

UEP 410: Controversies in Policy and Politics
Urban & Environmental Policy Department, Occidental College
Fall 2026

Class Meeting Time: Monday and Friday, 12-1:20pm; NOTE: Unless otherwise noted in the Course Schedule (below), we will not meet in class on Fridays.

Class Meeting Location: UEP Conference Room

Canvas Site: <https://oxy.instructure.com/courses/9359>

Course Instructors:

Professor James Sadd (he/him)
jsadd@oxy.edu

Student Hours: Monday 4-5pm and
Wednesday 3-5pm in HSC209.
Sign up [here](#).

Professor Madeline Wander (she/her)
mwander@oxy.edu

Student Hours: Tuesday 4:30-6pm and
Wednesday 9-10:30am in Office #203 in the
UEP Building (1882 Campus Rd). Sign up
[here](#). If these times do not work for you,
email Prof. Wander to find a time.

Course Description

This advanced seminar in Urban & Environmental Policy (UEP) is designed to guide UEP seniors in completing their capstone project requirement (“senior comps project”) for the major. The UEP senior comps project is a significant applied research project that captures the breadth and depth of students’ coursework, internships, and experiences in the UEP major. The course focuses on research and data analysis skills and writing for applied research. Students have the option to choose from four project types for their senior comps. Here are brief summaries of the four types (refer to [this document](#) for more detailed descriptions and requirements for each type of senior comps project):

- 1. Research Project (Proposal + Completed Project):** Students design and execute an original research project. They design the project in the fall (UEP 410), they conduct research during winter break, and they enroll in UEP 493 in the spring to complete the project.

- 2. Report / Case Study:** Students write a researched report and/or case study that documents a current topic, issue, place, policy, campaign, event, condition and/or process. The purpose of this type of comps research is to critically examine a particular case/issue and derive findings that inform future best practices, decision-making, scholarship, and/or policy interventions.
- 3. Policy Analysis:** Students apply Eugene Bardach and Eric Patashnik's Eightfold Path to conduct a structured, comparative policy analysis on a real-world issue of their choosing.
- 4. Community-Engaged Project:** Students work with a community partner on a relevant project for the community. This involves including the community partner in critical stages of the project, particularly in the design phase. A community-engaged project must take one of the three aforementioned comps types (research project, report / case study, or policy analysis) or a project determined in collaboration and partnership with the community partner and the course instructors.

Class readings, discussions, workshops, and assignments will examine social science research methodology and applications, particularly in the fields of urban and environmental policy, urban planning, and social change. Students are expected to have already taken (or be concurrently enrolled in) a research methods course. We will not be doing a lengthy overview of methods in this course with the expectation that students have this background already from UEP 305 or another relevant methods course. Rather, we will focus on deepening students' understanding of research methods applications as students discern which research methods are appropriate to pursue for their particular senior comps topic and project type. (NOTE: If students plan on doing any video work, they must have completed or be currently enrolled in the documentary film or other relevant courses in the Media Arts and Culture department.)

Student Learning Objectives

- Complete a capstone project that synthesizes concepts and practices learned and experienced in the UEP major;
- Design a research proposal and/or conduct research relevant to addressing urban and environmental challenges;
- Produce a polished written work that includes relevant policy recommendations; and
- Present final work to peers and Oxy community.

Classroom Community

Class times are scheduled and structured to support students' individual research projects. At the same time, the goal of the course is to create a learning community in which students work together as research colleagues. We—the instructors and the students—share the

responsibility of creating an inclusive and shared learning community. We, the instructors, are responsible for structuring and facilitating a space for learning and achieving course goals and student learning objectives. In so doing, we strive to foster an inclusive classroom environment, consistent with College [policy on discrimination, harassment, and retaliation](#). You, the students, are responsible for attending and participating in class (including peer review / feedback discussions), completing assignments on time, and being prepared to discuss readings and material in class. We are all responsible for engaging in respectful, open, and thoughtful discussion with one another.

Course Requirements & Grading

Final course grades will be assigned based on the following:

- **Participation (15% of course grade)**
 - Class attendance, including coming to class prepared.
 - One-on-one meetings with assigned faculty: Each student will be assigned a primary course instructor. Participation includes scheduled check-ins with students' assigned faculty, including coming prepared to these check-ins.
 - Group participation: Small group discussions, peer review, in-class workshops, and in-class co-working sessions.
- **Quality and timeliness of all assignment submissions except final products (25% of course grade);** see assignment matrix below.
- **Quality and timeliness of final comps products (60% of course grade);** see assignment matrix below.

Grade percentages are as follows:

A	94-100	B-	80-82	D+	67-69
A-	90-93	C+	77-79	D	63-66
B+	87-89	C	73-76	F	0-62
B	83-86	C-	70-72		

Here is an overview of the assignments by senior comps type and due dates:

Research Project	Report / Case Study	Policy Analysis	Due Date
Topic, Comps Type, and 2-3 Potential Research Questions	Topic, Comps Type, and 2-3 Potential Research Questions	Topic, Comps Type, and 2-3 Potential Research Questions	Aug. 25, 2026
Annotated Bibliography	Annotated Bibliography	Annotated Bibliography	Aug. 25, 2026
Project Overview	Project Overview	Project Overview	Sept. 4, 2026
Literature Review	Literature Review	Literature Review	Sept. 14, 2026
	Analytical Plan	Analytical Plan	Sept. 21, 2026
Research Design and Methodology	IRB Application (if applicable)	IRB Application (if applicable)	Sept. 29, 2026
IRB Application (if applicable)	Progress Report on Data Collection / Analysis	Progress Report on Data Collection / Analysis & Criteria Development	Oct. 19, 2026
Introduction and Background	Preliminary Findings	Preliminary Analysis	Nov. 9, 2026
Draft Comps Proposal	Draft Comps	Draft Comps	Nov. 20, 2026
	Draft Poster	Draft Poster	Nov. 24, 2026
	Final Poster	Final Poster	Dec. 1, 2026
	Poster Presentation	Poster Presentation	10:30am-12pm on Dec. 4, 2026, in Lower Herrick
Final Comps Proposal	Final Comps Submission	Final Comps Submission	Dec. 9, 2026

All assignments must be submitted via Canvas unless otherwise noted.

Electronic Devices Policy

Unless otherwise told and with the exception of special accommodations, students will not be allowed to use laptops, tablets, or phones in class. There is well-established research that

shows how note-taking on laptops and other electronic devices impedes learning. Such devices also distract us during class, making it difficult to develop and sustain a community of inquiry and mutual respect. Please come to class prepared to take notes by hand. This means bringing a notepad and a writing utensil to each class. Lecture slides will be available on Canvas to supplement note-taking. During certain class periods, we will require you to use your laptop, at which point we will inform you. So please also bring laptops to class for this purpose.

Late Assignment Policy

Late assignments will be marked down one letter grade (e.g., from A to A-) for each 24-hour period that they are late. If you are unable to submit an assignment on time, please communicate with your assigned faculty.

Artificial Intelligence (A.I.) Policy

A.I. tools like ChatGPT and Claude may not be used to complete any writing for this course. In some cases, A.I. tools may serve an educational purpose for data analysis, but students may only do this with explicit permission from their assigned faculty. We also encourage you to educate yourself about [the harm of AI on the environment](#), if you haven't already.

Mid-Semester Progress Reports

Mid-semester progress reports are not intended to be used as determinative or predictive of the final grade in a course, but to provide an opportunity for faculty to communicate an approximate estimation of progress by the students in the course by the midpoint of the current semester. Fall 2026 mid-semester progress reports submission window is October 6-19, 2026.

Credit Hour Policy

UEP 410 is a 4-unit course. On average, you should expect to spend at least twelve (12) hours a week (including in-class time) on this course.

College Policies

See [the UEP410 Canvas site](#) for information on the following college policies: Shared Academic Integrity Commitment; Civil Rights & Title IX; Special Accommodations/Learning Differences; and Accommodations for Reasons of Faith and Conscience.

Course Schedule

Reminder: Unless otherwise noted, we will not meet in class on Fridays.

WEEK 1

Assignment: The [UEP410 Summer Assignment](#) is **due on Tuesday, August 25**, the first day of the Fall 2026 Semester. The assignment consists of: 1) reading Chapters 1 and 2 of *Applied Research Methods in Public and Nonprofit Organizations* (links below); 2) identifying senior comps topic (submitted via [this Google Form](#)); 3) annotated bibliography (submitted via [Canvas](#)); and 4) identifying senior comps type and 2-3 potential research questions (submitted via [this Google Form](#)).

READING:

- Brown, Mitchell, and Kathleen Hale. 2014. "[Chapter 1: Overview and Context of the Research Process.](#)" Pp. 21–54 in *Applied Research Methods in Public and Nonprofit Organizations*. Newark: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated.
 - Brown, Mitchell, and Kathleen Hale. 2014. "[Chapter 2: Applied Research Questions, Literature, and Theory.](#)" Pp. 55–98 in *Applied Research Methods in Public and Nonprofit Organizations*. Newark: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated.
-

WEEK 2

Monday, August 31: CLASS – Semester Schedule, Research Question Workshop, & Literature Review Overview

Assignment: Project Description **due Friday, September 4**.

WEEK 3

Monday, September 7: NO CLASS – LABOR DAY; instead, schedule a one-on-one with your assigned faculty instructor during student hours or during the Friday class time slot to receive feedback on your Project Overview submission.

WEEK 4

Monday, September 14: CLASS – Research Methods and Data

READING:

- Brown, Mitchell, and Kathleen Hale. 2014. [“Chapter 4: Qualitative Data Collection in the Field.”](#) Pp. 137–70 in *Applied Research Methods in Public and Nonprofit Organizations*. Newark: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated.
- Brown, Mitchell, and Kathleen Hale. 2014. [“Chapter 6: Data Analysis.”](#) Pp. 201–48 in *Applied Research Methods in Public and Nonprofit Organizations*. Newark: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated.

Assignment: Literature Review **due Monday, September 14**

WEEK 5

Monday, September 21: CLASS – Research & Data Resources Session with [Social Sciences & Data Literacy Librarian Kristin Peace](#)

Assignment for Reports/Case Studies and Policy Analyses: Analytical Plan **due Monday, September 21**

Friday, September 25: CLASS (if applicable) – Institutional Review Board (IRB) Session with Prof. Wander

WEEK 6

Monday, September 28: CLASS – The Ethics of Research & Community Partnerships

READING:

- Raphael, Chad, and Martha Matsuoka. 2024. [“Chapter 2: Community-Engaged Research.”](#) Pp. 31–53 in *Ground Truths: Community-Engaged Research for Environmental Justice*, edited by C. Raphael and M. Matsuoka. Oakland: University of California Press.

Assignment for Reports/Case Studies and Policy Analyses: IRB Application (if applicable) **due Tuesday, September 29**

Assignment for Research Projects: Research Design and Methodology **due Tuesday, September 29**

WEEK 7

Monday, October 5: NO CLASS; instead, schedule a one-on-one with your assigned faculty instructor during student hours or during Monday or Friday class time slots to discuss your progress and questions you may have.

WEEK 8

Monday, October 12: CLASS – Qualitative Data Analysis with Prof. Wander

READING:

- Saldaña, Johnny. 2016. [“An Introduction to Codes and Coding.”](#) Pp. 1–42 in *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi, and Singapore: SAGE Publications Ltd.
-

WEEK 9

Monday, October 19: NO CLASS; instead, schedule a one-on-one with your assigned faculty instructor during student hours or during Monday or Friday class time slots to discuss your progress and questions you may have.

Assignment for Reports/Case Studies and Policy Analyses: Progress Report **due Monday, October 19**

Assignment for Research Projects: IRB Application (if applicable) **due Monday, October 19**

WEEK 10

Monday, October 26: CLASS – Data Visualization with Prof. Sadd

WEEK 11

Monday, November 2: NO CLASS; instead, schedule a one-on-one with your assigned faculty instructor during student hours or during Monday or Friday class time slots to discuss your progress and questions you may have.

WEEK 12

Monday, November 9: NO CLASS; instead, schedule a one-on-one with your assigned faculty instructor during student hours or during Monday or Friday class time slots to discuss your progress and questions you may have.

Assignment for Reports/Case Studies and Policy Analyses: Preliminary Findings/Analysis **due Monday, November 9**

Assignment for Research Projects: Introduction and Background **due Monday, November 9**

WEEK 13

Monday, November 16: CLASS – Poster-Making Workshop with Prof. Wander

Assignment for Reports/Case Studies and Policy Analyses: Draft Comps **due Friday, November 20**

Assignment for Research Projects: Draft Comps Proposal **due Friday, November 20**

WEEK 14

Monday, November 23: NO CLASS

Assignment for Reports/Case Studies and Policy Analyses: Draft Poster **due Tuesday, November 24**

WEEK 15

Monday, November 30: CLASS (if applicable) – Poster Work Session in study rooms on the second floor of the library

Assignment for Reports/Case Studies and Policy Analyses: Final Poster due Tuesday, December 1

Friday, December 4, 10:30am-12pm: POSTER PRESENTATION in Lower Herrick

WEEK 16

Assignment for Reports/Case Studies and Policy Analyses: Final Comps Submission due Wednesday, December 9

Assignment for Research Projects: Final Comps Proposal due Wednesday, December 9