

88-251: Empirical Research Methods

January 30, 2012

Instructor: John Gasper

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Course Time / Location: MW 13:00-14:20, Room 1064

Office Hours: TBA

In general, I have an open door policy: if my door is open and I'm not meeting with someone, you are welcome to come in and meet with me. **If my door is closed, I am not available** (out of the office, working, etc). I highly encourage you to **set up an appointment** to make sure I will be around.

Assistants:

- Reham Al Tamime

Required Texts:

- Babbie, Earl. 2010. *The Practice of Social Research*. 12th edition. Wadsworth. ISBN 0495598410
- We will also use the blackboard website extensively in the course. You are responsible for checking the site daily.

Course Description and Goals

This course teaches students how to evaluate and conduct original research regarding human behavior, whether it be in economic, social, or political settings. The course gives students practical experience in many of the most commonly used research techniques, including surveys, experiments, and quasi-experimental analysis. Although the course focuses primarily on the relationship between formulating research questions and implementing the appropriate methods to answer them, students can expect regularly to apply the statistical techniques learned in the course prerequisites, including basic statistical tests and regression.

By the end of the semester you should be able to formulate good research questions, collect your own data, and evaluate your own research. I expect you to design and administer your own surveys. The data you gather from both internet and non-internet surveys will form the basis of your final research project. As such, a lot of your learning in this course will take place outside of class.

Attendance and participation

It is easy to take the attitude that your job (and mine) is accomplished with your mastery of the material of the course, and consequently that I need not bother with whether you show up for class. Realistically, we know that in general the vast majority of students who feel they don't need to come to class are mistaken, but only find that out, to their shock, as they do poorly on exams. I will expect you in class and I expect you on time, and these will factor into your grade for the course. This not an easy course; it demands a large amount of work and a large part of the material will not come from just the text. The exams will cover both sets of material.

This semester we will be experimenting with "clickers" in the course. Once these are assigned to you, **you are required to bring your clicker to every class**. I will be using these to take attendance for the course. If you forget to bring your clicker and we use it that day, you will be counted as absent. In addition, I will occasionally give unannounced quizzes.

I will also make an effort to get to know you. It is also fair to say that those who sit near the front and participate in class will get the benefit of the doubt when their grades are below a borderline. During the first week of class, I ask that you schedule an appointment with me and come by my office. On the second day of class I will pass around a sheet with available times. These meetings will probably only last about 10 minutes but I find them incredibly valuable. I feel that I can best present material to you only after I know about you.

Cell phones and laptops

I understand that many of you will use a laptop to take notes during the lecture. This is fine. I am also willing to venture a guess that many of you will be tempted to check your email, the news, etc. This is **not** fine.

I also ask that you **turn off your cell phone during class**. If there is an emergency and you might need to be contacted, please talk to me before class. Otherwise there should be no reason to hear a phone ring or see someone send a text. Text messages and phone calls during class are very distracting and disrespectful to me and your other students.

Course Logistics

This course has a blackboard website, which should be set up and functioning. Handouts, updated syllabi and announcements will be posted there and you are responsible for checking the site regularly.

I hope you will meet with me during the semester, especially if you have questions about the course material. I welcome questions during class: if you have a question or a comment, please let me know. I will generally pause after each slide and ask if there are any questions – please feel encouraged to raise questions during class. I hope you will feel free to raise questions if you are confused or want me to talk more about some topic. There is a lot of material in the course – please help me teach you what you want to know!

Grades

I strongly encourage you to review the University's policies regarding academic honesty. To put it simply, my policy is that cheating of any kind will not be tolerated. If you have any question, please feel free to ask me. A good online source for the academic integrity policy is: http://www.studentaffairs.cmu.edu/theword/acad_standards/integrity.html

Each student's grade for the course will be based on the following:

1. *Online quizzes* 10%
2. *Pilot studies and drafts* 10%
3. *Midterm exam 1* 20%
4. *Midterm exam 2* 20%
5. *Final Project presentation* 15%
6. *Final Project report* 15%
7. *Participation* 10%

I know that your schedule during the semester can be hectic. I also know that various events can happen during the semester that make finishing projects on time difficult. I also, however, expect you to know these things as well. I have a no extensions policy, but **your lowest quiz score will be dropped when calculating your final grade.**

There are eight scheduled online quizzes, but throughout the semester I might give unannounced in-class quizzes. These will probably be short and not intended to be tricky. If you are absent from class, you will not be allowed to make up the quiz. Again, I will not accept late or emailed homework. Since the lowest scores will be dropped I will have a zero tolerance for late assignments.

In general, try to figure things out on your own first. **Visit Blackboard: I've set up a discussion board for the class. Any question you might ask me, you should ask there first,** unless it is of a personal nature. I am happy to help, but you'll learn the most by trying to solve problems on your own first. You will also learn a lot by trying to explain things to others. Therefore **part of your participation grade will come from your responses to questions asked on the Blackboard discussion board.**

Final projects: You may work in with one other person for your final project design and data collection, but your final project analysis, presentation, and report should be completed by you and you alone. You are not allowed to copy text or even graphs. This is an opportunity for you to present the data analysis and conclusions the best that you can.

Weekly readings and course outline

Class	Date	Topic	Reading	Quizzes	Milestones due
1	16-Jan-2012	Pretest and Syllabi	syllabus		
2	18-Jan-2012	Intro to Research Design	chp 1, chp 2	Quiz 1	
3	23-Jan-2012	Ethics	chp 3	IRB exam	
4	25-Jan-2012	Research Design	chp 4		
5	30-Jan-2012	Measurement	chp 5	Quiz 2	proposal draft 0
6	1-Feb-2012	Scales and Indexes	chp 6		
7	6-Feb-2012	Scales and Indexes	chp 6	Quiz 3	Review questions
8	8-Feb-2012	Review			
9	13-Feb-2012	Exam 1			
10	15-Feb-2012	Sampling	chp 7		
11	20-Feb-2012	Sampling	Lohr handout	Quiz 4	Research proposal
12	22-Feb-2012	Survey Design	chp 9		IRB forms due
13	27-Feb-2012	Survey Design	handout	Quiz 5	Survey draft
14	29-Feb-2012	Survey Design	handout		
Break	5-Mar-2012	Spring Break			
Break	7-Mar-2012	Spring Break			
15	12-Mar-2012	Experimental Design	chp 8		Survey pilot
16	14-Mar-2012	Experimental Design			
17	19-Mar-2012	Experimental Design	handout		Survey pilot 2
18	21-Mar-2012	Evaluation Research Design	chp 12		
19	26-Mar-2012	Evaluation Research Design	chp 12	Quiz 6	Final Survey
20	28-Mar-2012	Review			
21	2-Apr-2012	Exam 2			
22	4-Apr-2012	Analysis	R handout		
23	9-Apr-2012	Analysis	chp 14	Quiz 7	
24	11-Apr-2012	Analysis	chp 16		
25	16-Apr-2012	Analysis	handout	Quiz 8	
26	18-Apr-2012	Presentations			
27	23-Apr-2012	Presentations			
28	25-Apr-2012	Presentations			