SPPH 621: Approaches to Enquiry in Population and Public Health

2023 COURSE SYLLABUS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

UBC's Point Grey Campus is located on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the xwməθkwəy̓əm (Musqueam) people. The land it is situated on has always been a place of learning for the Musqueam people, who for millennia have passed on their culture, history, and traditions from one generation to the next on this site.

COURSE INFORMATION

Course Title	Course Code Number	Credit Value
Approaches to Enquiry in Population and Public Health	SPPH 621	3

Course Description

Scholarship within the area of population and public health draws on a range of disciplinary traditions, and as in other areas, approaches to research are evolving. While firmly rooted in traditions of epidemiology and related quantitative approaches, research in this area is increasingly multidisciplinary in scope – it relies on concepts and approaches from a wider set of disciplines, such as social sciences and humanities, and methods, such as qualitative and mixed methods.

SPPH 621 is offered as a foundational course to ensure that PhD students in the School of Population and Public Health (SPPH) are familiar with a broad and evolving set of quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods approaches used to conduct research in this area. It is intended to provide students with an understanding of the scope and nature of research in the area of population and public health, together with an appreciation of the challenges of conducting rigorous research across its span. It is designed to encourage the development of curiosity as the driving force behind the conduct of research, to support students in situating their individual research interests within this terrain, and to encourage them to take responsibility for advancing their own learning, in partnership with their graduate supervisors. Additionally, the course is intended to support students in making decisions about the approaches they wish to pursue, and refining a research question that is aligned with those choices.

As a primary focus, the course will consider the central role of research questions in conducting research, and explore the process of developing them. Students will be guided to develop research questions from each of three approaches (quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods), to consider a series of decisions relevant to developing and refining their research questions, and to outline an appropriate approach for their work. In addition, the course will orient them to a deeper understanding of the additional learning (including other coursework within and outside of SPPH) that will be required to advance proposal development and thesis research at the doctoral level.

The course will be offered in a blended format and rely on collaborative and learner-centred approaches. It will encourage students to actively consider and apply course content and concepts to their own research interests. This will be done through a series of weekly journaling, small group discussion, and workshop activities that are designed to complement the topics discussed in class.

Students are encouraged to approach the course with a spirit of curiosity and constructive discovery. Class participants come from different traditions and expect to continue learning from each other and from the class. Given the range of research in the area of population and public health, readings should not be interpreted as 'truth', but should be considered critically and creatively, in relation to one's experiences and other knowledge, and in relation to one's chosen approach to research. In addition, the course will be useful to the extent that students actively participate in applying the approaches being studied and actively consider the implications of key learnings in relation to their own research interests.

Course Objectives

- To become familiar with the 'culture' of research, and some of the controversies involved in the construction of knowledge
- To explore and describe your own 'researcher identity' within this terrain
- To explore and apply a range of scientific methods and approaches used in the areas of population & public health
- To understand the importance of framing a strong research question, and to apply this knowledge to develop a mixed methods research question
- To examine the range of approaches that might be used to investigate your chosen area of interest, while understanding the implications of these choices
- To make substantial progress in developing your own research question(s).

PREREQUISITES

Must be a PhD student at SPPH or have permission of the instructor.

COREQUISITES

n/a

CONTACTS

Course Instructor(s)	Contact Details	Office Location	Office Hours
Devon Greyson	devon.greyson@ubc.ca x25305 Email is best; I strive for a 48h turnaround on student emails (72h on holidays/weekends). Please flag as urgent if it is urgent.	SPPH 137	By appointment. I typically stay after our structured 2-5pm class during the 5-6pm hour to talk with students.

COURSE INSTRUCTOR BIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

Devon Greyson is an Assistant Professor at the UBC School of Population and Public Health, studying the ways people and health systems use information to influence health behaviour and improve population health and social equity. Devon is an Investigator with the Vaccine Evaluation Center at the BC Children's Hospital Research Institute, and much of their current research focuses on vaccination and health mis/dis/malinformation. Dr. Greyson has a PhD in Interdisciplinary Studies (UBC 2015), a Master's in Library and Information Studies (UBC 2005), and an undergraduate degree in Music and Women's Studies (Oberlin 1997). Prior to returning to UBC, Devon was an Assistant Professor of Health Communication at the University of Massachusetts in the USA.

OTHER INSTRUCTIONAL STAFF

Teaching Assistant TBC

COURSE STRUCTURE & LEARNING ACTIVITIES

This course will be offered in a blended format and course materials will be made available through the UBC *Canvas* system. A series of applied learning activities, both in-class and outside of class, will encourage students to actively consider and apply the approaches in relation to their own research interests. These will take a variety of formats, including individual, small group and full class exercises. They are designed to complement the topics discussed each week in class by adding to and enriching learning opportunities. These learning activities are central to the objectives of the course and are designed to move participants through a sequence of written and other exercises. Where issues and approaches arising from individual examples may contribute to the learning of the entire class, students will be invited to share their work with the class.

The course will use multiple approaches to learning, including: assigned readings, journaling, posting to a discussion board, interactive lectures (to be jointly provided by instructors with different research backgrounds), workshop activities, small group discussion, and student-led discussion, together with more active application of new learning through hands-on and written exercises, and peer review of others' work. Small group work, where students will work together to reflect on the application of new learning to their own interests and to provide feedback to peers, will form a significant component of the course. For this purpose, students will be assigned to their small groups at the beginning of the term. These groups will meet throughout the course to facilitate ongoing understanding and application, given different interests and approaches.

Each class will typically be structured as follows, although specific topics and guest speakers may require flexibility around this schedule:

2:00 - 2:30 Check in (1 takeaway and 1 question from the week's course materials)
2:30 - 3:20 Interactive lecture and discussion of key concepts
3:20 - 3:35 Break
3:35 - 4:30 Application & small group work
4:30 - 5:00 Reporting and wrap up (exit survey)
Optional: 5:00 - 6:00 office hours/individual conversations with the instructors

Students will be expected to undertake specific activities both to **prepare for** and **follow up** after each class. These learning activities are central to the objectives of the course and are intended to complement and build upon the in-class activities described above.

SCHEDULE OF TOPICS

Specific dates will be attached to topics closer to the start of the term, as events and guest presenter availability sometimes necessitate changes to the "typical" schedule for this course. However, the following is a general overview of the topics covered in SPPH 621.

Module	Topic	Subtopics
Researcher Identity	Introduction	*Introduction to the course and its aims *Introducing ourselves & objects/values *Overview and definition of key themes: enquiry vs. inquiry, research, population health, public health, importance of research questions *Introduction to course structure and key resources *Review of course assignments and expectations
	Paradigms & the nature of science in health research	*What is the nature of science and what is within the realm of science? Is science value free? What are other ways of knowing? *What is research? *What is a paradigm? (ontology, epistemology, methodology, axiology) *Understanding a range of perspectives and approaches in health research: e.g. positivist, constructivist, critical theory, transformative *Spectrum of research: from curiosity driven, to applied, to change/implementation science *Subjectivity, objectivity and situating oneself as a researcher, reflexivity
	Evolving traditions and approaches to research in Population & Public Health	*What are some of the historical perspectives and developments that have shaped and continue to shape this area of research? *What are some of the major traditions of research within population and public health? (e.g. epidemiology, quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods approaches, etc.) *What are some of the other relevant disciplinary traditions relevant to this area (e.g. sociology, anthropology, political science, economics, geography, etc.)? *What are some of the major themes within SPPH and where do they focus? *What are the major mechanisms for communicating about research in population and public health? How are these approaches changing over time and with new technologies?
From Concepts to Research Questions	Theory & concepts in research	*What is theory? *What is the difference between substantive and methodological theory? *How is theory developed, tested and refined? *How is theory differently understood and used in quantitative and qualitative traditions? *What are examples of key theories that are relevant in the area of P&PH? *How are theories and concepts related?

	Concepts to RQs	*What is the nature, importance and purpose of research questions? *What makes a good research question? *Are there differences in what makes a strong research question in qualitative and quantitative traditions? *Types of research questions *What are some common pitfalls in developing a good research question?
	Ethical issues in health research	*What are some of the biggest challenges in conducting ethical research? *What are important ethical principles in designing and conducting research? *What processes are used to ensure that research is conducted ethically? *What is the difference between procedural and process ethics?
Mixing Methods	Approaches to quantitative research design & data	*What are some of the major approaches to research design and collecting data in quantitative traditions? *What is the relationship between research questions, design & data collection? *How do quantitative research questions differ from qualitative research questions? *Example of a quantitative research project *What courses and opportunities within and outside of SPPH can support deeper understanding of the quantitative tradition?
	Approaches to qualitative research design & data	*What are some of the major approaches to research design and collecting data in qualitative traditions? *What is the relationship between research questions, research design, data collection, and data analysis? *How do qualitative research questions differ from quantitative research questions? *What courses and opportunities within and outside of SPPH can support deeper understanding of the qualitative tradition? *Example of a qualitative research project
	Approaches to mixed methods research	*What are the features of qualitative and quantitative approaches? What are the strengths of each? *How can different methods and approaches be used to enhance and communicate scope and depth of understanding? *What are some of the major approaches to research design in mixed methods research? *Mixed methods vs multi methods – what are the differences? *What are the optimal ways to structure mixed methods research questions? *In what ways are mixed methods approaches challenging? *Examples of mixed methods research projects

Putting it all Together	Research quality: How might you be wrong and how to ensure rigour	*Many terms are used to describe the 'soundness' of research: validity, rigour, and others. What do these terms mean and how do they differ? *What types of validity are important in conducting research? *Are different terms used in qualitative and quantitative traditions? In what ways are approaches to ensuring validity similar across these traditions? In what ways do they differ? What are the implications for mixed methods research? *What questions must be considered in developing a strong research plan? *Developing an integrated research plan and importance of ensuring things are 'plumb'.
	Presentations	
	Having impact: Research Writing & Knowledge Translation	*What makes a great research article? *How does one plan for impact? *The KT cycle

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of the course students will have:

1. explored aspects of their own 'researcher identity', documented their current understanding of this identity, and considered how it shapes and is shaped by their approach to research;
2. demonstrated the ability to frame a strong research question by formulating an overarching question that can evolve and serve as a focus for continued learning, proposal development, and thesis research;
3. framed research questions in each of qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods traditions that relate to their overarching research question, and demonstrate the relative strengths and challenges of each of these approaches;
4. created a foundational research plan that incorporates key aspects of researcher identity, research questions, and research design, with relevant approach and rationale;
5. experienced journaling as an approach to developing a habit of reflexivity in their research career;
6. communicated in multiple formats about course material, the complexity of conducting research, and the application of course learning to their own specific research agenda;
7. demonstrated an ability to understand, constructively reflect on, and provide helpful feedback on others' work, especially as it pertains to formulating research questions and linking approaches to research in a chosen area;
8. developed an ability to identify and select relevant future learning opportunities (e.g. formal courses, web-based learning resources, etc.) that will support them in advancing their thesis research.

LEARNING MATERIALS

Typically, required readings for each session will be drawn from a number of resources, including the required textbook, chapters from other relevant textbooks, published articles, and websites.

Weekly class outlines will be posted on the UBC Canvas system and will provide access to all required readings, with the exception of those drawn from the required textbook.

Required textbook:

Punch, Keith F. *Introduction to Social Research: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches*: Sage, 2013.

ASSESSMENTS OF LEARNING

Students will attain course competencies by participating actively in a wide range of learning activities. Completing required reading, written and other exercises prior to and following each class is critical to successful learning, effective class participation, and active application of new learning.

Assignment	Learning objective(s)	Weight
Journal synthesis 1	1, 5	10%
Journal synthesis 2	2, 5	15%
Journal synthesis 3	3, 5	15%
Small group work & class participation	6, 7	20%
3M Final presentation	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8	10%
Final paper	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8	30%

Journal synthesis assignments (40% total)

Every week, to support their own learning, students will be expected complete personal journal entries. These written exercises support students in reflecting on key learnings and considering their implications for their own research interests. As well, they will support students in developing a deeper understanding about their research interests, their initial research question, approaches to research that are aligned with their question, and developing these further for the final research paper. At three points over the course, students will develop a *synthesis* of their weekly journal entries for review and feedback. Students will develop a draft version to receive feedback from their small group peers and then submit a final version for grading. For this component, students will be assessed on their ability to engage with, and apply perspectives from key learning activities to their own research interest and development.

The three *journal synthesis* topics are:
    1) researcher identity;
    2) research questions; and
    3) mixed methods approach.

Small group work, class participation and peer feedback (20%)

Students will work in small groups that will meet over the duration of the course. These groups will provide an ongoing opportunity for students to discuss their research interests, and to provide verbal and written feedback to others. For this component, students will be assessed on discussion posts prior to class, class participation, small group discussion, and ability to provide written and oral feedback to others whose interests may differ from their own.

3M Final presentation (10%)

Students will give a presentation in the style of a 3MT talk. You may be familiar with the international 3MT competition, in which doctoral students compete to tell the story of their research in 3 minutes with one static slide as backdrop. This assignment asks you to use that format to present the story of your final assignment. In 3 minutes, with no notes or props, you will tell the story of your researcher identity, research question(s), and general approach. You may wish to highlight challenges you faced in arriving at the current version of their question, and mention your plan for advancing their future learning.

Final paper (30%)

Students will be expected to develop a final paper in which they describe their current understanding of their researcher identity, research question(s), and general approach. These components will build on work done for the journal synthesis assignments, and will require integration of these materials into a coherent document. In addition, students will be expected to describe challenges they faced in arriving at the current version of their question, and outline a plan for advancing their future learning through coursework and other means. This will involve reflection on personal strengths and challenges in moving forward on this agenda. The final paper is typically due one week after the final class.

Numeric and letter grades will be assigned as follows:

A Level (80% to 100%)

This category of achievement is typified by work that meets the highest expectations as outlined below. A+ is from 90% to 100%: It is reserved for exceptional work that greatly exceeds course expectations. In addition, achievement must satisfy all the conditions below. A is from 85% to 89%: A mark of this order suggests a very high level of performance on all criteria used for evaluation. Contributions deserving an A are distinguished in virtually every aspect. They show that the individual significantly shows initiative, creativity, insight, and probing analysis where appropriate. Further, the achievement must show careful attention to course requirements as established by the instructor. A- is from 80% to 84%: It is awarded for generally high quality of performance, no problems of any significance, and fulfillment of all course requirements.

B Level (68% to 79%)

This category of achievement is typified by adequate but unexceptional performance. It is distinguished from A level work by one or more problems, for example: a significant error in understanding, superficial representation or analysis of key concepts, or lack of coherent organization or explanation

of ideas. The level of B work is judged in accordance with the nature of problems demonstrated. B+ is from 76% to 79%, B is from 72% to 75%, and B- is from 68% to 71%.

C Level (55% to 67%)

This category of achievement is typified by less than adequate performance at the graduate level, and is distinguished from B level work by multiple problems, including: significant errors in understanding, superficial representation or analysis of key concepts, and/or lack of coherent organization or explanation of ideas. The level of C work is judged in accordance with the severity of the problems demonstrated. C+ is from 64% to 67%, C is from 60% to 63%, and C- is from 55% to 59%.

Note: All assignments are due on the dates noted. In the absence of a pre-arranged extension to the due date or documented medical circumstances, students handing in a late assignment will incur a penalty of 10% of the allotted assignment grade for each day after the due date. Late assignments may also result in delays in marking.

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

UBC provides resources to support student learning and to maintain healthy lifestyles but recognizes that sometimes crises arise and so there are additional resources to access including those for survivors of sexual violence. UBC values respect for the person and ideas of all members of the academic community. Harassment and discrimination are not tolerated nor is suppression of academic freedom. UBC provides appropriate accommodation for students with disabilities and for religious observances. UBC values academic honesty and students are expected to acknowledge the ideas generated by others and to uphold the highest academic standards in all of their actions.

Details of the policies and how to access support are available on **the UBC Senate website.**

SPPH POLICIES

SPPH is committed to providing a positive education experience free from discrimination. If you have had an experience in this course where you feel unsafe, have been mistreated or have witnessed mistreatment, please let us know.

If you want to raise this beyond the course instructor the School recommends the following. You may contact your academic supervisor, the education manager for your program or the Associate Director-Education.

You may also report your concerns to the Faculty of Medicine Office of Respectful Environments, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (REDI) at https://mistreatmenthelp.med.ubc.ca/. Both SPPH and the REDI Office have procedures in place for recording and acting on reports of mistreatment in the educational environment.

OTHER COURSE POLICIES

The academic enterprise is founded on honesty, civility, and integrity. As members of this enterprise, all students are expected to know, understand, and follow the codes of conduct regarding academic integrity. At the most basic level, this means submitting only original work

done by you, and acknowledging all sources of information or ideas and attributing them to others as required. This also means you should not cheat, copy, or mislead others about what is your work. Violations of academic integrity (i.e., misconduct) lead to the breakdown of the academic enterprise, and therefore serious consequences arise and harsh sanctions are imposed. For example, incidences of plagiarism or cheating may result in a mark of zero on the assignment or exam and more serious consequences may apply if the matter is referred to the President's Advisory Committee on Student Discipline. Careful records are kept in order to monitor and prevent recurrences.

The use of Chat GPT or other generative AI tools is permitted in this course. These are tools similar to data analysis software, and as such their use should be noted and cited accordingly. If you use generative AI to get ideas and/or partial answers for an assignment and/or to generate any text for a draft or final version of any part of an assignment, you must declare that you have used it, citing the specific tool and version you used. You must also add a couple sentences describing the extent to which it was used, and you must save any generated text from this tool in case it is requested. A TA or the instructor may ask you to provide the generated text in order to help with grading decisions.

Attendance: Students absent due to extenuating circumstances--including jury duty, scheduled activities for other classes, the death of a family member, health-related incapacity, or other extenuating circumstances such as religious observances, field trips for other classes, or dependent care emergencies--remain responsible for meeting all class requirements and contacting me in a timely fashion about making up missed work.

I do <u>not</u> require a medical note to excuse for minor illnesses that do not require ongoing accommodations. I recommend and appreciate communication regarding planned or unanticipated absences whenever possible. As participation is an important element of this course mark, excessive unexcused absences will impact grades.

Disability accommodation: I am committed to equitable teaching. Please ensure that you notify me *as soon as possible* if you require disability accommodations of any sort that may be applicable to this class, so that we might make a plan together for your success in this course.

Your success in this class is important to me. We all learn differently and bring different strengths and needs to the class. If there are aspects of the course that prevent you from learning or make you feel excluded, please let me know as soon as possible. Together we'll develop strategies to meet both your needs and the requirements of the course.

Extenuating Circumstances and Major Life Challenges: Life happens to all of us. But sometimes things are too much for one person to manage. If you are experiencing food or housing insecurity, significant physical or mental health challenges, family conflict, a childcare crisis, or other uncommonly difficult life circumstances, I invite you to come to my office hours or email me. We can discuss potential assignment extensions for extenuating circumstances, and work together to find support and resources on or off campus. School can be stressful. If you are having a very tough time, you don't have to go it alone. UBC has some counseling services on campus for students, including crisis support, an embedded counselor for the Faculty of Medicine, and an Indigenous Mental health and Wellbeing program: https://students.ubc.ca/health/counselling-services.

Style for Assignments: Please use a consistent and widely accepted citation style for assignments, such as APA or Vancouver style. The main principle is that when ideas come from a source, that source should be acknowledged, and specific quotes or facts should be identified with a page

number so that readers can verify them. Please review this online tutorial about plagiarism if you feel in need of a refresher: https://wiki.ubc.ca/LFS:Plagiarism

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