Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey
Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy

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RESEARCH METHODS

Spring 2015 COURSE SYLLABUS

Professor: Dr. Debbie Borie-Holtz
Lecture: Online Mondays
Lab: Online: Posted Thursdays & Due Sunday

Contact information for Professor and Teaching Assistant

Professor: Debbie Borie-Holtz, PhD
Office: Civic Square Building, 33 Livingston Avenue, Room 256
E-mail: dbholtz@ejb.rutgers.edu
Office Hours: Wednesday 10:30 am to 2:30 pm and by appointment on Thursdays
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TA:, MPP Candidate
Office: Civic Square Building, 33 Livingston Avenue, Room 264
E-mail:
Office Hours:

Communication Policy

Please reach out to us with questions! You may come to office hours or send us an e-mail. E-mails should be sent to your TA with a cc to your Professor The subject line (re:) in the e-mail should always state “research methods section (fill in your number).” We promise to always respond within 24 hours, and usually much quicker. In order to guarantee a response, you should always plan to e-mail at least 24 hours before a deadline. Notes sent less than 24 hours before may not be answered.

Course Description and Teaching Style

This course is designed to introduce students to research methods for public health, planning, and public policy. Basically, the course is an introduction to the fundamentals of social science research. The main goal is for you to learn to design and interpret research so you can solve problems and make informed decisions. During this semester, you will learn how to ask questions, how to probe for answers, and how to evaluate the answers we get as a result of research. The emphasis of the class is on gaining the ability to think logically and critically about social science research. We will cover both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, but more time will be spent on the former. You will work with a dataset this semester, conducting statistical analysis using SPSS, a computer software package. Your final assessment for the course will be a team-based, data analysis paper

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using one of two datasets.

Although we do not assume any previous work in methodology, we expect that you have successfully completed the statistics course required for Bloustein majors. The goal of this class is NOT to make you into expert statisticians or quantitative researchers, but into educated consumers – and often critics – of the research of others. Equally important, this class should give you a firm foundation upon which to stand as you complete your internship and/or senior seminar requirements for your major.

The class meetings are comprised of a weekly online lecture period and a weekly online lab session. The lecture section will be paired with weekly quizzes which should provide a feedback loop. The assigned readings should be completed prior to the lecture. We are firm believers of active learning; thus, we will attempt to use the lab sessions to facilitate activities between you and your classmates. The lab session will help you gain some hands-on practice with the concepts we learn in lecture and to work in a team environment. Thus, the lab will be structured around cases, discussions, and homework preparation. Your participation in lab activities in expected and will be part of your overall course grade. You must attend the lab online in order to receive credit for participating. This means you must coordinate responses with your team members on a weekly basis.

**Expectations**

So what are the expectations?

For many of you, this may be the first time you have enrolled in an online course. As such, it is important to emphasize that this course (lectures and labs) are offered in an asynchronous format, meaning you can log-in to view materials at any time --- but there are deadlines for completing ALL assignments like the weekly quizzes and the group lab assignments. In general, you should expect to spend 4 hours on the lecture materials for each lecture assigned. Additionally, I expect you to skim the chapters prior to downloading the static slides AND viewing the narrated video slides.

As mentioned, there will also be timed quizzes that will consist of the remaining grading assessments. These quizzes are intended to ensure that you are keeping pace with the readings and the lecture materials. No quizzes may be submitted late. The two lowest grades for all quizzes will be dropped. There are no exceptions for late submissions since feedback is automatically released within one hour of submission. Quizzes must be completed by Wednesdays at 8pm.

While we will not restrict access to the course materials so that you may move at your own pace, we will not respond to questions IF you have not viewed the Sakai lecture materials. We have a tool that allows us to measure which resources you access, how often and when. Many of the questions we receive are contained in the lecture materials so this must be your first source for information.
Course Objectives

The goal of this course is to provide students with:

1. An understanding of the logic of scientific inquiry and how to measure concepts
2. An ability to develop a research hypothesis and a complementary research design
3. An awareness of different types of data collection and analyses – both qualitative and quantitative
4. An introduction to analyzing quantitative data to test your own ideas about relationships between concepts

Required Materials

Textbook and Readings:


Computer Software:

- SPSS is available to you in the computer labs and on the Rutgers scarlet apps.

Datasets:

- The two datasets used in the course can be found on our class Sakai page.

Office Hours

Throughout the course, we will hold weekly office hours on-campus office located in the Bloustein School. If you are not on campus and wish to schedule an online meeting with myself or our TA, you can connect with us by clicking the Office Hour Link on the Sakai course site. Generally office hours are held in-person but we can make arrangements to connect by phone or web if provided with advanced notice.

Grading

Letter grades will be assigned as follows:

A = 90 - 100; Excellent or Superior B+ = 86 - 89; Very Good
B = 80 - 85; Good
C+ = 76 - 79; Solid Overall, but some flaws
C = 70 - 75; Average
D = 60 - 69; Significant problems in the work in terms of understanding, effort or writing
F = 59 or below; Failing

Course Grade

Your final grade will be based on:

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Assignments 45%
You will have six assignments; Assignments 2 and 3 are worth 10% each and Assignments 1, 4, 5, 6 and 7 are worth 5% each. Assignments must be submitted via Sakai by 10am on the due date.

Lab Exercises and Quizzes 20%
Group exercises are worth 1% each and will be completed in lab.
Weekly quizzes (equally weighted) will be given over the course of the semester and are worth 10% in total. (The lowest two quizzes will be dropped; the SPSS quiz is mandatory.)
These tasks are designed to ensure that readings are completed in a timely manner and that lab attendance is occurring regularly.

Midterm exam 15%
We will have one take home exam as listed on the syllabus.

Final paper 20%
In teams of two or three students, you will conduct original data analyses and write a paper on those results. Due on 5/7 at noon.

Ground Rules
Collegial and respectful conduct is expected in class. Class members should consider themselves colleagues who will collaborate to help each other develop a solid understanding of materials and concepts. To facilitate this process and your learning, we will adhere to some basic rules:

- Lab assignments - particularly those organized by group - should be completed by the deadline. Your classmates are depending upon your timely and quality participation.

- All assignments must be completed on time, typed in 12-point font, and submitted via Sakai. Late work will be penalized. Assignments will be marked down a half letter grade per day. Assignments cannot be submitted any later than one week after the due date; missed assignments will receive a “0.”

- Late submissions for the take-home exam and the final paper are not permitted under any circumstance.

- Cheating, plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Please see the University’s Policy on Academic Integrity for Undergraduate and Graduate Students located on the web at http://ctaar.rutgers.edu/integrity/policy.html. You should also note that we use the Turnitin feature on Sakai to help us identify problems with plagiarism.

- Any student in this course who has a disability that may prevent him or her from fully demonstrating his or her abilities should contact us as soon as possible so we can discuss accommodations necessary to ensure full participation and to facilitate your educational opportunities.
If you will be missing a lab assignment because of a religious holiday or observation, please let us know during the first week of the semester so we can make reasonable accommodations.

If any questions or concerns arise, please come see one of us! Office hours are listed on the top of the syllabus. If you cannot make office hours, please make an appointment.

Come to class prepared - that means treat your online session the same as if you were attending the class in person! Complete readings prior to lecture.

A Few Words to the Wise

- Seek help early!
- Don’t wait till the last minute if you are having difficulties.
- Be sure to watch all the videos provided BEFORE asking us questions! We will not hold individual meetings to provide summaries or repeat class material.

Semester Calendar

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