USP 430: Urban Studies Research Methods
Winter 2012

Mon/Wed 10-11:50 am
XSB 183

Prof. L.K. Bates
Office hours: Mon, 2-4 pm
Or by appt.

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Urban Center 370-E

Course description:
This course introduces students to social research in urban studies. It deals with the development of research design, data collection protocols, data analysis, and the dissemination of results. The focus is on research in the context of community development practice.

Course objectives:
Students will
* Gain an understanding of the philosophy of participatory action research and its use in CD practice.
* Learn practical methods of data collection and analysis that are appropriate for community-based organizations and for community development work.
* Consider the challenges of evaluating CD practice and learn approaches for measuring progress.

Requirements and policies:
* Required readings should be prepared for the date listed.
There is one required book available in the PSU Bookstore or other book sellers.
  -Additional required readings are found on the D2L site.
Recommended book available in the PSU Bookstore

* Grades and assignments

Professionalism, attendance, participation, and preparation 20 % of grade
Please arrive to class on time, having completed the readings outlined on the syllabus. There will be a number of opportunities to participate and demonstrate your preparation.

While all assignments are individually graded, this course involves work groups for review and consultation on projects. Members of the work group will complete evaluations of their colleagues that will contribute to this component of the grade.

The Platinum Rule is considered under this component of the course grade. The Golden Rule tells us, “Treat others as you would like to be treated.” By following the Platinum Rule, we will treat others as they wish to be treated. We will extend courtesy and consideration in our classroom community. Through discussion, our ideas may be questioned and challenged, but always in a respectful manner with the goal of mutual learning.
Reflection on positionality

Due 1/18 10 % of grade

Research design for community change

*Research question and background 2/1 10 %
*Best practices 2/13 5 %
*Data collection instrument 2/27 10 %
*Data implementation plan 3/5 5 %
*Dissemination plan 3/12 5 %
*Final product- research proposal 3/19 5 pm 35 % of grade

Grading

Late assignments will be penalized!

The generic grading rubric is as follows:

- An A assignment is one that demonstrates original thought and synthesis of ideas, sophisticated, cogent analysis, and is clearly written or presented. Outstanding work.
- A B assignment presents above average analysis with appropriate evidence to support the ideas and is clearly written or presented. Very good work.
- A C assignment shows a basic level of understanding, with analysis limited to the most obvious arguments. Writing is competent. Adequate work.
- A D assignment misunderstands or misrepresents the material, or is so poorly written or presented as to obscure the analysis. Inadequate work.

I will not discriminate against you on the basis of your well-formed and articulated viewpoints. Your grade will reflect the quality of your work and fulfillment of the expectations outlined in this syllabus, and nothing else.

*Academic Integrity

PSU’s Student Code of conduct prohibits “All forms of academic dishonesty, cheating, and fraud, including but not limited to: (a) plagiarism, which includes, but is not limited to, word for word copying, using borrowed words or phrases from original text into new patterns without attribution, or paraphrasing another writer’s ideas; (b) The buying and selling of all or any portion of course assignments and research papers; (c) Performing academic assignments (including tests and examinations) for other persons; (d) Unauthorized disclosure and receipt of academic information; and (e) Falsification of research data.”

A student found to have committed academic dishonesty will receive an F for the assignment, which may result in an F for the course grade.
Schedule of classes

**Mon 1/9**  The Participatory Action Research Approach

Think of your own experiences with research in community development—during colloquium, capstone, internships, etc. What challenges did you face? What challenges did the organization face? What did you accomplish and what do you wish you had known?

- RMCC, Ch. 1

**Wed 1/11**  Positionality: Fitting in as a goose in the V

Randy Stoecker shares his experience with a community organizer tired of researchers coming and going. How might you be perceived in this type of situation? How does your identity and background matter, and what can you do to gain trust and build relationships for research? After some discussion in class, you’ll write a reflection on these questions for Wednesday.

- RMCC, Ch. 2

**Mon 1/16**  No class – MLK Day

Prepare with background materials for research proposal project available on D2L

**Wed 1/18**  Research ethics in the project model

Positionality assignment due

What are our obligations as researchers? What does the university require of us, and what does good CD practice require? Are there any conflicts between these?

- RMCC, Ch. 3 and Appendix B

**Mon 1/23**  Diagnosing problems and thinking about data

A continuum of data needs: I know my problem, but not how to measure it; I know what data I need but where is it?; I have data but I need to interpret and present it. What are the appropriate indicators and technologies for community development research?

- RMCC, Ch. 4 and Appendix D

**Wed 1/25**  Finding the “Best” practices

How can we find out what works and what doesn’t?

- RMCC, Ch. 5

**Mon 1/30**  Evaluating CD Outcomes

What are countable and uncountable things we might want to consider as outcomes of CD? How can we build in evaluation from the start by having a theory of change? How could we back into evaluation if we didn’t plan ahead?
Wed 2/1  Evaluating CD: Capacity, Performance, Outcomes
Research question definition due
What are organizational barriers to doing evaluation in CD? What are data barriers? What are the most important pieces of CD to evaluate?
- NeighborWorks America, Storymap framework for CD Evaluation.

Mon 2/6  Embedding research, making it useful
How can we disseminate research through the community as well as to influential external stakeholders or policy-makers? What are ways of communicating research results to a non-technical audience?
- RMCC, Ch. 6 and Ch. 8

Wed 2/8  Drilling down: research questions
Work session in class.

Mon 2/13  Collecting our own data: Interviews and focus groups
Best practices background due
Part of pre-research may include getting the lay of the land through structured conversations with key stakeholders and community members. We also use interviews and focus groups to collect data for analysis.

Wed 2/15  Collecting our own data: Survey design
What do we need to think about when we create a survey to collect data? What issues might be particularly relevant for CD work? Salant and Dillman book if you have it.
- Bates, slides on Survey design-1

Mon 2/20  Collecting our own data 2: Survey implementation
- Bates, slides on Survey design-2
Wed 2/22       Data, data, data!

Sometimes our “best” available data aren’t so great for our purposes. What should we be aware of and what can we do about it? Guest speaker Dr. J. Jurjevich, Assoc Director of the Population Research Center will help us to understand what the U.S. Census can and can’t do for us.

- Coalition of Communities of Color- An Unsettling Profile. Exec summary, population profiles, and quality of data notes. [excerpt on D2L]

Mon 2/27       Pretesting our data collection instruments

Data collection instrument due

Bring your questionnaire drafts to go over with project group. What are your implementation ideas? Turn in for comments.

Wed 2/29       Realities of data collection in CD

Guest speakers TBD

Mon 3/5       Analyzing quantitative data- single variable

Data collection implementation plan due

- Bates, slides on One Variable analysis

Wed 3/7       Analyzing quantitative data- two and more variables!

- Bates, slides on Two+ Variables analysis

Mon 3/12       Talking about data: Don’t put everyone to sleep

Research dissemination and feedback plan due

How can we present our quantiative information so we don’t confuse or bore? How can we avoid Mark Twain’s worst kind of lie (“lies, damned lies, and statistics”)?


Wed 3/14       Wrap-up

Monday 3/19 at 5 pm       Final research proposal due in full