

APPLIED RESEARCH IN HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY AND PRACTICE

Instructor: Kata Orosz

Academic unit: SPP

Semester, year: Fall 2017 & Winter 2018

Course level: MA

Course description

Elective Course, Higher Education Policy Specialization/Concentration

This course provides participants with the opportunity to learn about the history, characteristics, or impact of a higher education policy or program in an applied learning setting. The course spans two terms.

In the fall term, each course participant will work with the instructor to identify a real-life higher education issue that they would like to study. For example, one participant may want to study the history of higher education stratification worldwide, another participant may want to compare the characteristics of higher education quality assurance policies in a particular region, and a third student may want to assess the impact of student loans on post-graduation outcomes among graduates of a particular university. Through an experiential learning process, participants will learn how to translate their interest in a particular higher education policy issue into researchable questions and how to design a research proposal for carrying out a policy research project.

In the winter term, course participants will carry out the policy research project outlined in their research proposal. Through a combination of weekly lectures, in-class activities, independent work, and individualized project guidance from the instructor, course participants will learn how to collect, process, and analyze data and how to present research findings and recommendations to an audience of higher education experts and practitioners. The course will conclude with the completion of a research project portfolio, which includes an executive summary of research findings, a presentation of policy implications and recommendations, and additional project documents that demonstrate course participants' skills in implementing and managing an applied policy research project.

Learning outcomes

Upon successful completion of the course, course participants will be able to:

- Identify researchable questions that lead to policy- or practice-relevant insights in the field of higher education

- Design a policy research project that can address the research questions
- Implement all steps of a policy research project, including data collection, analysis, and presentation of findings
- Articulate possible solutions based on research findings to an audience of experts and practitioners
- Demonstrate research, writing, and presentation skills to prospective employers, clients and other audiences

Assessment

To successfully complete the course, course participants will be required to regularly attend class, read the required readings, participate in in-class discussions and activities, attend one mandatory consultation with the instructor per term, and complete the following assignments:

- 1) Four preparatory assignments in the fall semester (40% of final grade, combined)¹
 - a. Description of a real-life higher education policy issue (due on September 25)
 - b. Review of research literature and expert opinion (due on October 16)
 - c. Research methods presentation (due on November 6)
 - d. Plan for data collection, processing, and analysis (due on November 27)
- 2) Research proposal that builds on the four preparatory assignments; max. 4000 words, due at the end of the fall semester (20% of final grade; due on December 31)
- 3) Two progress updates in the winter semester (pass / fail)
- 4) Research project portfolio, due at the end of the winter semester (40% of final grade)
 - a. Executive summary of research findings
 - b. Presentation of policy implications and recommendations
 - c. Additional project documents that demonstrate student skills in implementing and managing a policy research project

Prerequisites

The course requires course participants to be motivated to explore a higher education policy issue of their choice in considerable depth.

Required readings

Course participants are required to read in preparation for each class. A list of required readings is available under *Course schedule*, as well as on the course's e-learning site. PDF copies of these required readings are posted on the course's e-learning site.

¹ For more information about the preparatory assignments and the research proposal, see the *Course schedule*.

Mandatory consultation

Course participants are required to meet with the instructor outside of class to discuss their applied research project at least once per term. The mandatory consultation (as well as any other consultations that course participants request) can take place either during the instructor's office hours or by appointment.

Office hours

The instructor's office hours are on Mondays, 1:00 pm – 3:00 pm, SPP building (Október 6 utca 7), Room 416. Consultation by appointment is also possible. Course participants should request appointments for consultation by emailing the instructor at OroszK@ceu.edu at least 24 hours in advance of the requested meeting.

Policy on absence

As per SPP policy, regular class attendance is a mandatory precondition for passing the course. Course participants may miss classes for an excuse only. Course participants are expected to communicate absences via email and produce a doctor's note at the earliest possible opportunity and give it to the Student Affairs Coordinator. Missing more than one class in either term of the course without an immediate valid excuse and a written note to the course instructor may result in reduced final grade. The final course grade will be deducted by 0.3 of a grade per unexcused absence.

The course instructor does not have the right to grant leave for course participants. Any such cases should be referred to the applicable Program Director. Course participants who are granted a leave must inform the course instructor in advance that they will miss their classes.

Missed classes, even if excused, will have to be made up by extra assignments, except in the case of an absence due to medical reason provided a doctor's note is presented. Extra assignments will be assigned by the course instructor as appropriate.

Acknowledgement

I would like to acknowledge the influence of Dr. Laura Perna, and particularly her *Proseminar* offered in the Higher Education doctoral program in the Graduate School of Education at the University of Pennsylvania, on the structure and content of course. The general outline of the fall semester syllabus and the idea of the research presentation were in particular inspired by Dr. Perna's course.

COURSE SCHEDULE (Fall 2017)

September 18

Class 1: Introduction to policy research in higher education

The first session of the course will be devoted to introductions and the discussion of course participants' areas of interest in the field of higher education policy. The instructor will describe the learning outcomes, session topics, and course assessment in detail. We will also discuss the role of applied research in the policy process and consider examples of evidence-based policy making in higher education.

Required reading

O'Leary, Z. (2005). Researching real-world problems. In: Author, *Researching real-world problems: A guide to methods of inquiry* (pp. 3-20). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.

September 25

Class 2: Designing policy- and practice-relevant research

This session will provide an overview of the types of questions policy makes and practitioners in higher education commonly encounter. We will consider examples of how applied research may shed light on the origins of higher education policies; how it can be used to explore the forces that promote and limit the implementation of a particular policy or program, and how it can be used to determine the causal impact of a program or policy. We will discuss the specific higher education issues that course participants are interested in studying throughout the course.

Required reading:

Heck, R. (2004). Studying policy development, implementation, and impact. In: Author, *Studying educational and social policy: Theoretical concepts and research methods* (pp. 55-80). London: Routledge.

Assignment due: Policy / program description

Course participants must write a brief (max. 1000 words, not including references) description of an existing higher education policy / program that the course participant is interested in studying throughout the course. The paper must include information about the goals of the policy / program, the relevant context in which it operates (e.g., country, institution), the group of individuals that it targets, its activities, and its organizational background (staff, funding).

All material used in preparation of the assignment must be properly attributed. The assignment must be submitted through the course's e-learning site before **September 25, 9:00 am**.

Assignments will be checked for originality with the Turnitin software. The assignment is worth 10% of the final course grade.

October 2**Class 3: Building on what is already known**

In this class, we will discuss best practices for conceptualizing an applied research project with the help of systematic literature reviews and expert interviews. We will also consider the challenges associated with identifying relevant research and expert opinion, and practice strategies for critically assessing the strengths and limitations of available evidence.

Required readings:

Booth, A., Papaioannou, D., & Sutton, A. (2012). Systematic approaches to the literature. In: Authors, *Systematic approaches to a successful literature review* (pp. 17-35). London: Sage.

Perna, L. W., Orosz, K., & Jumakulov, Z. (2015). Understanding the human capital benefits of a government-funded international scholarship program: An exploration of Kazakhstan's Bolashak program. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 40(0), 85-97. [Introduction and guiding perspectives only]

October 9**Class 4: How to craft your research questions**

In this class, we will discuss and practice strategies for narrowing down a general interest in a higher education issue into a specific set of researchable questions. We will also practice how to use the literature review to create visual summaries of the conceptual framework of our applied research project.

Required readings:

Maxwell, J. A. (2013). Research questions: What do you want to understand? In: Author, *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach* (pp. 73-86). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.

Creswell, J. W. (2003). Research questions and hypotheses. In: Author, *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (pp. 105-118). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.

October 16**Class 5: How to match methods to research questions**

In this class, we will consider the strengths and limitations of the two main methodological paradigms (qualitative and quantitative) as they pertain to the specific research questions of course participants, and will discuss the suitability and feasibility of potential methodological approaches for answering the research questions of each course participant.

Required readings:

Creswell, J. W. (2003). A framework for design. In: Author, *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (pp. 3-26). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.

Heck, R. (2004). An overview of method in policy research. In: Author, *Studying educational and social policy: Theoretical concepts and research methods* (pp. 185-213). London: Routledge.

Assignment due: Literature review & research questions

Course participants must write a concise (max. 1000 words, not including references) review of academic literature and expert opinion that identifies gap(s) in knowledge pertaining to the specific higher education policy / program that the course participant chose for studying throughout the course. The concluding paragraph of the assignment must 1) articulate a set of researchable question(s) that address the identified knowledge gap(s); and 2) identify a community of policy makers or practitioners who would be interested in addressing the identified knowledge gap(s).

All material used in preparation of the assignment must be properly attributed. The assignment must be submitted through the course's e-learning site before **October 16, 9:00 am**.

Assignments will be checked for originality with the Turnitin software. The assignment is worth 10% of the final course grade.

October 23

Class 6: Combining qualitative and quantitative approaches in research

IMPORTANT: Due to the Hungarian national holiday, the class will not meet on October 23, 2017. Course participants will collectively determine by October 9 whether a make-up class in the same week or a take-home assignment is more feasible, given course participants' schedules. In case course participants collectively opt for the take-home assignment, they will have to complete a short assignment based on the required readings. In this case, the take-home assignment will be due on October 23 (Monday), by 11:00 am. The assignment will be graded pass / fail.

Required readings:

Bowen, G. A. (2009). Document analysis as a qualitative research method. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 9(2), 27-40.

Hartley, M., & Morphew, C. C. (2008). What's being sold and to what end? A content analysis of college viewbooks. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 79(6), 671-691.

Neuendorf, K. A. (2016). Message units and sampling. In: Author, *The content analysis guidebook* (pp. 70-95). Second edition. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.

October 30**Class 7: How to collect qualitative data & ethical issues in policy research**

In this class, we will discuss strategies for collecting qualitative data, with a focus on two data collection methods that are common in qualitative applied research projects: semi-structured interviews and document analyses. Course participants will practice drafting interview protocols and data collection protocols for document analysis. We will also discuss the role of institutional ethical research policies, and talk about best practices for ensuring that one's applied research project conforms to universal and institutional guidelines on ethical research.

Required readings:

Maxwell, J. A. (2013). Site and participant selection. In: Author, *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach* (pp. 96-100). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.

Jacob, S. A., & Furgerson, S. P. (2012). Writing interview protocols and conducting interviews: Tips for students new to the field of qualitative research. *The Qualitative Report*, 17(T&L Art, 6), 1-10.

Perna, L. W., Orosz, K., & Jumakulov, Z. (2015). Understanding the human capital benefits of a government-funded international scholarship program: An exploration of Kazakhstan's Bolashak program. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 40(0), 85-97.
[Research methods only]

Central European University (2015). *Ethical research policy*, document number [P-1012-1v1505](#).

November 6, November 13**Classes 8 and 9: Designing your methodological approach**

In these two classes, course participants will give 12-minute in-class presentations about the specific research method that they plan to use to answer their research questions.

Assignment due: Method presentation

Course participants must prepare a brief (max. 12 minutes) presentation to introduce the specific research method that they will use to answer their research questions. The research method must be introduced through the example of a real-life applied research project that is similar to the one the course participant plans to conduct. The presentation must include an argument for why the selected research method is suitable and feasible for the specific applied research project.

Material that has to be submitted prior to the in-class presentation includes: 1) PowerPoint slides or a Prezi link to accompany the in-class presentation, and 2) a document (e.g., journal article, research report, etc.) of the real-life applied research project that is similar to the one the course participant plans to conduct. Both the slides and the document must be submitted through the course's e-learning site. Presentations must be submitted through the course's e-learning site before **November 6, 9:00 am**. The presentation grade is worth 10% of the final course grade.

November 20**Class 10: How to work with (secondary) quantitative data**

In this class, we will discuss strategies using publicly available secondary data to calculate descriptive statistics. We will discuss common challenges associated with using secondary data and consider strategies for handling them.

Required readings:

Smith, E. (2008). Pitfalls and promises: The use of secondary data analysis in educational research. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 56(3), 323-339.

Orosz, K. (2017). Predicting the skill proficiency of Central European adults: The role of higher education, work experience, and socioeconomic background in "credential societies". *Hungarian Educational Research Journal*, 7(1), 28-42.

November 27**Class 11: How to process and analyze qualitative data**

In this class, we will discuss strategies for processing and analyzing qualitative data manually, and with the help of qualitative data analysis software. We will consider the use of keyword queries and semi-automated approaches to coding textual data. We will also discuss strategies for coding non-textual data.

Required readings:

Bazeley, P. (2013). Managing and preparing data for analysis. In: Author, *Qualitative data analysis: practical strategies* (pp. 63-92). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.

Assignment due: Plan for data collection, processing, and analysis

Course participants must write a max. 1000-word paper that describes the specific research method the course participant will use to answer their research questions. The paper must describe the proposed study sample, and specific plans for data collection, data processing, and analysis. The paper must also discuss how the proposed study will conform to universal and institutional guidelines on ethical research.

All material used in preparation of the assignment must be properly attributed. The assignment must be submitted through the course's e-learning site before **November 27, 9:00 am**.

Assignments will be checked for originality with the Turnitin software. The assignment is worth 10% of the final course grade.

Checklist / evaluation criteria for the assignment:

- Research questions
- Description of methodology & rationale for its use
- Proposed study sample

- Plan for data collection
(recruitment script, interview protocol, and consent form, if applicable)
- Plan for data processing (logistics, storage)
- Plan for data analyses (techniques, software)\
- Plan for ensuring the study follows ethical guidelines in research

Class 12: How to finalize your research plan and manage your research project

In this class, we will discuss how the policy / program description, the literature review and research questions, and the research methods should be combined into a coherent research proposal, in preparation for the mid-course assignment.

Course participants will also work on preparing a project timetable for conducting their applied research project in the Winter 2018 term. We will discuss different types of deliverables that may be completed within the time available for the study. We will work together to identify specific tasks that need to be accomplished during the winter break so that data collection for the applied research projects may begin upon the start of the Winter 2018 term.

Required reading:

Pickton, M. (2013). Writing your research plan. In: Grant, M. J., Sen, B., & Spring, H. (Eds.) *Research, evaluation and audit: Key steps in demonstrating your value* (pp. 45-63). London: Facet Publishing.

Mid-course assignment due: Research proposal

Course participants must submit a research proposal of approx. 3000–4000 words. Research proposals are due by **December 31, 11:59 pm**. Late submission will result in the assignment grade being reduced by a grade step (e.g. an A can become an A-) every 24 hours starting from the deadline. The mid-course assignment is worth 20% of the final course grade.

The research proposal must combine and expand upon the four preparatory assignments submitted in the fall term. The proposal must include:

- a description of a real-life higher education policy / program;
- a brief review of prior research and expert opinion on this policy / program;
- a clearly defined problem statement of what is not known about the policy / program;
- a set of research questions that addresses the identified gap(s) in knowledge;
- a clearly defined audience of policy makers / practitioners who would benefit from knowing the answer to the research question;
- a detailed description of planned research methods (study sample, plans for data collection, processing, and analysis; ethical considerations); and
- a project timetable for the Winter 2018 semester.

Research proposals will be evaluated based upon the extent to which they include each of the components listed above, as well as upon the extent to which they incorporate oral and written feedback received from the instructor and other course participants throughout the fall semester.

All material used in preparation of the research proposal must be properly attributed. The proposal must be submitted through the course's e-learning site and will be checked for originality with the Turnitin software.

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Note: The content of this course is designed to accommodate a range of higher education topics and applied research approaches. The course schedule presented below outlines the broad topics that will be covered in the Fall 2017 term. The instructor may decide, in consultation with course participants, to modify topic details and required readings for each class to better align course content to course participants' interest in specific higher education issues and applied research approaches. It is the instructor's responsibility to notify course participants about any changes to course content at least two weeks prior to the class that the change affects.