

Washington General Research Seminar

Professor: James Desveaux

This seminar complements the internship experience of participants in the UCDC Quarter in Washington program and is the keystone classroom component of the program. The intent of the course is to guide students through the process of conducting focused and detailed research. Students will learn to frame a research question, build an explanatory theory, develop a feasible research strategy, gather data, either from a variety of data sources, or in the "field," and then write a paper, largely based on their internship placement and experience in Washington. Through readings and written analysis, we will examine the qualities of solid, empirical research: significance, focus, clarity, and persuasiveness. Exploring these themes will help you to critically evaluate other research and improve your own skills as a researcher and writer.

Although there are nearly 30 of you, I am committed to making this a very high-quality academic experience, paying attention to your research concerns as much as possible. You are encouraged to actively participate in the seminar and to take full advantage of the many opportunities to meet individually and in the small tutorial groups with the instructors.

Group Tutorials

Students will participate in a tutorial with a small group of students who have similar substantive interests. I will lead these tutorials. However, the purpose of the tutorial meetings, which will take place in lieu of the seminar on **Feb 23rd**, is to promote discussion among students having similar challenges, working on similar problems. Each session will last approximately 1½ hours and will serve as an opportunity for students to help each other to focus their research and to communicate their findings effectively. Each group tutorial will consist of approximately 5 students, and I will try to place students with similar or overlapping research interests into each group. I will have more to say on this tutorial later in the term.

PLEASE PLAN ON BEING AVAILABLE FOR YOUR TUTORIAL AT ANY TIME SINCE THERE WILL BE 5 TUTORIALS OF 5 STUDENTS EACH, TUTORIALS WILL BEGIN IN THE MORNING AND THE LAST ONE WILL END SOMETIME IN THE LATE AFTERNOON.

GRADED COURSE REQUIREMENTS

While completing a piece of original research is the major objective and requirement of this course, there are other important, graded requirements. Most notably, all students should attend their field placements during normal office hours during the week. The placement provides the rationale for the seminar and, most likely, the substantive focus for the paper. There would be little point in coming to Washington if students missed the opportunity to work and do research in a policy-making or cultural institution. *All students will receive the appropriate credit-hours as designated by your individual campuses for passing this course.* Class requirements fall into four categories: participation, readings, writing assignments and oral presentations.

PARTICIPATION ☺

This course is a seminar, not a lecture course. Students should come to class prepared to participate in discussions about their placements, papers and weekly readings. They should feel free to ask questions of anyone and to voice any opinion. Without such active, informed participation, the time will go by very slowly. The instructor will lead the discussions, but only the students can make them worthwhile. Participation grades are sometimes the deciding factor for final grades. Please be ready to begin class *promptly* at 1:00 PM.

READINGS 📖

To better understand how to do research, one has to look at what others have done and how they have done it. Assigned readings provide the basis for class discussions just as a survey of the literature anchors most types of research. Readings can be found in the class reader. Students should bring their copies of each week's readings to the seminar for reference. The other reading is the very useful *Elements of Style* by Strunk and White. If you do not have this already, it can be purchased at many local bookstores. **Please note that in your course reader you will find a list of websites accompanied by descriptions.** The xeroxed reader is available for you to purchase at **US Printing & Copying Inc., 1725 M Street, NW, 785-9424.**

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

Regular writing assignments are an important feature of this course. Research is a pointless, selfish exercise unless it is shared with others. A series of short papers, coupled with the longer research paper, should give students the chance to improve their writing abilities by practicing and getting regular feedback. Do not use folders, cover slips or binders. Just staple. Be sure to number all pages and include your name on the document (a common problem). There are three assignments:

(1) Topic Identification essay will be handed in at the third seminar. At the end of the second class, I will hand out a sheet of "topic questions" for you to consider when composing your short essay. This will help you choose a topic that is limited in scope and practical to research. The essay should be 1 ½ - 2 single-spaced pages. In fact, you may think of this exercise as a "pre-proposal" of your intended research. Attach to this a list of *at least* 5 possible sources.

(2) The Research Proposal sets the intellectual and methodological foundation for the research paper. It is due in electronic form on _____. **Please submit it as an attachment as either a Word, WordPerfect, or PDF document. Again, my email is: desveaux@ucla.edu.** It should be brief (4-6 double-spaced pages, plus a list of references at the back) and to the point. It should answer several questions (that should not serve as paper headings) in much more detail than the topic worksheet: What is my topic? Why is it worth studying? What is the principal research question I am asking? What do I think will be the answer to this question (my hypothesis)? Why do I think my hypothesis is the answer (my theory)? What will I need to know and where will I need to go in order to answer the research question? How does the literature help me to shape my theory and provide methods to answer my question? What are my methods and why did I choose them? This last question is very important and should occupy much of the paper. After reading the proposal, the instructor should be assured that you have focused your topic sufficiently and that you have a feasible plan for gathering data to answer your question. **I will have more to say about the proposal as the time approaches, and I will send a couple of sample proposals as guides.**

(3) The Research Paper completes the written requirements and is due _____ **outside Professor Desveaux' office** (Rm. 327). The paper should be focused, serious and creative. The research should be original (using either new data or not so new data in original, imaginative ways) and the writing must be clear and readable. You will submit one (1) hard copy and one electronic copy to Prof Desveaux.

The Topic. The paper need not focus on public policy nor political science, although most will have some type of policy focus. In fact, I value diversity, so non-political science students should feel very welcome. Actual topics will vary widely. It matters most that you are interested enough to deeply explore a problem, using *original or unprocessed data* such as survey results, field observations, interviews, economic or demographic data, maps, paintings, historical accounts, or archeological notes. You don't want your exploration to equate to two ships passing in a foggy night. In other words, the subject needs to be reasonably limited in scope and focused on a researchable question, given the tools at your disposal. Avoid speculative research or analyses of events that have not yet happened, such as the next US election. In some cases, though, it's reasonable to craft a project in which you offer an assessment of some future outcome based on what has already happened in a similar chain of events. For instance, it might be reasonable to analyze some problems in reaching environmental accords in ongoing trade negotiations with countries in other parts of the world (i.e., South Korea) by looking at what has happened with NAFTA. Or, you might apply a similar logic to the current proposals for reducing the budget deficit being bandied about. Students should avoid writing papers as valentines (given unvarnished praise to the institution where they work), although a topic related to the field placement will be easier to research. Moreover, you may discover that picking a topic involves an embarrassment of riches. In other words, you're in Washington, and you have considerable leeway in making a choice, which

can—paradoxically—make choosing a topic difficult. Nevertheless, try not to be delayed by the search for a “perfect” topic. Choose a topic that you think will hold your interest, and try to play to your strengths.

The Hypothesis and Theory. The paper should seek to *explain* a particular phenomenon, such as a particular set of policy strategies of President Obama, not just describe it. It should answer a “why” or “how” question by giving a plausible, testable explanation or hypothesis that can be verified or rejected empirically. What factors are influencing President Obama as he adjusts his policies regarding Afghanistan? How big a factor is domestic politics? Regarding health care, will President Obama make compromises with republicans in the new Congress? In these examples, you could identify a dependent variable (policy strategy taken) and hypothesize that the choices were influenced by a series of factors—the independent variables—such as Mr. Obama’s core constituents, versus the wider electorate that has come to support him, insurance companies, or pressure from moderate or liberal Democrats, particularly in the Senate, differences of opinion among his inner staff, and public opinion polling data measuring where most Americans stand on these issues. In your theory section, you would explain why this hypothesis seems plausible based on what you *know* in advance and what others have said about similar questions. The research question is up to you, but you must use this framework for developing an explanatory theory.

The Research or Methods. In researching the paper, take advantage of the many resources available in Washington: the people, social programs, campaigns, bureaucracies, libraries, archives, institutions, historical sites, embassies, art galleries, etc. You are not obligated to do research directly related to your internship, but that can be a significant advantage in getting access to data. More generally, use this as an opportunity to try new research techniques and to explore creatively. It is more important to experiment and to learn about the process than to come up with precise or “scientific” data. One student examined public opinion about the media by handing out surveys at a Metro stop. The questions were a bit crude and the sampling unscientific, but the results were fascinating and it was a valuable experience. While we expect you to be rigorous in your methodology, you may not “succeed” in proving your hypothesis. Do not worry; this is okay, and a frequent outcome of an honest commitment to the process. Another student thought he would show that Congress had reasserted itself in foreign policy after the Cold War. He found no evidence for this, but he did not “fail” because the fact that the end of the Cold War produced no change was itself an interesting and counter-intuitive finding.

The Writing. Papers of this length (approximately 20 double-spaced pages, plus appendices and references) often fall apart as the reader begins to wonder what the writer is doing, what they are trying to prove, and whether it matters. We will try to avoid this fate by discussing how to write a good research paper. Such a paper should have the following, which need not be headings or separate sections:

- A) An abstract that summarizes the paper in approximately 150-200 words. This single-spaced abstract should have a brief description of the topic, the question, the hypothesis, the methodology (very important), and the findings. Include the abstract after the cover page but do not include it in the page count;
 - B) A clear introduction that explains the subject matter and specifies the research question;
 - C) A hypothesis to prove or disprove backed by a theory that explains why this hypothesis is sensible;
 - D) A review of the scholarly literature (references to this literature could be found throughout the paper rather than separated as its own section);
 - E) An *explanation and discussion of methods* (an *absolute necessity*);
 - F) A presentation of findings;
 - G) A discussion of those findings; and
 - H) A conclusion that pulls the paper together, discusses the implications of the findings (such as possible public policy changes), and suggests avenues for future research. (You might integrate sections G and H.)
- I)

Students should remember that a research paper is not merely a presentation of findings. *It is a crafted piece of prose that makes a clear argument.* A superior paper presents *original* research (rather than rehashed findings by other researchers) in a way that is easy to follow and enjoyable to read. However, some very fine scholarship often consists of studies that synthesize and reinterpret findings that others have uncovered in previous work. In any event, do not just give the “facts.” Present them in a way that advances or disproves a theory or argument. Poorly written papers with grammatical or spelling errors and an unclear organization will receive the grade they deserve. Always check for typos and other errors. As with all written assignments, be sure to **number each page**.

ORAL PRESENTATIONS 🌟

People highly value the ability to present ideas and data orally. The famous philosopher of science, Karl Popper, once said, "Speaking clearly is speaking so that words do not matter." The same logic applies to writing. Both speaking and writing should be thought of as tools to efficiently communicate ideas. Oral presentation or writing should not be an obstacle course for the listener or reader. Remember, what you regard as clear in your head, or when speaking informally to a friend, do not necessarily come across clearly to your audience unless you work at it, and make it so. Approaching your topic with focus and enthusiasm, and treating it as a craft, will go a long way toward improving the final product.

Oral presentations will take place a week before the due date of the paper. Your presentations of research findings challenge you to improve both writing and oral presentation skills and you'll learn to avoid certain pitfalls. Hopefully, you'll find the feedback you receive to be helpful as you're finishing the final paper. Research presentations should be focused, lively and well organized. You want to share not only your findings, but also your enthusiasm with your colleagues. Students may use handouts, overheads, software such as PowerPoint, and brief videotapes to make their case. These can be invaluable. Presentations should be given with the understanding that the audience knows little or nothing about your subject. Presentations should be short. Toward that end, students will be allowed 12 minutes for the final presentation, followed by 5 minutes of questions. *Time limits will be strictly enforced;* presentations will be cut off after 12 minutes. As part of your presentation, you should discuss your thesis, methods, and conclusion(s). **Because I know that all of you have internship commitments, and I don't want to interfere with that, I've organized the presentations so that they will occur over two days when the seminar normally meets. Hence, half of the students will make presentations on _____. The other half will present at the final class. THESE WILL BE ALL DAY SESSIONS (WITH TIME FOR LUNCH AND BREAKS, OF COURSE). EVERYONE IS EXPECTED TO BE IN ATTENDANCE FOR ALL PRESENTATIONS. NO EXCEPTIONS.**

In addition to the major presentation at the end of the quarter, students will be asked to make less formal oral presentations from time to time. For example, students may be asked to take the lead in summarizing readings, leading discussion on those readings, or telling the class about their research topic and methods as a way to invite further discussion and suggestions. These informal presentations will not be graded, but they will be included as class participation.

POLICY NOTES

Extensions will not be granted for any assignment, large or small, except in the extreme circumstances of incapacitating health or family emergency. In these situations, students must provide a letter by a doctor or family member testifying that they cannot complete an assignment on time for those reasons. Students granted extensions or course incompletes must submit a letter specifying the exact date and time when work will be completed. Any violation of this agreement may result in an "F" for that assignment. Assignment grades will be lowered by a half-grade each day after the due date.

Grades are important to students, particularly in a double-weighted course, so great care is taken in giving and weighing them. The instructor will note whether grades improved over time and intangibles such as effort and creativity when considering the final grade. **The assignments are weighted in descending order as follows: final paper (50%), oral presentation (20%), research proposal (15%), and participation and worksheets (together) (15%).** An "A" on the final paper may not necessarily result in an "A" for the course if other grades are lower. Students will not be graded on a curve; everyone can get an "A," particularly by showing improvement during the quarter. But then again, no one should assume they will come away with an "A" just because they are in the program. Grades may be reviewed if the student believes there has been an error. However, understand that a grade review may result in a lower grade as errors can be made in both directions. Consider this possibility before making an appeal. **No one passes this course if ALL assignments are not completed (topic worksheet, research proposal, final paper, presentation).**

Ethical violations will be taken **very** seriously. You should review your campus policies concerning plagiarism and other forms of unethical behavior. We are far from California, but we follow university policy to the letter. Some of the rules are obvious, but bear repeating: do not submit the same paper for two courses without explicit permission (the instructor will check your paper with any 199 course work). Do not use the work of others without careful and full citation. Do not conduct research in a covert or misleading manner. Do not use paper-writing services, etc. *And please do not copy material from the internet without*


attribution. We have software to detect violations and internet plagiarism. If, for instance, the final paper is significantly different from these earlier works, however, you may expect that this will raise suspicion, and we are likely to enquire further. *Be sure that the paper you hand in is the paper you wrote.* Hand it in yourself; do not give another person that duty. You are responsible for whatever is handed in under your name. As you know, the campuses subscribe to **turnitin.com**, and I use the service.


Handing in papers can be an issue for some individuals. We also want to be sure that you hand in your own work in a timely manner, so please follow these guidelines:

- A) The **topic worksheets** are due at the time of the tutorial or meeting. These should be handed in personally.
- B) The **research proposal** is due on days when you are not necessarily attending classes. However, since everybody is residing in the same building, and everyone has access to a computer, submitting assignments in accordance with the time requirements stated throughout your syllabus will not be a problem. Therefore, deadlines will be enforced.
- C) The **final paper** must be handed in no later than **6PM on _____**. You must turn in the paper (one hard copy and an electronic (e-mailed) version) by that time, placing the materials in a box outside Professor Desveaux' office, or handing it to Professor Desveaux, or placing it in his mailbox.


MEETING SCHEDULE

WEEK 1, GETTING STARTED



-  **Readings** Putnam, Robert D. 1995. "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital."
Journal of Democracy, 6(1): 65-77.

David Brooks. "Social Science Palooza." *NY Times*.
-  **Tutorials** Will be discussed during this class meeting.


WEEK 2, RESEARCH AND IMAGINATION

-  **Readings** Gladwell, Malcolm. *Outliers: The Story of Success*. 2008, ch. 1, 2.
◊ Topic essay questions handed out.

WEEK 3, DESIGNING YOUR STUDY


-  **Readings** Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, Sidney Verba. *Designing Social Inquiry* (1994). pp. 3-33; 35-46; 99-114.
- Suggested:** Wayne C. Booth et. al. "From Topics to Questions," and "From Questions to Problems," from *The Craft of Research* (1995).
-  **PAPER DUE** **Topic Worksheet** (1 ½ -2 single spaced pages, plus potential bibliography) due at beginning of class.


WEEK 4, RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS

-  **Readings** Patton & Sawicki, "The Need for Simple Methods of Policy Analysis and Planning." (1986, 1993)
Johan Lehrer, "The Truth Wears Off: Is there something wrong with the scientific method?" *The New Yorker*, Dec 13, 2010.

WEEK 5, NO CLASS


WEEK 6, NEW WAYS OF THINKING ABOUT OLD PROBLEMS

 **Readings** Baumgartner, Frank R., and Bryan D. Jones. "Agenda Dynamics and Policy Subsystems." *Journal of Politics*. 53:4, 1991.

 **PAPER DUE** **Research Proposal** with Literature Review (4-6 pages)

Submit electronic copy as attachment to: desveaux@ucla.edu.

WEEK 7, THE PRESENTATION

 **Readings** Strunk, William Jr. and E.B. White. 1979. The Elements of Style 3rd or 4th edition). New York: MacMillan Publishing (entire).

Discussion of sample research papers from the reader.

WEEK 8, TUTORIAL MEETINGS (THROUGHOUT THE DAY)

WEEK 9, (all day session) **ORAL PRESENTATIONS (first half)**


Format 12 minute oral presentation plus 5 minute Q&A period; Time limits will be strictly enforced.

Content Discuss hypothesis, methods, findings and conclusions from your research paper. Use of supporting materials (handouts, overheads, videos, etc.) is encouraged. You may use the TV-PC projection system to show "slides," such as those in *MS Power Point*.

WEEK 10

FINAL WEEK

(all day session) **ORAL PRESENTATIONS (second half)**

 **PAPER DUE** Research Paper, due **6:00 PM**.

Research papers should be approximately 20 pages double-spaced (plus references, tables, figures, etc.) **Do not, under any circumstances, exceed 25 pages.** Write fewer words if need be; do not just change the font and layout. Number all pages. Include a 150-200-word single-spaced abstract. Hand in one hard copy and an electronic copy of the complete paper, with title page, abstract, etc.

This seminar complements the internship experience of participants in the UCDC Quarter in Washington program and is the keystone classroom component of the program. The intent of the course is to guide students through the process of conducting focused and detailed research. Students will learn to frame a research question, build an explanatory theory, develop a feasible research strategy, gather data, either from a variety of data sources, or in the "field," and then write a paper. For many students, the research project will be based largely on their internship placement and experience in Washington, though research ideas may derive from elsewhere. Through readings and written analysis, we will examine the qualities of solid, empirical research: significance, focus, clarity, and persuasiveness. Exploring these themes will help you to critically evaluate other research and improve your own skills as a researcher and writer.