Subject Description Form

Subject Code	APSS5201
Subject Title	Policy Research Method
Credit Value	3
Level	5
Pre-requisite / Co-requisite/ Exclusion	Nil

Assessment Methods			

100% Continuous Assessment	Individual Assessment	Group Assessment
1. Documentary Research Report	0%	10%
2. Seminar Presentation	0%	20%
3. Class Exercises	40%	0%
4. Group Project Report	0%	30%

- The grade is calculated according to the percentage assigned;
- The completion and submission of all component assignments are required for passing the subject; and
- Student must pass all components (standard of passing) if he/she is to pass the subject.

Objectives

This subject aims to provide students with the necessary principles, knowledge and skills for conducting research for developing, analyzing and assessing social policy. Students are expected to learn how to identify and develop research designs and data collection strategies for researching on social policy. These conceptual tools will in turn enable students to become a more sophisticated consumer and producer of research while getting a hands-on introduction to familiarize them with a range of quantitative and qualitative methods commonly used in researching on social policy, including archival and documentary research, using government and Census data, identifying best practices, bench marking, planning and implementing surveys, focus group interviews and analyzing data.

Intended Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the subject, students will be able to:

a. Understand the strength and limitations of major concepts and principles associated with various methods commonly used in social policy research;

	b. Demonstrate their knowledge and competence in designing, implementing and managing proficiently the tools and procedures involved in completing social policy research professionally and ethically; and c. Analyze and interpret findings in social policy research and highlight local and comparative contexts.

Subject Synopsis/ Indicative Syllabus	1. What is policy research?
	    ● A branch of applied social science research/a domain of social policy research
	    ● The theoretical base of policy research – agency and structure
	    ● Examples of policy research
	    ● Needs assessment, policy development or advocacy
	    ● Impact assessment and evaluation
	
	2. Designing policy research
	    ● Conceptualizing the policy research question
	    ● Quantitative, qualitative or mixed Methods
	    ● Data requirement
	    ● Research design for policy research
	    ● Developing research plan
	
	3. Researching social policy I: Descriptive Statistics
	    ● Basic plots
	    ● Secondary analysis
	    ● Using Census data
	    ● Correlation
	
	4. Researching Social Policy II: Regression Analysis
	    ● Ordinary Least Squares
	    ● Substantive significance
	    ● Statistical significance
	    ● Causal significance
	
	5. Researching social policy III: Causal Threats
	    ● Reversed causality
	    ● Omitted variable bias
	    ● Selection bias
	
	6. Making recommendations and communicating research
	    ● Actual data analysis
	    ● Criteria for policy recommendations
	
	7. Reflecting on policy research
	    ● Reflection on policy research
	    ● Challenges of policy research
	    ● Roles of policy researcher

Teaching/Learning Methodology	This subject will engage students in a variety of teaching and learning methods. Interactive lectures and workshops will help students to become conversant with the common paradigms and frameworks currently embedded in understanding and practicing social policy research. Group project activities will further allow students to

acquire practical knowledge, competence and skills in deciding and using specific techniques commonly required for conducting social policy research. The seminar presentation along with the written reports will ensure they gain experience in data analysis, develop empathy, responsibility and sensitivity in making appropriate recommendations and developing effective communication skills for conveying social policy research findings to the professional community and public at large.

			Intended subject learning outcomes to be assessed		
Assessment Methods in Alignment with Intended Learning Outcomes	Specific assessment methods/tasks	% weighting	a	b	c
	1. Documentary Research Report	10%	✓	✓	✓
	2. Seminar Presentation	20%	✓	✓	✓
	3. Class Exercises	40%	✓	✓	✓
	4. Group Project Report	30%	✓	✓	✓
	Total	100%	✓	✓	✓

Explanation of the appropriateness of the assessment methods in assessing the intended learning outcomes:

Documentary Research Report
Students are expected to complete a documentary research report of no less than 2,000 words, demonstrating their capability in conducting a literary review and summarizing and synthesizing trends, benchmarks and best practices of selected social policy using Census or other secondary data.

Class Exercise(s)
Students will be given class exercises to test their analytical competence with regard to the designing of policy research.

Seminar Presentation
Students are expected to present their research progress demonstrating their competence not only in using appropriate policy research techniques for collecting data but also in communicating effectively and sensitively.

Group Project Report
Students will be asked to engage in a group project using selected methods and techniques covered in the lectures to research a particular social policy. Their findings and policy recommendations and strategies for communicating their results will be highlighted in a report of 4000-5000 words. This will enable students to show not only their knowledge and competence, but also their creative and independent thinking in making decisions for planning, executing, as well as managing research activities and interpreting and communicating the findings of their research professionally.

Student Study Effort Expected	Class contact:	
	▪ Lectures	39 Hrs.
	Other student study effort:	
	▪ Self-directed study	39 Hrs.
	▪ Preparation for documentary research	16 Hrs.
	▪ Preparation for seminar presentation	10 Hrs.
	▪ Preparation for final group project	20 Hrs.
	Total student study effort	124 Hrs.
Medium of Instruction	English	
Medium of Assessment	English	
Reading List and References	Essential Becker, S. & Bryman, A. (Eds.) (2004). *Understanding research for social policy and practice: Themes, methods and approaches.* Bristol**:** The Policy Press. Byrne, D. S. (2011). *Applying social science: the role of social research in politics, policy and practice*. Bristol: The Policy Press. Fink, A. (2014) *Conducting research literature reviews: from the Internet to paper* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. King, Gary, Robert O. Keohane, & Sidney Verba. (1994). *Designing social inquiry: Scientific inference in qualitative research*. Princeton university press. Gerber, Alan S., & Donald P. Green. (2012). *Field experiments: Design, analysis, and interpretation*. WW Norton. Hammersley, M. (2013). *The myth of research-based policy & practice.* London: Sage Publications. Majchrzak, A. (2014). *Methods for policy research: Taking socially responsible action* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. Supplementary Askew, R., John, P. & Liu, H. (2010). Can policy makers listen to researchers? An application of the design experiment methodology to a local drugs policy intervention. *Policy & Politics,* 38(4): 583-598.	

Bessant, J. Watts, R., Dalton, T. & Smyth, P. (2005). *Policy talk.* Sydney: Allen and Unwin.

Bickman, L. & Rog, D.J. (Eds). (2009). *The SAGE handbook of applied social research methods.* Los Angeles: Sage Publications.

Bloor, M. & Wood, F. (2006). *Keywords in qualitative methods: a vocabulary of research concepts.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Clark, V.L.P. & Creswell, J.W. (Eds.) (2008). *The mixed methods reader.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Coers, M. (2002). *Benchmarking: a guide for your journey to best-practice processes*. Houston, TX: American Productivity & Quality Center.

Edwards, M. (2001). *Social policy, public policy: from problem to practice.* Sydney: Allen and Unwin.

Jung, T., Nutley, S., Morton. S. & Millar, A. (2010). Linking research and policy in Scotland. *Evidence & Policy,* 6(2): 213-235.

Machi, L. A. (2012). *The literature review: Six steps to success* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Mertens, D.M. & Ginsberg, P.E. (Eds.) (2009). *The handbook of social research Ethics*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Pardey, P.G. & Smith, V.H. (Eds.) (2004). *What's economics worth? Valuing policy research.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Scott, S. (Ed.) (2006). *Documentary research.* London: Sage Publications.

Spicker, P. (2011). Generalisation and phronesis: Rethinking the methodology of social policy. *Journal of Social Policy,* 40(1): 1-19.

Stone, D. & Denham, A. (Eds.) (2004). *Think tank traditions: Policy research and the politics of ideas.* Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press; New York: Palgrave.

Yin, R.K. (2011). *Qualitative research from start to finish.* New York: Guildford Press.