
	Interviewing: Types of instruments and human subjects	3.2	
	Interviewing: Types of questions	3.3	3.3(1,2)
	Interviewing: Recording, processing, and analysis	3.4	3.4
	Surveys: Distribution options	3.5	
	Surveys: Question wording	3.6	3.7
	Surveys: Types of answers	3.7	
	Sources of bias in interviews and surveys	3.8	3.8
	Gearing the method to the question	3.9	3.9
	Strategies for recruiting human subjects	3.10	3.10(1,2)
	Research ethics	3.11	3.11
Goals:			
Discuss material and do collaborative exercises			
Demonstration of Qualtrics on-line survey software			
Discuss Western’s research ethics approval process			
Module 4: Analyzing quantitative data			
Oct. 29–30	Introduction	4.1	
	Introduction to the Jamovi software package	4.2	
	Types of variables	4.3	
	Describing distributions	4.4*	4.5
	Visualizing distributions: The histogram	4.5*	
	Comparing distributions: Box plots	4.6*	4.6
	Analysis of variance (ANOVA) – Is between-group variance greater than within-group variance?	4.7*	4.7
	Visualizing joint distributions: Crosstabulation	4.8	
	Linear regression analysis (continuous DV) – What influence do independent variables have on your dependent variable?	4.9*	4.9
	Binomial logistic regression analysis (categorical DV) – What are the odds that an outcome will occur?	4.10*	4.10
	Goals:		
Discuss material and do collaborative exercises			
Review Proposal Assignment			
Review MRP expectations			

* In Module 4, videos made by datacamp.cc are available for these items. See Handout 4.2.

COURSE WEBSITE

This course makes use of OWL. Please refer to the course website regularly for announcements and course information: <https://owl.uwo.ca/portal>.

COURSE FORMAT

- *Materials.* Complementing the textbook, other reading PDFs, handouts, and exercises will be made available on OWL prior to each scheduled weekend meeting. For reference purposes, videos used during the 2020 on-line “pandemic edition” of the course will be posted on Youtube after class.
- *Exercises.* Exercises are for self-assessment purposes only and are not graded. Their purpose is to improve your understanding of the concepts through application. Enter your answers into OWL’s Tests and Quizzes function to see the correct answers. Although they are not formally graded, the instructor will monitor your performance and discuss trouble spots with you as needed. We will work through additional exercises during our in-class meetings.
- *Teams.* Students will perform hands-on work in teams of 4 or 5. Team members are expected to collaborate on their own time to discuss course material, work through exercises, and complete two Mini-Projects that apply course concepts.
- *Class Meetings.* The weekend meetings will be used to collaboratively discuss and work through the concepts and exercises.
- *Consultations with Instructor.* Individuals and groups are welcome to schedule Zoom consultations with the instructor at other times.

TEXTBOOK

The textbook is available as an e-book through the library at <https://tinyurl.com/pa9914book>.

van Thiel, Sandra. 2014. *Research Methods in Public Administration and Public Management: An Introduction*. 1st ed. London, UK: Routledge.

Should you desire a print copy, please visit the bookstore website—<https://bookstore.uwo.ca>—for the latest information regarding book sales and delivery. While the book is unfortunately expensive, you will be able to sell it back to the bookstore in December. It can also be found on on-line new and used book retailers. Note that a second edition is being published in Sept. 2021. Either edition is good.

TECHNOLOGY REQUIREMENTS

Several of our exercises require specific software packages. (An iPad, Android tablet, or Chromebook *will not work*; your device *must* run Mac OS X or Windows.) Please ensure that the following software is installed:

- **Microsoft Word.** For consistency of experience, version 2016 is preferred.
- **Microsoft Excel.** For consistency of experience, version 2016 is preferred. Excel should also have the Analysis ToolPak add-in installed. For more information on the Analysis

ToolPak, see: <https://support.office.com/en-us/article/Load-the-Analysis-ToolPak-305C260E-224F-4739-9777-2D86F1A5BD89>

- **Jamovi.** Jamovi is a free, easy to install, cross-platform, user-friendly graphic user interface for the R statistical package. Download at: <https://www.jamovi.org>
- **A web browser.** We will access data from websites and use browser-based software, including the Qualtrics survey platform.
- **Zoom.** Due to the pandemic, some aspects of the course will be delivered on-line. Everyone must have Zoom installed and be signed in using your Western account.

Open-source and commercially available alternatives to Microsoft Office possess many of the same features, however for the purposes of this course, Word and Excel will be used to demonstrate concepts and methods. Note that Western graduate students are entitled to a free installation of Microsoft Office 2016 (Windows or Mac). See:

<http://www.uwo.ca/its/sitelicense/microsoft/homeuse.html>

If you are unable to meet these requirements, please let the instructor know as soon as possible before the class begins so that we can make alternative arrangements.

EVALUATION

Annotated bibliography (10%). An annotated bibliography is an important research tool and a building block of a literature review. The assignment will exercise your library research and critical reading skills and accelerate the development of your proposal.

- Submit on or before **Friday, Sep. 24.**

MRP abstract (no grade). To help the LGP Program Director assign an MRP Supervisor, you will submit an abstract, or description, of what you expect to study. This will not be a fully developed proposal. It will include your name, the project title, a brief description of the research question, method, and anticipated findings or goals (maximum 300 words), whether you expect that information will be gathered from human subjects, and subject keywords.

- Submit on or before **Friday, Oct. 22.** The LGP director will email an invitation to fill out an on-line form.

MRP research proposal (50%). This will include a research question and description of a research design. While you will not be held to this proposal as you move forward with your MRP, it is an opportunity to systematically think through the research process and your project. As you will have been matched to your supervisor on the basis of the abstract, you will have the opportunity to consult with him or her as you prepare the proposal.

- Submit your final proposal, with a one-paragraph description of what you learned from the peer review, on or before **Friday, Dec. 3.**

Group mini-projects (30%). After the completion of Modules 3 and 4, you will collaborate to complete a small group project designed to exercise your newfound research skills! Each assignment is worth 15%.

- Module 3: Design a short survey or interview guide with commentary on your choices. **Due Friday, Oct. 15.**
- Module 4: Analyze a provided dataset. **Due Friday, Nov. 12.**

“3 Minute Thesis” Poster presentation (10%). This is a test of your communication skills! Make a single-slide poster describing your research design and methods. You will have three minutes to present, followed by approximately three minutes of questions.

- Submit your poster slide as a PDF on **Monday, Nov. 22.**
- Present on **Saturday, Nov. 27.**

SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS AND DUE DATES

Meeting #1 – Modules 1 and 2 (in-person)	Sep. 10–11
▶ Annotated Bibliography Assignment due (10%)	Sep. 24
▶ MRP abstract due (no grade)	Oct. 22
Meeting #2 – Module 3 (in-person)	Oct. 1–2
▶ Module 3 Mini-Project due (15%)	Oct. 15
Meeting #3 – Module 4 (in-person)	Oct. 29–30
▶ Module 4 Mini-Project due (15%)	Nov. 12
▶ Submit Presentation Poster Slide (10%)	Nov. 22
Meeting #4 – Poster Presentations (on-line)	Nov. 27
▶ Final Proposal due (50%)	Dec. 3

COURSE POLICIES

E-mail policy: All Western University students are required to have an @uwo.ca e-mail account. The instructor will *only* respond to e-mails sent from a Western University account, that clearly identify the sender, and have “PA9914” in the subject line. The instructor will **not** accept assignments by e-mail.

Late assignments: The penalty for late assignments is two percentage points per day (including weekend days). A grade of 80% on an assignment therefore becomes 72% in four days. Assignments more than 10 days late will not be accepted. Extensions due to illness require a medical certificate. If you foresee problems meeting submission deadlines please consult the instructor early; accommodations can always be made with adequate advance notice. This means *at least one week before the deadline*, not the night before the work is due! The last day for submission of term assignments with penalty is **Monday, December 13, 2021**, after which they cannot be accepted.

Academic Offences: Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site:

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism-detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>).

If you are unclear about what constitutes plagiarism or how to reference sources, please visit the Writing Support Centre <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/writing/> or review information at: <http://www.lib.uwo.ca/tutorials/plagiarism/>.

ASSISTANCE

If you are having trouble with the course material or are falling behind in your work, please contact the course instructor as soon as possible. We can only help you if the lines of communication are open. Learning to express ideas clearly is a central goal of the university experience. If academic writing does not come easily to you, you are strongly encouraged to make use of the Writing Support Centre: <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/writing/>.

Health/Wellness Services: Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

Accessible Education Western (AEW): Western is committed to achieving barrier-free accessibility for all its members, including graduate students. As part of this commitment, Western provides a variety of services devoted to promoting, advocating, and accommodating persons with disabilities in their respective graduate program.

Graduate students with disabilities (for example, chronic illnesses, mental health conditions, mobility impairments) are strongly encouraged to register with Accessible Education Western (AEW), a confidential service designed to support graduate and undergraduate students through their academic program. With the appropriate documentation, the student will work with both AEW and their graduate programs (normally their Graduate Chair and/or Course instructor) to ensure that appropriate academic accommodations to program requirements are arranged. These accommodations include individual counselling, alternative formatted literature, accessible campus transportation, learning strategy instruction, writing exams and assistive technology instruction.

READING SCHEDULE

Module 1: Getting started

van Thiel, Chapter 1, “Research in public administration.”

van Thiel, Chapter 2, “The research problem.”

van Thiel, Chapter 3, “Theoretical framework.”

Module 2: Research design

van Thiel, Chapter 5, “Research design.”

van Thiel, Chapter 4, “Operationalization.”

van Thiel, Chapter 8, “The case study,” beginning of chapter to the end of section 8.3.

Module 3: Research with human subjects

Interviews and surveys

van Thiel, Chapter 8, “The case study,” section 8.4 to the end of the chapter (on interviewing).

van Thiel, Chapter 9, “Desk research,” pp. 108–111 (on content analysis).

van Thiel, Chapter 7, “The survey.”

Smith, Scott M. n.d. “7 Tips for Writing Great Questions: Details, details, details. Follow these simple tips to make sure you get the little things right in your next survey.” Qualtrics. (PDF on OWL)

Smith, Scott M. n.d. “Determining Sample Size.” Qualtrics. (PDF on OWL)

Koop, Royce. 2016. “Institutional- and Individual-Level Influences on Service Representation and Casework in Canadian Cities.” *Urban Affairs Review* 52(5): 808–831. (PDF on OWL)

Doberstein, Carey. “Whom Do Bureaucrats Believe? A Randomized Controlled Experiment Testing Perceptions of Credibility of Policy Research.” *Policy Studies Journal* 45(2): 384–405. (PDF on OWL) + Doberstein’s survey instrument

van Thiel, Chapter 11, “Analyzing qualitative data.”

Research ethics

Bouma, Gary D., Rod Ling, and Lori Wilkinson. 2013. “Ethics in Human Research.” Ch. 9 in *The Research Process*, 3rd ed., pp. 165–192. Toronto, ON: Oxford University Press. (PDF on OWL)

van Thiel, Chapter 12, “Reporting results,” pp. 154–155 (on research ethics).

UWO Research Ethics Guidelines for LGP MRPs

(https://localgovernment.uwo.ca/masters/courses/final_research_paper.html and scroll down)

Module 4: Analyzing quantitative data

van Thiel, Chapter 9, “Desk research,” except for pp. 108–111 on content analysis, which you read earlier.

van Thiel, Chapter 10, “Analyzing quantitative data.”

van Thiel, Chapter 12, “Reporting results.”