Western Michigan University
School of Public Affairs and Administration

Course Syllabus

PADM6970, Doctoral Dissertation Seminar
Fall 2011

(Battle Creek Campus; Wednesdays, 6:00 to 9:00 PM)

Udaya R. Waglé
School of Public Affairs and Administration
Western Michigan University
1903 W Michigan Ave
Kalamazoo, MI 49008
Phone: (269) 387-8934; Fax (269) 387-8935; Email: udaya.wagle@wmich.edu
Web: http://homepages.wmich.edu/~uwagle

Overview

Completing a dissertation successfully is the last and often most challenging part of doctoral studies. The goal is to put one’s theoretical knowledge and research proficiency to practical test by carrying out an independent, albeit guided, project producing an original piece of research and making a significant contribution to solving a problem and expanding the knowledge base in the specific discipline. While research is an ongoing process, in which one is expected to stay on top of the relevant developments in the discipline, the assumption is that students are capable of thinking through the important milestones in the dissertation process and developing a dissertation prospectus that spells out the core concepts and questions as well as the designs of research and the structure of intended dissertation. Designed in a seminar format, this course guides students through the formative stages of proposal development in which constant, critical thinking is required. Interaction among the instructor and students is important to transform your latent ideas into a novel, researchable dissertation project.

Catalogued Course Description

Dissertation Seminar is intended to assist doctoral students in the preparation of a dissertation proposal and to facilitate the transition from course work to dissertation. This course will review of proposal components, with particular emphasis on research design and developing the literature review, and will also focus on key issues such as dissertation format standards,
psychological and time management demands, committee formation, HSIRB training, and project management.

**Course Objectives**

This course does not aim to provide additional substantive material or methodological toolkit, the way typical graduate courses do. Its goal is rather modest as it attempts to apply your cumulative understanding and skills to specific research situation. From the perspective of one’s program of study, however, this course poses a real-world test helping to make a realistic transition from coursework to dissertation. On balance, a successful completion of the course is marked by your ability to do the following:

- Apply your theoretical and methodological understanding and skills into devising researchable ideas and specific research questions and hypotheses,
- Conduct a focused review of the relevant literature and create appropriate conceptual framework,
- Develop a realistic research design with specific research strategies,
- Think through and articulate a chapter-by-chapter outline of the intended dissertation,
- Communicate research ideas and their appropriate theoretical and methodological issues effectively and efficiently,
- Critique other’s ideas paying particular attention to both theoretical and methodological rigor and reality, and
- Gain understanding of the process of dissertation including stress, time, and project management, committee formation, dissertation proposition and defense, and human subjects reviews.

**Prerequisites**

Students must have successfully completed the five core courses as well as the comprehensive exam in the PhD Program in Public Administration. Moreover, although not formally required, one can maximize the utility of this course by taking it after all other methods and elective courses have been completed.

**Textbooks**

Typically, courses like this do not have any specific textbooks to which students are not already exposed. In fact, you will find many of the textbooks and materials used in other courses useful here. You will also be expected to conduct comprehensive literature search and review around the topic of your choosing. I have selected the following as the only required text as it approaches dissertation from a practical standpoint and offers suggestions on what to do and what not to do.

You may also find the following reference books handy in this course as well as throughout your dissertation process.


**Course Expectations and Policies**

In this seminar course, the assigned readings will be helpful to get ideas on how to manage the dissertation process. For the most part, students will be working on their chosen dissertation topics either searching for relevant literature, reviewing them, or revisiting their own ideas, presentations, and write-ups. Some of the class meetings can be freed to allow greater focus on the specific topics so that students can be well-equipped to update their progress and discuss their ideas, questions, concepts, or designs in the forthcoming class meetings. A part of the class meetings will be focused on specific approaches to managing the process with most of the time devoted to substantive ideas, methods, and projects and to critiquing them.

The following will be the specific components and expectations in the course with applicable grading weights.

1) **Active Participation** (30%): Active class participation is at the center of this course. In each class meeting, students will update on their progress and present their ideas and plans which will then be discussed, commented on, and critiqued by the entire class helping each other.
The goal is to get instant feedback on everyone’s work and plans. A mere presence in the classroom would not suffice for this purpose as other students will be counting on your inputs in order to refine their own ideas and work. Also, both the quality and quantity of engagement would count as participation only for the sake of participation simply wastes the valuable class time. Participation in some in-class activities that reflect on the timely progress on our project will also count toward your active participation grade.

2) **Dissertation Prospectus** (60%): This will be the only formal written assignment in the course. This moderate-size concept paper of between 20 to 30 pages in length should be in the form of preliminary proposal that details the problem, questions, concepts, design, and format, which you can further refine incorporating my comments and utilize to start the conversation for committee formation or grant-seeking. A draft copy of your prospectus is due at 6:00PM on November 23 to an assigned discussant (through email) and your final prospectus is due at 6:00PM on December 7 (also through email). You will also have to upload your draft prospectus to Turnitin (ClassID: 4267589) by 6:00 PM on November 23.

3) **Class Presentation and Discussion** (10%): You will be expected to present your proposed research project in class on the final day of class (11/30). You will also be expected to discuss dissertation prospectus of a colleague in the same class.

**Standard Codes of Conduct**

While doctoral students are typically assumed to make informed choices avoiding academic misconducts, the potential implications of doing so will also be more severe. The following university-wide policies apply to your conduct in this course.

“You are responsible for making yourself aware of and understanding the policies and procedures in the Undergraduate and Graduate Catalogs that pertain to Academic Honesty. These policies include cheating, fabrication, falsification and forgery, multiple submission, plagiarism, complicity and computer misuse. [The policies can be found at [http://catalog.wmich.edu](http://catalog.wmich.edu) under Academic Policies, Student Rights and Responsibilities.] If there is reason to believe you have been involved in academic dishonesty, you will be referred to the Office of Student Conduct. You will be given the opportunity to review the charge(s). If you believe you are not responsible, you will have the opportunity for a hearing. You should consult with your instructor if you are uncertain about an issue of academic honesty prior to the submission of an assignment or test.”
In addition, I will ask for your participation in the submission and review process of Turnitin, a University-subscribed software, to help us detect any concerns of plagiarism. Let me know if your participation in this process is of concern to you. I also encourage you to visit http://osc.wmich.edu, www.wmich.edu/registrar, and www.wmich.edu/disabilityservices and access the Code of Honor and general academic policies on such issues as diversity, religious observance, and student disabilities.

**Course Outline and Meetings**

1. Dissertation: What to Expect? (9/07)  
   Chs. 1 and 9.

2. Problems and Questions (9/14 & 9/21)  
   Ch. 2 and 3.

3. Literature Review (9/28 & 10/05)  
   Ch. 4.

4. Research Design (10/12 & 10/19)  
   Chs. 5 and 11.

5. Analysis, Writing, and Ethical Considerations (10/26, 11/02, & 11/09)  
   Chs. 6, 7, 8, 10, 12, and 13.

6. Presentation and Wrap up (11/16 & 11/30)  
   None