

Syllabus

PSC 233W, Fall 2018

Dear Student:

In this syllabus, I'm going to try to tell you what I think are the most important things you need to know in order to decide whether to take this course. I'm not going to cover all the details -- just the stuff I think you absolutely need to know in order to make that decision in the first week of the semester.

Of course, if there's anything you need to know that I don't cover here, just send me an email or ask me when you see me in our class meeting. I'm at stuart.jordan@rochester.edu. My office hours are by appointment.

-Stu

How your work in this course affects others

Above all else, you should know that whether you show up and do your work in this course has consequences for persons other than you. The course is taught in partnership with local government agencies and non-profit organizations. All of the work you do in this course contributes to a project that I've planned in collaboration with these partners over the last 12 months (sometimes more). These projects are real -- i.e. our partners have real needs and they expect the work students do in this course to meet those needs. So, if you take this course and then blow off your work or become unable to do your work, you'll leave those needs unmet, you'll force our partner organizations to change their plans, and you'll harm my ability to recruit partners to invest in future projects for other students. Moreover, you'll work as part of a team of students in this course and each of you will depend in part on work done by other members of the team. So if you fail to show up and do your work, you'll make it harder for everyone else on the team to deliver a quality product for our partners.

There are plenty of courses at the UofR in which you are the only person who stands to lose anything if you decide to blow off coursework or your life gets in the way. If you think this is a semester when you want the freedom to blow things off (By the way, I'd like everyone to have at least one semester like that in college.), or you think other demands in your life might get in the way of you doing the work in this course, don't take this course.

Showing up

In many courses, showing up for class and other scheduled activities is just one among many entirely optional things you can do or not do in the course. For instance, sometimes you can skip lecture and just do the reading. That's not the case in this course. If you take the course, showing up for scheduled activities counts towards your grade (details on exactly how later in this document). More importantly, whether you are physically present affects the ability of the rest of the team to do quality work. And if the quality of the work suffers...see the section above. So if showing up is something you can't do every week, every time, all semester, or if showing up every week, every time, all semester is something you're not sure you'll want to do, don't take this course.

Times and Places

So exactly when and where do you have to show up? You probably already know that our scheduled class meetings are **10:25-11:40 on Mondays and Wednesdays**. During the semester's first four weeks (up through September 20th) and the last five weeks (November 12 through December 12) you are expected to be there for both those meetings every week, and all of the stuff I wrote above applies (i.e. it counts toward your grade, and if you're not there it harms people other than you).

But during the middle 7 weeks of the course (September 24 through November 9) showing up requires something quite different. During this phase of the course, we will split into two workgroups, with each workgroup concentrating on one of our two partner organizations. During that period, you will meet with your assigned workgroup during just ONE of our two regular class meetings (which one will be determined in the week of September 17). But the time you would spend on the other meeting will instead be taken up by **field work** for your workgroup. If you haven't been paying attention so far, now's the time to tune in:

Field work will require you to spend about 3 hours each week for every one of those seven weeks from September 24 to November 9 at one of the two field sites for the course. These sites are off campus, and can take up to 30 to 40 minutes for you to travel to...**so the total off-campus time-commitment each week will be about 4 hours**. There is a pretty wide range of choices in time slots during the week available for you to meet the field work expectation. But, **all of the available field work time happens during weekday mornings or early on weekday afternoons**. So if you have an especially full schedule of morning and early afternoon classes, this course may not be possible for you this semester. On the first day of class, I'll point out [this form](#). You can look at it now to check the field work schedule and see if in fact you have the time in your schedule to do the field work in this class.

Earning a passing grade in the course requires that you fully attend and complete six field work sessions for your workgroup during those seven weeks from September 24 to November 9. So check your schedule now. If the fieldwork isn't possible for you given your other commitments, don't take this course.

Will this be worth doing?

So what will you do and learn in this course? There's a few parts to this: First of all, the organizations we partner with in this course are involved in the implementation of public policy. The organizations vary from one semester to another. But they all represent a part of our political institutions that are critical and often invisible in popular media: The organizations on the ground that try to turn law and legislation into actual services for and actions towards individuals. These organizations include, for instance, lower criminal and civil courts, housing providers, police departments, social welfare agencies, health-care providers and schools. In this course, you're going to be involved directly in their work, and you're going to watch them do their work. So you will get some exposure to what policy and law look like when they are implemented in practice.

Second, the projects you'll work on in this course are research and evaluation projects. In each case, I've worked with staff at the partner organization to identify something that organization needs to learn about its environment in order to effectively pursue its mission. You and your workteam will be collecting and analyzing data that the organization can use for that purpose. You will also work to describe the data you collect and the results of your analyses in a way that help members of the organization accurately understand the world they're working in and make critical decisions going forward. So, you will gain direct experience in the design and conduct of this kind of applied research and evaluation.

Finally, it's worth saying that the organizations we partner with in this course typically serve persons whose basic human needs -- e.g. for health care, decent housing, physical security, educational and economic opportunity -- go unmet by the private market. Another way of saying this is that these organizations work face-to-face with the poverty, exclusion and exploitation embedded in our communities in the U.S. The persistence of these injustices and the harms they inflict are always painful to witness. You'll witness a good bit of them in this course.

In this particular semester (fall of 2018), we have two partners: Legal Aid of Rochester and Huther-Doyle, Inc. Legal Aid of Rochester provides low- and no-cost legal representation to low-income persons. In particular, they are the most common provider of representation to tenants in litigation between landlords and tenants. In that project, we will collaborate with legal aid to build a new dataset that describes eviction hearings that take place in Rochester City Court. This is part of a larger effort by Legal Aid and other institutions in Rochester to identify and advocate for reforms to the practices of the Rochester City Court and the government of the City of Rochester that can address concerns of housing affordability, quality and access.

Huther-Doyle is a non-profit clinic in the City of Rochester that provides outpatient mental health and addiction treatment. Almost all of the care Huther-Doyle provides is paid for by the U.S. Federal Medicaid program -- thus they are part of the network of institutions in the U.S. that provide health care to those unable to buy insurance or acquire it as an employee benefit. Our project will support an effort by Huther-Doyle to modify its practices in ways that more effectively meet the needs of clients who suffer from the after-effects of traumatic life experiences.

What work will you do when?

The course is broken up into three phases.

Phase 1: Context and Preparation. 8/29-9/21

In this phase you will learn critical background on the institutions you'll be working with and the challenges to policy and practice our projects will tackle. Your work will consist of weekly readings (100 to 200 pages), in-class discussions, and weekly reflective writing assignments. Attendance at both course meetings are required every week during this phase. You will learn about and prepare for participation in both of our two projects during this phase. At the end of the phase you'll be assigned to one of the two projects (the Legal Aid project or the Huther-Doyle project), and will concentrate primarily on that project for the remainder of the semester.

Phase 2: Field Work, Data Collection, Observation. 9/24-11/9

In this phase you will conduct the field work and data collection for the project to which you've been assigned. As I wrote above, your work each week will consist of field work and a required class meeting with your team. In addition to these activities, you can expect 2 to 3 hours of work on your own each week in processing and preparing the data you collect for use by the rest of your team, as well as occasional reading and reflective writing assignments.

Phase 3: Analysis and Reporting. 11/12-12/12

In this phase you will be given responsibility to generate written and audio-visual material that helps the partner organization on your project to accurately understand and interpret the data your team has collected. We will again meet as a full group during our two class meetings each week, and you will be required to attend both. Your work will consist primarily of data analysis, drafting of your material, giving and receiving peer feedback on drafts, and re-writing. You will deliver a final product by 12/12. Staff from partner organizations will occasionally participate in our class meetings to help us refine our work.

Your Course Grade

We will keep a spreadsheet called a task tracker [at this link](#). (Currently, the task tracker is accessible to anyone with a link. 2 weeks in, once enrollment for the course is set, I will restrict access to students in the course.) The task tracker will list for each week exactly what you are expected to do that week -- including required readings, attendance at meetings and field work, data entry, and any assignments (drafting, reflective writing, etc.) I will review your work weekly and mark on the task tracker whether you have completed your required work for the week at an acceptable level of quality.

If you do all your required work by the deadline at an acceptable level of quality every week, you can expect an 'A' in this course. You can expect that failing to complete anything less than 90% of required tasks on time, or failing to submit on time and complete any work on which your peers or our partners directly depend will result in a grade of B or lower. Failing to complete anything less than 80% of required tasks on time, or missing multiple deadlines for tasks on which your peers or our partners directly depend will result in a grade of C or lower.

Finally, failing to fully complete (meaning showing up on time, staying the full time, and doing the required work) for 6 field work sessions during phase 2 of the course will result in a failing grade for the course.

What you should take from all this is that showing up and putting in the time is thing that really matters in this course. You will have about 9 hours of tasks to do per week, including any time you spend in class meetings and field work. If you put the this time in and do your assigned tasks to the best of your ability, you will get an 'A.'

Accessibility and Accommodations

I'm committed to making this course accessible to all students. Please let me know if you need accommodations to fully participate in any feature of this course. I also strongly encourage you to reach out for support from UofR's Office of Disability Resources by emailing disability@rochester.edu or calling (585) 276-5075.

Academic Honesty

I will give specific instructions on what is OK and not OK on each assignment. If you find me insufficiently clear, please remind me.

That said, there are four things to be especially aware of regarding academic honesty in this course.

First, you will frequently be assigned reflective writing assignments that ask you to describe your thoughts, questions, beliefs and reactions to your readings and experiences. Never allow anyone else to write these for you. You should almost never have a need to use any source for these, because they ask you to describe your own thoughts and reactions. However, if you do draw on an outside source, you must quote it and cite it.

Second, you will be collecting and entering data. I will treat any falsification or faking of data as a severe violation of academic dishonesty, because it stands to do severe harm to the populations our partners serve, to our partners, and to the ability of the University to positively impact the community beyond campus.

Third, you will be working with sensitive data that you may not share beyond the students in the course and our partner organizations. Sharing this data with others could do immense harm to the persons whose our partners serve. It will also violate the trust of our partners and thus harm the ability of the University to positively impact the community. Thus I will treat any such sharing of sensitive data as a severe breach of academic honesty.

Fourth, in the final phase of the course, you will author and produce written and audio-visual material for our partners. Those materials will be presented as your work and thus should be solely your work, albeit informed by feedback from me and your peers. The work you do in this phase will likely be most effective if it is informed by and draws on outside sources. You should never include material in this work that is drawn from outside sources without proper quotation and citation. **This applies to both draft and final versions of this work.**