

PUBP 6112 Syllabus

Research Design in Policy Science

Fall 2026

General Course Information

Description

I am pleased to have this opportunity to work with you this semester as we explore the vital role that research design plays in the analyses and processes associated with public policy. This course provides a comprehensive overview of the analytical frameworks and methodologies required to design, evaluate, and implement public policy research. It emphasizes how real-world social problems get transformed into testable research questions and how to select appropriate qualitative and quantitative approaches. The curriculum covers experimental, quasi-experimental, and non-experimental designs, emphasizing how to establish causal relationships, isolate policy impacts, and interpret empirical results in ways that meaningfully inform public decision-making. Key topics include conceptualization and measurement, operationalizing variables, selecting analytical frameworks, and mitigating threats to internal and external validity.

The course also addresses the practical and ethical dimensions of conducting research. It covers data collection techniques ranging from surveys to large administrative datasets and the protection of human subjects through a training module on Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines in social and behavioral research. Through real-world policy studies and the development of original research proposals, students assess the trade-offs inherent in different methodological choices and evaluate how those choices shape the strength, credibility, and policy relevance of research findings. Ultimately, the course prepares students to produce and critically consume evidence-based research that supports strategic decision-making and effective public governance.

Course Goals and Learning Outcomes

After completing this course, you should be able to:

- Identify and critically evaluate elements of effective research designs.
- Formulate research questions, theories, and testable hypotheses.
- Distinguish between descriptive, predictive, and causal questions.
- Explain key design approaches and their interrelationship.
- Critique the credibility of academic and policy studies.
- Understand the ethical issues concerning the protection of human subjects in research.
- Effectively draft and communicate research proposals.

Course Requirements & Grading

We will use the course website on Canvas for accessing (and updating) the syllabus, all written assignments, as well as grading and assignment feedback. Please consult these materials first, then reach out with

questions. Below are the major assignments that you will engage in as part of this class. All written work done for this class will be submitted for grading through the Assignments pages of the class Canvas site. Situations may arise where you may need more time to complete and submit assignments due to health-related or other issues. Email me in those situations prior to being late for accommodation appropriate to your circumstance.

Assignment	Date	Weight (Percentage)
Mid-term Exam	10/15	20%
Five Homework Assignments (4% each)	Various	20%
Final Research Proposal (written)	12/8 by 5pm	20%
Five written proposal milestones (1% each)	Various	5%
Proposal Presentation (oral)	12/3 and 12/8	10%
Two Research Peer Reviews (5% each)	Various	10%
IRB training	9/15	5%
Class Participation	Cumulative	10%

Class Participation

One of my goals is to foster a learning community with our class. Your participation is vital to creating a healthy community. To encourage this, I assess your participation in the class throughout the term. Class participation is based upon the following factors: attendance, participation in class discussions, and the quality of your contributions when participating. You are expected to complete all required readings for this class by the due date listed on the syllabus. Discussion in class will depend heavily on the readings you have completed for that day's class.

Grading Scale

Your final grade will be assigned as a letter grade according to the following scale:

A	90-100%
B	80-89%
C	70-79%
D	60-69%
F	0-59%

Course Materials

Course Textbooks

The following textbooks will need to be purchased (e.g., Amazon) or obtained from another source (e.g. the library):

[R] Paul R. Rosenbaum. *Causal Inference*. The MIT Essential Knowledge Series, The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 2023.

[GT] Rachel Glennerster and Kudzai Takavarasha. *Running Randomized Evaluations: a practical guide*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 2013.

You are not required to purchase these books. I will make the reading assignments available through Canvas.

[AP] Joshua D. Angrist and Jorn-Steffen Pischke. *Mastering Metrics: The Path from Cause to Effect*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 2015.

[KKV] Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba. *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference In Qualitative Research*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 1994.

[KL] Kevin B. Smith and Christopher W. Larimer. *The Public Policy Theory Primer*. (3rd Edition). Routledge, New York, NY, 2018.

[SCC] William R. Shadish, Thomas D. Cook, and Donald T. Campbell. *Experimental and Quasi-experimental Designs for Generalized Causal Inference*. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, MA, 2002.

[W] Jeffrey M. Wooldridge. *Introductory Econometrics: A Modern Approach*. (5th Edition). South-Western Cengage Learning, Mason, OH, 2013.

[C] Scott Cunningham. *Causal Inference: The Remix*. Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, 2026.

Additional Materials/Resources

Additional readings and materials will be made available to you through the class Canvas home page.

As a member of this class, you have access to the class Canvas site. Links to course readings are available on that site. So too is information on assignments and exams. Please notify me right away if you have any problems.

Course Policies, Expectations, & Guidelines

To help us create an active, respectful learning environment I encourage us to follow the Georgia Tech's statement on Student-Faculty Expectations (see <https://catalog.gatech.edu/rules/21/>). The following policies, expectations, and guidelines are intended to help foster this learning climate.

Attendance

It is important that you attend all class sessions. I do note who is attending each class session and who is not. That is one of the important elements that contributes to your class participation grade (see Class Participation under the Description of Graded Components). Here is a link to Georgia Tech's statement on class attendance: <https://catalog.gatech.edu/rules/4/>. At the end of the semester, I will add up any unexcused absences and deduct points from your class participation grade. For every three unexcused absences your class participation grade will drop a letter grade. Please work with me to keep your unexcused absences to a minimum.

Absences. A student may miss class on occasion due to medical issues, career-building opportunities, family events, or religious observances. I ask that you let me know of these events prior to your absence so that I can record an excused absence.

Georgia Tech has a web page that describes the expectations, rights, and responsibilities of students, instructors, the Office of Student Life, and health care providers with regards to absences. The information is intended to give students better directions as to how they should proceed to notify instructors when they are ill and need to miss class, and what kind of documentation they should provide and to whom. You can find the Georgia Tech policies at the following web page: <http://www.catalog.gatech.edu/policies/student-absence-regulations/>. Please note that I do not require medical documentation for absences due to illness. If you experience a more serious condition that leads to more than a week of absences, then let's discuss your options ranging from working with me to access course material and notes from class discussions to withdrawing from the class.

Health Etiquette. Relatedly, I would like everyone to be generally mindful of everyone else and, as much as possible, to engage in safe and healthy practices - such as using a mask when necessary.

Honor Code

The Academic Honor Code is a student initiative that became an official Institute policy in 1996. The objective of the Academic Honor Code is to increase academic integrity and strengthen trust in the Georgia Tech community. Students enrolled at Georgia Tech signed an agreement acknowledging their awareness of the Academic Honor Code. The standard of conduct for this course is the Georgia Tech Honor Code, which aims to cultivate a community based on trust, academic integrity, and honor. Be sure to review the Honor Code at <https://catalog.gatech.edu/policies/honor-code>. Discussion is encouraged on homework assignments and projects. However, you are responsible for completing individual assignments independently. Plagiarism is avoidable and unacceptable. Take some time to review the following website produced by Indiana University on how to recognize plagiarism: <https://plagiarism.iu.edu/overview/index.html>. While breaches of academic honesty are not expected in this course, they will be dealt with in accordance with Georgia Tech policy, should they occur.

Institute Values

We aim to uphold the Institute's values (<https://strategicplan.gatech.edu/values>) in this course, which will support the cultivation of a high-quality learning environment. All of this will occur with everyone's commitment to upholding these values. Be sure to give me feedback on what works as we move forward and let's aim collectively to cultivate a high-quality, supportive, and fun learning environment. Patience, kindness, respect, and other similar considerations go a long way in creating a high-quality learning environment.

Tech is committed to equal opportunity in education and employment. The Institute does not discriminate against individuals based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, or veteran status in the administration of admissions policies, educational policies, employment policies, or any other institute-governed programs and activities.

To maintain a safe learning environment that fosters the dignity, respect, and success of students, faculty, and staff, Tech prohibits discriminatory harassment, which is unwelcome verbal, nonverbal, or physical conduct directed at any person or group based upon race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, or veteran status that has the purpose or effect of creating an objectively hostile working or academic environment.

Faculty Responsibilities for Reporting. "Responsible Employees," which includes faculty, instructors, TAs, administrators, and other persons in positions of authority, must report sexual misconduct. As a Responsible Employee, if you are aware of or told about alleged sexual harassment, sexual violence, or other discrimination, including sexual, regarding a student or another employee, you **MUST** report these claims to the Title IX Coordinator or one of the designated Deputy Title IX Coordinators. Similarly, I must report all concerns about students who may engage in harm to themselves or others.

Special Accommodations and Disability Services

Your experience in this class is important to me. Georgia Tech complies with the regulations of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and offers accommodations to students with disabilities. If you have already established accommodation with the Offices of Disability Services, please communicate your approved accommodation to me at your earliest convenience so we can discuss your needs in this course. If you have not yet established services through Disability Services, but have a temporary health condition or permanent disability that requires accommodations (conditions include but are not limited to mental health, attention-related, learning, vision, hearing, physical, or health impacts), you are welcome to contact Disability Services at 404-894-2563 or dsinfo@gatech.edu or disabilityservices@gatech.edu. Disability services offer resources

and coordinate (with students and their instructors) reasonable accommodation for students with disabilities and/or temporary health conditions.

Wellness, Mental Health, and Stress

Georgia Tech can be stressful. “At Georgia Tech, we are concerned about your overall physical, social, and mental well-being. A comprehensive list of wellness related resources has been compiled and maintained by the Office of the Vice President for Student Engagement and Well-being (student-resource-guide.gatech.edu)

When channeled properly stress can lead to new understanding, skill development, or discoveries. However, I want to know if you are experiencing negative forms of stress that are leading you to consider inappropriate approaches to your studies or harm to yourself or others. Georgia Tech has a variety of resources available (see <https://mentalhealth.gatech.edu/resources/students/student-mental-health-resources>) including 24/7 crisis support (see <https://mentalhealth.gatech.edu/clinical-services/get-help-now>) as well as access to virtual mental health providers.

Student Academic Success Resources. Graduate students at Tech have developed a list of 9 tips for success. These can be found at [Tech Grad Students](#).

Student Use of Mobile Devices in the Classroom

Laptops and other mobility devices can be used in this class. There may be sessions where you will want to access the Georgia Tech Library and government databases as part of the class activities. I ask that you use these resources constructively and productively.

Course Modality and Digital Etiquette

The course will be conducted through in-person meetings. If there is a need to hold classes online at any point in the semester, we will pivot to online learning. In an online learning environment, I would appreciate you turning on your camera at the beginning of class to acknowledge and greet one another, as well as during Q&A and discussion sessions.

Generative Artificial Intelligence

One of the fastest changing policy landscapes at Georgia Tech is related to generative artificial intelligence. This fast-emerging technology needs to be incorporated into our approaches for developing research methods and problem solving in public policy. Here is the link to Georgia Tech’s current thinking on AI: <https://oit.gatech.edu/ai/guidance>. Please note that use of the popular DeepSeek large language model is prohibited for use at Georgia Tech.

I treat AI-based assistance, such as ChatGPT and Copilot, the same way we treat collaboration with other people: you are welcome to talk about your ideas and work with other people, both in and outside of class, as well as with AI-based assistants. However, all work you submit is your responsibility and cannot be fully written by AI. You can use AI to help structure and express; however, any use of AI must be acknowledged with sufficient details to allow a person to understand AI’s role. For instance, **“This document was developed and written with the assistance of Anthropic’s Claude AI tool, model Opus 5.”** Be sure to verify all AI statements and suggestions as those can be inaccurate or complete hallucinations. Including anything produced by AI without proper acknowledgement and citation (as shown in bold above) will be treated as an academic misconduct case. If you are unsure where the line is between collaborating with AI and copying AI, please review Georgia Tech’s guidance on responsible use: <https://oit.gatech.edu/ai/guidance>.

As generative AI develops it is highly likely that this guidance will also adapt. We will actively monitor any additional guidance that might be issued by Georgia Tech. In our class discussions we will also discuss the ways in which you are encountering and using AI.