



Texas A&M University
RPTS 615: *Analytic Techniques in RPTS* (3 hours); Fall 2011
Thurs 3:55-6:55pm
109 AGLS Building

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Office hours (4:00-5:00pm MW) or call

REQUIRED TEXT:

Russell, B.H. (2000). *Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. Other readings as assigned, of which some are provided to you and others you may have to locate and track down.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

The purpose of this course is to provide you with a basic background in research methods as well as strategies for planning, designing, evaluating, and applying research within a social science framework. In addition, a secondary component of this course is to guide you through the numerous phases of the research design as you begin to draft a research proposal.

OBJECTIVES:

- ❖ Explore the intellectual roots of social science
- ❖ Learn the vocabulary of social research
- ❖ Isolate a research problem and formulated specific hypotheses and/or questions
- ❖ Compile a literature review
- ❖ Develop a research design
- ❖ Explore strategies for collecting and analyzing quantitative & qualitative data
- ❖ Draft a plan for data analysis
- ❖ Learn about and critically evaluate peers' research projects
- ❖ Integrate each component of the research design into a draft of a research proposal

COURSE FORMAT:

This course is designed to familiarize you with numerous aspects of research methods. Each week you will learn of a new topic and in order to understand each particular topic, you will construct a piece of the research design puzzle = a research proposal. Class sessions and assignments will help facilitate this process. Near the end of the semester, you will compile and synthesize these segments, and submit a draft of the proposal. The final paper will be a product of comments you received from your peers, the instructor, and your advisor throughout the semester. **DO NOT BE FEARFUL THOUGH, WE WILL WORK THROUGH THE PROCESS – ONE PIECE AT A TIME!**

A spirit of collaborative learning will guide every step we take. You will learn from your peers, and they will learn from you.

EACH CLASS MEETING: Every week, we will take a step further and discuss a new concept, method, or tool in the proposal writing process. Each meeting will consist of a *lecture/discussion* portion as well as a *proposal workshop* portion (in which you will have the opportunity to talk with each other about your projects). You should come to class prepared to discuss the assigned reading for that particular day. For the workshop portion—sometimes you will work in pairs; sometimes, in groups of 3-4, depending on the assignment that week. We will try to form groups according to research topics and methodological approaches. Writing assignments will be due each week at a time we determine in class.

PEER EVALUATIONS: In addition to completing your own assignments, you will be asked to evaluate and critique each others' work thoughtfully and carefully. Occasionally, you will be given a set of questions to answer about your peers' work.

FINAL RESEARCH PROPOSAL: At the end of the semester, you will have completed a revised, fully-developed project proposal, which will include the following:

- I. Problem statement
- II. Theoretical background (or literature review)
- III. Hypotheses and/or research questions
- IV. Research Design
- V. Sampling strategy
- VI. Methods for data collection
- VII. Plan for analysis
- VIII. Significance of research

QUIZZES: Two quizzes (worth 15% each) will be given throughout the semester. Each will be in-class and will be open-notes and open-book.

FINAL EXAM: A final take-home exam will be given. It will be open-notes, open-book, open consultation with your peers, and all questions will be based on your readings and course discussion.

COURSE EVALUATION:

There are four major components you will be graded on for this course:

Completion of all assignments and peer reviews	30%
Final proposal	25%
Quizzes	30%
Final exam	15%

ATTENDANCE:

As this is a graduate seminar, your regular attendance and active participation are absolutely required. If you miss class 1-2 times for unexcused reasons, your grade will drop by one letter. If you miss 3 times for unexcused reasons, your grade will drop by two letters. If you miss more than 3 times, well, you'll fail. To request an excused absence, please meet with me in advance.

CLASS SCHEDULE:

September 1

Introduction and initial discussion of research topics and plans for the semester

Assignments for next week:

- Read Bernard (2000), "About Social Science," p. 1-25
- Write Initial statement of research topic or interest

September 8

Discussion of research topics and plans for the semester and discussion of social science, science philosophy, epistemology

Assignments for next week:

- Read Bernard (2000), "Foundations of Social Research," p. 29-60
- Read and critique example proposal(s)

September 15

Lecture/discussion: *Variables, measurement and concepts, operational definitions, operationalizing variables, levels of measurement, units of analysis, and last but not least, reliability and validity*

Workshop: What makes a good proposal? (based on your individual critiques from last week)

Assignments for next week:

- Review Bernard (2000), p. 29-60
- In one example proposal, identify: units of analysis, independent/dependent variables, concepts, operational definitions
- Identify and write as many of these as you can for your own proposal

September 22

QUIZ ONE (at beginning of class covering Sept 1, 8, and 15 material)

Workshop: Identifying variables and units of analysis (based on your assignment from last week)

Assignments for next week:

- Read Bernard (2000), "Preparing for Research," p. 65-87
- Write 2-3 types of research topics in your subject (modeled on p. 82-87)
- Meet with advisor and compile brief write-up of meeting

September 29

Lecture/discussion: *Research process, ethics in research, role of theory in research, guide to choosing research problems, & last but not least drafting research questions*

Workshop: Drafting research questions (based on your assignment last week creating types of research topics) and tracking down sources (navigate Google Scholar and team race)

Assignments for next week:

- Read Beins (2009), p. 79-89 and Riddick & Russell (2008), p. 49-66, each concerning literature reviews
- Create annotated bibliography of 15-20 academic sources on your topic

October 6

Lecture/discussion: *Literature reviews*

Workshop: Discussions of theory and literature (based on your formulated annotated bibliography)

Assignments for next week:

- Read Riddick & Russell (2008), p. 139-163 for overview of research designs
- Read Creswell and Plano Clark (2007), p. 58-88 for mixed methods designs
- Build on your annotated bibliography with 8-10 additional academic sources
- Draft a problem statement and research question

October 13

Lecture/discussion: *Research designs...research questions guide your design!!!*

Workshop: Discussions of problem statements and research questions (based on your assignment from last week)

Assignments for next week:

- Read Bernard (2000), "Sampling," p. 143-183
- Turn annotated bibliography into first draft of narrative literature review (or theoretical background)

October 20

QUIZ TWO (at beginning of class covering Sept. 22, Sept. 29, October 6, and October 13 material)

Lecture/discussion: *Forms of sampling*

Workshop: Brainstorming sampling strategy

Assignments for next week:

- Read Bernard (2000), "Interviewing," p. 189-222
- Read Henderson & Bialeschki (2002), p. 183-196
- Draft a sampling strategy

October 27

Lecture/discussion: *Qualitative data collection: Everything you need to know about interviewing*

Workshop: Discuss proposed sampling strategy (based on your assignment from last week)

Assignments for next week:

- No READING! Yippie.
- Pulling it together: Problem statement + literature review (or theoretical background) + research hypothesis or question + research design (qual, quant, mixed methods, experimental) + sampling

November 3

Lecture/discussion: *Quantitative data collection*

Assignment for next week:

- Read Schutt (2009), "Survey Research," p. 255-310
- Draft methods for data collection (how data to be collected, when, where, how long, type of instrument to be used)
- Meet with advisor and compile brief write-up of meeting

November 10

Brief meeting. No lecture.

Assignment for next week:

- Read Krueger and Casey (2009), "Moderating Skills [for Focus Groups]," p. 85-112
- Read "Methods for Conducting Educational Needs Assessment: Nominal Group Technique (2008)," p. 1-3
- Read Okoli and Pawlowski's (2004) article, "The Delphi Method as a Research Tool..." p. 15-29
- Read Henderson and Bialeschki (2002), "Observations," p. 197-217 and "Unobtrusive Methods," p. 211-218
- Prepare draft of interview script, survey instrument, and/or other data collection materials
- **Take-home exam distributed**

November 17

No Class. I will be away on a research project.

November 24

Thanksgiving – No class, enjoy yourself!

December 1

Lecture/discussion: *Alternative forms of data collection*

Workshop: Group reviews and critiques

Assignments for next week:

- Read Bernard (2000), “Qualitative Data Analysis I: Text Analysis,” p. 437-469.
- Read Bernard (2000), “Univariate Analysis,” p. 501-540 and “Bivariate Analysis: Testing Relations,” p. 545-607 each concerning quantitative data analysis

December 6 (Redefined day)

**** Take-home exam DUE at beginning of class****

Lecture/discussion: *Overview of qualitative and quantitative data analysis*

Assignment for next week:

- Read Babbie (2010), p. 119-120 and Locke, Spirduso, and Silverman (2000), p. 119-130 each on presenting full draft of proposal)
- Complete a full draft of your proposal: problem statement, literature review (or theoretical background), research question or hypothesis, research design, research methods (e.g., sampling strategy, data collection techniques) and data collection materials (e.g., interview script, survey instrument)
- Submit full copy to your advisor and arrange a meeting time to discuss your work...very quick turnaround...Final paper due December 9th.

December 9

**** Final Research Proposal DUE in my office by 5:00pm ****

The instructor reserves the right to alter the course timeline and syllabus overall as necessary