

Public Opinion and Policy

POLSCI 4SS3

Winter 2024

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popw24.gustavodiaz.org

Welcome!

This course is about **quantitative research designs** applied to **public opinion and policy**

- **Quantitative:** Data analysis using statistics and statistical programming software
- **Research design:** Thinking about how research is conducted

Welcome!

This course is about **quantitative research designs** applied to **public opinion and policy**

- **Public opinion:** Views among the “general” public
- **(Public) policy:** Government actions and how to carry them (decision making)

Why public opinion and policy?

- Both are important for the operation of government and adjacent organizations
- *Why together?*
- Both are important and difficult/expensive to get right
- Minimize mistakes **before** conducting a study

Do private, for-profit clinics save taxpayers money and reduce wait times? The data says no

'Privatization is such a broad term that it's basically useless,' says one doctor

[Marcy Cuttler](#), [Christine Birak](#) · CBC News · Posted: Mar 14, 2023 4:00 AM EDT | Last Updated: March 14, 2023



Content warning

- We will rely heavily on **math** and **statistics** to think about the properties of a research design
- You will be asked to:
 - Read technical writing
 - Understand and explain statistical concepts
 - Apply them in writing and coding
 - Write a statistics-heavy final project (**optional**)

Materials

Course website

popw24.gustavodiaz.org

POLSCI 4SS3
Public Opinion
and Policy

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Public Opinion and Policy

POLSCI 4SS3 – Winter 2023 – McMaster University

Course Description

This course explores quantitative research designs to answer questions about public opinion and policy in academia, government, and industry. We will examine how to conduct surveys to understand variation in public opinion or attitudes toward several subjects across the world. We will also examine empirical strategies to generate credible evidence to inform policy and decision-making in different contexts.

In this website you will find all the course materials. Assignments must be submitted through [Avenue](#).

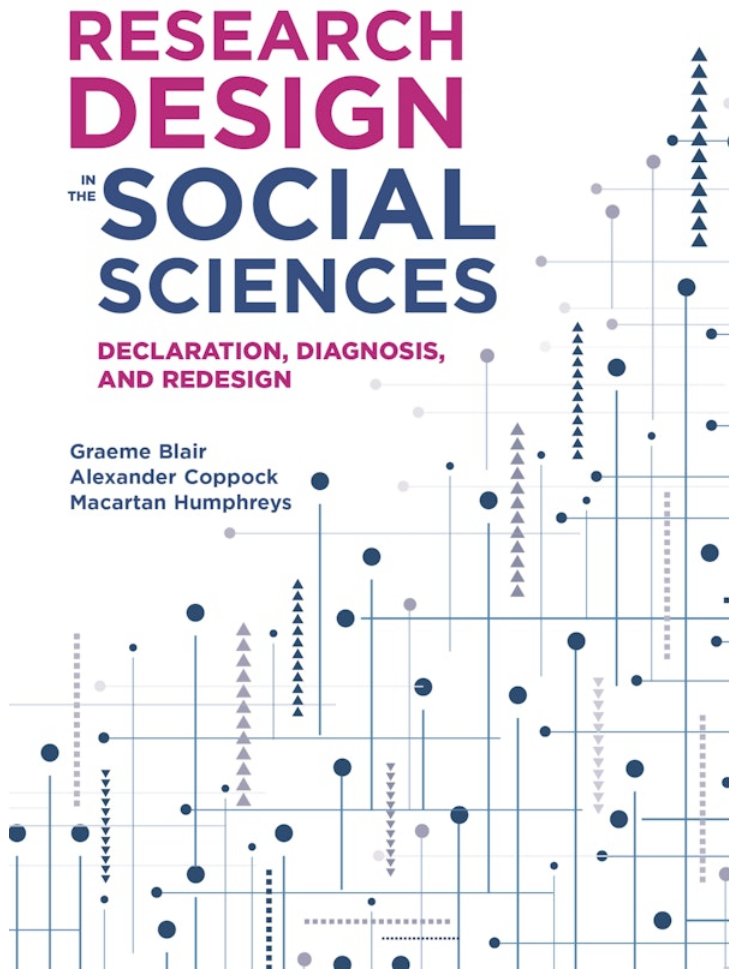
Instructor

- 👤 [Dr. Gustavo Diaz](#)
- 🏛️ KTH 505
- ✉️ diazg2@mcmaster.ca
- 📅 [Schedule a meeting](#)

Course details

- 📅 Thursdays
- 🕒 2:30-5:20 PM
- 📍 See [Avenue](#)
- 📅 January 11-April 4, 2024

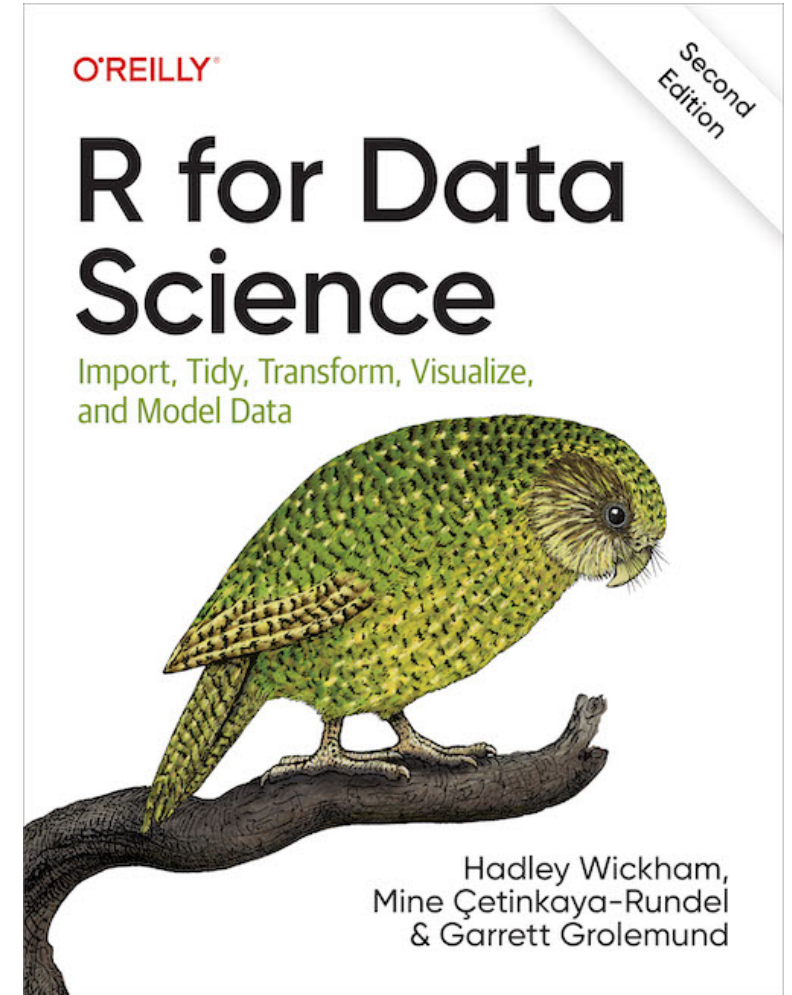
Required reading



- **FREE ONLINE. DO NOT BUY**
- Short chapters with math and code
- Read 1-3 sections + 1-2 research articles per week

Suggested reading

- **ALSO FREE ONLINE. DO NOT BUY**
- Second edition
- Good to consult while working on lab assignments



Software

R and RStudio

The screenshot displays the RStudio interface with the following components:

- Source Editor:** Contains R code for loading packages, filtering data, and creating a boxplot.
- Environment:** Shows the 'daily' data frame with 365 observations and 3 variables.
- Console:** Shows the execution of the R code, including the output of the 'count(date)' function.
- Plots:** Displays a boxplot titled 'Number of 2013 New York Flights Each Weekday'.

```
1 library(nycflights13) ## package containing flights dataset
2 library(lubridate)
3 library(dplyr)
4 library(ggplot2)
5
6 head(flights, n = 3)
7 daily <- flights %>%
8   mutate(date = make_date(year, month, day)) %>%
9   count(date) %>%
10  mutate(wday = wday(date, label = TRUE))
11 head(daily, n = 3)
12 ggplot(daily, aes(wday, n)) +
13   geom_boxplot(outlier.colour = "hotpink") +
14   labs(x = "Weekday", y = "Flights",
15        subtitle = "Number of 2013 New York Flights Each Weekday")
16
```



Console Output:

```
# A tibble: 3 x 19
  year month day dep_time sched_dep_time dep_delay arr_time sched_arr_time arr_delay carrier
<int> <int> <int> <int> <int> <dbl> <int> <int> <dbl> <chr>
1 2013 1 1 517 515 2 830 819 11 UA
2 2013 1 1 533 529 4 850 830 20 UA
3 2013 1 1 542 540 2 923 850 33 AA
# ... with 9 more variables: flight <int>, tailnum <chr>, origin <chr>, dest <chr>, air_time <dbl>,
# distance <dbl>, hour <dbl>, minute <dbl>, time_hour <dtm>
> daily <- flights %>%
+   mutate(date = make_date(year, month, day)) %>%
+   count(date) %>%
+   mutate(wday = wday(date, label = TRUE))
> head(daily, n = 3)
# A tibble: 3 x 3
  date n wday
<date> <int> <ord>
1 2013-01-01 842 Tue
2 2013-01-02 943 Wed
3 2013-01-03 914 Thu
> ggplot(daily, aes(wday, n)) +
+   geom_boxplot(outlier.colour = "hotpink") +
+   labs(x = "Weekday", y = "Flights",
+        subtitle = "Number of 2013 New York Flights Each Weekday")
>
```

Boxplot Data Summary:

Weekday	Min	Q1	Median	Q3	Max
Sun	710	890	900	910	940
Mon	910	960	970	980	1000
Tue	840	940	950	960	990
Wed	890	950	960	970	1000
Thu	910	960	970	980	1000
Fri	910	960	970	980	1000
Sat	680	690	750	770	860

Computer access

- Work on assignments during our weekly meetings and beyond
-  + RStudio works on most laptops and has a cloud option
- See popw24.gustavodiaz.org/resources for installation guides
- Computers in the classroom should work
- Computer labs open when courses are not scheduled 

Evaluation

Assignments

1. Attendance and participation
2. Weekly lab assignments, due on Mondays at 5 PM
3. Response papers, due on Wednesdays at 8:30 PM
4. Optional final project: Pre-analysis plan, due April 25 at 11:59 PM

Contract grading

- To get a B+:
 - Miss no more than 3 class meetings
 - 9 out of 11 weekly lab assignments
 - 3 response papers satisfactorily
 - Be delayed/late on no more than one assignment
 - Have satisfactory participation status

Grading policies

- Improve your grade by completing more assignments or the final project
- Missing/delayed/late assignments decrease your grade
- Make up work **only if necessary**

Schedule

Semester at a glance

- **First half:** Focus on designs for public opinion (surveys)
- **Second half:** Focus on public policy (experiments, RCTs, AB testing)
- **Weekly reading and lab assignments**
- **Choose weeks to write response papers**
- **Choose whether to do final project by April 4**

Class meeting

- Brief lecture (< 30 min)
- Discussion (~ 40 min)
- Break (10 min)
- Lab (Remaining time)

Tips

Doing well in this course

- Content is cumulative. Stay engaged!
- Work with others, especially on coding
- Come to class prepared to work backwards from **findings** to **research design choices**
- See also popw24.gustavodiaz.org/resources

Stay in touch!

-  KTH 505
-  diazg2@mcmaster.ca
-  calendly.com/diazg/student-hours



Lab

Now: Install and get acquainted with R

popw24.gustavodiaz.org/content

popw24.gustavodiaz.org/resources

