Syllabus
PUBM 5430: Research Design

Instructor: Professor Chengxin Xu

Seattle University

Winter 2026

Course Information:
Class Hours: Tuesday 6:00-8:40pm
Classroom: Pigott Building, 108

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Contents

1 Course Description

This course exposes students to issues central to understanding and applying research-based evidence to public affairs and administration. These issues include the use of theory or models, measurement concepts and methods, qualitative and quantitative modes of observation, identifying causes, the logic of control variables, and understanding experiments and quasi-experiments. The emphasis is on learning these ideas through practice with many different examples of real-world research and empirical evidence.

2 Student Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to [1] [2]:

1. **Develop analytical skills** in the conduct of original research for the purpose of further social justice.†

2. **Effectively communicate** oral/written research findings on public issues to diverse populations. ‡

3. **Create appropriate research methods and design** to support empirical research objectives, including:

   - Build theory- and evidence-based logic models for problem assessment and program evaluation;*
   - Create surveys for both quantitative and qualitative data collection.*

3 Required Textbook and Materials

Required:

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[1]†Introduced; ‡Practiced; * Assessed.

[2]Following learning outcomes are to be practiced further in PUBM 5440: Applied Data Analysis.

Remler, Dahlia K. and Gregg G. Van Ryzin. *Research methods in practice: Strategies for description and causation*, 3rd Edition. SAGE Publications (2021). (Referred to as "Remler & Van Ryzin". 2nd edition is also acceptable.)

There are also a number of other readings, such as journal articles or book chapters. Any required reading materials other than textbooks will be available on `Canvas`.

4 Course Evaluation

Students are expected to keep up with assigned readings and to participate actively in class discussions. There will be four projects and a final exam. Grades will be based on the following:

- Class participation — 10%

- Two Lab Sessions — 20%

- Human Subjects Training Certification for Institutional Review Board (IRB) Application — 10%

- Program Evaluation Project:

    - Program Theory and Hypothesis Report — 15%
    - Analytical Strategy Report — 15%
    - Poll for the Program — 15%
    - Qualitative Investigation and Final Evaluation Proposal — 15%

Class Participation (10%): The successful completion of this seminar is on the basis of discussion and interactions among students and the instructor. Students are expected to attend every class meeting, read assigned materials carefully, and bring constructive opinions and questions to the class. Sharing personal working experience is strongly recommended.

Human Subjects Training Certification for Institutional Review Board (IRB) (10%): To better learn about the issues of ethics and human subjects research students will complete the human subjects training protocol as conducted by the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) in collaboration with Seattle University Institutional Review Board. This training is online and takes approximately 1-2 hours to complete. Once it is completed please submit me your certificate as an attachment for credit. A link to human subjects training is here.

Lab Sessions (20%): This class includes two lab sessions to build hands-on experience for students to practice necessary skills for quantitative and qualitative research design. In the first lab, students are required to replicate an online survey through Qualtrics and submit their survey in Qualtrics shareable format. In the second lab, students will conduct coding analysis for an example interview transcript and submit their coding results. Submissions are required as completions of lab sessions.

Program Evaluation Project (60%): The project mimics the evidenced-based decision making and evaluation process increasingly used in federal, state, and local governments. In general, its

goal is to understand the program effectiveness from both theoretical and empirical perspectives. Students must complete and submit the program evaluation project in *four steps*. The instructions for each project can be found on `Canvas`.

Be sure to read all instructions carefully, and complete all parts of the project. Projects will be graded according to their presentation quality as well as its analytical substance. Students may consult with each other on assignments, but the work handed in must be the student's own, original work. *Students are encouraged to submit a draft at least 3 days before the deadline.*

- **Step 1: Program Theory and Hypothesis Report (15%):** At this stage, you need to build a theory that explains why a selected program or policy intervention is effective to influence social outcomes. This includes identifying key outcome variables of interest, the theoretical effect of the program/intervention on these variables, and the strategy for impact evaluation. The program can be a federal, state, or local government program or a program/intervention run by a nonprofit or international organization. Be sure to pick a focused, concrete program—preferably one about which you have some background knowledge. Use press releases, websites, or other sources to find a good description of the program, its activities, and its goals. You are then required to use a logic model to illustrate the causal effect of the program. More detailed instructions are posted on `Canvas`.

- **Step 2: Analytical Strategy Report (15%):** In this report, you need start with discussing potential challenges of program impact evaluation. Then, choose an evaluation strategy that can help you to overcome these challenges, such as randomized experiments or quasi-experiment strategies (e.g., Difference-in-Differences, IV Strategies, Regression Discontinuity Design). Finally, please discuss the limitation of your choice.

- **Step 3: Poll for the Program (15%):** At this stage, you need to design **a survey** to collect public opinions (i.e., a poll) on the program/policy you used for previous two projects. You need to include a group of variables that capture the public opinion on the program, such as whether they support such program, and how, the public think, the program should be funded or implemented. More detailed instructions are posted on `Canvas`.

- **Step 4: Qualitative Investigation and Final Evaluation Proposal (15%):** At this stage, you need to create a plan for a focus group interview with two elements. First, discuss who the participants are and why they are included. Second, come up with three to four semi-structured interview questions for a focus group. Design questions for program participants or people related, asking open-ended questions about their expectations, experience, thoughts, or critiques of the program.

    Combine all previous parts into your final evaluation proposal. You would also expect that you have already received my comments for previous works. Revise your work accordingly and put all four parts together to compose the final program evaluation plan. Details are discussed on `Canvas`.

APA (see a [guidance](#) here) is required in terms of writing style of your assignments. In-text citations are preferred to footnotes or endnotes. Writing clarity and quality are considered in grading. Please use a standard font such as Arial, Calibri, or Times New Roman. Pages should use 1-inch margins, double-spaced, with 12 point fonts. If you think you need help with your

writing, talk to the professor. There are resources on campus to help you. Also feel free to seek for services of the Writing Center at Seattle University.

   Due dates of all assignments are listed on the Course Schedule and your Canvas Calendar.

5   Grading Policy

Students' final grades will be calculated as follows:

A	94-100	A−	90-93	B+	87-89	B	83-86
B−	80-82	C+	77-79	C	73-76	C−	70-72
D+	67-69	D	63-66	D−	60-62	F	59 or less

Any students who want to challenge their course grade shall follow the Academic Grading Grievance Policy at Seattle University. The detail of the policy can be found here. An agreement to receive an Incomplete (I) grade may be negotiated if your circumstances do not allow you to finish the course on time. The Incomplete Grades Policy of the university is available on the Office of the Registrar website.

6   Course Policies

General Expectations: This a graduate-level course and so students are expected to be motivated to read and study the assigned textbooks and other materials carefully before class. This includes doing exercises from the textbook on your own to test your understanding of key concepts and methods. Regular attendance and keeping up with all readings and assignments is essential to doing well in this course.

Submitting Assignments: Assignments should be submitted via Canvas rather than e-mailed unless being required by the professor. Canvas optimizes the grading process and student-professor communication.

Late Submission: It is very important in this course to keep up with assignments and to hand them in on time. Grades will be reduced for late assignments, and the later the assignment, the greater the grade reduction. Students should expect a penalty for late assignments (not be graded higher than 8.5/10). Assignments that are submitted two or more weeks late will only be accepted for credit at the discretion of the professor and will not be graded higher than 7.5/10.

If you find that you are unable to complete an assignment on time, please communicate with me in advance. I do understand that life happens and can sometimes get in the way. I'll do my best to be flexible; for that to happen, we need to keep in dialogue so that I know where you are in your learning and how I can best support you.

Revising and Resubmitting Assignments: Students who receive a grade of less than 8/10 for an assignment AND who hand in the original assignment ON TIME will be given an opportunity to

revise and resubmit the assignment. A change of grade will be made only for assignments that demonstrate a significant improvement through the student's own effort (making only minor corrections or edits in response to the professor's written feedback on the initial assignment will not be sufficient for a change of grade).

IMPORTANT: When resubmitting an assignment, students must attach a copy of the original assignment and grade sheet to the revised assignment. Resubmissions must be made within one week after the initial graded assignment has been returned to the student. The maximum grade possible for a resubmission is 8.5/10.

Keeping Your Assignments: Students should keep all of their completed assignments, including those graded and handed back, until well past the end of the term. Your original assignment with the grade on it is your evidence that you completed the assignment and received the grade that you earned.

The syllabus serves as a general outline. I reserve the right to deviate from any part of the plan as necessary. Students will be notified of any such modifications.

7   Academic Integrity Policy

Students must follow the school's `integrity policy`. Please be aware that plagiarism and any forms of cheating will never be excused under any circumstances – **I will check each assignment carefully using plagiarism detection software**. Violation of these policies leads to immediate failure of the course. If you are not familiar or clear about the school's academic integrity policy, please refer to the tutorial `here`.

7.1   The Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence

The use of the work or intellectual property of other persons or the outputs of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) programs (e.g., ChatGPT, DALL-E, Github Copilot) presented as one's own work without appropriate citation or acknowledgment is now considered as plagiarism by the university policy. The use of AI is encouraged in this class, but please notice at the end of the assignment how AI has helped you to finish your work. Appropriate use of AI includes brainstorming, literature search and review, and language polishing.

8   Disability Services

Seattle University is committed to providing students with disabilities an equal opportunity to participate in its classes and activities. This goal is fundamental to its belief in social justice. To achieve this goal, faculty and staff work together to remove barriers in physical access, communication, attitudes, and policies that can prevent students from taking part in programs. In addition, the University provides supplemental support services through the Disability Services Office.

Students who are requesting academic, housing, and meal plan accommodations for the first time are required to complete the new student application via the myDS New Student Application link and meet with `Disability Services` **before receiving services**. During the intake meeting, the student will discuss their goals at Seattle University, the assistance they may need in reaching them, and the creation of a personalized accommodations plan. Students must also provide documentation from a qualified diagnostician that:

- Establishes the nature of their disability.

- Provides evaluative data with test names and scores supporting their current need for specific accommodations.

- May list services recommended for the student.

Documentation is confidential and will not be released or discussed with the student's permission. For more information, please see the Documentation page and Requirements for Documentation of Disabilities.

If the student needs, or expects to need, an accommodation not supported by their documentation, the student should discuss options for additional evaluation with DS Staff.

For more information regarding disability services, please see: https://www.seattleu.edu/disability-services.

9   Statement of Diversity

Seattle University celebrates educational excellence achieved through diversity. In the meanwhile, diversity is a central topic in the field of public and nonprofit administration. In this class, we will frequently face opportunities and challenges of diversity, equity, and inclusion. We will have discussion of the normative and pragmatic value of diversity and learn how to embrace it.

Students are encouraged to honor the uniqueness of themselves and peers, and to appreciate the opportunities we have to learn from each other. In particular, students are welcomed to share their personal experience regarding diversity policies and management. Students have to demonstrate respect to others' opinions and refrain from personal attacks, hatred language, and personal judgments.

10   Policy on Religious Accommodations

Consistent with Washington State law (RCW 28.10.039), it is the policy of Seattle University to reasonably accommodate students who, due to the observance of religious holidays, expect to be absent or endure a significant hardship during certain days of their academic course or program.

A student seeking accommodations under this policy must provide a written request to the student's faculty member: (i) within fourteen (14) calendar days from the first day of classes of

the academic quarter in which the student is requesting accommodations; and (ii) identifying the specific dates the student requests accommodations.

For more details about the policy on religious accommodations for students, please see here.

The course schedule is on the next page...

11   Course Schedule

Week 01, 01/05 - 01/09:   Introduction[3]

Week 02, 01/12 - 01/16:   Theory and Models

Week 03, 01/19 - 01/23:   Causal Identification I: Randomized Experiments

Week 04, 01/26 - 01/30:   Causal Identification II: Observational Studies

Week 05, 02/02 - 02/06:   Measurement

Week 06, 02/09 - 02/13:   Sampling

Week 07, 02/16 - 02/20:   Data Collection

Week 08, 02/23 - 02/27:   Qualitative Research Method I: Data Collection

Week 09, 03/02 - 03/06:   Qualitative Research Method II: Coding and Analysis

Week 10, 03/09 - 03/13:   Evidence-based Practices for Public Services

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[3]Readings other than textbook chapters are listed on Canvas