PSJ 540-01/02 (CRN 1790, 2523):

Research Methodology for Peace Studies and Practice

Syllabus

(Version 2015-01-28; content subject to change)

Spring 2015

Section 1: Thursdays, 9:15am-12:05pm, KIPJ 214
Section 2: Thursdays, 1:00-3:50pm, KIPJ 214

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Office hours: W, 8:30am-12pm, 1-2:30pm

COURSE OVERVIEW

This course is intended for graduate students in Peace and Justice Studies and related social sciences. It is structured so as to introduce students to basic concepts of social science and program research, with a view to enabling students to evaluate the legitimacy and applicability of various research methods in particular settings within the Peace and Conflict field. There will be three primary “modules” within the course: (I) Introduction to Peace Studies research; (II) Research Methods; and (III) Program Monitoring & Evaluation.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to:

1. Generate relevant and answerable research questions;
2. Analyze the philosophical commitments, and practical and behavioral assumptions that underlie different types of social science research;
3. Identify, and evaluate the appropriateness of, different methodologies and types of evidence to construct arguments and test hypotheses;
4. Assess the quality of others’ research methodology and proposals;
5. Identify and assess various strategies employed for program research.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

Each section will meet once per week.
The structure of each session will differ depending on the material being presented and the preferences of the class. A typical session might be broken into the following components:

- Assignment review,
- Recommended reading presentations,
- Lecture,
- Discussion,
- Activity,
- Preview of the following week’s readings and/or assignments.

The following components will make up your final grade:

- **Class Participation.** Discussion-heavy classes depend for their effectiveness on the active engagement of all participants. That’s you. Please come prepared to discuss the readings, to wrestle with the ideas out loud (< 80 db, please), and to use the richness of your own experience to gauge how convincing/useful the ideas are. Readings are generally listed in descending order of priority, in case you fall behind.

- **Recommended Reading Presentation.** Each week, an average of 1-2 students will present a 10 minute synopsis of a recommended reading. If the recommended reading list includes an example of scholarship showcasing a theme or method in that week’s reading, one of the presentations will be on that. In the synopsis, identify (a) the research question, (b) the larger theory that is being extended, restricted, or negated, (c) explain and identify its assumptions/conditions, and (d) anticipate (but do not present) weaknesses in the argument. When the floor opens to questions, you may be pressed to respond to those weaknesses on behalf of the author.

- **Weekly Assignments.** Each week during the first two-thirds of the class, there will be one assignment due, detailed in this syllabus after each of the respective weekly readings lists. Assignments will be geared toward having you put the readings and ideas discussed in class into conversation with a research topic (or topics) of your choice. Each assignment will be due before the following class session (with the exception of the first session’s assignment, which is just to come prepared to talk). Moreover, you may be required to give a brief overview of your main points on request, so come prepared to do so. There will be no weekly assignments during Weeks 11-14.

- **15-20 Page Research Prospectus ***OR*** a take-home Article Critique.** You will be asked to read two articles that employ differing methods to examine a single issue. Your assignment will be to evaluate the strengths and limitations of each method employed, and their appropriateness given the subject matter. Additional guidance will be provided on Blackboard.

Grades will be calculated using the weighting percentages below:
**Assignment** | **Due Date** | **Points**
--- | --- | ---
Class Discussion | Throughout | 15
Recommended Reading Presentation | Variable | 10
Weekly assignments (5pts x 10) | Throughout * | 50
Final assignment | 12 May | 25

* Due prior to class time on the due date.

**CONDUCT**

There is a zero-tolerance policy for breaches of academic integrity in this class. Plagiarism will result, at minimum, in a zero for that assignment – and possibly for the course. It is incumbent upon you, the student, to familiarize yourself with university policy and abide by it.

This is a professional degree program, and you are expected to treat your classmates and professors professionally – after all, they will shortly be your colleagues in the Peace & Conflict field. Nowhere will this be more important than in our class discussions. The latter are intended to be helpful, and you are encouraged to critique your peers in respectful, constructive, and professional terms.

**TIMELINE**

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<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>29-Jan</td>
<td>Why do Peace Research?</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>5-Feb</td>
<td>Philosophical Commitments of Social Science Research</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>12-Feb</td>
<td>RQ Formulation, Research Design, &amp; Writing Proposals</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>19-Feb</td>
<td>Causation, Repeatability, Explanation, and Mechanisms</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>Measurement, Validity &amp; Reliability</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>5-Mar</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<td>Survey Research Designs, Quasi-Experimental Designs</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>19-Mar</td>
<td>Ethnographic, Participant Observation, and Action Research (Prof. Carpenter)</td>
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<td>26-Mar</td>
<td>Doing Fieldwork</td>
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<td><strong>EASTER BREAK</strong></td>
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<td>11</td>
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<td>Intro to M&amp;E Concepts</td>
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<td>Planning Tools</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>7-May</td>
<td>Evaluating Peacebuilding and Crisis</td>
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**COURSE MATERIALS**

Course materials will be made available on the Blackboard site. There are no required textbooks for this class.

**WEB RESOURCES**

[www.dmeforpeace.org](http://www.dmeforpeace.org), the learning portal for design, monitoring and evaluation for peacebuilding.

WEEKLY READINGS

Week 1. Why do Peace Research?

Key Topics:
- Course overview
- Why qualitative research?
- Why quantitative research?
- “Objectivity” and “values-based” research

Required:

Recommended:

Assignment (same day):
- Come prepared to talk for 3 minutes in a structured way about your own research interests. What question, case or phenomenon are you interested in studying? Why? Where? How might you go about it? Consider writing out talking points.
Week 2. Philosophical Commitments of Social Science Research

Key Topics:
- Philosophical commitments of social science research
- (Post-)Positivist vs./and constructivist approaches
- Behavioral assumptions in social science research

Required:

Recommended:

Assignment:
- Write a 1-2 double-spaced paper that states the epistemological perspective that you believe best encapsulates your approach to research inquiry. Why this and not other competing philosophical frameworks for inquiry? Make reference to the readings.
Week 3. RQ Formulation, Research Design, & Writing Proposals

Key Topics:
- Discovering a research question
- Designing qualitative research
- Triangulation
- A template for writing proposals

Required:

Recommended:

Assignment:
- Write a 2-3 double-spaced paper describing (a) the larger problem driving your research interest, (b) your research question, (c) how you discovered it, (d) the body of literature your research might speak to, and (e) preliminary thoughts on how you plan to answer this question. You will likely also want to consult a professor or advisor who may be advising your capstone or instructing the course for which your paper is destined.
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Week 4. Causation, Repeatability, Explanation, and Mechanisms

Key Topics:
- Causation vs. correlation
- Explanation vs. description
- Mechanisms vs. outcomes
- Type I and type II errors

Required:

Recommended:
- EX.: Petersen, R. (2001). Resistance and Rebellions: Lessons from Eastern Europe. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. [Ch. 1 (pp. 1-27) and Ch. 6]

Assignment:
- In 2 pages or less, clearly state (a) your research question (such as it is now stands – could also be expository); (b) three alternative hypotheses, including a null hypothesis; and (c) brief explanations of mechanisms motivating each.
Week 5. Measurement, Validity, and Reliability

Key Topics:
- Constructs vs. indicators
- Typologies of indicators
- Internal vs. external validity
- Units of analysis

Required:

Recommended:

Assignment:
- Building on last week’s assignment, restate (or revise) your research question and three hypotheses. Then create a table of five columns for the variables used to test your hypotheses: (1) construct, (2) measure, (3) class, (4) type, and (5) hypothesis. Fill in the table with the variables you now deem important for testing your research question.
Week 6. Case Studies

Key Topics:
- What is a case?
- What is the value of case study research?
- Case selection
- Comparative case method

Required:

Recommended:

Assignment:
- Write a double-spaced 2-3 page statement on the applicability of case study research to your own research topic. If you believe you will use a case approach, is it a single-case or comparative case? What will your selection criteria be for your case(s)? What within- or between-case variation is being explored? What weaknesses with internal or external validity do you foresee, and how might these be mitigated? If you do not plan to do case research, why not? (Touch on the same issues.)
- OR –

- Write a double-spaced 2-3 page paper on a scholarly book or major article that employs a case study design. What qualifies as a case here? What unit is chosen (Village? Nation? Firm or institution?)? How were the cases chosen, and according to what criteria? Does case selection here impact the robustness of the research findings? Why and how so? What generalizations, if any, can be drawn from the study?
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Week 7. Survey Research Designs, Quasi-Experimental Designs

Key Issues:
- Sampling typologies and application to qualitative research
- Types of survey and quantitative designs

Required:

Recommended:

Assignment:
- In no more than 1 single-spaced page, discuss the applicability of survey methods, RCTs, or quasi-experimental methods to your research project (choose just one). How would the chosen method be adapted to your needs, and what problems might you encounter in doing so? You may wish to search the World Bank’s Development Impact blog for further considerations.

- OR –

- Choose a scholarly book or article based on survey research, randomized control trials, or quasi-experimental methods. In no more than 1 single-spaced page, discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the chosen research design. For instance, in the case of survey research, you might discuss whether it was a longitudinal survey, or a one-shot survey, and how that affects the answer to the research question. Or you might discuss the sampling frame and possible selection bias. You may wish to search the World Bank’s Development Impact blog for further considerations.
Week 8. Ethnographic, Participant Observation, and Action Research

Key Topics:
- What is participant observation? Thick description? Ethnography?
- How do these differ from Participatory Action Research?
- Conditions when these approaches are appropriate
- Types of interviews

Required:

Recommended:

Assignment:
- Attend a public meeting a write a brief ethnographic description (no more than 3 pages) of what you observe. Examples might include a faculty senate session, a student rally, or a town hall meeting. Your assignment is to derive some insight into the event that a journalist would miss (or at least probably not report). For instance, what symbols, metaphors, or discourses were employed? Can the event be seen itself in metaphorical terms for a larger struggle or belief system? What kinds of social structures can be discerned, and how are they reified or challenged in this context?
Week 9, Doing Field Work

Key Issues:
- Gaining access
- Ethics of fieldwork
- Field notes

Required:

Recommended:

Assignment:
- In no more than 1 single-spaced page, present some of the most prominent logistical and ethical dilemmas you foresee to any potential field work required for your research project (or, if not applicable, your summer internship). Pay particular attention to the context of the conflict dynamic you seek to understand.

  – OR –

- Choose a scholarly book or article based on field research. In no more than 1 single-spaced page, present some of the most prominent logistical and ethical dilemmas you discern to have affected that research. Did the author recognize these dilemmas? If so, did she/he minimize or mitigate them, and how?
Week 10, Research Ethics

Key Issues:
- Design of ethical research involving human subjects

Required:
- **SKIM:** The USD IRB application

Recommended:
- Mackenzie, David, “How should we understand ‘clinical equipoise’ when doing RCTs in development?” Development Impact, Washington, D.C.: World Bank. Available at:

Assignment:
- Complete the CITI program’s human subjects research training and test, entitled “Social and Behavioral Responsible Conduct of Research Course: Social & Behavioral Research Investigators,” online at: https://www.citiprogram.org/default.asp. Save your results page in HTML or PDF format, and upload them to the corresponding Blackboard assignment.
Week 11, Introduction to M&E Concepts

Key Topics:
- Interrelations between program management, implementation, and M&E
- Defining “program,” “evaluation,” and “program evaluation” (PE)
- Rationale behind PE
- Objectives, milestones, benchmarks, and indicators
- Key Issues to be asked in PE
- Goal-attainment versus system model approaches to PE
- Strategy, sector, and process benchmarks specific to peace consolidation
- Results-Based Management

Required:

Recommended:
- As a resource: DM&E for Peacebuilding at http://dmeforpeace.org/.
Week 12. <TBD>

Week 13. Planning Tools

Key Issues:
- Understanding and developing the common program planning tools (results frameworks, logic frameworks (LogFrames), Gantt charts, and milestone charts)
- PERT/CPA techniques used in planning, monitoring and evaluating
- The link between tools and PE

Required:

Week 14. Evaluating Peacebuilding and Crisis

Key Topics:
- Indicators used in peace consolidation

Required:
- Take a look at: http://www.peacebuildingdata.org/

Recommended: