New York University
Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service

P11.2910 Doctoral Research Colloquium, Fall 2009

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Office Hours: Tuesdays, 10:00am-11:30am

Meeting Times and Places:

The regular meeting time for the Colloquium is Thursdays from 3:30-4:45PM in the Rudin Conference Room on the 2nd floor of the Puck Building. In addition, one or two class sessions may be held for enrolled students in the middle and at the end of the semester; these sessions will be scheduled later in the semester.

Course Schedule:

There are eight sessions with speakers scheduled for the spring, including one session devoted to student presenters. You must attend and participate in these discussions. Further, students are expected to meet with speakers from outside of the NYU community immediately following their talks in the Lafayette Conference Room until 5:45PM. Students are expected to take advantage of this opportunity at least once during the semester.

Assignments:

In addition to active participation in the colloquium discussions, students are required to complete two other tasks.

First, before each formal presentation, students are required to read the paper that will be presented and to submit two questions to address to the author about this work. Students should email these questions to me by noon on the Tuesday before the seminar.

Second, students are required to submit a critique of two of the papers presented during the semester. The critiques are due one week after the seminar in which the paper is discussed. At least one critique MUST be submitted by October 16th and no written work will be accepted after December 14th.

The critique should be between 500 and 800 words. The critique should assume that the reader is familiar with the paper, and should not summarize its contents. Instead, the critique should analyze such questions as:
What is your assessment of the overall persuasiveness of the key arguments?

How well does the model or conceptual framework capture the behavior that the author is trying to model?

Does the model provide a useful, appropriate framework upon which to base the empirical analysis?

How does the conceptual framework chosen differ from alternatives? Why is this one better (or worse) than others?

To what extent does the empirical analysis address the central hypotheses generated by the theoretical work?

How might additional research more thoroughly test the central hypotheses or address an unanswered question?

How sound are the methodological approaches used in the paper?

Are there data or specification problems that might lead to bias? In what direction? Why?

Is the empirical work satisfying? What are its limitations? What are its strengths?

Are there puzzles that are left unanswered? How would you design a follow-up study to address them?

Is the sample used appropriate here?

Do you feel comfortable generalizing from the sample studied to the broader population?

From what you can tell in the article, do you have any concerns about the wording of the survey questions or the particular measures used?

Do the questions used adequately capture the behavior or characteristics that the authors assume?

Do you think the survey methods, and the measures that were used, were appropriate to the population under study?

These questions are suggestions only and are not meant to be exhaustive. Similarly, no one expects you to address every one of these questions in a critique. A critique should tackle just a few of the most salient of these questions. You should focus on the issues that you think are most critical.

Remember, in writing a critique, the strengths should be highlighted, as well as the weaknesses. The following paraphrases the instructions from the American Journal of Evaluation to their reviewers; the instructions should help set the “tone” for the critiques.

Your review will be most helpful if you:

- Provide specific comments about the strengths and weaknesses of the paper;
- Base your comments on the quality of the paper and its potential contribution to the field, rather than on conformity to your own preferred approach or theoretical framework; and
- Give comments that would be helpful to the author; ad hominem attacks are not appropriate. While holding the work to high standards, try to make your comments thoughtful and focused on how this work might be improved.
Some students have found the book, Girden, Ellen R. (2001) *Evaluating Research Articles* helpful in learning how to prepare such critiques.

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**Grading:**

Class Participation (all aspects including questions) 30%
Critiques 70%