Overview

The goal of this seminar is to help you complete a research project that satisfies degree project requirements and meets the needs of a client. This seminar and project will also help prepare you to conduct projects during your professional career. In a structured format, the seminar works through the stages of developing and executing such a project, while enabling you to learn from each other, from the literature on research methods, and from the instructor’s experience. Students will complete projects that span a variety of topics and methods, in areas that include policy analysis, program design, management, and evaluation. Assignments will keep you on pace to complete the final report by the end of the spring quarter. Upon successful completion, you will have learned to:

- Develop a research question that is feasible to investigate over two quarters and provide an answer your client will find valuable.
- Design a research project that gathers relevant data and uses appropriate methodologies to answer the research question.
- Work with a client to manage and meet expectations.
- Prepare a written report that clearly presents your research, findings, and recommendations.
- Prepare and deliver a concise and engaging presentation of your findings.

Expectations

Reading and written assignments must be completed prior to the class sessions in which they are noted below. You will regularly present your work in progress to the class, and offer constructive comments on others’ work, both in class and electronically. In addition, we will explore issues related to applied research through discussions of the assigned reading and possible presentations by invited guests.

The structure of the seminar will vary widely from week to week. Most weeks during the winter quarter we will meet as one group. These sessions will provide opportunities to work together as you craft your research question, negotiate the terms of your relationship with your client, select your research methods, gather and analyze data, and begin your written report. You should use these opportunities to try things out and think creatively and ambitiously. Unlike many other Evans School classes, there are no wrong answers in this class; there are only more or less useful and feasible research questions, more or less rigorous research methods, and more or less comprehensible and compelling written products and presentations. The goal of these class sessions is to provide you with a safe environment in which you can discuss your progress and receive feedback from your classmates and me so that you can refine and improve your ideas. I will create a supportive environment in which each of you feel comfortable discussing your work and receiving constructive feedback. In exchange, I expect that you come to each seminar prepared to discuss
your ideas and progress, and constructively and respectfully critique others’ ideas and progress. During weeks when we do not meet, which will mostly be during the spring quarter, you will be expected to work on your research or meet with your client, fellow students, or me. These weeks are not breaks. They are a time when you are expected to move your project forward.

Please keep in mind that you are undertaking a very large project, with the vast majority of the work occurring outside the classroom. One of your most important tasks is to decide how to manage this time so that you deliver your client an outstanding product at the beginning of June. You will work in the early part of the course on putting together a schedule and work plan, and your classmates and I will do our best to help you stay on that track. But it is your responsibility to decide how best to spend your time and ensure you are making adequate progress.

The Syllabus is Subject to Revisions

This syllabus is not a contract. It is subject to revisions as needed to improve the seminar content and to change assignments and due dates as the instructor deems appropriate.

Optional Books on Research Methods

The following books are not assigned for class. They provide guidance on how to develop high-quality research projects.


Assignments and Grades

Assignments must be posted to Canvas the day before class. Thus, if we are meeting on Friday January 8, the assignment due for that weekly meeting must be posted on January 7. I may give more precise times for particular assignments.

I will use the grades specified in the Student Handbook: 4.0, 3.7, 3.4, 3.2, 3.0, or 2.6. Please see the interpretation of these grades provided in the “Evans School Guidelines for Course Grades” in the MPA student handbook.

Your course grade will be based on the following components:

- (20%) In-class participation. Class participation means that you completed all the assignments and assigned readings before class and actively provide constructive feedback to your classmates during class. I will reduce your participation grade by .4 for every class you miss (which is one-tenth of a 4.0 for a ten-week quarter, on the presumption we will meet ten weeks total over the winter and spring quarters). To make up for a missed class you can complete an extra assignment to be specified at that time.

- (10%) First presentation. Your presentation will be graded in terms of how well you communicate your research question, methods, and progress.
• (10%) First draft of some chapters. You will be graded on the completeness of the draft, not its quality. There will be a 0.1 penalty for each day you are late in submitting this draft (i.e., if you receive a grade of 4.0 based on completeness, but turn it in one day late, your grade will be 3.9).

• (30%) First draft of complete report. You will be graded on the quality and completeness of this draft. There will be a 0.1 penalty for each day you are late.

• (20%) Final draft of your revised report. You will be graded entirely on the quality of the report, with a 0.1 penalty for each day you are late. The report must be complete. I will return it ungraded if it is not complete and final.

• (10%) Final presentation. Your presentation will be graded in terms of how well you communicate your research question, methods, findings, and recommendations. Prepare the presentation as if you are giving it to your client.

Community Conversation Norms

As you participate in class, please keep in mind these Evans School norms. As a professional school, we have a responsibility to communicate with each other – inside and outside of the classroom – in a manner consistent with conduct in today’s increasingly diverse places of work. We hold ourselves individually and collectively responsible for our communication by:

• listening carefully and respectfully;
• sharing and teaching each other generously;
• clarifying the intent and impact of our comments;
• giving and receiving feedback in a “relationship building” manner; and
• working together to expand our knowledge by using high standards for evidence and analysis.

Academic Integrity

As a student in this course, you acknowledge that you are a member of a learning community in the Evans School of Public Affairs that is committed to the highest academic standards. As a member of this community, you agree to uphold the fundamental standards of honesty, respect and integrity, and you accept the responsibility to encourage others to adhere to these standards. If you are uncertain about whether a particular action constitutes academic misconduct, please ask me for guidance before an assignment is due, or see the UW’s guidance on what constitutes academic misconduct at: depts.washington.edu/grading/pdf/AcademicResponsibility.pdf.

Online Resources

The Evans School has assembled some materials that you should review as you develop and complete your research:

• Capstone Project website: http://evans.uw.edu/myevans/students/capstone-projects-overview.
• Public Service Clinics website: http://evans.uw.edu/myevans/students/public-service-clinics
• For applied research methods, literature reviews, and high performing teams, see: http://evans.uw.edu/myevans/students/research-writing-and-team-resources
• List of award-winning DPs: http://evans.uw.edu/myevans/students/student-awards
The Final Report

A complete report is likely to contain most of the following elements. Exact content will vary based on the topic and type of report.

- Cover page, executive summary, and table of contents
- Introduction (with topic, client’s objective, research question, and key findings)
- Diagnosis of the problem, key factors (explanatory variables), and supporting literature
- Research methods
- Analysis
- Findings
- Alternatives and trade-offs
- Recommendations
- Expected consequences of implementing the recommendations
- Evaluation plan during and/or after implementation
- References section and appendices

Human Subjects Approval

If your project involves the collection of data about living individuals using surveys, interviews, observation, administrative data, or private information and you plan to share your findings beyond the Evans School or your client organization (as in a journal article), you must obtain Human Subjects approval prior to the collection of data. It cannot be done retroactively. If your project will be submitted only to the Evans School and your client organization (and the individuals studied are employees, clients, or other members of that organization), then you do not need to go through the Human Subjects review process.

Winter Quarter Schedule

Week 1 – Jan 8 – Project Design, Management, and Expectations

Read before class:

- The course syllabus.
- Review all links on the “Proposal to Presentation” web site.

Products due (one per team, posted on Canvas by 3pm on Jan 7):

- “Getting Started” assignment (posted on the course web site).
- Your client’s proposal to the Evans School (if applicable).

Class discussion: Getting started on your project, including communicating with your client, scoping the project and research question, and possible research methods.

Week 2 – Jan 15 – Librarian Guidance on Information Sources

Meet in the Allan Library (room TBA) for presentation by UW Public Affairs Librarian Emily Keller.
Read before class:

- “Literature Review.”
- “How to Prepare an Annotated Bibliography.”

**Week 3 – Jan 22 – What Good Capstone Projects Look Like**

Readings:

- Two award-winning capstone projects of your choice. (To find them, visit the [page](#) that lists the winners for the Narver, Pealey, and Public Service Clinics prizes. Then go to the [archive](#) to review two projects that won one of those three prizes.) As you read, develop a set of criteria for what makes a good degree project, including what makes it useful for a client.

Product due:

- One-page memo (by each student) of what you learned from the Capstone projects you read about what makes a good capstone project. Use bullets to highlight each point.
- Draft letter of agreement with your client (guidance and sample posted at [http://evans.uw.edu/myevans/students/proposal-presentation](http://evans.uw.edu/myevans/students/proposal-presentation)) or, for independent projects, copies of correspondence with your client about what your project will entail.

Class discussion: What you learned from reading past Capstone projects.

Remainder of class time: meet with your group and/or Craig.

**Week 4 – Jan 29 – Basic Research Methods**

Read before class:


Products due:

- Signed letter of agreement with client.
- A one- or two-page memo that states the type of research you plan to conduct and how you will conduct it (including data you will gather, interviews you will conduct, and other methods you will use).

Class discussion: Pros and cons of various research methods. What evidence you might gather for your own project. How you might analyze that evidence. Whether and how to seek human subjects approval.

Products due:

- First draft of annotated bibliography. (“Annotation” means a short paragraph after each bibliographic entry that specifies the content and usefulness of the source for your project.)
Class discussion: What you learned from your literature review. How what you learned influences your research design and methods.

**Week 5 – Feb 5 – Designing Interview and Survey Questions**

Read before class:

- **Basic guidance for survey design.**

Optional readings to further enhance your skills:


Products due:

- Memo with draft survey and/or interview questions, along with the population of individuals from which you will sample.
- Work plan with timeline through May (one per team). Samples available at [http://evans.uw.edu/myevans/students/proposal-to-presentation](http://evans.uw.edu/myevans/students/proposal-to-presentation).

Class discussion: Interview methods and survey designs.

**Week 6 – Feb 12 – No Class; Meet with Craig**

Product due: Revised survey and/or interview questionnaire.

No class: Meet with professor to discuss your research methods.

**Week 7 – Feb 19 – Progress Report Presentation**

Products due: Students present brief reports, with handouts.

Class discussion: Comments and feedback from students and instructor.

**Week 8 – Feb 26 – Draft Intro Chapter and Outline**

Product due: First draft of your intro chapter and an annotated outline of the rest of your report (to be posted by 5pm on Feb 25). Your intro chapter should lay out your research question, the motivation of your
report, the context and purpose of your project, and your methods and their rationale. After the intro chapter, append an outline of annotated chapters for the rest of your report. Note in your draft and outline how you plan to fill remaining gaps.

**Week 9 – March 4 – No Class; Meet with Craig**

Readings:

- Draft chapters and outlines from another group or individual (to be assigned). Read each document you are assigned twice. On the first reading, edit for grammar and style. On the second, put yourself in the shoes of the client. Imagine that you are receiving a report that begins with this introductory chapter. Does the chapter lay out its purpose effectively? Is the methodology compelling – will you believe the results? Does the outline contain all the additional information and analysis that the introductory chapter promises? Does it seem like it will provide what the client needs? Come to class with suggested edits as well as at least two concrete general suggestions for improving the organization or content.

Product due:

- Your comments on another person’s or group’s draft chapters.

**Week 10 – March 11 – No Class; Meet with Craig**

**SPRING BREAK**

**Spring Quarter Schedule**

**Week 1 – TBA – No Class; Meet with Craig as Needed**

Product due: First draft of entire report (with gaps to be filled and annotation of how they’ll be filled, including mock-ups of data tables to show how the data will be presented when gathered and analyzed).

Draft reports will be distributed among students for review and feedback.

Class discussion: Updates on projects, research approaches that are working, envisioned, or scrapped; how to draw findings, how to analyze findings.

**Week 2 – TBA -- Presentations**

Class discussion: Presentations of progress so far.

Product due: Comments on others’ draft reports.

**Week 3 – TBA – No Class; Meet with Craig as Needed**

**Week 4 – TBA – No Class; Meet with Craig as Needed**
Product due:

**Week 5 – TBA – Presentations**

Class discussion: Presentations of data analysis so far.

Product due: Second draft of entire report, with data analysis.

Draft reports will be distributed among students for review and feedback.

**Week 6 – TBA – No Class; Meet with Craig as Needed**

Product due: Revised second full draft sent to client and professor for review.

**Week 7 – TBA – No Class; Meet with Craig as Needed**

Product due: With luck, your completed report for submission for Evans School awards consideration.

**Week 8 – TBA – Practice presentations**

Videos (please watch all of them before and after making your slides):

- “Avoid Death by PowerPoint,” [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bOrHxRB3JrQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bOrHxRB3JrQ).
- “Presentations: Good/Bad Examples,” [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S5cIsusCPAE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S5cIsusCPAE).

Product due: Draft presentation that you will give to your clients.