

Western University
Local Government Program
Research Design and Methods in Public Administration
Public Administration 9914
Fall 2022

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Office Hours: By appointment, in person (SSC7237) or on Zoom
Dates: Fridays 4–7pm / Saturdays 9am–3pm: Sep. 9–10 (in person)
Sep. 30–Oct.1 (in person)
Nov. 11-12 (in person)
Dec. 3 (on Zoom, 9am–12pm)
Location: University Community Centre WAL5 66
Zoom session on Dec. 3

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

Public administrators in local government conduct 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 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 Major Research Paper (MRP). 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 draft research proposal and been assigned a supervisor who will guide you through the rest of your MRP work in the coming academic terms. The skills you learn in this course are also transferrable to other class assignments and your professional work, and you will also be able to use them to critically interpret and evaluate academic and professional research products.

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.

Concerned about COVID-19? Please consult the university's policies and updates regularly at <https://www.uwo.ca/coronavirus/>.

COURSE WEBSITE

Please refer to the course OWL website regularly for announcements and information.

COURSE FORMAT

- The course will be taught in an interactive, hands-on format. In-person sessions will combine short lecture segments with group exercises, facilitated through the instructional technology in Western's WALS classroom.
- Your work outside the classroom will include both individual written assignments, and hands-on exercises that you will complete in teams of 4-5 students.
- The interactive character of the course requires that you be ready and willing to participate fully in class discussions and group work.

COURSE MATERIALS

Textbook

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

The textbook is available as an e-book through the Western Libraries system. Simply sign in using your UWO credentials and locate the book by searching for its title. You will have unlimited access to reading the book online, but only a limited number of pages can be downloaded. You can also buy a print copy on-line through new and used book retailers; unfortunately, the book is expensive. Note that a second edition (slightly revised) was published in 2021, but we will be using the first edition since it is in Western Libraries.

Other Course Materials

There will be some **additional reading PDFs** for our second (Sept. 30-Oct 1.) and third (Nov. 11-12) in-person sessions. These will be posted on the OWL site under "Resources."

Three days in advance of each in-person session I will post several **summary sheets** and **exercises** on the OWL site. Each summary sheet contains an overview of key points related to a specific topic. There will usually be one or two exercises associated with each topic.

ADVANCE PREPARATION

Advance preparation is essential for success. Before each in-person session, you should:

1. Read the assigned textbook reading and (if relevant) additional reading.
2. Review the summary sheets for the materials to be covered.
3. Review the exercises and be prepared to discuss them in group format in the class.

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

Note that Western graduate students are entitled to a free installation of Microsoft Office 365 (Windows or Mac). See: <https://wts.uwo.ca/sitelicense/microsoft/homeuse.html>

- **Jamovi.** Jamovi is a free, easy to install, user-friendly graphic user interface for the R statistical package, which we will use for data analysis. Download at: <https://www.jamovi.org> (please download the Desktop version, 2.2.5 solid)
- **Zoom.** Our final course session (tentatively scheduled for the morning of Saturday November 26th) will be conducted on-line via Zoom. The instructor will also be conducting most office hours consultations on-line via Zoom. Please have Zoom installed on your computer, and sign in using your Western Zoom account.

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

All assignments will be due on OWL, except for the MRP abstract and the 3MT (see below).

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. 23.**

MRP abstract (no grade). To help the LGP Program Director assign an MRP Supervisor, you will submit an abstract (short 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. 21.** The LGP director will email an on-line form.

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

- Module 3: Design a short survey or interview guide with commentary on your choices. **Due Friday, Oct. 14.**
- Module 4: Analyze a provided dataset. **Due Friday, Nov. 25.**

3MT (“3 Minute Thesis”) Poster presentation (10%). This is a test of your communication skills! Make a single-slide poster describing your intended MRP 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 **Thursday, Dec. 1.**
- Present on **Saturday, Dec. 3.**

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 on or before **Friday, Dec. 9.**

OVERVIEW OF MEETINGS AND DUE DATES

Meeting #1 – Modules 1 and 2 (in-person)	Sep. 9–10
▶ Annotated Bibliography Assignment due (10%)	Sep. 23
Meeting #2 – Module 3 (in-person)	Sep 30.–Oct.1
▶ Module 3 Mini-Project due (15%)	Oct. 14
▶ MRP abstract due (no grade)	Oct. 21
Meeting #3 – Module 4 (in-person)	Nov. 11–12
▶ Module 4 Mini-Project due (15%)	Nov. 25
▶ Submit Presentation Poster Slide (10%)	Dec. 1
Meeting #4 – Poster Presentations (on Zoom)	Dec. 3
▶ Final Proposal due (50%)	Dec. 9

MEETINGS, TOPICS AND READINGS

Module 1: Getting started

Sep. Advance Reading

- 9–10** van Thiel, Chapter 1, “Research in public administration.”
van Thiel, Chapter 2, “The research problem.”
van Thiel, Chapter 3, “Theoretical framework.”
Module 1 summary sheets and exercises, posted to OWL on Sep. 7

Topics

- Introducing ourselves
- Course overview
- Common goals of public administration research
- Inductive vs. deductive research
- The ladder of abstraction
- Good research questions
- Writing a literature review
- Using library resources
- Writing annotated bibliographies

Module 2: Research design

Sept. Advance Reading

- 9–10** van Thiel, Chapter 5, “Research design.”
van Thiel, Chapter 4, “Operationalization.”
van Thiel, Chapter 8, “The case study,” beginning of chapter to end of section 8.3.
Module 2 summary sheets and exercises, posted to OWL on Sep. 7

Topics

- Ontologies and methodologies
- Components of a research design
- Strategies for case selection and comparison
- Operationalizing concepts as variables
- Causal relationships and causal inference
- Types of information
- Reliability, validity and replicability

Module 3: Gathering empirical data

Sep. 30 – Advance Reading

Oct. 1

- van Thiel, Chapter 9, “Desk research,”
van Thiel, Chapter 8, “The case study,” section 8.4 to the end of the chapter
van Thiel, Chapter 7, “The survey.”
- Smith, Scott M. n.d. “7 Tips for Writing Great Questions” 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
- 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 3 summary sheets and exercises, posted to OWL on Sep. 28

Topics

- Quantitative vs. qualitative approaches
- Secondary or primary data?
- Interviewing: Types of instruments and interview subjects
- Interviewing: Designing questions and recording the data
- Surveys: Distribution options
- Surveys: Designing questions
- Surveys: Types of answers
- Bias in interviews and surveys
- Strategies for recruiting human subjects
- Research ethics in the use of human subjects

Module 4: Analyzing qualitative and quantitative data

Nov. Advance reading

- 11–12 van Thiel, Chapter 11, “Analyzing qualitative data.”
van Thiel, Chapter 10, “Analyzing quantitative data.”
van Thiel, Chapter 12, “Reporting results.”
Module 3 summary sheets and exercises, posted to OWL on Oct. 9

Topics

- Qualitative data coding – goals and strategies
- Coding in practice
- Types of variables
- Describing and visualizing distributions
- Analysis of variance (ANOVA)
- Crosstabulations
- Linear regression analysis
- Binomial regression analysis

COURSE POLICIES

E-mail policy: All Western University students are required to have an @uwo.ca e-mail account. Please use it for all correspondence regarding the course. 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. If you foresee problems meeting submission deadlines please consult the instructor early; accommodations can be made with advance notice. This means *at least one week before the deadline*.

Academic Offences: Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read 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

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. I 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/uwoom/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.