

Policy Research and Evaluation Design

Course Title	:	Policy Research and Evaluation Design
Course Code	:	SOC 506
Recommended Study Year	:	Taught Master Year 1
No. of Credits/Term	:	3
Mode of Tuition	:	Lecture-Tutorial
Class Contact Hours	:	3 hrs per week
Category in Major Prog.	:	Master of Social Sciences in Comparative Social Policy (International)
Discipline	:	Sociology and Social Policy
Prerequisite(s)	:	N/A
Co-requisite(s)	:	N/A
Exclusion(s)	:	N/A
Exemption Requirement(s)	:	N/A

Course Description

This course familiarizes students with the significance of research in the formulation of evidence-based policy and practice. It provides a comprehensive overview of the application of research across various phases of the policy-making process and elucidates the essential components of a rigorous research design. Students will engage with the philosophical foundations and academic and practical importance of various research methodologies and their implementation in policy research and evaluation aimed at facilitating social transformation.

Aims

This course aims to equip students with knowledge and skills to apply various research methods in policy research and evaluation.

Learning Outcomes (LOs)

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. explain the different stages of the research process and various approaches to social policy and evaluation research
2. formulate research questions and hypothesis for policy and evaluation research
3. appraise different qualitative or quantitative research methods and their appropriateness to particular research questions
4. critically discuss ethical issues involved in the research process
5. develop a research design for a policy research or evaluation
6. communicate and present the research question, design and findings professionally

Indicative Contents

Introduction	• Policy process • Research process
Research Methodology	• Philosophical worldviews • Research positionality • Research question and hypothesis • Conceptualization and measurement • Population and sampling • Validity and reliability
Science Communication	• Traditional and Non-Traditional Presentation and Dissemination of Research Findings
Ethics in Social and Policy Research	• Involvement of Stakeholders • Importance of Context • Conducting Research with Human Participants • Conducting Research with the “Vulnerable” • Empowerment and Challenges • Use of Artificial Intelligence in Research Writing
Research Designs	• Qualitative • Quantitative • Mixed methods • Comparative
Policy Research and Evaluation for Social Transformations	• Needs Assessment • Theory of Change • Social Impact Assessment
Proposing and Reporting Policy and Evaluation Research	• Proposal and report writing

Teaching method

The instructional components of this course, encompassing both lectures and tutorial sessions, will be characterized by a high degree of interactivity, collaboration, and practical engagement. Throughout the weekly lectures, illustrative examples pertaining to policy research and evaluation will be employed to elucidate the underlying concepts and methodologies associated with various research methods. In the tutorial sessions conducted on a weekly basis, participants will actively partake in discussions and activities designed to reinforce and apply the knowledge acquired during lectures.

Assessment Criteria

Continuous Assessment	100%
<i>Class Participation</i>	10%
<i>Group Fieldwork Project (team work)</i>	25%
<i>Group Poster Presentation of Research (team work)</i>	25%
<i>Individual Research Proposal</i>	40%

Class Participation (10%)	Class participation involves active participation in all class discussions as well as preparing class materials, such as lecture prompts, printed questions for in class discussion, and other materials assigned by a subject teacher.
Group Fieldwork Project (25%)	You will work with a team on a fieldwork project. Your task, with your team, is to choose a policy research or evaluation question of your choice and carry out fieldwork with appropriate method(s) that address the research questions. In your group report of no more than 5000 words in total excluding bibliography and appendix (word length will be adjusted based on your group size), you will cover the rationale of the methods chosen, steps in carrying out the fieldwork, reflection on ethics and challenges encountered as well as preliminary data analysis.
Group Poster Presentation of Research (25%)	Every group will design a poster to present their learning experience and discussions and show how the experiences are linked to their research topics. Grading will be based on the assessment rubrics provided in the last section of this course outline.
Individual Research Proposal (40%)	For this assignment, you will write a research proposal on a policy research or policy evaluation project of your choice. This output intends to prepare you for your Capstone Research project in Term 2. The research proposal should include literature review, research question and methodology and be of no more than 3500 words in length (excluding bibliography and appendix) . You need to provide details of the research design with a clear justification of your choice of methods. A draft of your survey questionnaire or interview guide (or any other materials showing preparation for fieldwork), your work schedule (as a table if you like), and any supporting tables and figures should be placed in the appendix of your research proposal.

Measurement of Learning Outcomes

Learning Outcomes	Assessment Method			
	Class Participation and Engagement	Questionnaire Project (teamwork)	Group Poster Presentation of Research (teamwork)	Individual Research Proposal
1. Explain the different stages of the research process and various approaches to social policy and evaluation research	☒	☒	☒	☒
2. Formulate research questions and hypothesis for policy and evaluation research	☒	☒	☒	☒
3. Appraise different qualitative or quantitative research methods and their appropriateness to particular research questions	☒	☒	☒	☒
4. Critically discuss ethical issues involved in the research process			☒	☒
5. Develop a research design for policy research or evaluation			☒	☒
6. Communicate and present the research question, design and findings professionally				☒

Required Course Readings

- Birkland, T. A. (2019). *An introduction to the policy process: Theories, concepts, and models of public policy making* (Fifth edition). Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group.
- Bryman, A. (2016). *Social research methods* (Fifth Edition). Oxford University Press.
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (Fifth edition). SAGE.

Supplementary Readings for Developing Research Skills

- Corbin, J. M., & Strauss, A. L. (2015). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (Fourth edition). SAGE.
- Creswell, J. W. (2015). *A concise introduction to mixed methods research*. SAGE.

Other Recommended Readings

- Becker, S, Bryman, A., and Ferguson, H. *Understanding Research for Social Policy and Social Work*, Bristol: The Policy Press, 2012.
- Bickman, L., and Rog, D. J (ed.), *The SAGE Handbook of Applied Social Research Methods*, Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc, 2009
- Buckingham, A., and Saunders, P., *The Survey Methods Workbook*, Polity Press, 2004.
- Byrne, D. *Applying Social Science: The Role of Social Research in Politics, Policy and Practice*, Bristol: The Policy Press, 2011.
- Czaja, R., and Blair, J., *Designing Surveys*, Pine Forge Press, 2005.
- David, M. (ed.), *Case Study Research*, London: Sage, 2006.
- Denzin, N.K., and Lincoln, Y.S. (eds.), *Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry*, London: Sage, 2003.
- Etzioni, A. 2008. The Unique Methodology of Policy Research in Moran, M., Rein, M. and Goodin, R.E. *The Oxford Handbook of Public Policy* Oxford: OUP, 2008, pp. 833-843.
- Epstein, M. J. and Yuthas, K. *Measuring and Improving social impacts: A Guide for Nonprofits, Companies and Impact investors*. San Francisco: BK Publishers, 2014.
- Healey, J., *Statistics: A tool of social research*, 8th Edition, Belmont: Wadsworth Cengage, 2009.
- Kee, C.H., Kwan, T., Chan, J. and Ng, T. *Introduction to Social Impact Measurement: Hong Kong Context*. Hong Kong: Fullness Social Enterprises Society Limited, 2016.
- King, G., Keohane, R.O., and Verba, S., *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*, Princeton University Press, 1994.
- Linstone, H.A., and Turoff, M. *The Delphi Method: Techniques and Applications*, Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1975.
- Ng, P., *Effective writing: a guide for social science students*, Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 2003.
- Punch, I., *Introduction to Social Research: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches*, 2nd Edition, London: Sage, 2005.
- Ragin, C.C., and Becker, H.S, *What is a case?: Exploring the foundations of social policy inquiry*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- Ragin, C.C., and Amoroso L.M., *Constructing Social Research: The Unity and Diversity of Method*, Los Angeles: Sage, 2011.
- Silverman, D., *Interpreting Qualitative Data: Methods of Analyzing Talk, Text, and Interaction*, 3rd Edition, London: Sage, 2006.
- Shadish, W.R., Cook, T. and Campbell, D. *Experimental and Quasi Experimental Designs for Generalized Causal Inference*, Belmont: Cengage, 2002.
- Van Maanen, John, Jesper B. Sørensen, and Terence R. Mitchell. "The interplay between theory and method." *Academy of management review* 32.4 (2007): 1145-1154.

Written Report Submission Guidelines

- For all written reports (including group fieldwork project and individual research proposal), you have to submit your works (**Font: Times New Roman, font size: 12, 1.15 spacing, moderate margins**) via **Turnitin on Moodle**.
- Please state clearly the following on the first page of the group fieldwork project: **name and student ID of all group members; course code & course name; topic/title; date of submission; and word count**.
- Please state clearly the following on the first page of the individual research proposal: **name and student ID; course code & course name; topic/title; date of submission; and word count**.
- Late submission will receive a 10% reduction in marks (cumulative) for each day past the deadline. Papers received more than 5 days after the deadline will not be marked.
- All citations and references should be given in the proper citation and reference format. The recommended citation style for this course is the **American Psychological Association (APA) 7th Edition** style.
- Number all the pages and check for grammar and spelling errors before submitting the paper.

Important Notes

- Emails with course information/updates will be sent as needed. This will be posted on Moodle and you are required to read and take the necessary actions.
- If you are struggling to meet the project deadline due to an emergency or mitigating personal circumstances, you have to report in writing, along with supporting evidence, to the course instructor and the Programme Office as soon as possible.
- Students are expected to spend a total of 9 hours (i.e. 3 hours of class contact and 6 hours of personal study) per week to achieve the course learning outcomes.
- Students shall be aware of the University regulations about dishonest practice in course work, tests and examinations, and the possible consequences as stipulated in the Regulations Governing University Examinations. In particular, plagiarism, being a kind of dishonest practice, is “the presentation of another person’s work without proper acknowledgement of the source, including exact phrases, or summarised ideas, or even footnotes/citations, whether protected by copyright or not, as the student’s own work”. Students are required to strictly follow university regulations governing academic integrity and honesty.
- Students are required to submit writing assignment(s) using **Turnitin** which will be made available by the course instructors in Moodle. To enhance students’ understanding of plagiarism, a mini-course “Online Tutorial on Plagiarism Awareness” is available on <https://pla.ln.edu.hk/>.
- Students are **encouraged** to utilize AI tools introduced in the course in a responsible and ethical manner, fully recognizing both their potential and limitations. Students can also integrate generative AI tools in their assignments strictly for brainstorming/ideation, grammar checks and enhancements but not on writing your assignments and other course deliverables. The instructor will be responsible for informing students about the university’s policy on academic integrity as well as course assessment requirements at the beginning of the course, including which assignment can and cannot make use of Generative AI tools.
- Students are **allowed to employ AI-enabled tools in their assignments if they declare such use**. The university expects students to uphold academic integrity at all times. For more details, students should consult the “Guidelines for Using Generative Artificial Intelligence (GAI) Tools¹ at Lingnan University”.

Assessment Rubrics

Marking rubric for Class Participation (10%)

	A; A- Excellent 100-80	B+; B; B- Good 79-65	C+; C; C- Pass 64-50	F Failure 49-0
Contributes to group meetings (25%)	<i>Helps group discussions move forward by demonstrating analytical thinking.</i>	<i>Offers new suggestions to advance the work of the group.</i>	<i>Shares ideas but does not advance the work of the group.</i>	<i>Does not share ideas.</i>
Facilitates the contributions of course participants (25%)	<i>Engages team members in ways that facilitate their contributions to group discussions by both constructively building upon or synthesizing the contributions of others as well as noticing when someone is not participating and inviting them to engage.</i>	<i>Engages team members in ways that facilitate their contributions to meetings by restating the views of other team members and/or asking questions for clarification.</i>	<i>Engages team members by taking turns and listening to others without interrupting.</i>	<i>Does not engage team members and fails to listen to others.</i>
Fosters constructive team environment (25%)	<i>Supports a constructive team climate by doing all the following:</i> <i>Treats team members respectfully by being polite and constructive in communication.</i> <i>Uses positive vocal or written tone, facial expressions, and/or body language to convey a positive attitude about the group and its work.</i> <i>Provides assistance and/or encouragement to team members.</i>	<i>Supports a constructive team climate by doing any two of the following:</i> <i>Treats team members respectfully by being polite and constructive in communication.</i> <i>Uses positive vocal or written tone, facial expressions, and/or body language to convey a positive attitude about the group and its work.</i> <i>Provides assistance and/or encouragement to team members.</i>	<i>Supports a constructive team climate by doing any one of the following:</i> <i>Treats team members respectfully by being polite and constructive in communication.</i> <i>Uses positive vocal or written tone, facial expressions, and/or body language to convey a positive attitude about the group and its work.</i> <i>Provides assistance and/or encouragement to team members.</i>	<i>Does not support a constructive team climate.</i>
Individual contributions outside of team meetings (25%)	<i>Completes all assigned tasks by deadline.</i> <i>Work accomplished is thorough, comprehensive, and advances teaching and learning in the group.</i> <i>Proactively helps other team members complete their assigned tasks to a similar level of excellence.</i>	<i>Completes all assigned tasks by deadline.</i> <i>Work accomplished advances the project.</i>	<i>Completes all assigned tasks by deadline.</i>	<i>Fails to complete assigned tasks by the deadline.</i>

Marking rubric for Group Fieldwork Project (25%)

Grade		Understanding of topic (20%)	Use of evidence (20%)	Critical analysis (20%)	Structure of argument (20%)	Writing and Referencing (20%)
A (85-100) A- (80-84)	Excellent	- Comprehensive understanding and coverage of issues. - Insightful and well-informed. - Clearly answers the question.	- Wide range of evidence used to support argument. - Thoroughly researched. - Use of primary sources.	- Excellent critical awareness of subject matter and current issues. - Shows original thinking and analysis.	- Clear structure. - Presents a convincing and well-developed argument.	- Thorough referencing throughout. - Uses references correctly. - Demonstrates excellent writing skills.
B+ (75-79) B (70-74) B- (65-69)	Good	- Clear discussion of relevant issues. - Shows good insight into the subject. - Answers the question.	Good use of evidence to support arguments.	- Goes beyond description. - Analyses material to develop argument.	- Clear structure - Develops a sound argument.	- Generally, uses references correctly but some parts less well referenced. - Competent writing skills.
C+ (60-64) C (55-59) C- (50-54)	Pass	- Shows some coverage and understanding of main issues. - Does not answer the question fully/directly enough.	- Adequate range of evidence used. - Could have drawn on more suitable evidence.	- More description than analysis in content. - Needs to draw material together to develop argument.	- The argument needs further development. - Structure needs more clarity.	- Some parts are not referenced correctly. - Writing skills could be improved.
F (49-0)	Failure	- Superficial coverage and significant misunderstanding of the issues. - Does not answer the question fully/directly enough.	- Relies on limited range of sources. - Has not been thoroughly researched.	- Too descriptive. - Needs to draw material together to develop argument.	- The arguments are not clear. - The structure is not clear. - Some repetition. - Little clear linkage from point to point.	- Referencing is not consistent. - Writing skills need considerable improvement. - Sentence structure needs work. - Need proofreading.

Marking rubric for Group Poster Presentation of Research (25%)

Criteria	Excellent	Good	Fair	Failure
	A (85-100) A- (80-84)	B+ (75-79) B (70-74) B- (65-69)	C+ (60-64) C (55-59) C- (50-54)	F (0-49)
The visual presentation of the poster is well designed to deliver information effectively (5%)	• Display attracts viewer's attention well. • Use of font size and variations of words are easy to read from an appropriate distance. • Poster is well organized and easy to follow. • Graphics and other visuals enhance presentation. • The poster is neat and appealing to look at.	• Display generally attracts viewer's attention well. • Use of font size and variations of words are generally easy to read from an appropriate distance. • Poster is generally well organized and easy to follow. • Graphics and other visuals generally enhance presentation. • The poster is generally neat and appealing to look at.	• Display is somewhat distracting. • Words are somewhat too small and variations are not enough to read from an appropriate distance. • Poster is somewhat disorganized and difficult to follow. • Graphics and other visuals somewhat enhance presentation. • The poster is somewhat redundant and confusing to look at.	• Not very visually appealing. • Use of font size and variations of word is distracting. • Poster is disorganized and difficult to follow. • Graphics and other visuals do not enhance the presentation. • The poster is redundant and confusing for readers.
The poster content demonstrates appropriate unstanding and critical reflection of conference presentations (10%)	• Great summaries of learning experiences in conference presentations and discussions. • Great reflection of conference contents by linking them with relevant course concepts and theories. • Great reflection of conference contents by extending them to students' research interests and social policy issues.	• Good summaries of learning experiences in conference presentations and discussions. • Good reflection of conference contents by linking them with relevant course concepts and theories. • Good reflection of conference contents by extending them to students' research interests and social policy issues.	• Fair summaries of learning experiences in conference presentations and discussions. • Fair reflection of conference contents by linking them with relevant course concepts and theories. • Fair reflection of conference contents by extending them to students' research interests and social policy issues.	• Poor summaries of learning experiences in conference presentations and discussions. • Poor reflection of conference contents by linking them with relevant course concepts and theories. • Poor reflection of conference contents by extending them to students' research interests and social policy issues.
The presentation of the poster and interaction with audiences are effective (10%)	• Demonstrating great understanding of the subject matter and the poster content; • Demonstrating great capacity to succinctly and effectively describe the group's learning and reflection to audiences; • Having great interaction with audiences and addressing questions of audiences effectively.	• Demonstrating good understanding of the subject matter and the poster content; • Demonstrating good capacity to succinctly and effectively describe the group's learning and reflection to audiences; • Having good interaction with audiences and addressing questions of audiences quite effectively.	• Demonstrating fair understanding of the subject matter and the poster content; • Demonstrating fair capacity to succinctly and effectively describe the group's learning and reflection to audiences; • Having fair interaction with audiences and addressing questions of audiences fairly effectively.	• Demonstrating poor understanding of the subject matter and the poster content; • Demonstrating poor capacity to succinctly and effectively describe the group's learning and reflection to audiences; • Having poor interaction with audiences and addressing questions of audiences effectively.

Marking rubric for Individual Research Proposal (40%)

Grade		Understanding of topic (20%)	Use of evidence (20%)	Critical analysis (20%)	Structure of argument (20%)	Writing and Referencing (20%)
A (85-100) A- (80-84)	Excellent	- Comprehensive understanding and coverage of issues. - Insightful and well-informed. - Clearly answers the question.	- Wide range of evidence used to support argument. - Thoroughly researched. - Use of primary sources.	- Excellent critical awareness of subject matter and current issues. - Shows original thinking and analysis.	- Clear structure. - Presents a convincing and well-developed argument.	- Thorough referencing throughout. - Uses references correctly. - Demonstrates excellent writing skills.
B+ (75-79) B (70-74) B- (65-69)	Good	- Clear discussion of relevant issues. - Shows good insight into the subject. - Answers the question.	Good use of evidence to support arguments.	- Goes beyond description. - Analyses material to develop argument.	- Clear structure - Develops a sound argument.	- Generally uses references correctly but some parts less well referenced. - Competent writing skills.
C+ (60-64) C (55-59) C- (50-54)	Pass	- Shows some coverage and understanding of main issues. - Does not answer the question fully/directly enough.	- Adequate range of evidence used. - Could have drawn on more suitable evidence.	- More description than analysis in content. - Needs to draw material together to develop argument.	- The argument needs further development. - Structure needs more clarity.	- Some parts are not referenced correctly. - Writing skills could be improved.
F (49-0)	Failure	- Superficial coverage and significant misunderstanding of the issues. - Does not answer the question fully/directly enough.	- Relies on limited range of sources. - Has not been thoroughly researched.	- Too descriptive. - Needs to draw material together to develop argument.	- The arguments are not clear. - The structure is not clear. - Some repetition. - Little clear linkage from point to point.	- Referencing is not consistent. - Writing skills need considerable improvement. - Sentence structure needs work. - Need proofreading.