PPOL 5160 Evidence in Public Policy
Spring 2025

SYLLABUS

Time and Venue
Section 1:   Tuesday   10:30AM-1:20PM   Room 1, 30/F, Tower 1 Millenity
Section 2:   Tuesday   2 PM-4:50 PM   Room 3, 30/F, Tower 1 Millenity

Instructor   Raul P. Lejano, Division of Public Policy   lejano@ust.hk
Office hours Wednesday 10-11:30 am (PPOL Office) or zoom by appointment.

Teaching Assistants Section 1:   Wichanon Jamwutthipreecha   wjaa@connect.ust.hk
                         Section 2:   Sushan Hou shouae@connect.ust.hk

Course Description
Policy analysis and formulation can involve some degree of applied research, in order to answer questions or solve problems encountered in the policy arena. This course introduces students to the basic concepts and methodologies of social science research and their applications to public policy research. The course focuses on the development of students' professional skills in research design, data collection techniques, data analysis, and presentation of research findings. Another benefit of the instruction is that of enhancing the student's ability to read, comprehend, and utilize relevant research literature. Along with basic readings on research design and implementation, a number of public policy articles will be taken up, each illustrating the application of concepts and approaches taken up in class. In-class exercises in real time policy analysis will be conducted each week.

Course Objectives
This core course seeks to
1) familiarize students with key research methodologies commonly used in public policy research;
2) enable students to formulate a general research strategy for a given policy problem;
3) enable students to design and implement field work or program evaluation for policy research;
4) improve students' ability to comprehend and utilize research literature relevant to their field(s) of interest.
5) deepen students' understanding of the role of evidence in policymaking.
6) instil skills in critical thinking and dispel notions of policy analysis as simply a methodological exercise.

Textbooks
Rassel, G., Lelan, S., Mohr, Z. and E. O'Sullivan (2021). *Research Methods for Public Administrators* (7th edition). Routledge, New York.
Lejano, R. P. (2006). *Frameworks for Policy Analysis.* Routledge, New York.

Additional Texts
Lejano, R.P. and W.S. Kan (2025). *Interpretive Policy Analysis: Hermeneutics for Our Times,* (in press).
Lejano, R.P. and W.S. Kan (2022). *Relationality: The Inner Life of Public Policy.* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge and New York.
Yin, R. (2009). *Case Study Research: Design and Methods.* Sage, London.
Weiss, C. (1998). *Evaluation: Methods for Studying Programs and Policies.* Prentice-Hall, New York.
Saldaña, J. (2015). *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers.* Sage, Thousand Oaks.
Kivedal, B.K. (2023). *Applied Statistics and Econometrics*, Palgrave Macmillan.

Plus: select journal articles. All readings found on Canvas.

Important note: Readings assigned for a certain class meeting are meant to be read before the meeting. So being, it is important to come to class already having done the readings for that day.

Assessment

Assignments (2)	25%
Group Project (due May 17)	25%
Final Exam (May 21)	30%
Attendance/	20%
Professionalism/Participation	

Specs on the assignments, group project, and final will be handed out in class.
At some points in the class, we will refer to public data sources. An example of open data can be found at https://data.gov.hk/en/

Schedule and Readings

Week 1.   Introduction   Feb. 4
(Policy questions, empiricism in policy, cases)
What types of questions arise in policy work? How do these questions translate into research projects? What examples of policy questions can we generate around topics of interest to us?

Readings: Lejano, Section 1 (Introduction)
                Rassel et al., Ch. 1 (Beginning a Research Project)

Week 2.   Structuring the Investigation   Feb. 11
(Quantitative/Qualitative approaches, program evaluation)
What are the differences between quantitative and qualitative research approaches (in terms of data and methodology)? Why and in what situations would we turn to one or the other (or both)? In taking up these questions, we also discuss the turn towards empiricism and evidence in policy (versus the purely ideological).

Readings: Lejano, Ch. 1 (Origins of the Classical Model)
                Rassel et al., Ch. 2 (Research Designs for Description)
                Rassel et al., Ch. 3 (Research Designs for Explanation)
                Lejano, Ch. 9 (Experience)

Week 3.   Study Design and Quantitative Data-Gathering   Feb. 18
                (Survey design, experimental design, data collection)
We discuss how to design data collection, with specific attention to designing (and testing) a quantitative survey. Cross-sectional, longitudinal, and other designs are discussed (e.g., case-control versus pre-post comparisons). We also discuss relevant issues around sample size, the ethics of human (and nonhuman) subjects research, and community engagement.

Readings: Rassel et al., Ch. 5 (Sampling)
                Rassel et al., Ch. 7 (Collecting Data with Questions and Questionnaires)
                Journal Article: Lee, A., Keung, V. M., Lau, V. T., Cheung, C. K., & Lo, A. S. (2021). Impact of COVID-19 on life of students: case study in Hong Kong. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 18(19), 10483.

Week 4.   Quantitative Data Analysis: Hypothesis Testing   Feb. 25
                (t test, chi-square, others)

Having collected the data, how do we go about analyzing it? What use are tests of significance and how do we conduct them? We will, in small groups, gain experience with some of these analytical methods, using Excel (alternatively, STATA) using data from the in-class survey conducted last week (online). We will also discuss a research article that utilizes some of these methods.

Readings: Rassel et al., Ch. 12 (Examing Relationships Between Variables)
              Journal Article: Barnes TD, Beaulieu E, Saxton GW. Restoring trust in the police: Why female officers reduce suspicions of corruption. Governance. 2018 Jan;31(1):143-61.

Week 5.   Quantitative Data Analysis: Correlating Variables, Model Generation   March 4
            (regression analysis)
Why and when would we use regression analysis, instead of the methods discussed previously? How do we conduct and interpret regression analyses? How can we use regression equations to build simply policy models? We will, in small groups, gain experience with regression analysis using the in-class survey data. We will also discuss a research article that revolves around linear regression (and its variants).

Readings: Rassel et al., Ch. 14 (Regression and Correlation)
              Journal Article: Gong, T., & Xiao, H. (2017). Socially embedded anti-corruption governance: Evidence from Hong Kong. Public Administration and Development, 37(3), 176-190.
              Neshkova, M. I., & Kostadinova, T. (2012). The effectiveness of administrative reform in new democracies. Public Administration Review, 72(3), 324-333.

Week 6.   Quantitative Program Evaluation   March 11
Another common type of policy research involves program evaluation --i.e., determining the effectiveness and other effects of a policy or program. We discuss how program evaluation is often designed, how to use program theories in research design, and how some data analyses are conducted. We discuss a research article that illustrates program evaluation in practice.

Readings: Weiss, Ch. 3 (Understanding the Program)
              Lejano, Ch. 6 (Critique)
              Leung, S. et al. (2003). Process and Outcome Evaluation of the Positive Parenting Programme in Hong Kong, HK SAR Govt.

Week 7.   Qualitative Data Gathering   March 18
There is a problem with solely relying on positivistic evidence. Consquently, we take a turn toward the qualitative, with some focus on interpretive analysis. What policy questions demand a qualitative approach, and how does study design differ (compared to the quantitative approach)? We pay particular attention to designing and conducting interviews. In small groups, we will design and implement short interviews (with some group members interviewing others in the group). Transcripts of the interviews will be analyzed in class the following week.

Readings: Lejano, Ch. 4 (Postpositivism)
              Kvale, Ch. 6 (Thematizing and designing an interview study)
              Kvale, Ch. 7 (Conducting an interview)
              Journal Article: Kan, W. S., & Chui, E. (2021). Vouchers and consumer-directed care: Implications for community care services in Hong Kong. The British Journal of Social Work, 51(1), 96-113.

Week 8.   Qualitative Data Analysis   March 25
            (thematic analysis, textual and narrative analysis)
Having collected the data (which often consists of text), how do we go about analyzing it? We pay special attention to the use of thematic analysis and, parallel to this, narrative analysis. We also discuss a research article revolving

around interview data. In small groups, we will analyze interview transcripts from the in-class interview exercise done previously.

Readings: Lejano and Kan (2025). Ch. 1 (Why interpret?)
             Lejano and Kan (2025). Ch. 3 (How to interpret)
             Saldaña, Ch. 3 (First cycle coding methods)
             Stewart, J. (2012). Fiction Over Facts: How Competing Narrative Forms Explain Policy in a New Immigration Destination 1. In Sociological Forum (Vol. 27, No. 3, pp. 591-616). Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

Week 9.   Mid-Term Break   Week of April 1

Week 10.   Qualitative Analysis: Building Theory with Data   April 8
Another important function of the policy researcher is to theorize about a policy phenomenon with the aim of better explaining what is going right, wrong, or otherwise with a certain policy, and to simply understand policy situations in a deeper way. This week, we apply ideas from critical theory, dialectics, and phenomenology to interpret a policy situation (especially in cases where we have evidence to support our interpretation). One mode of theorizing involves applying social theory to explain policy phenomena, and another is to use policy observations to build a working theory-in-practice of what is going on.

Readings: Maxwell, J.A. and M. Chmiel (2013). Generalization in and from Qualitative Analysis.
             In Flick, U. (ed.) The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis.
             Lejano and Kan (2025), excerpt.

Week 11.   Additional Topics   April 15
We extend our learning about regression by studying how to account for other (hitherto unmeasured) variables through the use of a fixed effects model and use of instrumental variables. Examples will be taken up in class and in the group session.

Readings: Kivedal, B.K. (2023). Chapters 6 and 7 in Applied Statistics and Econometrics, Palgrave Macmillan.

Week 12.   Mixed-Methods Analysis   April 22
                (case study research)
Some research endeavours naturally bring both qualitative and quantitative data to the fore. This is often the case in case study research. How do we integrate different types of evidence in case study analysis, how do we use them to triangulate toward policy findings? We discuss a research article based on case study analysis.

Readings: Yin, Ch. 4 (Conducting Case Studies: Collecting the Evidence)
             Yin, Ch. 5 (Analyzing Case Study Evidence)
             Journal Article: Lejano, R. P., & Shankar, S. (2013). The contextualist turn and schematics of institutional fit: Theory and a case study from Southern India. Policy Sciences, 46, 83-102.

Week 13.   Advanced Topics   April 29

TBA. Also, initial group presentations by L2 in class.

Week 14.   Group Presentations   May 6

Group Reports Due (by email)	May 14

Finals	(Location and Time: TBA)	May 21

POLICIES

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY CODE

All work must be entirely your own. Please cite the relevant work whenever you borrow ideas from others, using the proper reference format (e.g., APA, MLA). Examples of violations of the academic integrity code include but are not limited to: failure to use quotation marks when quoting, failure to give full credit when paraphrasing, use of others' ideas or work products, submission of work prepared through impermissible collaboration, and submission of work prepared by you for another class. (Your work in this class may be related to your work in another class, but the work you submit for this class should not duplicate that submitted for another class. If you anticipate an exception, please do not hesitate to ask.) Violation of the Academic Integrity Code may result in failure in the course, as well as more serious academic sanctions. For details about the academic integrity code, please refer to https://acadreg.ust.hk/generalreg.html.

Students have the option of checking for plagiarism before turning in each homework, for example using the anti-plagiarism software Turnitin available on Canvas. A rule of thumb is that the similarity score should not exceed 15%, excluding references. Though use of software for spell and grammar check are acceptable, students in PPOL 5160 are asked not to use AI to write their essays or reports. Similarity also applies to essays by different students in the same class (in other words, for individual assignments, do not copy other students' work).

LATE HOMEWORK POLICY

The only legitimate justification for late homework submission is sick leave or other emergency. Depending on the length of sick leave, you may be asked to present proof of sickness such as a "certificate of sickness" which is obtainable from the doctor. In any other case, extensions on homework due dates are granted only on a case by case basis, and you will need to request extensions from the instructor at least five days before the due dates. For instance, if you have several assignments due at the same time, you may request an extension, which may or may not be granted. When extensions are granted, your submissions will not be penalized.

The "hard deadline" for each assignment is 3 days past the original due date. Late submissions are penalized if extensions are not granted beforehand: your grade will be reduced by 10% if less than one day late and 20% if the homework is one day or more overdue, and by 50% if more than two days overdue. Any submissions are not accepted beyond the hard deadline.

HEALTH AND HYGIENE

If you are feeling under the weather (and certainly if you test positive for COVID), please stay home and work out, with the professor, how to make up for the missed discussion. The professor will see to it that you can catch up with the material discussed. It may even be possible to join by zoom (again, you would need to discuss these options with the professor).