

## **PAD 6250**

### **Research Design Paper Assignment**

Research is about figuring things out. Your task for this project is to pick a research question and design a research study to answer it. You will describe the relevant past work on the area, formulate hypotheses, create a plan to get relevant data, decide how to measure the variables, and plan how you would analyze the data. You do NOT need to actually conduct the study (although some of you might later decide to actually conduct it for your job or as a practicum project). You will write a paper describing your proposed study. You will submit a brief project proposal approximately a month before the final paper is due.

Formulating a topic is the most difficult part for many students. You might think about Babbie's wheel of science here. There's also a section in the text about formulating a research project that many find helpful (and he also has sections at the end of each chapter linking back to that). Here are some other things to think about when coming up with a topic: the "why?" question you answered from the first day of class, your own experiences, issues from other classes, problems from work/internships, what other people are writing about in the news or in academic journals.

Your research question should be sufficiently narrow and should be feasible to answer with your study. It should also be something we don't already know the answer to. Don't get hung up on originality, though. Remember that there's nothing new under the sun: innovative ideas are just looking at old ideas in new ways, or by combining them in novel ways. If your initial question has been studied/answered, can you go deeper or put a new spin on it? Think about the limitations of past work and go from there.

Your research question should NOT be a question about values. "Should we implement a wealth tax?" "Should we arm public school teachers?" "Should the US have a single-payer health care system?" These are all important questions but inappropriate research questions. (You can revisit them in the policy analysis course.) Science and research can't answer values questions; they might inform them, though. For example, "are citizens in single-payer countries more satisfied/dissatisfied with quality of health care?" is answerable through research (although it's still somewhat broad). Again, the best questions will probably be very narrowly focused and relevant to your work area, your job, your future job as a manager, etc.

Write up your paper using the following basic format:

- Title
- Intro/Research Question
  - Begin by making clear what question your study is trying to answer.
  - Briefly explain why your question is worth answering. It should be at least somewhat relevant for public administration, nonprofit studies, or quasi-public work (social entrepreneurship, etc.).
  - Your RQ should be sufficiently narrow, feasible to answer, and currently (more or less) unanswered.
- Background/Literature Review

- Summarize the *relevant* work that has been done related to your research question.
- Try to make this section not terrible. Instead of just regurgitating past research (e.g., “Grayer (2018) found that.... Neuby (2012) showed that....”), try to frame this as a way to build an argument for why your study is worth doing and why you expect your hypotheses (next section) to be true.
- If you use five words in a row from someone else, then you need to put them in quotation marks and provide a citation. It’s much better if you rewrite to paraphrase the information (and you’ll still cite it). You should almost always avoid direct quotes and paraphrase instead.
- Hypotheses
  - State and justify any hypotheses about what you expect to find.
  - Justifications can be very brief—they just need to show why you expect your hypothesis to be true. They should probably link back to things you discussed in the literature review. If it’s very clear how the hypotheses come from the literature review, you might be able to just list them without justifications.
- Data & Methods
  - You might need to split this into two sections, depending on your project. Most of you will probably describe the data first then the methods, but for some projects the reverse will make more sense. Use your human brain.
  - Briefly describe the data you’ll use to test your hypotheses. If you’ll need to collect data for the study, then describe how you’ll do so. Who is the population of interest? Who will be in the sample? Describe how you’ll pick who’s in the sample (i.e., the sampling procedures). If you’ll use data that already exists, you should discuss who gathered the data, when, how, how you acquired it, and what the sample size is.
  - What is your unit of analysis?
  - Make it clear what your variables are. If you’re testing relationships, you should clarify the dependent and independent variables.
  - State how you measure your variables.
    - Briefly discuss conceptualization and operationalization for your variables. You don’t have to define those or even use those words, but I should understand what concepts you’ll be measuring, what indicators you’ll use, and the levels of measurement for the variables (e.g., nominal, dummy, etc.).
    - If you’ll collect data from a survey, you should have the actual survey questions in the appendix at the end. If appropriate, you might also give the wording for any confusing/important ones in this section as well.
    - It may be appropriate to discuss the validity and/or reliability of key variables. Are you measuring what you really want to measure? Does this survey question get at the dimension you really want to be examining? Are respondents likely to tell us the truth? Are their opinions likely to be well-formed enough that they would have given the same answer if they had been asked a week later instead?

- Describe how you'll do the study. Is this an experiment, quasi-experiment, observational study, qualitative field research, secondary analysis, content analysis, or something else?
- Explain why this is the right approach to answer your research question.
- Describe the details of what you'll do. If it's a qualitative study, will you use interviews, focus groups, ethnography, or something else?
- Discuss what you'll do with your data after it's ready. Will you test your hypotheses with confidence intervals, crosstabs, differences of means, regression, or something else? Briefly make it clear why that's the right approach.
- Discussion
  - Very briefly return to your research question and discuss the extent to which your project will answer your research question. You might briefly remind the reader why it's important.
  - Elaborate on the potential implications of your research findings. Since you won't actually conduct the study, you might think about implications if your results turn out one way and implications if they turn out another way.
  - Does this suggest additional steps you (or other researchers) should take? Do you see weaknesses/limitations in your approach? You might discuss additional variables you wish you could have included but couldn't (for some reason). You might discuss problems you see with the way you're measuring your variables. Are any of the problems from class relevant here (reductionism, ecological fallacy, threats to internal/external validity, ethical issues, etc.)?
- Appendix
  - If you're proposing a survey, you should probably give some/all of the questions here.
  - You might add anything else that might be relevant here.

You will submit the paper on D2L. The text should probably come out to about 5-8 double-spaced pages (1 in. margins, 12 pt. font, Times New Roman typeface) without the title page, appendix, references, etc. However, you should focus on including the important stuff rather than fluffing it up to meet a certain length. Throughout your paper, strive to use active voice verbs. (Avoid the passive voice. Try not to start sentences with "There is." If you are editing your text and notice that you have started sentences with phrases like "It could be argued that" or "It is believed that" or "Extant research indicates that," delete everything up through the "that.") Also, strongly consider using Grammarly, the [KSU writing center](#), and the [KSU library research consultation services](#) (note that you'll need to make an appointment with the social sciences research librarian).