

University of Montana  
Public Administration 506: MPA Applied Research Methods  
Online  
Three (3) Credit Hours  
Fall 2019 (August 26 – December 13)

**Instructor:** Professor Christina Barsky, Assistant Professor

**Classroom:** LAW 147

**E-Mail:** Christina.Barsky@mso.umt.edu

*E-mail is the most reliable way to reach me.* In general, I reply to messages within 48 hours (**or two business days**) of receipt. Please include **PUAD 506** in the subject line of your message (this increases my reply efficiency).

**Office Location:** LAW 149

**Office Telephone:** 406-243-2871

*You must leave a voice message for me to know that I have missed your call.*

**Office Hours:** In-person or virtually, by appointment

### **Course Description**

For many of us, research methods can be intimidating, yet exhilarating. Now more than ever, public administration must be able to use data to inform decisions. In general, public administrators are concerned with how to effectively pursue policy goals within the bureaucracy of government and non-governmental entities. In public administration's infancy, Luther Gulick called for a *science of public administration* (1937). This call sparked a debate centered on how the field approached research methodology: through a positivist lens or some other view. More than eighty years later, this contestation continues. The important question, however, is not concerned with what the best method for public administration research is, but rather the quality, usefulness, and applicability of that research. This course provides an overview of how research is approached in the public sector. In addition, this class is designed to elevate your skills as a social science researcher through the design and implementation of applied research projects.

### **Expectations for Student Learning for this Course & the University of Montana's MPA Program**

1. Explore how to incorporate research methods and inquiry into policy and practice
2. Formulate clear research questions, identify the research question(s) in reports and articles
3. Utilize quantitative and qualitative techniques when in decision-making and problem solving
4. Critically evaluate the role of power, representation, culture, diversity, and inclusion in the public sector
5. Demonstrate graduate-level writing, critical thinking, research, analytical, and public speaking skills

In exploring these learning objectives, this course will introduce and begin to develop core national (NASPAA) MPA competencies to **analyze, synthesize, think critically, solve problems, and make decisions.**

### **Required Course Materials**

- Pajo, Bora (2018). *Introduction to research methods: A hands-on approach*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Moodle required readings (noted with an asterisk in the course schedule)
- SPSS (a statistics software package available to University of Montana students).
  - We will discuss how to access this in class
- Watch, listen, and read professor updates and additional posted material (e.g., podcasts, research in the news)

For students interested in lowering their costs, I encourage you to consider using the [University's inter-library loan \(ILL\) program](#).

### **Course Expectations**

#### **Class Preparation and Participation:**

This course is designed to provide graduate students the foundations of social science research for the public and non-profit sectors. This can only be accomplished by engaging the material inside and outside of class. You should come to class prepared to engage in a productive dialogue, which means you should rigorously read and prepared the assignments.

**Attendance & Tardiness:**

You are allotted one absence for the semester. You can use this absence for any reason. Upon a second absence, you must meet with me to determine what extra assignments need to be submitted to make-up for the additional absence. Any more than two absences during the semester will result in serious consideration of whether the course should be dropped and attempted again in the future. If you are frequently late to class or leave early, you should expect to have your overall grade reduced.

**Laptop Computers, Tablets, & Mobile Phone Policy:**

Engagement in class requires that you silence your devices (*do not just put them on vibrate*) and not access them during class. Devices are distracting and should only be used to locate readings or upon my direction. Be mindful of the disrespect it shows your classmates and me if you choose to browse the Internet and social media instead of being present for our class.

**Using Moodle:**

You can find additional copies of the syllabus, readings, assignment instructions, grades, announcements, and other supports for this class on Moodle. Visit <http://umonline.umt.edu> to access the class.

**The Firing Option:**

When working in groups, members reserve the right to use the firing option. For members not meeting expectations, the group can seek remedy by first providing a written warning and engaging in consultation with the professor. If performance does not improve, the group can fire the underperforming member. Fired students will then have to conduct an additional research project individually, in addition to completing any remaining course assignments.

**Robot:**

If you are taking this course via robot, please ensure that you are near your modem, have a strong wifi connection, and enough bandwidth. You must have a webcam and microphone that work. Slides from presentations will be sent before class so remote students can follow and interact with the class. If you are participating via robot, you are expected to coordinate with a partner/group for assignments. Troubleshooting is your responsibility. If the robot fails, reconnect on your own so we limit disruptions.

**Guidelines for ALL Written Work:**

- You are expected to practice professional, graduate-level writing and will be evaluated on content, organization, writing/grammar, and following assignment instructions
- Work must be typed, double-spaced, utilize 12-point font, and have one-inch margins
- You are required to utilize proper and appropriate citations. This means parenthetical (in-text) citations and a reference page. (Any academic style guide is acceptable since public administration is multi-disciplinary, APA is preferred)
- Assignments are due on the date/time listed in the course schedule
- All assignments must be turned in electronically on Moodle in Microsoft Word (.doc or .docx files). If I am unable to open the document, you will not receive a grade. Submission of assignments via email will not be accepted unless specific arrangements have been made
- Collusion is not allowed for individual assignments and will be treated as an act of plagiarism

**Mastery-Based Learning (Course Grading):**

I employ the concept of mastery-based learning in this course. The idea is that you will achieve a high-level of understanding of our subject matter by progressing at the pace appropriate for your learning.

In this course, you can earn an A, B, or C (there are no pluses or minuses). Rather than assign scores for assignments throughout the term, your assignments will 'meet expectations' or 'need revision'. You will revise assignments that need revision as many times as necessary to meet expectations, before moving to the next course concept. In addition, I will provide written and/or verbal feedback on assignments within 10 business days. My feedback will include identifying strong elements of your work, drawing your attention to areas for improvement or expansion, questions for consideration, and suggestions to improve your knowledge of course competencies. All assignments for this course must be completed and meet expectations to pass the class.

To earn a B in this class you must:

- Meet the criteria for all assignments
- Attend all classes, arrive on time, stay for the duration of class, and be fully present
- Actively participate in class discussions and exercises
- Work collaboratively with your group
- Ask thoughtful questions
- Revise all assignments so they meet the course expectations
- Meet due dates for assignments that require them
- Follow graduate and professional writing guidelines

To earn an A in this course, you must do the above and:

- Turn in high-quality assignments the first time you submit them
- Produce ethical, creative, unique, and engaging assignments
- Demonstrate not only topic competency, but synthesis
- Employ problem-solving and individually investigate solutions to challenges as they present
- Receive feedback and critique in an open, constructive manner
- Demonstrate a commitment and interest in the course topic, applied project, and group work
- Show careful attention to detail that reflects editing and consideration for your audience

Earning an A in this course means that you have produced exceptional work. Your performance in all aspects of the course must be outstanding. I will let you know if you are in contention for an A in this course.

Please set an appointment with me to discuss any questions or concerns related to mastery-based learning. It is always better to talk sooner rather than later.

I will provide written feedback on each assignment. You are welcome to discuss any assignment with me before turning it in. Drafts should be first sent to the [UM Public Speaking and Writing Center](#).

**Help with Technology:**

Call UMLine by phone, 406-243-4999 or email [umonline-help@umontana.edu](mailto:umonline-help@umontana.edu) if technological problems arise. There is no on-call assistance during nights or weekends. I cannot provide IT support, so please contact the appropriate University staff if an issue arises.

**MPA Portfolio:**

Students enrolled as MPA degree students are required to complete a [portfolio](#) in their final semester of the program. It is your responsibility to keep track of assignment grades and feedback. Scan and save paper feedback. Screenshot or use your 'snipping tool' to save digital feedback in your files. If you have questions, contact me.

**Assessment of Subject Mastery (Assignments)**

This semester you will be evaluated on 1) participation and practice; 2) science to society; and 3) the practical data collection project.

**Participation and Practice**

During our first meeting we will decide as a class what a productive and engaged class looks like. In addition to defining good participation, we will outline the practices we do not value during our time together.

In addition to class participation, you will complete a number of in-class practice exercises. The exercises are designed so you practice some applied research skill and reflect on your learning. All class exercises and reflections must be completed to meet the minimum expectation for this class.

**Science to Society (outlines due by 4:00pm on Moodle the day of your presentation, see schedule)**

Throughout the semester, each student will use develop their critical research consumption and communication skills. Communicating science to society increasingly involves the use of data visualization. For this assignment, you will work individually to explore the role of data visualization and its effectiveness for communicating research. This assignment includes:

- Producing a one page, single-spaced full-sentence outline that showcases your understanding of the research question, strengths and weaknesses of the data visualization tool, and demonstrates your synthesis of course materials, lectures, and discussion
- Providing a 5-minute presentation in class on your article and tool

To complete this assignment, you will find a popular media from a reputable source that utilizes some form of data visualization to communicate its findings. For an example, see [“Extensive data shows punishing reach of racism for Black boys”](#) (*New York Times*).

Visit the ‘Science to Society’ folder on Moodle for articles on data visualization that will be helpful in producing your outline and presentation.

# More than one student will present each day. It is your responsibility be sure that you present different articles. You will sign-up for presentation days in class and I will add the calendar to a [Google Doc](#). You should add your article here as soon as possible so there is no duplication #

### **Practical Data Collection Project (6 components)**

Throughout the semester, you will complete a series of assignments that will enhance your comfort and knowledge of quantitative and qualitative research.

You **will work in teams of two or three** to complete these assignments. Public administration, and research in general, is collaborative. When working with others, be sure that all names appear on all assignments as you only need to submit *one* copy on Moodle.

Use this [Google Doc to sign-up](#) and indicate your team preference. *Only under extenuating circumstances will you be allowed to work on your own. Please contact me to discuss.*

For these assignments, you will need to identify an organization (public or nonprofit) that will serve as your research organization throughout this project. You are welcome to use your own organization. In addition, you will need to identify some problem or issue that you are seeking to inform decision-making about. This might be *what type of employee wellness program do our employees want* or *why don’t program participants attend financial education classes?* I encourage you to think about the courses you are taking in the MPA program and the issues that are of interest to you. Project assignments are noted as “PDCP” in the course schedule.

### **Part I: IRB Training (Due Sept. 9 at 4:00pm Mountain)**

Researchers of all kinds are required to maintain IRB certification and receive IRB approval for their research design. The University of Montana requires all research involving human subjects conducted by faculty, staff, or students engage with the University to be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to initiation. This is part of ethical research.

For this part of your research project, you must complete [section 1](#), [section 2](#), and [section 6](#) of the University of Montana’s [Online Research Ethics Course](#). Turn in a PDF of your certificates, showing that you have completed the assignment, in Moodle (Week 3).

# Please note that this certificate is *only* recognized at the University of Montana and affiliate campuses #

### **Part II: Organization and Research Question (Due Sept. 16 at 4:00pm Mountain)**

For this assignment, you will identify your organization and the research question. In 3-4 double-spaced pages:

- State your research question. Your question should be concise and comprehensive.
- Provide an overview of your organization
- Provide an overview of the problem or issue

I encourage you to look ahead and consider how your research question will lend itself to quantitative and qualitative data collection. You will be attempting to answer your question by conducting field work, so be sure you can collect the data necessary.

### Part III: Survey Instrument (Draft Sept. 30; Revision Oct. 7; Fielding Oct. 14)

For Part III you will draft your own survey instrument, test and revise, and collect data using the tool.

For this assignment, your team will draft a short survey tool that you will use to collect data in the field. Your survey should have no more than 10 substantive questions. Your survey can include additional demographic questions.

<b>Sept. 30 (Draft)</b>	<b>Bring 6 copies of the following <u>printed</u> to class on Oct. 1</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- A draft of your survey as a Word document, including the question language, question directions, numbering, and answer choices. Also identify where page breaks will occur.</li><li>- A narrative describing your sample and your survey distribution strategy</li></ul> Remember, your survey <i>must</i> include an informed consent page.
<b>Oct. 7 (Revision)</b>	<b>Submit a link to your Qualtrics survey and your narrative describing the sample and distribution strategy on Moodle by 4:00pm on Oct. 8</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- After receiving feedback last week, you will revise and build your survey tool in <a href="#">Qualtrics (online)</a></li></ul> You will need to request access to Qualtrics and log in with your NetID and password.
<b>Oct. 14+ (Fielding)</b>	I will test your online survey and determine if it meets expectations or needs revision. Once your survey meets expectations, you will distribute it and collect <i>at least 10</i> responses

You are expected to demonstrate survey best practices when completing this assignment. This includes following ethical standards, question design, question ordering, and general language, look, and feel.

# Since Part III and Part IV investigate the same research question, it is wise to consider what information is best collected quantitatively (survey) versus qualitatively (interview) #

### Part IV: Interview Protocol (Draft Due Oct. 21; Revision Oct. 28; Fielding Nov. 4)

For Part IV you will draft semi-structured interview protocol, test and revise, and field the protocol. Your interviews should seek to address your research question.

For this assignment, your team will draft a semi-structured interview protocol that you will use in the field. Your protocol should have between 6 and 8 substantive questions.

<b>Oct. 21 (Draft)</b>	<b>Bring 6 copies of the following <u>printed</u> to class on Oct. 21</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- A draft of your semi-structured interview protocol</li><li>- A narrative describing the individuals that will participate in your research, the interface you will use for your interviews (e.g., in-person, Zoom, telephone), and how you will collect the data (take notes, record).</li></ul> Remember, you <i>must</i> have a statement of consent. <u>Do not</u> include the names of your participants in the narrative, instead use identifiers.
<b>Oct. 28 (Revision)</b>	<b>Submit your revised interview protocol and fielding narrative on Moodle by 4:00pm on Oct. 28.</b>
<b>Nov. 4+ (Fielding)</b>	I will review your protocol and determine if it meets expectations or needs revision. Once your protocol meets expectations, you will utilize it to conduct <i>at least three</i> interviews.  <i>All students must conduct one interview.</i>

# Interview questions should get at things that are not best answered using survey research or secondary analysis. By using open-ended semi-structured interviews, you are able to dive deeper into your research topic #

### Part V: Analysis (Dec. 2, 4:00pm Mountain)

For this assignment, you will analyze the data you collected in order to address the research question. You will produce a comprehensive research report that in approximately 15 double-spaced pages provides:

<b>Top-Line Findings</b>	This section is structured like a research abstract or executive summary. It should include one or two sentences that relate to the sections below.
<b>Organization Overview &amp; Issue or Problem Overview</b>	This is your research question and context pertinent to your study.
<b>Methods</b>	In this section, you should examine how the data were collected. You should include a justification for the methodological approach. This might include the strengths of the approaches used, an explanation for the question design, and cite course material. This section is where you should include information on your sample and fielding strategies.
<b>Data Analysis</b>	This section is where you explain what the data find. Build and include appropriately sized tables and charts to illustrate your findings (do not use SPSS or Qualtrics charts/tables). Interpret your findings. Address what the data suggest about the research question.
<b>Conclusion, Recommendations, and Action Steps</b>	In the final section, you will include an assessment of the limitations of your research, including recommendations for others or future research. In this section you may address the disadvantages of the research methods used and propose alternative approaches. Address what decisions can be made based on your analysis. Address what conclusions can be drawn. Return to your research question to wrap up your findings in this section.

Include instruments, interview notes, and additional charts or tables in an appendix to your report. Include citations to course materials and other scholarly sources to support your work.

#### **Part VI: Presentation (Dec. 2, in class)**

During our final class meeting, each team will present their research findings to the class. I will circulate a sign-up for times part way through the semester.

In 8-10 minutes, each team will present the findings from their research project. Your presentation should include: an introduction/overview/hook; research question; methodology; background; discussion of data and results; analysis; conclusion.

You may use PowerPoint or Keynote but do so judiciously.

#### **Course Schedule**

You must stay up with the course readings and assignments in order to maximize your online classroom experience. Although this is a general outline of readings, the schedule is subject to change as the semester proceeds. Students will be notified of any changes or modifications to the course schedule.

The readings marked with an asterisk (\*) are available on Moodle, required, and organized by week. I encourage you to download readings at the beginning of the semester.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Readings &amp; Assignments</b>
<u>Week 1</u> (Aug. 26 – Sept. 1)	Course Overview Introductions The Purpose of Research	<u>Read:</u> Pajo Chpt. 1; Gravetter & Forzano*  <u>Due:</u> - <a href="#">Add your information to the PDCP topic and team Google Doc</a>
<u>Week 2</u> (Sept. 2 – Sept. 8)	<b>Labor Day Sept. 2</b> <b>No Class Meeting</b>	
<u>Week 3</u> (Sept. 9 – Sept. 15)	Problems, Formulating Research Questions, the Research Process, and Literature Reviews	<u>Read:</u> Pajo Chpt. 2 & 3  <u>Due:</u> - PDCP I (IRB certificates) turned in on Moodle by 4:00pm 9/9

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Research team and topic finalized and updated on Google by 4:00pm on 9/13</li> </ul>
<u>Week 4</u> (Sept. 16 – Sept. 22)	Conceptualizing a Quantitative and Qualitative Research Designs	<u>Read:</u> Pajo Chpt. 4, 11  <u>Due:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- PDCP II (Research Question) turned in on Moodle by 4:00pm 9/16</li> <li>- Science to Society Cirrus Group outlines due by 4:00pm on 9/16</li> </ul>
<u>Week 5</u> (Sept. 23 – Sept. 29)	Reliability, Validity, and Sampling	<u>Read:</u> Pajo Chpt. 5, 6  <u>Due:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Science to Society Cumulus Group outlines due by 4:00pm on 9/23</li> </ul>
<u>Week 6</u> (Sept. 30 – Oct. 6)	Data Collection: Surveys	<u>Read:</u> Pajo Chpt. 7  <u>Due:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <u>Bring 6 PRINTED copies</u> of PDCP III Draft to class (due at start of class)</li> </ul>
<u>Week 7</u> (Oct. 7 – Oct. 13)	Data Collection: Secondary Data	<u>Read:</u> Pajo Chpt. 8  <u>Due:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- PDCP III (Qualtrics link and narrative) due on Moodle by 4:00pm on 10/13</li> </ul>
<u>Week 8</u> (Oct. 14 – Oct. 20)	Data Collection: Observation and Focus Groups	<u>Read:</u> Cyr*; Center for Civic Partnerships*  <u>Due:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Science to Society Stratus Group outlines due by 4:00pm on 10/14</li> </ul>
<u>Week 9</u> (Oct. 21 – Oct. 27)	Data Collection: Interviews	<u>Read:</u> Rugg & Petre*; Whiting*; Gill et al.* <u>Due:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <u>Bring 6 printed copies</u> of PDCP IV Draft to class (due at start of class)</li> </ul>
<u>Week 10</u> (Oct. 28 – Nov. 3)	Qualitative Analysis	<u>Read:</u> Pajo Chpt. 12  <u>Due:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- PDCP IV (interview protocol and narrative) due on Moodle by 4:00pm on 10/28</li> </ul>
<u>Week 11</u> (Nov. 4 – Nov. 10)	Quantitative Analysis	<u>Read:</u> Pajo Chpt. 9 & 10 ( )  <u>Due:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Science to Society Lenticular Group outlines due by 4:00pm on 11/4</li> </ul>
<u>Week 12</u> (Nov. 11 – Nov. 18)	<b><i>Veterans Day Nov. 11 No Class Meeting</i></b>	
<u>Week 13</u> (Nov. 18 – Nov. 24)	Communicating Research	<u>Read:</u> Pajo Chpt. 13, 14  <u>Due:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Science to Society Arcus Group outlines due by 4:00pm on 11/18</li> </ul>

<u>Week 14</u> (Nov. 25 – Dec. 1)	<b>Research Conferences with Prof. B</b> <b>No Class Meeting</b>	
<u>Week 15</u> (Dec. 2 – Dec. 8)	Research Conference Presentations & Remembering Research Ethics	<u>Read:</u> Lewis-Kraus*; Singal*; Michelson* Johnson*  <u>Due:</u> - PDCP V due on Moodle by 4:00pm on 12/2 - PDCP IV delivered in class

### Classroom Policies

**Extra Credit:** There is no extra credit available in this course.

**Make-up Exams:** There is no exam for this course.

**Classroom Etiquette:** Should a student fail to act in an appropriate, professional manner, with their peers or the professor, they will be removed from course discussions.

**E-Mail Etiquette:** E-mail is an effective tool and a good way for you to reach out to me with questions, but it does not replace office hours. If you have involved questions about course materials or your performance, please set up a time to meet with me.

**Incompletes or Withdrawals (“W”) from the Course:** If for some reason the course is not working out for you, please adhere to the University’s add/drop [policies](#). See the MPA Student Handbook for information about incompletes.

**Late Assignments:** Students are expected to submit all work on the date specified on the course calendar. *Any exception must be approved by me 72 hours before the date in question.* Students must complete all assignments to receive a grade for the course. Assignments turned in late will result in a reduction of the student grade by 10% every two days.

**University Attendance Policy:** Please review the course participation and attendance policy (above). Students who are registered for this course but do not attend the first two class meetings may be required by the professor to drop the course. This rule allows for early identification of class vacancies to permit students on the course waitlist to add classes. Students not allowed to remain in the course must complete a drop form or drop the course via CyberBear to avoid receiving a failing grade. Students who know they will be absent should contact the professor in advance.

**Wikipedia:** The “Truth by Consensus” is not reliable (and sometimes not valid). Wikipedia should not be cited in any assignment. Rather, you should become comfortable citing scholarly research and peer-reviewed sources as a graduate student at the University of Montana.

**Academic Dishonesty (Plagiarism):** Students must follow the University’s policies for academic dishonesty. More information can be found in the [Student Code of Conduct](#). All work submitted must be your own. Duplicated work (e.g., work completed for another class) will be considered self-plagiarism. Acts of academic dishonesty will result in a grade of zero (0) for the assignment. Moreover, acts of plagiarism will be reported to the Academic Court. To avoid plagiarizing, cite each reference or source (direct quotes, paraphrases, *and* ideas) you use and give proper credit for the ideas, opinions, and findings of others. When using the direct quotes, use quotation marks and appropriate citation (e.g., APA) that include the page number and work’s title.

**Moodle:** This course is supported by Moodle. Please refer to the site regularly for additional readings, supplemental material, announcements, grades, assignment submissions, or updates to the schedule. When submitting assignments on Moodle, students should attach Microsoft Word .doc or .docx files.

**Sensitive Course Materials:** Advanced degree programs seek to expand and challenge student assumptions, worldviews, and conceptions. Therefore, we engage with a wide range of material that do not necessarily affirm personal or broadly accepted understandings, ideas, and beliefs. Students are encouraged to discuss these matters with the professor.

**Disability Assistance:** The University of Montana assures equal access to instruction through collaboration between students with disabilities and instructors. For more information, visit [Disability Services for Students](#). If you think you may have a disability adversely affecting your academic performance, and you have not already registered with Disability Services, please contact DSS in Lommasson Center 154 or call 406/243.2243. As your professor, I will work with DSS to provide an appropriate modification.

**Cultural Leave Policy:** The University of Montana Cultural and Ceremonial Leave Policy states: “Cultural or ceremonial leave allows excused absences for cultural, religious, and ceremonial purposes to meet the student’s customs and traditions or to participate in related activities. To receive an authorized absence for a cultural, religious or ceremonial event the student or their advisor (proxy) must submit a formal written request to the instructor. This must include a brief description (with inclusive dates) of the cultural event or ceremony and the importance of the student’s attendance or participation. Authorization for the absence is subject to approval by the instructor. Appeals may be made to the Chair, Dean or Provost.



The excused absence or leave may not exceed five academic calendar days (not including weekends or holidays). Students remain responsible for completion or make-up of assignments as defined in the syllabus, at the discretion of the instructor.”