

**University of Nebraska at Omaha, School of Public Administration**  
**PA 9800, Advanced Research Design, fall 2003**  
**Professor: Dr. Richard Box, [rcbox@cox.net](mailto:rcbox@cox.net), 554-6022**

### **Course Description**

The broad purpose of the course is to prepare the student for the dissertation and the specific objective is to complete a dissertation proposal draft by the end of the semester. It need not be ready for defense before the student's supervisory committee; the point is to consider the issues involved in the dissertation research and practice drafting an appropriate proposal.

The course requires students to think systematically about a major research project. The online student handbook language for the proposal is: "Students will complete a Dissertation Proposal and defend it before their Supervisory Committee. The proposal should consist of a statement of the topic to be addressed, an explanation of why the topic is important, a review of the relevant literature, and an appropriate research design." In 9800, the professor's role is not to impose a vision of content or methodology on students, but to provide a framework of accepted academic practice within which people can construct their own project.

First, students survey books and articles on writing dissertations so they understand what guidance is available. Second, the final product for the semester will be a paper, 12-15 single-space pages in length (exclusive of references), describing a dissertation project. We will exchange materials by e-mail attachment in Word. Use 11 point Times New Roman font.

The work will proceed in prescribed stages with explicit products and due dates. In addition to the professor for the course, students will coordinate with their supervisory committee chairs and/or committee members as assigned. The due dates given are the latest for submittal of material and students may accelerate the pace of work if they choose. Students who do not meet the schedule will be asked to drop the course; grades of incomplete will be given only when, because of serious unforeseen emergency, a student is unable to complete an assignment late in the semester.

The professor does not feel the need at this level to offer in full the standard language about format, clarity of writing, plagiarism, submitting work on time, and so on. For guidance in these matters, see the online syllabus for PA 9400, The Environment of Public Administration. Close-to-perfect use of language and citation/reference style is expected and flawed or late work will be graded down. Students choose whether to use APA or Turabian/Chicago parenthetical style and the chosen style will be applied with care and precision.

With each new section, students send the entire revised paper to date, with references. A letter grade will be given for each assignment. The final course grade will be a matter of judgment about quality of product and student effort as well as an aggregate of grades on assignments.

The professor will respond to each submittal within a few days and may ask for revisions. Revisions should be returned within a few days to allow adequate time for review and to avoid delays in the semester's work. It is possible the schedule below may need to be revised by the professor during the semester; if so, it will occur following consultation with class members. Students meet as a group only once--to share resources about dissertations and discuss research questions--and meet individually with the professor toward the end of the semester to assess progress.

### **Schedule**

Friday, September 5, 5:00-7:30pm. Meet at a place to be determined online. At the beginning of the semester, the professor will write people registered in the course to select a meeting place. Students will have two things ready to present. The first is a description and summary of items they have found to be useful from a survey of books and articles on dissertations. An appropriate result of a search and reading would be presentation of two or three books and several related

articles. UNO Library holdings in this area are limited and use of inter-library loan may be necessary. Please do not check books out for more than one or two days, since others will have no materials available. Presentations should be outlined in a brief handout with copies for class members and the professor, indicating primary points of interest and references.

Second, on one sheet of paper, bring a primary research question and three secondary research questions, with copies for class members and the professor. Here is an example of a primary research question, followed by three secondary questions: "What is 'good' leadership in public agencies?"; "What behaviors are identified with good and bad leaders?"; "How does one come to be a good leader?"; "What outcomes are associated with good leadership?").

Sunday, September 21. Send an introduction to the dissertation proposal, 2-3 single-space pages in length, describing the research area and primary research question, why it is important to fill this gap in knowledge, and in general terms what the reader should expect in relation to ideas, methodology, and results. The introduction should refer to particularly important authors, literature, and concepts in the area of study, without bogging down in detailed literature review.

Sunday, October 19. Send a thorough literature review, 5-7 single-space pages in length. This may be divided into two or three sections related to different conceptual areas. Some of this material should have been developed in earlier coursework. This is an opportunity to refine and focus, coming to the cutting edge of knowledge in the area of study. As a result of this work, students should be able to claim credibly they are among the most knowledgeable people in American academia in this particular area, at least in relation to the published literature.

Sunday, November 9. Send a section on research questions and methodology, approximately 3 single-space pages in length. The section states and discusses the primary and secondary research questions or hypotheses and outlines the methodology. Also, send the final section of the paper. In approximately 2 single-space pages, the section discusses possible results, implications, and future directions for the research. Include an abstract for the proposal, not to exceed 150 words.

Friday, November 21. Meet individually in the professor's office, by appointment set online a week in advance, to discuss progress.

Sunday, December 7. Send the completed paper incorporating suggested revisions.