Course Overview and Objectives

The course addresses the epistemology, the context and the practice of applied social science research as it is related to policy and program analysis. We will study a number of approaches to research design, evidence, ethics and the practical execution of research projects.

By the end of the course, you should be able to draft a workable research proposal, choosing among a range of available research tools, and be able to explain and defend your approach. A consistent theme throughout the course concerns the uses to which research is put, and the constraints imposed by its institutional context.

There are four learning goals:

1. To understand major issues in the philosophy of social science as these affect the conduct of research.

2. To know the range of qualitative research techniques and their strengths and weaknesses.

3. To understand, and to have an approach to resolving, ethical and political issues that arise in the conduct of social science research.

4. To develop skills in the design of analytically sound and practical research projects.
Course Requirements

This course is a seminar. You are expected to attend class having completed the readings for each, prepared with opinions about the readings, or questions. Lectures do not repeat what is found in the readings.

In almost every class, we will spend part of the time discussing the practical aspects of research design and proposal development. Many practical examples are provided, and you will have an opportunity to work on the situation appreciation and research proposal in class. It is important that you choose a topic within the first 2 or 3 weeks of class.

Assignment 1: Policy Institution Analysis

DUE: January 21, 2008  
WEIGHT: 10% of course grade

The purpose of this assignment is to ensure that all members of the class have a clear and realistic understanding of the basic institutions through which policy research is conducted in Canada. It is also intended to help you become familiar with policy and evaluation research, as these may be distinguished from other forms of social science research.

In the first class, you will be assigned responsibility to study a Canadian policy research institution. In the third class, you will present the results of your research, orally, and then submit a short written version of your findings to the instructor. Report on (1) the area(s) of interest of the research institution; (2) its structure and, if possible, its mode of funding; (3) any ideological tendencies that are apparent from published research (give examples); and (4) the official and evident mandate. Identify the likely audience for this particular institutions’ research, and its relationship to academic scholarship.

Assignment 2: Situation Appreciation

DUE: March 3, 2008  
WEIGHT: 30% of course grade

This assignment requires you to prepare an analysis of a real situation in which decisions must be taken about the desirability, focus, timing and nature of a policy research or evaluation project. You will prepare a preliminary analysis of research needs and contextual constraints in the situation. You are encouraged to use the situation appreciation assignment as the first step in preparing the research proposal that you will submit as a final assignment in the course.
Assignment 3: Research Proposal

DUE: April 7, 2008
WEIGHT: 60% of course grade

You will submit a research proposal for a primarily qualitative, policy-relevant research project. Details about this assignment will be provided in class, and we will work on your assignments in stages during class time.

READINGS

The readings for the course are all available on-line. To read articles free of charge, you must retrieve them through the Carleton University library website, and you will need a student card.

In addition, I recommend that you purchase a good social science research methods text for your own reference work. There are often used copies of such textbooks available. Two useful books are:


COURSE OUTLINE

Week 1 (January 7)  Introduction to the Course

- Introductions
- Main themes
- Mutual expectations
- Lacunae
- Assignments
- How to Approach Writing a Research Proposal

Week 2 (January 14)  Basic Issues in Applied Social Science Research


Ian Shaw, “Qualitative Research and Outcomes in Health, Social Work and Education” *Qualitative Research* vol 3 n 1 (2003) pp57-77. (on-line)


**Week 3 (January 21) Policy Research I**

See Assignment 1.

**Week 4 (January 28) Policy Research II**


**Week 5 (February 4) Analysis Before Design**


Benjamin Baez, “Confidentiality in qualitative research: reflections on secrets, power and agency” *Qualitative Research* vol 2 (April 2002) pp 35-58. (on-line)


**Week 6 (February 11) Workshop on the Situation Appreciation**

**** READING WEEK *****

**Week 7 (February 25) Research Design**


Helen Sampson, “Negotiating the Waves: The Usefulness of a Pilot in Qualitative Research” *Qualitative Research* v 4 Dec 2004 pp 383-402. (on-line)

Alan Bryman, “Integrating Quantitative and Qualitative Research: How Is It Done?” *Qualitative Research* 2006, 6, 97. (on-line)

**Week 8 (March 4) Research Ethics**

Part I:

Guest speaker: Leslie McDonald-Hicks, Ethics Coordinator, Carleton University

Part II:


Week 9 (March 11)  Qualitative Strategies: Case Studies and Alternatives


Additional readings TBA

Week 10 (March 18) Questions of Evidence


Additional readings TBA.

Week 11 (March 23)  Tools and Techniques

Readings TBA.

Week 12 (Apr 1) Organizing and Communicating Results

Mary Dixon-Woods, Andrew Booth, Alex J. Sutton, “Synthesizing Qualitative Research: A Review of Published Reports” *Qualitative Research* (2007) 7, 375 (on-line)

Some Canadian Policy Research Institutions

Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives
Canada West Foundation
Fraser Institute
C. D. Howe Institute
Institute for Research on Public Policy
Caledon Institute
North-South Institute
International Development Research Centre
Policy Research Initiative
Saskatchewan Institute of Public Policy
Pembina Institute
National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy
Canadian Policy Research Networks