

RESEARCH DESIGN, PRACTICE, AND POLICY (PAM 3120/SOC 3150)

Fall 2016, TU/TH 11:40AM – 12:55PM, MVR 157

Instructor Kelly Musick, Associate Professor of Policy Analysis and Management
Office hours: Tuesdays 1:30-2:30pm and by appointment

TAs	Radu Andrei Pârvulescu	Salma Mutwafy
	Ph.D. Candidate in Sociology	Undergraduate in PAM
	Campus address: Uris Hal 357	Office hours: Mondays 12:30-2:30pm, Mann Lobby
	Office hours: Tuesdays 5-7PM	

COURSE WEB SITE

The course web site will be used for posting the syllabus, assignments, readings, announcements, and more. Please enroll at: <http://blackboard.cornell.edu/> and check regularly for updates.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Research Design, Practice, and Policy offers an introduction to the basic tools of social science research. It draws on examples from sociology, economics, demography, and human development, and it emphasizes both the development of skills to evaluate the work of others and hands-on experience applying research methods to policy-related problems. The course begins with a discussion of the fundamental concepts and issues involved in social science research and moves on to consider a variety of approaches to empirical research.

COURSE AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

This course aims to familiarize you with systematic approaches that can be used to answer questions about poverty, family life, racial inequality, and a multitude of other substantive areas central to public policy. It prepares you to think critically about research findings you will encounter in the news, in professional books and journals, and in your own work. By the end of the course you will have gained:

- 1) An understanding of the possibilities and problems of studying the social world;
- 2) A familiarity with a variety of research methods, their strengths, and their limitations;
- 3) Skills for critically evaluating the research of others;
- 4) Hands-on experience applying research methods to policy-related issues;
- 5) A critical awareness of ethical issues in the responsible conduct of social research.

HOW LEARNING (AND TEACHING) ARE STRUCTURED

The class is structured to provide varied ways for students to interact with the course material, e.g., through readings, hands-on empirical research, and collaboration with classmates. Assignments will include opportunities for reflecting, writing, and doing, and class time will include lecture, discussion, and group learning projects. Your active participation in this process is critical to our learning objectives.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Readings: Class discussion, assignments, and exams depend on your careful and critical reading of course materials – and they should be completed before class on the date specified. There is one required book, available for purchase at the Cornell University Store and Amazon.com and on reserve at Mann library:

Russell K. Schutt. 2015. *Investigating the Social World*, 8th Edition. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

Additional required readings will be made available electronically, some through the university library, and others from publicly accessible websites.

Exams (midterm and final, 25% each): The midterm and final will be in-class, closed-book exams. They will cover all course material (lectures, readings, discussions, films, etc.) and are intended to gauge your understanding of the fundamental problems that arise in studying the social world and the various approaches designed to address them. Makeup exams will be given only under exceptional circumstances (i.e., illness or emergency).

Reaction papers (3 papers, 20%): Students will be graded on 3 brief papers written in response to prompts provided most weeks (marked on the schedule below with ***). Students can choose which 3 to complete throughout the term. An optional 4th paper may be completed and the lowest score dropped. The purpose of these assignments is to engage with the readings and other course material, write clearly and purposefully, think about social data, and practice applying key concepts. Papers must be typed, fit to no more than 1 page (12-point font), written in complete, coherent sentences, and turned in by the start of class on the due date. No late papers will be accepted.

Consulting project (20%): We will work together on an empirical research project for a client, developing a set of research questions, data collection strategies, and methods of analysis. This hands-on project will require us to grapple with problems that arise in dealing with data and taking a project from start to finish. It is designed to develop students' empirical research skills while providing a valuable public service. The project will consist of a series of assignments and a final report, and the final project grade will have both individual and group-based components. Details will be posted to our course website.

Class participation (10%): Students are expected to come to class ready to engage with the course material, including having completed all readings and other assignments. Participation grades will depend on your preparation and the quality of your active participation in class. If you anticipate missing lectures, leaving early, or arriving late to class, make arrangements in advance with a classmate to help you with missed material.

SUMMARY OF GRADED ASSIGNMENTS

Grading rubrics will be used to assess writing assignments and class participation. They will be posted to help structure and improve your work. No incompletes will be given.

25% Midterm exam – Thurs, 10/6, in class

25% Final exam – time & location TBA

- 20% Reaction papers
- 20% Consulting project
- 10% Class participation

Peer evaluations: In addition to instructor feedback, some of your work will be assessed by your peers. In particular, your short papers may be evaluated by your classmates, and there will be a peer evaluation component to the group project grades. This provides useful feedback, while also developing your skills in evaluating the work of others – critical skills that many of us use on a regular basis in our professional lives.

Instructor evaluations: In addition to the standard evaluation at the end of the term, I may ask for brief mid-term evaluations from you. I also welcome any constructive observations throughout the course.

COURSE POLICIES AND RESOURCES

Writing resources: Students are expected to be familiar with established practices for acknowledging the use of academic sources. A useful tutorial on recognizing and avoiding plagiarism is available at <http://plagiarism.arts.cornell.edu/tutorial/index.cfm>. The library also offers a range of services to help students through the research process, including consultations with a librarian to answer questions about why, how, and when to document sources. You can review the library's services on their main page, or follow this link to make an appointment with a librarian at Mann:

<http://www.mannlib.cornell.edu/library-services/consulting>. The Knight Institute for Writing in the Disciplines has excellent resources designed to help students at all stages of their writing. Services include walk-in one-on-one consultations and peer mentoring, see: http://www.arts.cornell.edu/knight_institute/walkin/resources.htm.

Academic integrity statement: Absolute integrity is expected of every Cornell student in all academic undertakings. Integrity entails a firm adherence to a set of values, and the values most essential to an academic community are grounded on the concept of honesty with respect to the intellectual efforts of oneself and others. Academic integrity is expected not only in formal coursework situations, but in all University relationships and interactions connected to the educational process, including the use of University resources. A Cornell student's submission of work for academic credit indicates that the work is the student's own. All outside assistance should be acknowledged, and the student's academic position truthfully reported at all times. In addition, Cornell students have a right to expect academic integrity from each of their peers. For further information regarding the Cornell Code of Academic Integrity see: <http://cuinfo.cornell.edu/aic.cfm>.

Unless you have the express permission of the instructor, you should not buy or sell course materials. Such unauthorized behavior constitutes academic dishonesty.

Turnitin.com acknowledgement: Students agree that by taking this course that all papers submitted for the course may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to Turnitin.com for the detection of plagiarism. All submitted papers will be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of such papers. Use of the Turnitin.com service is subject to the Usage Policy posted on the Turnitin.com site.

Disability accommodations: In compliance with section 504 of Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act, reasonable accommodation will be provided to students with documented disabilities. Students with disabilities must provide the College with appropriate documentation of their disability before any accommodation can be made. Reasonable accommodation will be provided, on a case-by-case basis.

TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE

As the course progresses, **supplementary readings may be added, and it may be necessary to make some adjustments to the schedule of readings, topics, assignments, and due dates printed in this syllabus to accommodate progress on our consulting project**, guest presenters, and student needs. You should check the course website on a regular basis for updates and changes.

WEEK 1

8/23: Course logistics and major themes

8/25: Studying the social world

Reading: Schutt Ch. 1; Cherlin, “Going to Extremes”; Stolberg, “Obama Puts His Own Spin on Mix of Science with Politics”

Due TH 8/25: Find an example in the media (newspaper, magazine, television, website, etc.) of a claim based on some kind of empirical evidence. Bring this into class (a copy if possible, otherwise a description of the content and source) and be prepared to discuss the claim and the evidence used to support it. (Do you find this evidence convincing?)

***** PROMPT for evidence in the social sciences (final draft due TU 9/6 for those turning in papers):** In a few sentences, summarize what Cherlin sees as a “troubling pattern” in public discussions of demographic research. How do extreme statements about the effects of single-parenthood on children line up with the evidence? What are the potential consequences for public debate and policy of “going to the extremes,” how does the scientific method play into the tendency to advance extreme arguments, and how can social scientists avoid these extremes? Does Cherlin advocate that social research back away from moral concern and social commentary?

WEEK 2

8/30: Writing workshop

Guest: Tom J. Ottaviano (tjo65@cornell.edu), Business and Economics Librarian, Cornell
Reading: Schutt Ch. 2 and Appendix A

Due TU 8/30: On-line plagiarism tutorial

9/1: Consulting project—meet the client, overview, and key goals

Guest: Margaret Frey, Associate Dean for Undergraduate Affairs, College of Human Ecology, Cornell University
Reading: Penner, “Gender Inequality in Science”; Steele, “Thin Ice: Stereotype Threat and Black College Students”; “U-M Launches A.R.T. 2.0”; “Big Data's Coming of Age in Higher Education”; “Is Viewing Learning Analytics the Same as Checking Your 'Likes'?”

WEEK 3

9/6, 9/8: Concerns in research with human subjects

Reading: Schutt Ch. 3; Review Cornell's IRB procedures and forms at <https://www.irb.cornell.edu/>; Allen, "Spies Like Us"; "Are We Just There to Help the Army Aim Better?"

Due TU 9/6: Certificates of completion for on-line human subjects training. You can complete either the NIH training at <http://phrp.nihtraining.com/users/login.php> OR the Cornell training delivered by CITI (Collaborative Institute Training Initiative) at <http://www.irb.cornell.edu/training/citi/>. On Cornell's site, login to CITI using your netid. When given course options, be sure to select "Social and Behavioral Research – Basic." A confirmation screen will appear once you've successfully completed the training; print this and hand it in on Tues. If you've already completed the training for another course or project, you can login to CITI, access your training record, print the screen showing your record, and hand that in on Tuesday.

Guiding questions for ethical issues in the responsible conduct of social research: Is potential harm or deception ever justified in research involving human subjects? How do you weigh potential harm against the advancement of science? Should there be distinct rules governing the treatment of vulnerable populations? How does your understanding of the Tuskegee study play into your thinking on these issues?

WEEK 4

9/13: Conceptualization, operationalization, and measurement

Reading: Schutt, Ch. 4; Rubin, "Measurement of Romantic Love"; Zencey, "G.D.P. R.I.P."

***** PROMPT for developing good measures (due TH 9/15 for those turning in papers):** Summarize what Rubin is trying to do in his article on love. What kinds of validity does he test, and what does he find? How convinced are you that he has developed a meaningful way to measure love? What are the challenges to measuring love, and what would you do differently?

9/15: Intro to qualitative research methods

Reading: Schutt Ch. 10; Becker, "How I Learned What A Crock Was"; Harrington, "Obtrusiveness as a Strategy in Ethnographic Research"

WEEK 5

9/20, 9/22: Participant observation and other ethnographic methods

Reading: Duneier, "The Magazine Vendors" and "A Statement on Method," *Sidewalk*; Cohen, "On the Ropes (Goffman Review)"

***** PROMPT for ethnographic research (due TH 9/22 for those turning in papers):** What is Duneier describing in his chapter from *Sidewalk*, "The Magazine Vendors"? What methods does he use to understand life on Sixth Avenue? What are some of the steps Duneier takes to gain access to the magazine vendors, ensure that his observations are valid and reliable, and link circumstances of individual lives to broader social forces? In your view, do these steps allow him to provide an objective account of the sidewalk? Explain.

Due TH 9/22: Observational analysis

WEEK 6

9/27: In-depth interviewing

Reading: Schutt Ch. 11, pp. 168-172; Lareau, “Methodology: Enduring Dilemmas in Fieldwork” (pp. 259-274)

9/29: Analyzing in-depth interviews

Sassler and Miller, “Class Differences in Cohabitation Processes”; Rubin & Rubin, Ch. 7 & 8 of “Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data” (in “Course Reserves”).

***** PROMPT for in-depth interviewing (due TH 9/29 for those turning in papers):** What does Sassler argue in her chapter on cohabitation, and how do her findings differ from prior research on the process of moving in together? Briefly describe Sassler's methods and evidence. Discuss the pros and cons of Sassler's approach to understanding cohabitation relative to survey methods.

DUE FRI 9/30: Interview guide

WEEK 7

10/4: Review and catch-up

10/6: Midterm exam (in class)

WEEK 8

10/11: October break—enjoy!

10/13: Sampling and sampling variation

Reading: Schutt Ch. 5; Abraham et al., “How Social Processes Distort Measurement”

***** PROMPT for how samples shape what we know (due TH 10/13 for those turning in papers):** What do Abraham et al. argue is behind the large variability in survey estimates of volunteering and the fact that these estimates do not appear to be declining like other measures of social capital? What is their evidence? What are the implications of their findings for our understanding of volunteering? What are the potential implications for social science research more broadly?

Due TH 10/13: Analysis of in-depth interviews

WEEK 9

10/18, 10/20: Survey research methods

Reading: Schutt Ch. 8; Laumann et al., “Study Design,” *The Social Organization of Sexuality*; Bakalar, “They Report Abstinence, but S.T.D. Says Otherwise”

***** PROMPT for studying sex with a survey (due TH 10/20 for those turning in papers):**

According to Laumann et al., what was the state of sex research prior to the National Health and Social

Life Survey (NHSLs)? What are the arguments against studying sex using survey research methodology? What steps do Laumann et al. take to address these arguments, and what evidence do they cite to suggest that their survey was a success? In your reasoned view, do they adequately address the challenges associated with a sex survey? Explain.

WEEK 10

10/25, 10/27: More on surveys and analyzing quantitative data

Readings: Schutt, Chapter 9; TBA

Due TU 10/27: Proposal for survey/quantitative analysis

WEEK 11

11/1: Research design and causation

Readings: Schutt Ch. 6; Waite, "Does Marriage Matter?"; Parker-Pope, "Is Marriage Good for Your Health?"

11/3: No formal class meeting; group project meetings

***** PROMPT for association and causality (due TH 11/3 for those turning in papers):** What is Waite arguing in "Does Marriage Matter"? What evidence does she cite in support of a causal relationship between marriage and individual well-being? Are you convinced that the associations between marriage and the various outcomes she discusses are causal? Why or why not?

WEEK 12

11/8, 10: Social experiments

Reading: Schutt Ch. 7; Pager, "Mark of a Criminal Record"

***** PROMPT for designing lab and field experiments to assess causality (due TH 11/10 for those turning in papers):** What did Pager set out to test in "Mark of a Criminal Record"? Summarize Pager's research design and findings. How does her approach improve upon existing work on the effects of incarceration? What are the limitations of this work?

WEEK 13

11/15, 11/17: Evaluation and policy research

Readings: Schutt, Chapter 12; Card and Krueger, "Employer Responses to the Minimum Wage" (especially pp. 20-36); Trenholm et al., Final Report on Abstinence Education Programs

***** PROMPT for experimental and quasi-experimental approaches to policy evaluation (due TH 11/17 for those turning in papers):** Briefly summarize the methodological approaches of Card and Krueger and Trenholm et al. What are the similarities in their approaches, and what are the differences? Pay particular attention to how these studies gain leverage on causality, their strengths and limitations, and their relevance to policy.

WEEK 14

11/22: Secondary data analysis and big data

Readings: Schutt, Chapter 14; Kramer et al., “Experimental Evidence of Massive-Scale Emotional Contagion”; Goel, “As Data Overflows Online, Researchers Grapple with Ethics”

***** PROMPT for big data (due TU 11/22 for those turning in papers):** Briefly summarize Kramer et al.'s study, including the key question, data source, method, and main finding. What is novel about the study, and what about the approach proved controversial? What are the pros and cons of using big data in this way, and ultimately do you see an ethical problem?

11/24: Thanksgiving—enjoy!

WEEK 15

11/29: Wrap-up

12/1: Reports/recommendations to client

Due TH 12/1: Final project presentations and final reports

Final exam: time & location TBA

READINGS

Abraham, Katharine G., Sara Helms, and Stanley Presser. 2009. “How Social Processes Distort Measurement: The Impact of Survey Nonresponse on Estimates of Volunteer Work in the United States.” *American Journal of Sociology* 114(4):1129-1164.

Allen, Charlotte. 1997. “Spies Like Us: When Sociologists Deceive Their Subjects.” *Lingua Franca* 7(9): 31-39.

Bakalar, Nicholas. 2011. “Behavior: They Report Abstinence, but S.T.D. Says Otherwise.” *The New York Times*, January 14.

Becker, Howard. 1993. “How I Learned What a Crock Was.” *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 22(2): 28-35

Burns, Bridget. 2016. “Big Data's Coming Of Age In Higher Education,” *Forbes*, January 29. Retrieved 08/30/2016; <http://www.forbes.com/sites/schoolboard/2016/01/29/big-datas-coming-of-age-in-higher-education/#72b120e12a32>

Card, David and Alan B. Krueger. 1997. “Employer Responses to the Minimum Wage: Evidence from the Fast-Food Industry 20.” Chapter 2 in *Myth and Measurement: The New Economics of the Minimum Wage*. Princeton University Press.

Cherlin, Andrew J. 1999. “Going to Extremes: Family Structure, Children's Well-Being, and Social Science.” *Demography* 36(4):421-428.

Cohen, Phillip N. 2015. “On the ropes (Goffman review)”. Blog, May 28. Retrieved August 22, 2016. <https://familyinequality.wordpress.com/2015/05/28/on-the-ropes-goffman-review/>

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- Kramer, Adam D., Jamie E. Guillory, and Jeffrey T. Hancock. 2014. "Experimental Evidence of Massive-Scale Emotional Contagion Through Social Networks." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 111(24):8788–90.
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- Michigan News. 2016. "U-M launches ART 2.0 to help students with course decisions," March 28. Retrieved 08/30/2016; <http://ns.umich.edu/new/releases/23633-u-m-launches-art-2-0-to-help-students-with-course-decisions>
- Pager, Devah. 2003. "The Mark of a Criminal Record." *American Journal of Sociology* 108(5):937-75.
- Parker-Pope, Tara. 2010. "Is Marriage Good for Your Health?" *The New York Times*, April 14.
- Penner, Andrew M. 2015. "Gender inequality in science." *Science* 347(6219): 234-235.
- Rubin, Zick. 1970. "The Measurement of Romantic Love." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 16(2):265-273.
- Rubin, Herbert and Irene Rubin. 2005. *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data (second edition)*. California: Sage.
- Sassler, Sharon and Amanda Miller. 2011. "Class Differences in Cohabitation Processes." *Family Relations* 60:163-177.
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Stolberg, Sheryl Gay. 2009. "Obama Puts His Own Spin on Mix of Science With Politics." *The New York Times*, March 10.

Trenholm, Christopher, Barbara Devaney, Ken Fortson, Lisa Quay, Justin Wheeler, and Melissa Clark. 2007. *Impacts of Four Title V, Section 510 Abstinence Education Programs Final Report*. Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

Waite, Linda. 1995. "Does Marriage Matter?" *Demography* 32(4):483-507.

Zencey, Eric. 2009. "G.D.P. R.I.P." *The New York Times*, August 10.