APPLIED POLICY RESEARCH (SC519)  

INSTRUCTOR:  Nicholas Redel (nicholas.redel@gmail.com)  
OFFICE HOURS:  By appointment  
CLASS MEETINGS:  Wednesdays 6:00-8:30pm, 413 McGuinn Hall  

COURSE OVERVIEW  
This course introduces students to techniques for carrying out public policy research in applied settings. It covers a range of quantitative and qualitative approaches to public policy research, providing an overview of experimental and quasi-experimental design, quantitative analysis, and qualitative research methods. This course will provide students with the ability to define research questions systematically, and to address those questions with the selection and application of appropriate analytical tools. By centering the discussion on research in applied settings, students will gain the ability to make research decisions in the context of limited resources (especially limited information, financial resources, and constraints on time). The course is structured around lectures and case discussions.  

PREREQUISITES  
This course is designed for graduate students in the Department of Sociology with SC702 or equivalent coursework, and open to advanced undergraduates with SC200 or equivalent coursework.  

REQUIREMENTS  

CLASS PARTICIPATION (20% OF YOUR GRADE)  
Class participation is strongly encouraged. Effective class participation requires that you complete the assigned readings before coming to class and contribute meaningfully to class discussions. You are encouraged to ask questions and share relevant insights from prior experience and previous exposure to the topics. Both the quality and quantity of your contributions will count towards your final grade. Excessive absences and lateness will have a negative impact on your participation grade.  

ASSIGNMENTS  
You will be asked to complete two case reaction papers and one research proposal (submitted in two parts). Information about each assignment will be posted on the course website. All papers must be submitted in hardcopy at the start of class on the dates specified below. Papers should be printed with one inch margins and 12 point font.  

CASE REACTION PAPERS (30% OF YOUR GRADE). Students are asked to prepare two case reaction papers. Each case reaction will take the form of a memo that outlines the major challenges of the proposed research and offers suggestions for addressing these challenges. Reaction papers are due on the following dates:  

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reaction</th>
<th>Due</th>
<th>Length</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reaction 1 (15%)</td>
<td>Due: 03-19-14</td>
<td>Length: 3 pages, single-spaced</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reaction 2 (15%)</td>
<td>Due: 04-23-14</td>
<td>Length: 3 pages, single-spaced</td>
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RESEARCH PROPOSAL (50% OF YOUR GRADE). Students are asked to prepare a research proposal on a sociological topic of their choosing. Students should define a research question (ideally the question they intend to address in a masters or undergraduate thesis), select an appropriate method for addressing the research question, and construct an analysis plan. This proposal will be submitted in two parts: (1) as a midterm draft; and (2) as a final paper.
In the midterm draft, students should define the research question, providing relevant background information and demonstrating a need for the proposed research. Students are encouraged (but not required) to include a detailed outline of the methods section, which will enable me to provide feedback before work commences on the final draft.

The final paper should provide a fully articulated research proposal in three parts: (1) the research question, which will consist of revisions to the midterm draft; (2) the research method, selecting an experimental, quasi-experimental, or qualitative design and discussing how the design will be applied; and (3) the analysis plan. The research proposal papers are due on the following dates:

| Research Proposal, Midterm Draft | Due: 03-26-14 | Length: 5-6 pages, double-spaced |
| Research Proposal, Final Paper   | Due: 04-30-14 | Length: 12-15 pages, double-spaced |

**ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**

When working on individual assignments, students are expected to do their own work. Published work should be properly cited. If you have questions about citing work or any other matter, please see me. More information about Boston College’s academic integrity policy is available at http://www.bc.edu/integrity.

**COURSE MATERIALS**

This course has two main texts, the book by Rossi, et al (see below) and a coursepack. The Rossi book and coursepack are on reserve at the O’Neill Library and available for purchase at the BC Bookstore. Additional readings (not included in the book or coursepack) will be posted on the course website. These readings are listed on the course schedule in blue. Please note that three chapters have been assigned from the book by Neuman (see below). Chapters 7 and 10 are available on the course website, but due to copyright restrictions chapter 8 cannot be posted online. The Neuman book has been placed on reserve at the O’Neill Library.


**COURSE SCHEDULE (subject to change)**

**January 15**
Introduction and course overview

**January 22**
Introduction to program evaluation
Reading: *Decker / Rossi* chapter 1 and 3

**January 29**
Conceptualization, operationalization, validity and reliability
Reading: *Neuman* chapter 7

**February 5**
Assessing program process and measuring program outcomes
Reading: *Rossi* chapter 6 and 7
February 12
Assessing program impact, lecture #1: experimental design
Reading: Rossi chapter 8 / Check website for additional readings

February 19
Assessing program impact, lecture #2: quasi-experimental design
Reading: Rossi pages 265-286 / Check website for additional readings

February 26
Assessing program impact, lecture #3: quasi-experimental design
Reading: Rossi pages 286-300 / Check website for additional readings

March 11
Not a class session but this event might be of interest. MIT Media Lab from 4:30-6:00pm.

March 12
Data sources: extant data, primary data, and the National Food Study
Reading: Gupta chapter 8 / Neuman pages 240-267 and chapter 10 / Check website for case

March 19
Experimental and Quasi-Experimental Design Case
Speaker: James Mabli, Associate Director of Human Services Research, Mathematica Policy Research
Case Reaction #1 due

March 26
Quantitative Analysis, lecture #1
Reading: Rossi chapter 10 / Check website for additional readings
Midterm paper due

April 2
Quantitative Analysis, lecture #2
Reading: Check website for readings

April 9
Qualitative Research Design and Analysis, lecture #1
Reading: Strauss pages 10-34 and 39-48 / Marshall chapter 4

April 16
Qualitative Research Design and Analysis, lecture #2
Reading: Marshall chapter 5 / Neuman pages 267-274 / Edin Intro and Appx A-B / Check website for case

April 23
Qualitative Research Case
Speaker: Kati Kriz, Associate Professor of Sociology, Director College Honors Program, Emmanuel College
Case Reaction #2 due

April 30
Practical Considerations: Adapting research to real world challenges
Final paper due