Public policy research, though it follows general scientific principles, is distinctive in both its choice of questions and what constitutes a satisfactory answer. There is, however, no single paradigm in terms of research methods; it is not merely applied economics or political science. Effective research requires familiarity with a wide variety of research techniques. This course, which will emphasize empirical research since the vast majority of policy dissertations are empirical rather than conceptual, covers a range of these techniques and illustrates how they can be used individually and jointly in policy research.

The course is also designed to compensate for a bias in the analytic offerings of both the School and the University generally. Every social science unit offers an array of courses on statistical methods. Some units (particularly Economics) offer modeling courses, typically involving mathematical techniques. Data collection gets little attention (except in the excellent Joint Program in Survey Methodology) and qualitative analysis of data almost none. This course provides an introduction to a number of different techniques of data collection and non-statistical analysis that play a role in policy research. The course title in Testudo is misleading; instead of “qualitative” it should read “other than statistical” but such a broad title would appear eccentric in a university catalogue.

Since the course is designed primarily for doctoral students, it uses dissertation research at MSPP for illustrative purposes. There are now 49 dissertations on the program web site http://drum.lib.umd.edu/handle/1903/2803/browse?type=title&submit_browse=Title The 49 show the range of topics and methods used, from personal interviews and media reports for understanding the dynamics of political protest in Kyrgyzstan (Kevin Jones) to highly sophisticated statistical modeling of data on welfare programs to assess the effectiveness of child care interventions in US welfare reform efforts (Chris Herbst). You will be required to assess how well various dissertations implemented the methodology they claimed to be using. The course Canvas site contains a folder for dissertations and another for dissertation proposals.

A major goal of the course, not so clearly expressed in the titles for individual classes, is to enhance your skill at framing a good policy research question. Students often stumble at the beginning of their dissertation research because of weaknesses in question formulation. Policy research is more than the identification of an interesting topic and the collection of a relevant data set; there has to be a question that is analytically sensible, policy relevant and fits into a literature. We will spend a great deal of time assessing the questions that dissertation writers have posed.

Because the course covers quite varied methodologies, each of which is complex to execute, it is impossible to have you carry out original exercises using each one. The
emphasis in pedagogical terms is on rigorous assessments of published papers and dissertations. For example, you will have to take a small number of related case studies and examine how well the authors define their questions, the validity of the constructs used, the strength of the causal relationships claimed etc.

After spending a week examining exemplary public policy research, to illustrate what we are aspiring to, the course presents a variety of techniques.

- **Qualitative methodology** In what way do the analytic methods of qualitative research differ from the quantitative? (1 class but it will recur in other parts)
- **The case study** is not a well developed methodology but a large number of policy dissertations use it. One session will consist of presentations in which you will present critical analyses of specific case studies. (2 classes)
- **Personal interviews** Many dissertations depend on conducting a small to medium number of interviews with either elites or randomly chosen subjects. This is a very useful practical skill. (2 classes)
- **Survey research** is included because so much empirical policy research relies on surveys and there is a lot of publication potential (rarely realized) in understanding the process that generates the specific data being used. You will learn how to collect data and thus to assess the soundness of surveys that are used in different kinds of policy research. (3 classes)
- **Systematic reviews.** In a growing number of policy areas “systematic reviews” have become common; these emphasize truly comprehensive collection of prior research. (1 class)
- **Dissertation preparation.** Not a methodology but series of methodological challenges. How do you develop a good policy research question, choose the right analytic technique and find relevant data? (2 classes)

The coverage of topics here is incomplete. It reflects what I observe has been important for other PhD students and important in my own policy research career. Techniques not covered in this course include: ethnography, archival research and conduct of field experiments (data collection); meta-analysis (a complement of systematic reviews) cost-benefit analysis and risk assessment (analytic techniques). I have left open two of the later classes (April 18 and 25) for additional topic(s). In the class of February 14, after the class has developed some esprit, let’s talk about what you would most like to add to the course.

**Course Requirements**

You will be required to write and present one major research paper and to do at least two other written and oral assignments. Examples of assignments include: assessing how well a specific case study achieves its goals, developing a survey to estimate the number of immigrant students at the University of Maryland or critiquing a meta-analysis. The research paper (ca. 20 pages), will require use of one or more of the analytic or data collection techniques examined in the course. It is a methodological paper; it requires that you first identify a good question (i.e. both of policy and technical interest) and then discuss alternative methods for answering that question. Illustrative topics include: assessing the effects on the flow of illegal immigrants of changing the sanctions on employers who hire illegal aliens; comparing alternative methods of
delivering development aid in conditions of continuing low level conflict. Each paper will be circulated in advance of presentations; one student will be designated as the lead discussant. The paper should be submitted to me in a draft form; the grade will reflect both the quality of the draft and the improvements achieved in the revisions.

Students will be expected to participate actively in class, which will usually follow what is (perhaps pretentiously) called the Socratic method and requires reading of materials in advance. Participation includes asking questions of other students’ presentations, which also encourages constructive collegial criticism. Each student will be asked to lead discussion of a specific topic in two or three classes. The grade will be based on

a. Class participation (20%)
b. Class presentations (10%)c. Paper (40%)
   (i) Draft (25%)
   (ii) Final (15%)
d. Assignments (30%)

The readings are diverse and include a modest number of books for purchase. Most of them are not expensive as text books go nowadays. They are all available through Amazon in the necessary quantities. The other readings will be available through Blackboard or as live links.

Each semester as a result of weather, sickness or freak events (getting caught overseas without my passport one time) one class seems to get lost; in 2010 snow cost two classes. On the first day we should agree on a date in the last two weeks for a potential make-up class in case it is needed.

**Books**

**Required**


**Optional**

- King, Keohane and Verba (1994) *Designing Social Inquiry* [classic text on qualitative methodology. Insightful but formalistic and dense.]
Dissertations for critical analysis

We will review a number of dissertations to assess how well they meet the criteria for good policy research that have emerged during this course. The list below is the initial set from which we will draw examples of particular methodologies. If you have another dissertation of particular interest, don’t hesitate to add it to the class list as a candidate for discussion at various points.

Dissertation list

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Principal Methodologies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chuluunbat, Nara</td>
<td>Why was Mongolia Successful? Political and Economic Transition in 1990-1996</td>
<td>Review of historical documents, interviews with key participants, Historical narrative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fitzsimmons, Mike</td>
<td>Governance, identity and counterinsurgency strategy</td>
<td>Multiple case studies with well developed political models. Data collection from numerous interviews of participants in Iraq.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hetling, Andrea</td>
<td>Has the Family Violence Option Benefited Abused Women?</td>
<td>Statistical modeling. Primary data collection from sample of administrative records</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jones, Kevin</td>
<td>The dynamics of political protests: a case study of the Kyrgyz Republic</td>
<td>Quantitative analysis of survey data. Multiple case studies,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ma, Jianbo</td>
<td>An institutional analysis of the Chinese land conversion process</td>
<td>Case study. Document review, interviews, field observation. New institutional economics framework; no formal modeling or statistical analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perez, Michelle</td>
<td>Does the policy-making process affect farmer compliance? A three-state case study of nutrient management regulations</td>
<td>Case study. Many open-ended interviews and document reviews.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selee, Andrew</td>
<td>The paradox of local empowerment: decentralization and democratic governance in Mexico</td>
<td>Statistical analysis of government financial data, interviews. Multiple case studies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Schedule

1) January 31. Introduction. Policy research; what we might aspire to
   Course objectives, organization. Statement of student interests
   Examine two very different first rate policy studies; methods used and explanation for limitations. Five students will be assigned responsibility for leading discussion on a specific chapter of the Jencks study or part of the George article.

   Readings
   Jencks, Christopher The Homeless (Chapters 1-3, 6,8, 11 )
   Rosstke et al. (1990) Sexual Orientation and US Military Personnel: Options and Assessment RAND [Chapter 1 only]

2) Feb. 7 Qualitative Methodology
   Is there a qualitative methodology comparable to that for statistics? G&B is a tough read on this; a very high level of abstraction and a tendency to assume you already know the literature but the issue is critical for the course, not just for our work on case study methods. King, Keohane and Verba is no easier but the struggle in Chapter 2 is worthwhile. Ragin and Mahoney are brief but insightful essays on the distinctions between qualitative and quantitative methods.

   Readings
   Ragin Charles “Combining Qualitative and Quantitative Research” in National Science Foundation. 2004. Workshop on Scientific Foundations of Qualitative Research. Washington, DC. Available at:
   James Mahoney “The Distinctive Contributions of Qualitative Data Analysis” in National Science Foundation. 2004. Workshop on Scientific Foundations of Qualitative Research. Washington, DC. Available at:

   G&B pp.3-8 and Chapter 7
   King, Keohane and Verba Chapters 1 (skim) and 2 (through page 63)

   Case study assignment given out at end of class

3) Feb. 14 Snowed out

When to choose a case study to answer a research question. How to design and execute a case study. Contrast “A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.” (Yin, p.13) and “the detailed examination of an aspect of an historical episode to develop or test explanations that may be generalizable to other events” (G&B, p.5)

Readings
Yin, Chapters 1 and 2
G&B Chapters: 3, 4, and 5
Gerring, J. “What is a Case Study and What is it Good For?” APSR 2004 pp.341-355 [tough read]

Case Studies for class discussion
Lee, (1989) “A Methodology for MIS Case Studies” MIS Quarterly 13(1) 33-50 [The early discussion of method is very good but focus on the Markus case study that Lee analyzes in the article]

5) February 28 Case Studies: Multiple and comparative cases, process tracing [2.30-6]

In quantitative research, more data is always better. However, multiple case studies can confuse; how does one reconcile conflicting results? Process tracing, which explicitly sets out links between independent and dependent variables is a method for handling these problems.

Readings
G&B Chapters 8, 10, 12
Yin Chapter 5

Dissertations for assessment of their use of case study methods: Fitzsimmons, Jones, Ma, Selee [One student will make a presentation on methodological aspects of each one]

March 6: case study assignment due

6) March 7 Developing a good policy research topic [workshop]
The purpose of this session is to develop a sense of what constitutes a good policy research topic. Each student will make a brief oral presentation on the topic you have preliminarily chosen for your final paper. For advanced students, that probably should be close to your dissertation topic. For first year students, just a topic in your field. Each student will have 12 minutes for presentation and Q&A; aim at roughly an even division.

**March 12** Proposals for final papers due.

7) **March 14** [Professor Afzal, Guest lecturer] The field work experience.

Professor Afzal is undertaking a study to understand the links between schooling and the formation of intolerant/radical attitudes among high school students in Pakistan. This research involves a long series of decisions; which regions/school types to sample; strategies for gaining access to the schools; developing a questionnaire to reflect her own experience observing classes; recruiting, training and monitoring field workers; developing an analytic strategy etc. Before class you will receive a set of questions and readings that will allow you to participate in a discussion of these issues.

**March 19** Proposals for final papers returned

March 21 Spring break

8) **March 28** Interviews: Design and Strategies:

For what kinds of policy research is a small number of interviews worth while? How to select respondents, prepare questions, conduct interviews, record responses and analyze the data.

Each student will be asked to conduct three interviews in the following week on a topic agreed to in class. In 2013 with seven students from seven countries the topic was what determined whether a foreign graduate student would return to his country of origin. Let’s discuss topics of interest to you on February 21 so you can start recruiting subjects; not everybody has to tackle the same topic.

**Readings**

Carol Warren and Tracy Xavia Karner *Discovering Qualitative Methods* Chapters 3-7 [skim 3-5]

Dissertations to be assessed with respect to qualitative interviews:

Fitzsimmon
Rosner

9) **April 4** Surveys (I)

Basic techniques of survey research. Selecting sampling frames and sample size, alternative techniques for conducting interviews (telephone, mail, in-person) and the trade-offs among them. Formulating questions.

**Readings**

Fowler Chapters 1-6 (except 4)
Surveys to be discussed
A student will be assigned to evaluate in detail some aspect of a survey from the list below. For each survey there will be a different aspect (sampling frame, response rate, instrument design etc.) that needs to be discussed.

Transparency International Report on the Transparency International Global Corruption Barometer 2007 [sampling frame; modality of interview]
National Hospital Discharge Survey. [sampling frame; coding]

April 4 Survey assignment handed out [five pairs and one singleton]

10) April 11 Surveys (II)
Dealing with non-response. Surveying elusive populations. What can and cannot be studied through surveys. Limitations of survey data.

Readings
Fowler 4,7,8,11 (skim 11)
Tourangeau and Plewes (eds.) (2001) Non Response in Social Science Surveys
National Academy Press (Chapter 1 only)
DaVanzo, J.; J. Hawes-Dawson; R.B. Valdez; G. Vernez 1994 Surveying Immigrant Communities (skim Chapters 1 and 2; read 3 and 4)

Dissertation survey to be discussed
Hetling

April 21: survey memo due

11) April 18 Interview Presentations
Student presentations based on the interviews; discussion of what was learned both from the interviews and the process. Weiss is a good book as you prepare these, particularly his analysis of specific interviews pp. 83-113. [This comes 3 weeks after the initial discussion of presentations because it will take time to carry out the assignment.]
April 21 write-up of personal interviews due

11) April 25 Systematic reviews
Like “evidence based medicine”, systematic reviews are an effort to impose discipline on how the social scientist summarizes prior empirical literature. There is now a well developed set of procedures which, though not raising major conceptual issues, present important practical challenges. The reading material is primarily in the form of manuals and procedures that have been developed by the Campbell Collaboration
(http://www.campbellcollaboration.org/) which promotes systematic reviews in a variety of social policy areas.

Readings

Campbell Collaboration *Systematic Reviews: An Introduction* [series of detailed powerpoint slides]

Peter H. van der Laan, Monika Smit, IngeBusschers, Pauline Aarten

*Cross-border Trafficking In Human Beings: Prevention and Intervention Strategies for Reducing Sexual Exploitation* [Campbell Collaboration review] Example of a review that failed; good illustration of the early stages ] EYOB presents

Sandra Jo Wilson, Emily E. Tanner-Smith, Mark W. Lipsey, KatarzynaSteinka-Fry, & Jan Morrison *Dropout prevention and intervention programs: Effects on school completion and dropout among school-aged children and youth* [Campbell Collaboration review; skip meta-analysis][very complete review of rich set of studies]

April 25 Draft Papers due

13) May 2 Cost-benefit analysis

Australian Handbook of CB Analysis [Most you will only have to read selected sections; some of it will be familiar to you from some economics course you have taken. The Table of Contents is very clear and you should be able to choose what you need to understand the technique.] Stokey and Zeckhauser *A Prime for Policy Analysis*, is much crisper and less detailed.

The Abecedarian study is an example of cost-benefit analysis applied to a major social experiment.

Do additional class with exercises.

Readings to be provided later

14) May 9 Dissertation proposals

The dissertation proposal is a major hurdle for doctoral students and is highly specific to each discipline. After discussing general guidelines, we will assess a number of recent dissertation proposals at the School. Five students will present or critique a specific proposal and make a presentation in class.
Prospectuses to be assessed:
  Fitzsimmons
  Herbst
  Hetling
  Lamb
  Pratap
  Sun Rui

May 3 Draft Paper returned with comments

May 13 (tentative): Student Presentations

May 16 Final versions of papers due