

## **PUBA 747: APPLIED RESEARCH PROBLEM I**

**Fall, 2023**

School of Government

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

1.5 credits

On-Campus, 11am-1230am, Knapp Bldg - Rm 3108

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### **Course Description**

PUBA 747 requires students to reflect on and demonstrate how they apply and integrate their learning from MPA courses and their professional work experiences (PWE) to respond to an applied research problem. Students will select from a list of applied research problems. In this course, the student will design and work on applied research to respond to their selected problem. The applied research will be written and evaluated by a three-person committee during PUBA 748.

### **Learning Objectives**

This course requires students to illustrate and apply theoretical and conceptual materials within the context of their professional work experiences and in conducting an applied research project that responds to a complex public service problem. At the completion of the course, students will be able to:

- Reflect on professional experiences systematically and routinely.
- Integrate classroom learning with real-life experiences.
- Develop a foundation of work that will inform the applied research problem.

### **Course Texts**

The following is a suggested text to help you better understand applied research. It is available in the UNC library, which you can access at the following link:

Brown, M., and K. Hale. *Applied Research Methods in Public & Nonprofit Organizations*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2014.

### **Ground Rules**

This is a graduate-level course that demands students be carefully prepared. Furthermore, this course is presented within the context of a professional degree program and will be conducted according to the standards of the professional workplace. Students are expected to refrain from non-class-related communication and interactions such as texting and social media AND expected to be **ON CAMERA for every class session** (*if you cannot be on-camera please request to switch to the in-person class section*). Class members should consider themselves colleagues who will collaborate to help each other develop a solid understanding of materials and concepts. (Note: This does not suggest collaboration on research questions and research design for your applied problem; it suggests collaboration to understand course content so you are able to individually produce a high-quality project.)

All assignments must be completed on time. Unless otherwise specified for a specific assignment, all assignments should follow *The Chicago Manual of Style*. Please use author-date citation style and **in-text citation**. Include citations for all sources, including page numbers with direct quotes. You are in graduate school, and the expectation is that you will submit first-class, error-free work in each assignment. If writing is a challenge for you (and it is for many of us), visit the Writing Center: <https://writingcenter.unc.edu/>. **All writing assignments (except forums, see later) are due 2 hours before the live session.**

## Assignments

<i>Assignment</i>	<i>Percent of Grade</i>
Class Participation	15
Forum Posts	15
PWE Reflection Memo	10
Applied Problem Selection Memo	10
Literature Review	25
Research Design Memo	25

- *Class Participation*: A successful class depends on the active participation of all students. Fifteen percent of the course grade will depend on engagement and respectful interactions with professor and peers.
- *Forum Posts*: Throughout the semester, students will be required to respond to a series of forum posts. **All forum posts are due 24 hours prior to live session.**
  - Forum Post 1: Describe the organization you worked with during your professional work experience (PWE), including what type of organization it is and how it is structured (centralized decision-making authority? Few or many hierarchical layers? Many or few rules?). Discuss the organization's clients or program beneficiaries and the political, social, and economic environment in which they work. Also describe the project you worked on. How did the project go? What resources did you have at your disposal that were needed to complete the project? What resources did you lack that you needed for successful project implementation? Prior to class, please review at least three peers' responses, and be prepared to discuss in the live session.
  - Forum Post 2: In your experiences, who made decisions and how were determinations made related to information standards? Were your organizations able to get information effectively and efficiently? Did you perceive that quality information was used to inform problems? Did people seem to care about the quality of information? Prior to class, please review at least three peers' responses, and be prepared to discuss in the live session.
  - Forum Post 3: Identify challenges or problems that involved data and/or a decision you have been involved with or observed in a professional work setting. What qualitative or quantitative methods were used to answer the problems? Would you consider additional techniques? Which, and why? Prior to class, please review at least three peers' responses, and be prepared to discuss in the live session.
- *PWE Reflection Memo*: A memo of two to three pages in length. The goal of this assignment is to develop a concise description of the organization and environment

during your PWE and how your knowledge of scholarship informs your understanding of organizational issues present. Assume that the memo has been requested by one of the top organizational leaders, who wants an outsider's perspective of the organization, its environment, its challenges, and possible theory solutions. This paper must be substantiated with scholarship from your MPA studies.

- *Applied Problem Selection Memo*: A memo of one to two pages in length, describing the problem, why it is important, and the main question(s) of the project. Students also must discuss the project's relevance and significance to public service or management, citing relevant literature.
- *Literature Review*: A four-to six-page primary literature review for the applied project. Students will provide a review of the literature and scholarship to inform and support the problem analysis for their selected ARP prompt. This literature review will serve as raw material for the literature review that will be included in your final ARP. A literature review is more than a summary of previously published research on the topic. Students will synthesize existing literature to draw key lessons, which will help students understand key concepts and constructs to study during the research process. In addition to this assignment, it is expected that the response to the applied research problem developed 748 will incorporate literature throughout, including in the formulation of recommendations.
- *Research Design Memo*: A memo of two to three pages in length, providing a brief description of the research design, including the research question, the unit of analysis, what data will be used (e.g., interviews, survey data, secondary data), the sampling strategy (e.g., justification of the sample, description of sample selection), the analytical strategy chosen (e.g., content analysis, regression and/or interviews), and why that strategy is best suited to address your research question. It is also recommended that students include a design contingency plan in the event that data collection does not go 100% as planned.

**PUBA 747 Schedule**

<b>Unit</b>	<b>Dates for Fall term</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Learning Objectives</b>	<b>Assignment Due</b>
1	Thursday, August 31	PWE Skills, Reflection, Context and Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop reflective learning process skills.</li> <li>• Apply reflective learning strategies.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Forum Post 1</b></li> </ul>
2	Thursday, Sept 7	Applied vs. Theoretical Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compare applied and theoretical research.</li> <li>• Practice appropriate application for each research response type.</li> <li>• Identify and articulate research questions from applied problems.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>PWE Reflection Memo Due</b></li> </ul>
3	Thursday Sept 14	Problem Definition and Analysis of Organizational Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe relevant context, influences, values, and stakeholders.</li> <li>• Evaluate feasibility of research questions.</li> <li>• Practice skills in articulating applied research questions.</li> </ul>	
4	Thursday Sept 21	What We Already Know	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify different types and sources of information to inform your work.</li> <li>• Evaluate quality of previous work.</li> <li>• Explain role of literature reviews in responding to applied problems.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Forum Post 2</b></li> <li>• <b>Applied Problem Selection Memo Due</b></li> </ul>
5	Thursday Sept 28	Designing Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore design considerations. Demonstrate knowledge of sample and data issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Forum Post 3</b></li> <li>• <b>Study Visualization</b></li> </ul>
6	Thursday Oct 5	Qualitative Research Methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluate appropriate use of qualitative methods. Compare and evaluate qualitative techniques.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Literature Review Due</b></li> </ul>
7	Thursday Oct 12	Quantitative Research Methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluate appropriate use of quantitative methods. Compare and evaluate quantitative techniques.</li> </ul>	

8	Thursday Oct 19			<b>Research Design Memo</b>
9	Tuesday- Thursday October 24-26 <sup>th</sup>	Meet with the Instructor 1:1 Virtually	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Apply learning to individual applied research problem.</li></ul>	<b>Meetings</b>

## **Grading System**

The MPA program follows the graduate schools grading system of H, P, L, and F, or High Pass, Pass, Low Pass, and Fail. In PUBA 747, assignments are evaluated on a traditional numerical 100-point grading scale. Unlike a traditional grading scale, however, numerical values awarded for assignments do not convert directly to a letter grade at the end of the semester. A High Pass is awarded to students who consistently submit course assignments that are truly excellent and distinguishable. Conversely, students who consistently do not put enough effort into course assignments and/or fail to demonstrate mastery of key concepts will earn a Low Pass. For more information on the grading scale, please visit the graduate handbook:

<http://handbook.unc.edu/pdf/handbook.pdf>.

In this course, an Incomplete (I) grade will be given only if the student has arranged it before grades are due. Students will receive an Incomplete only if they have written documentation proving they are unable to complete the course through no fault of their own and they are generally passing the class (75 percent grade or higher). Students receiving an Incomplete will sign a contract with me detailing what they must do to complete the class and the day by which they will complete it. If the student does not complete the class by the date in the contract, the grade will become an F.

## **Accommodations**

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill facilitates the implementation of reasonable accommodations, including resources and services for students with disabilities, chronic medical conditions, and temporary disability or pregnancy complications resulting in difficulties with accessing learning opportunities. All accommodations are coordinated through the Accessibility Resources and Service Office. In the first instance please visit their website.

<http://accessibility.unc.edu>, 919-962-8300, or [accessibility@unc.edu](mailto:accessibility@unc.edu). A student is welcome to initiate the registration process at any time; however, the process can take time. You are encouraged to contact ARS as early in the semester as possible.

## **DEI Statement**

Your faculty for this course are committed to demonstrating that we value the perspectives of individuals from all backgrounds reflecting the diversity of our students. Diversity is broadly defined to include race, gender identity, national origin, ethnicity, religion, social class, age, sexual orientation, political background, and physical and learning ability. Although we strive to make this classroom an inclusive space for all students, please let us know if there is anything we can do to improve. We appreciate suggestions.

## **Plagiarism**

Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated, and disciplinary action will be pursued if such behavior is discovered. For further information about academic misconduct, see the UNC Code of Student Conduct located on the web at

<http://instrument.unc.edu/>.