



**DALHOUSIE
UNIVERSITY**

FACULTY OF MANAGEMENT

MGMT 5146

**RESEARCH
METHODS**

BY

PETER M. BUTLER PH.D.

PREVIOUS TERM (subject to revision)

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LESSONS

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The Masters of Public Administration (Management) MPA (M) program offers public servants an alternative to the regular MPA program. This degree program brings to Dalhousie a specific clientele of mature learners who desire graduate-level studies in public administration for reasons of personal and professional development but currently find it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to take the regular MPA. Potential candidates must already possess a high level of professional experience in public administration. The program reflects the experience and the educational needs of senior-level public servants while maintaining the high academic standards to which the School and Dalhousie are committed.

We are pleased to provide you with information regarding your Research Methods course. Throughout the MPA (M) program you will be receiving similar information specific to each course. It is important to read through this information, as each course is unique. If you believe there is information that should be included in this manual in addition to the material presented, please contact Morven Fitzgerald at (902) 494-6312 or morven.fitzgerald@dal.ca.

ABOUT THE INSTRUCTOR

ISABELLE CARON, Ph.D.

Isabelle Caron is a Professor in the School of Public Administration at Dalhousie University. She holds a Ph.D. in Public Administration and an MA in Sociology from the University of Ottawa. Her research focuses organizational control, performance, accountability, integrity, diversity, and intersectionality in the public sector and in public policy. From 1999 to 2012, she worked at the Privy Council Office and the Treasury Board Secretariat of Canada, as well as at Health Canada and Canadian Heritage as a senior policy analyst.

COURSE ASSISTANCE

Throughout the duration of the course, you will frequently find it necessary to contact the course instructor. Please feel free to do so at any time during regular business hours. It would be helpful if prior to your call or online interaction, you would organize your thoughts and make a list of your questions so that the discussion will be guided and on track. Be sure to clearly indicate the purpose of your e-mail message in the subject header to avoid the message being classified as SPAM. More prompt responses will be received via email communication (at Isabelle.Caron@dal.ca). Emails will be answered within 48 hours on business days.

COURSE INTRODUCTION

This is a course about research methods. It will focus upon how information is gathered, analyzed and used to inform policy decision-making in the public sector. Much of our work will involve learning about quantitative methods which involve a survey design. However, data collection involving qualitative research techniques and participant observation will also be presented. We will also examine the use of secondary data sources which may involve meta-data analysis using census material and other public documents or may take an approach using comparative historical analysis.

COURSE GOALS

The course goals are to contribute to your understanding and expertise with research methodologies. It is assumed that students have undergraduate degrees from a wide range of disciplines and may also have had some exposure to research methods. Completing this course will refresh your undergraduate experience and expand your current knowledge about current social science research and its application to the public sector. More particularly it will allow you to evaluate critically, information that is available to you from empirical research and apply it to evidence-based management practices in public sector administration and policy development.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The lessons provided in the eight units of the course have the following overall learning objectives:

- Understand the general approach to conducting empirical research.
- Understand the basic assumptions underlying problem formulation and the research process.
- Develop the ability to write a formal proposal to conduct an empirical study.
- Understand the significance of ethical issues that may arise in the course of selecting one research design relative to another.
- Critically evaluate published research.

- Understand alternative data collection techniques and be able to defend strengths and weakness of strategies selected.
- Understand alternative approaches to identifying relationships between variables selected for study.
- Be able to interpret and explain findings drawn from social research and derive conclusions for the design of public policy based on them.

COURSE FORMAT

Live classes are accessible from Brightspace via Collaborate Ultra. These synchronous sessions are highly recommended, but not mandatory. The purpose of these live classes is to allow a discussion between the students and the professor about the content of the modules. These sessions will also be an opportunity for students to ask questions about the course content.

To participate actively, the use of a webcam is recommended. Headset or headphones are strongly recommended to avoid echo effects for other participants. Meetings will be recorded by the instructor and made available on Brightspace the day after the course. These sessions will never be used later or outside of this course.

TEXTBOOKS AND READINGS

Social Research Methods, Fifth Canadian Edition by Alan Bryman, Edward Bell, James J. Teevan, Oxford University Press Canada 2019.

Warren S. Eller, Brian J. Gerber and Scott E. Robinson *Public Administration Research Methods, Second Edition*, Routledge, New York, 2018.

COURSE ASSESSMENT

Credit for the course will be based on a successful completion of **four** components, three assignments and a **final examination** held during the last intensive of the course. Detailed instructions regarding the three assignments will be posted during the term. You will have four weeks to complete each assignment and the guidelines for completing each of them will be posted

along with the assignment itself. Assessment is directly related to following instructions, clarity of expression and presentation as well as to evidence of critical thinking in your writing.

- Assignment 1 - Presentation of a research question or research objective relating to a public policy issue of importance to you and your work. (20%)
- Assignment 2 - A Literature Review and critique of published materials relevant to the research question that you have identified. (20%)
- Assignment 3 - Submission of a Research Proposal which includes a statement of the importance of the issue to public policy, full problem formulation, study design, measurement procedures and analytics as well as a statements about expected findings and their implications for the policy under consideration. (30%)
- Participation to a minimum of five forum discussions. (5%)
- The final examination will also contribute 25%* to the overall grade for the course.

*You must earn a passing grade (B-) on the final exam in order to pass the course

ASSIGNMENT DUE DATES

ASSIGNMENT #	LESSONS COVERED	DUE DATE
Assignment 1 – Research Question or Objective	Lesson 1, 2	September 25
Assignment 2 – Literature Review	Lesson 1, 3	October 30
Assignment 3 – Research Proposal	Lesson 4, 5, 7	November 27

ASSIGNMENTS/EXTENSIONS

Assignments must be submitted by the assignment due date. Dalhousie University will only consider documented exceptions to this rule, such as serious medical emergencies or problems of a similar nature. In exceptional circumstances, an extension of up to one week **may** be granted at the professor's discretion, if requested in advance of the due date.

Late submissions will be assessed at a penalty of TEN percent per day. Assignments will not normally be accepted seven days or more after the due date; in such cases the student will receive a grade of zero.

SOCIAL RESEARCH AND THE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

- What it means to use scientific methods in social research.

This is a course in research methods for the public sector. As such, the focus will be upon how information is gathered, how it is analyzed, and how it is used to inform policy decision-making and understand program delivery. The general approach to this course closely resembles the one described by Jody Fitzpatrick in her article, “What Are Our Goals in Teaching Research Methods to Public Administrators?”¹

Fitzpatrick’s approach fits well with the approach to teaching research methods embraced by the School of Public Administration. Take a look at the “alternative methods” she proposes in Table 2 and the goals she sets forth in Table 3. They represent our intended direction. At the end of this course, you should be a stronger consumer and user of research. If the goal of the course could be summarized in one short sentence, I would choose “sharpening critical thinking skills.”

- Why public sector organizations do social research.

There are a lot of assumptions underlying the role of government in society and some of them are especially relevant to our course, such as assumptions concerning order or pattern in both the physical world and in human behavior and the claim that nature is knowable and causation can be identified. These are discussed in the chapter assigned from Bryman, Bell and Teevan. However, any introductory discussion about the assumptions of science and the nature of explanation becomes complicated when you overlay that discussion with notions about the role of evidence in decision making. We socially construct our understanding of the world and our place in it and make decisions based on these constructions. This means that we assume there is a knowable order to events and behaviour and it is possible to explain them with appropriate evidence.

¹ Fitzpatrick, Jody. “What are Our Goals in Teaching Research Methods to Public Administrators?” Journal of Public Affairs Education Vol 6 #3(2000): 173-81

- Collecting evidence in social research.

The course will consider alternative pathways to collecting evidence and explore the characteristics of the scientific method as they relate to causal inference.

- Using evidence-based research for public policy management.

Here we will explain the linkages between research methods and evidence-based decision making in public administration.

- Social and professional interaction in public sector research.

The course will deal with social science research generally, albeit with an application to public management. Public administration, from the point of view of research, can be described as a diverse and constantly changing field of inquiry into the behaviour of individuals and groups involved in the administrative and managerial activities and processes. Researchers in Public Administration study people involved in analyzing, planning, organizing, implementing, and controlling the programs and activities in agencies, units, and systems for the purpose of meeting the needs of society.

The research conducted in this discipline addresses the many organizational and management questions that arise from this wide-ranging field. Public administration researchers have looked at a wide variety of topics while maintaining a largely practical focus using a purpose of research may be either basic or applied. Basic research, which is also called pure or theoretical research, is usually conducted to increase the general storehouse of knowledge. Basic research is concerned with coming up with theories about things are and why events happen the way they do. On the other hand, applied research is conducted to solve practical problems or to help researchers understand past behavior in order to predict future behavior. Applied researchers are concerned with developing theories why something happened; they look for causal relationships. They conduct research in order to describe in detail what happened or to plan programs that will cause events to happen. In this way, they hope to be able to predict future events or consequences. The focus is on applied or empirical research for the resolution of practical problems faced by public and non-profit organization administrators and managers.

- Ethical issues and social research.

There have been major changes recently in the care given to ethical review of proposed social research at Canadian universities especially research that directly involves human subjects. The characterization of human “subjects” is not just associated with sticking electrodes onto the foreheads of individuals. Today it is a term which is applied to any research when people are being observed, from experiments where people are the subjects to surveys where they are participants.

- Overview: The role of research in social policy management.

Applied social research is widely used by bureaucratic organizations like hospitals, government departments and educational institutions for planning and making choices among alternative policies to develop and monitor them. Those who are responsible for policy implementation will find it advantageous to become acquainted with the process of social research and its methods in order to execute evidence-based decisions.

SCHEDULE

LESSON	DATE	TITLE	DELIVERABLES
1 (1 week)	September 1 – 6	Research Questions, Problem Formulation and the Research Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Welcome video ➤ Introduce yourselves
2 (1 week)	September 7 - 13	Empiricism and Measurement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Forum discussion for Lesson 1 due by Sept 13.
3 (3 weeks)	September 14– October 4	Qualitative Research Data Collection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Live Class 1 Sept. 15, 8:00 pm ➤ Forum discussion for Lesson 2 due by Sept. 20. ➤ Assignment 1 due Sept. 25
4 (2 weeks)	October 5 - 18	Quantitative Research Data Collection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Live Class 2 Oct. 6, 8:00 pm ➤ Forum discussion for Lesson 3 due by Oct 13. ➤ Midterm course evaluation available Oct. 8 - 14
5 (2 weeks)	October 19 – November 1	Survey Designs and Sampling Techniques	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Live Class 3 Oct. 20, 8:00 pm ➤ Forum discussion for Lesson 4 due by Oct 25. ➤ Assignment 2 due Oct. 30
6 (2 weeks)	November 2 - 15	Summarizing Data with Statistics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Live Class 4 Nov. 3, 8:00 pm ➤ Forum discussion for Lesson 5 due by Nov. 8.
7 (2 weeks)	November 16 – 29	Interpreting the Data and Writing a Report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Live Class 5 Nov. 17, 8:00 pm ➤ Forum discussion for Lesson 6 due by Nov 22. ➤ Assignment 3 due Nov. 27
Online Intensive	December 4- 6 (Mountain)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Student Rating of Instruction available Dec. 5 - 11
Online Intensive	December 10 – 12 (Atlantic)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Student Rating of Instruction available Dec. 11 - 17

APPENDIX A: CLASS POLICIES

Extended absence from class

- Emergencies
 - Contact the course instructor
- Illness
 - Contact your instructor as soon as possible to inform him or her of your illness.
 - All absences due to illness must be supported by a physician's note to be submitted to the course instructor.

Late penalties for assignments

Assignments must be submitted by the assignment due date. Dalhousie University will only consider documented exceptions to this rule, such as serious medical emergencies or problems of a similar nature. In exceptional circumstances, an extension of up to one week **may** be granted at the professor's discretion, if requested in advance of the due date.

Late submissions will be assessed at a penalty of TEN percent. Assignments will not normally be accepted seven days or more after the due date; in such cases the student will receive a grade of zero.

ACCOMMODATION POLICY FOR STUDENTS

Students may request accommodation as a result of barriers related to disability, religious obligation, or any characteristic under the Nova Scotia Human Rights Act. Students who require academic accommodation for either classroom participation or the writing of tests and exams should make their request to the Advising and Access Services Center (AASC) prior to or at the outset of the regular academic year. Please visit www.dal.ca/access for more information and to obtain the Request for Accommodation – Form A.

A note taker may be required as part of a student's accommodation. There is an honorarium of \$75/course/term (with some exceptions). If you are interested, please contact AASC at 494-2836 for more information.

Please note that your classroom may contain specialized accessible furniture and equipment. It is important that these items remain in the classroom, untouched, so that students who require their usage will be able to participate in the class.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

In general:

The commitment of the Faculty of Management is to graduate future leaders of business, government and civil society who manage with integrity and get things done. This is non-negotiable in our community and it starts with your first class at Dalhousie University. So when you submit any work for evaluation in this course or any other, please ensure that you are familiar with your obligations under the Faculty of Management's Academic Integrity Policies and that you understand where to go for help and advice in living up to our standards. You should be familiar with the Faculty of Management Professor and Student Contract on Academic Integrity, and it is your responsibility to ask questions if there is anything you do not understand.

Dalhousie offers many ways to learn about academic writing and presentations so that all members of the University community may acknowledge the intellectual property of others. Knowing how to find, evaluate, select, synthesize and cite information for use in assignments is called being "information literate." Information literacy is taught by Dalhousie University Librarians in classes and through online tutorials.

Do not plagiarize any materials for this course. For further guidance on what constitutes plagiarism, how to avoid it, and proper methods for attributing sources, **please see** <http://plagiarism.dal.ca/Student%20Resources/>

Any paper submitted by a student at Dalhousie University may be checked for originality to confirm that the student has not plagiarized from other sources. Plagiarism is considered a very serious academic offence that may lead to loss of credit, suspension or expulsion from the University, or even the revocation of a degree. It is essential that there be correct attribution

of authorities from which facts and opinions have been derived. At Dalhousie, there are University Regulations which deal with plagiarism and, prior to submitting any paper in a course; students should read the Policy on Intellectual Honesty contained in the Calendar or on the Dalhousie web site at: <http://www.registrar.dal.ca/calendar/ug/UREG.htm#12>

Furthermore, the University's Senate has affirmed the right of any instructor to require that student papers be submitted in both written and computer readable format, and to submit any paper to a check such as that performed by anti-plagiarism software. As a student in this class, you are to keep an electronic copy of any paper you submit, and the course instructor may require you to submit that electronic copy on demand.

Finally:

If you suspect cheating by colleagues or lapses in standards by a professor, you may use the confidential email: managementintegrity@dal.ca which is read only by the [Assistant Academic Integrity Officer](#).

CLARIFICATION ON PLAGIARISM VERSUS COLLABORATION

“There are many other opportunities for plagiarism, for instance, copying on exams and assignments. There is a clear line between group work on assignments and copying solutions from others. It is alright to work on assignments with your friends. In fact, working in groups may be beneficial. For best results, you should always attempt to solve the problem alone, prior to meeting with the group. Whenever you collaborate with your colleagues on assignments, **you must always prepare your own submission. Copying is plagiarism!** This includes copying the work of others, making changes, and submitting it as your own work.

Specific examples of plagiarism include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Copying a computer file from another student, and using it as a template for your own solution
- Copying text written by another student

- Submitting the work of a tutor as your own
- Including your name on a group submission when you have not contributed to that submission

Specific examples of acceptable collaboration include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Discussing the issues and underlying factors of a case with fellow students, and then each of the students writing up their submissions individually, in their own words.
- Working on a computer-based exercise collaboratively, and then each of the students creating their own submissions individually, from start to finish.

PREVIOUS TERM (subject to revision)

APPENDIX B: VIRTUAL TEAM GUIDELINES

- **Access your Learning Management System consistently, frequently** to check for updates and news – approach it as part of your social media routine
- **Determine how often team members will check in** with each other and stick to this communication schedule. At this time, determine if there will be any time zone challenges for team meetings and deadlines; discuss solutions.
- **Explore** the architecture of Brightspace. Consider using Brightspace's **e-Portfolio** as a team – This is right beside your Brightspace Calendar and it is a place to record and reflect on your learning experience.
- **Develop and follow a team charter** with your virtual team to establish roles and responsibilities. This is when you want to determine exactly what digital tools the team will be using (Brightspace?/Googledocs?/Facebook?/Office 365?)
- **Appoint and refer to a team records manager.** If you are unable to locate shared work, this person could help you find what you are looking for.
- **Connect during “live office hours”** to communicate with your instructor.
- **Stay present and visible online.** Communicate regularly with your peers via the designated forum.

APPENDIX C: ABOUT THE AUTHOR

DR. PETER M. BUTLER,

Dr. Peter Butler is a sociologist whose professional skills encompass all aspects of public affairs research and teaching. He has been a member of the Dalhousie University faculty since the middle seventies. However, for several years he was on leave-of-absence from the University working as a senior advisor for social policy in the office of the Premier of Nova Scotia.

He holds a Ph.D. from the University of Toronto and is now Professor Emeritus of Sociology and Public Administration at Dalhousie where he continues to lecture in courses about Canadian politics, social policy and public opinion. In addition he has continued to teach quantitative social research methods in both the Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology and at the School of Public Administration. He has also worked in university administration as both Vice-Chair and Interim Chair of Dalhousie Senate.

As a researcher Dr. Butler has consulted on a variety of public affairs and policy studies holding appointments with national public opinion firms such as **Decima Research**, **NRG Research Group** and **The Strategic Counsel**. He has worked as a consultant for various provincial and federal government departments and has authored a number of scholarly articles and research reports. He is the author of the book, **Polling and Public Opinion: A Canadian Perspective**, published by the University of Toronto Press. He has also written over eighty consulting reports and as a public opinion consultant and is a frequent contributor to national media on public affairs.