

# OLAC020 Introduction to Research Design and Methods for Public Policy

Open Learning Initiative, OLLive-UP, Spring Semester, 2021

Seminar Leader: Simona Torotcoi

Email: [s.torotcoi@berlin.bard.edu](mailto:s.torotcoi@berlin.bard.edu)

Class times: 9-10:30 Tuesdays and Thursdays

Location: SR 12 Kuckhoffstr. 24

Office Hours: [signup link](#) and [zoom link](#) (if needed)

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1LOkGOOJjazaH7DBcv9AjB67yMXIMsC7sDEnHPeUP5ZY/edit?usp=sharing>

Class link if online teaching: <https://bard.zoom.us/j/83290189307>

Credits: 4 US credit, 8 ECTS

## 1. Course Description

After introducing students to a more advanced knowledge of public policy's core mechanisms, principles and theories, this course aims to provide insights into three core areas in public policy.

- The first module brings in the **microeconomics** foundations necessary for civil servants, policy-makers and academics.
- The second module looks from a critical perspective at **policy research** conducted in different policy areas (i.e., environment, employment, education). The focus of this module will be on developing students' skills articulating and critically discussing how policy issues are researched (i.e., how issues are problematized, how policy responses are designed, implemented, monitored and evaluated in different contexts).
- The last module aims to familiarize students with the **basic components of a research paper in public policy**. The aim of this part is to introduce students to the core of policy writing and help them design and prepare for their final paper and prepare them for graduate level assignments in the field of public policy.

## 2. Learning goals and objectives

By the end of this course students will be able to

- Analyze different types of policies from an economic perspective
- Express and articulate the main argument/idea from an academic article
- Critically assess the strengths and weaknesses of existing research, research design and methodology
- Conduct research in an area of their interest and appropriately use research design tools

### **3. Academic Integrity**

All assignments should be students' original work, plagiarism is not accepted nor tolerated. Bard College Berlin maintains the staunchest regard for academic integrity and expects good academic practice from students in their studies. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

Students are encouraged to make use of the tutor office hours and have weekly individual meetings with the course instructor and discuss issues related to their academic performance in the course (presentations, assignments, etc.), and if relevant in the program.

### **4. Attendance**

Attendance at all classes is a crucial part of the education offered by Bard College Berlin. To account for minor circumstances, two absences from twice-per-week courses should not affect the participation grade or require documentation. More than two absences (that is absences from two sessions of 90 minutes) in a semester will significantly affect the participation grade for the course.

In case of missing classes, the student will be asked to write a make-up assignment as decided by the instructor.

Late arrivals should be avoided. If students are not able to attend a class, they should let the instructor know in advance. Bard College Berlin does not offer credit for any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes, regardless of the reasons for the absences, whether excused or unexcused. The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.

### **5. Readings**

All readings are mandatory and to be completed before class, as they will be the base for the class discussions. There is a possibility of some changes to the scheduled class readings. You will be notified of any changes made if the case.

### **6. Use of Laptops and Other Electronic Devices in Class**

Use of laptops for taking notes in class is allowed, and we will rely on technology to assist us in class. However, mobile phones are not allowed, and the use of other electronic devices (laptop, tablet) for purposes unrelated to the coursework will result in a 0-points participation grade for that particular session.

## **7. COVID-19 related policies**

Due to the current pandemic bringing small groups together can put our health at risk. In-person seminars will allow for physical distancing this term. Classrooms will be ventilated (i.e., open windows for 5 minutes) every 45 minutes. In order to ensure a safe space, students and the instructor are expected to use masks during the class. If you have any symptoms it is recommended to call the Berlin info-hotline at: 03090282828.

## **8. Policy on Late Submission of Papers**

According to BCB's policy, assignments/essays that are up to 24 hours late can be downgraded up to one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where an instructor agrees to accept a late essay, it must be submitted within four weeks of the deadline and cannot receive a grade of higher than C.

Grades and comments will be returned to students in a timely fashion. Students are also entitled to make an appointment to discuss essay assignments and feedback during instructors' office hours. Students are entitled to make an appointment with an instructor to discuss seminar participation, or may be asked to meet with the instructor at any stage in the semester regarding class progress.

## **9. Course Platform**

This class is using Google Classroom, a virtual class portal available to help us save time, keep classes organized, and improve communication.

## **10. Consultations**

Consultation: by appointment but mandatory to meet 2x during the semester:

- to discuss midterm grade and progress (week 8/9)
- to discuss auditing related aspects
- to discuss the final grade and get advice on how to further improve their skills to be better students during MA (end of completion week)

Office Hours: signup link and zoom link (if needed)

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1LQkGOOJjazaH7DBcv9AjB67yMXIMsC7sDEnHPeUP5ZY/edit?usp=sharing>

## **11. Assignments and assessment**

### **Participation – 30%**

Students are expected to attend all classes, prepare the required reading(s) for each session as well as take active part in class discussions. Participation will be assessed both quantitatively and qualitatively. Students are expected to treat class preparations seriously and show they can work individually and in group within specific timeframes. Students whose performance in respect to participation has not been satisfactory should receive a warning in writing. Temporary remote participation for those needing to miss classes for COVID-19 related reasons will be agreed upon individually on a case-by-case basis.

### **Microeconomics quiz - 15%**

Before each session from the Microeconomics module students will be given a short ungraded quiz (max 10 questions) related to the assigned readings for that class. A final quiz will account as 15% the grade for this module.

### **Group presentations - 20%**

During the semester students are expected to give 2 oral presentations on 2 session topics (the final paper presentation is not graded!). The first presentation is on a specific policy issue whereas the second presentation is a research paper on that specific policy issue. Both presentations are group presentations (if possible)!

### **Capstone project - 35%**

As the final step in successfully graduating from your studies the capstone project is one of the most important assignments since it can have a double role. On the one hand, it is a tool that reflects, to a certain extent, your academic performance throughout the program; on the other hand, it is a means to help you acquire fundamental skills in conducting research. The writing process activates and enhances your abilities to plan, design, conduct and present an original piece of research whilst relying on your personal (i.e., self-management) and inter-personal skills (i.e., receiving feedback from peers or advisor).

The final paper is an original piece of research of around 3000-4000 words. The paper should identify a policy area and a specific policy issue that is researchable within the given timeframe. The topics of the papers are chosen by students. One of the most important components of the paper is the use of a specific research method –i.e., interview, survey, text analysis, literature review, etc. Students are encouraged to submit short assignments (on a voluntary basis, not graded) throughout the term which would help them in the final paper writing process. The aim of these assignments is to make students think about their final research paper for this class and shape it accordingly. **Deadline 18th of May 2021.**

## 12. Course Structure

Module & aims	Week	First Session	Second Session	Assessment	Consultations
<b>Module 1 – Microeconomics</b> (familiarize students with microeconomics foundations, analyze public policies from microeconomics perspective)	1-5 Feb	Introduction	Introduction to Microeconomics	Quizzes, debates, exercises	Individual plans
	8-12 Feb	Trade	Demand		Auditing (preparations)
	15-19 Feb	Supply	Demand, supply and government policies		
	22-26 Feb	Taxes	Consumer and producer surplus		
	1-5 Mar	Final quiz	Debate seminar		
<b>Module 2 – Research in Public Policy</b> (explore the link between research and policymaking)	8-12 Mar	Education	TBD	Case presentations (group work)	Case presentations
	15-19 Mar	Employment	TBD		Individual plans
	22-26 Mar	Environment	TBD		
	29-2 Apr	Spring break			
<b>Module 3 – Research Design and Methods in Public Policy</b> (prepare students to conduct research in a policy area of their interest)	5-9 Apr	Basic essay structure	Research questions	Weekly writing assignments, research presentations and final research paper	Final papers
	12-16 Apr	Literature review	Literature review		
	19-23 Apr	Case selection	Research methods		
	26-30 Apr	Research methods	Constructing arguments		
	3-7 May	Analysis and discussion	Final presentations		Final presentations
	10-14 May	Final presentations	Federal Holiday		Individual plans
	17-21 May	Completion week			

### 13. Course structure in details

#### **Module 1: Microeconomics**

This module uses Gregory Mankiw's book Principles of Economics (Available online on Google Classrooms).

##### **Week 1**

Session 1 Introduction

Session 2 Introduction to microeconomics Chapter 1 & 2 Ten Principles of Economics  
Thinking Like an Economist

##### **Week 2**

Session 1 Chapter 3. Interdependence and the Gains from Trade

Session 2 Chapter 4. The Market Forces of Demand

##### **Week 3**

Session 1 Chapter 5. The Market Forces of Supply

Session 2 Chapter 6. Supply, Demand, and Government Policies

##### **Week 4**

Session 1 Chapter 6. Supply, Demand, and Government Policies - taxes

Session 2 Chapter 7. Consumers, Producers, and the Efficiency of Markets

##### **Week 5**

Session 1 Final quiz

Session 2 Debate seminar

#### **Module 2: Research in Public Policy**

This Module uses Michael Hill and Frédéric Varone's 7th Edition The Public Policy Process (Routledge, 2016).

##### **Week 6 Education**

Session 1 - TBD

Session 2 - TBD

##### **Week 7 Employment**

Session 1 - TBD

Session 2 - TBD

##### **Week 8 Environment**

Session 1 - TBD

Session 2 - TBD

## Week 9 - Spring break

### Module 3: Research Design and Methods in Public Policy

#### Week 10

Session 1 Basic essay structure

**Required reading:** <https://politicalscienceguide.com/what-is-research/>

**Ungraded assignment 1 (post-class):** In 250 words summarize the details of your intended research project. Alternatively, reflect on 1-2 possible research topics and questions/problems; think on what is the aim of your research e.g. do you want to describe something, to explain something?

Session 2 Research questions

**Required reading:** <https://politicalscienceguide.com/what-is-research/the-research-question-2/>

**Ungraded assignment 2 (post-class):** Based on Assignment 1, provide a list of 3-4 versions of your research question and, if the case, the corresponding sub-questions.

#### Week 11

Session 1 & 2 - Literature review

**Required reading:** Randolph, J. (2009). A Guide to Writing the Dissertation Literature Review. Practical Assessment, Research & Evaluation, 14(13):1-13.

**Ungraded assignment 3 (post-class):** You should provide a list of 2-3 alphabetically organized sources, each with a bibliographic entry. There should be an annotation for each source: a short paragraph explaining what each particular source covers, what is the core of the argument and how it relates to (and is useful for) your project (about 500 words).

#### Week 12

Session 1 Case selection

Session 2 Research methods

**Required reading: TBD** Based on students' needs and preferences the two sessions are dedicated to exploring various research methods.

#### Week 13

Session 1 Research methods

**Ungraded assignment 4 (post-class):** After you have defined your research question and set specific parameters for your research the next logical step would be to think what methods you can use to answer your question. Why is this method suitable to answer your question? Which data do you plan on using, and how will you collect them? In other words, how will you conduct your research? (no word count).

Session 2 Constructing arguments

**Required reading: TBD**

#### Week 14

Session 1 Analysis and discussion

Session 2 Final presentations

**Week 15**

Session 1 Final presentations

Session 2 Federal Holiday

**Week 16 – Completion week**