RESEARCH DESIGN (CCCC 7200-01)

Tulane University
Fall Semester 2011
Professor Stephanie M. Arnett

Contact Information:
Office: 220 Newcomb Hall – Office A2
Office Telephone: (504) 862-3009
E-mail: sarnett@tulane.edu

Meeting Time: Mondays from 2:00 to 4:30pm
Meeting Place: Newcomb Hall 314
Office Hours: Mondays 10am-12pm &
any day by appointment

Course Description and Goals:
This course focuses on the logic and processes of research design, with emphasis on the fit between substantive research questions and empirical evidence. Topics include epistemology, data collection techniques, measurement, sampling, and research ethics. Participants gain practical experience across multiple research stages and from a variety of methodological perspectives. Participants will develop research expertise in four in-depth modules on surveys, documents, observations, and interviews, and will complete IRB certification requirements for conducting ethical research. Participants will also improve their technical writing skills, namely how to summarize, explain, and evaluate research concepts, principles, and procedures. Each student will design research protocols grounded in their own research interests as a part of the course and will demonstrate their methodological proficiency in both oral and written formats via a formal presentation on the logic of one specific research design and a mandatory comprehensive final examination.

Learning Outcomes:
At the conclusion of this course, you will be:

(1) comfortable using terms and concepts employed in social science research methodologies,
    --- assessed via classroom discussion, a final classroom presentation and a final examination ---.

(2) able to understanding and critically assess findings published in academic journals and in the public sphere based on your knowledge of research design – i.e., the “fit” of methods, data, and argument –, and
    --- assessed via classroom discussion and homework assignments ---,

(3) prepared to plan and carry out research projects on topics relevant to a variety of academic disciplines
    --- assessed via classroom discussion, homework assignments, and a final examination ---.

Course Prerequisites:
Please insure that you have met the requisites for registration in this course. In cases where students have sufficient preparation for successful participation in and completion of the course, the prerequisite requirement may be waived at the discretion of the instructor.
Course Requirements:

** Active class participation is required and expected. **Attendance**, careful consideration of the material, and attentiveness in the classroom are all necessary components of a successful experience in this class but represent passive participation. Active participation enhances the educational experience for everyone in the course, therefore you are expected to attend **ALL class meetings**. You should use laptop computers responsibly in the classroom, and your participation grade will be negatively impacted if your use of the computer distracts your classmates and/or leads me to believe that you are not giving your full attention to the class. Texting is **NOT ALLOWED** during class time. Texting and/or distracting computer use will be noted and will result in a lowering of your participation grade in the course. Attendance will be recorded, and excessive absences and/or frequent tardiness will result in a lowering of the final grade.

** Weekly written assignments** will be given to help students prepare for our weekly meetings and clarify concepts discussed in assigned readings and during class. These assignments will include essays, an annotated bibliography, and research protocols and are due at the beginning of the class for which they are assigned.

** Four research proposals** will be prepared by students during the course. These proposals will provide opportunities for participants to demonstrate how a research topic of interest may be investigated with different methods. Each participant will select a general research topic within their substantive area of interest and will explore this topic from the perspective of four different methods. Given that a research question determines the appropriate method of inquiry, research questions will change and develop in accordance with each target method. Specific directions for these proposals are posted on Blackboard.

** A comprehensive take-home final exam** encompassing all course readings, written assignments, and discussions will be given at the end of the course.

*Should you fall behind in your work, fail to understand something covered in the course, or have a question about a subject not addressed in the course, please call, stop by my office, or send an e-mail to communicate your concerns.*

Evaluation of Performance:

You will be evaluated on your completion of the course requirements and assignments, and your final grade will be based on the following grading scale:

- A = 93-100
- A- = 91-92
- B+ = 89-90
- B = 83-88
- B- = 81-82
- C+ = 79-80
- C = 73-78
- C- = 71-72
- D = 60-70

*Students earning less than 60% of possible points in the course will receive an F.*

Participation and Attendance will constitute 20% of your final grade.
Weekly assignments are worth 30% of your final grade.
Four research proposals will constitute 30% (7.5% each) of your final grade.
One comprehensive final exam will be worth 20% of your final grade.
** You will receive an A on work that demonstrates your comprehension of the material and your ability to critically analyze and synthesize it.

** You will receive a B on work that demonstrates that you have read and understood the course material.

** You will receive a C on work that demonstrates that you have read the course material and are approaching an understanding of that material, but have not yet reached that point.

Note: Late papers and/or e-mails will not be accepted without deduction in the grade if other arrangements are not agreed upon in advance.

Academic Accommodations:
All students deserve equal access to the information presented in the course and fair testing situations. If you have special needs, please go to the Office of Disability Services (ODS) as soon as possible to develop a plan of appropriate action in accordance with the Tulane University Accessibility Policy:

“It is the policy and practice of Tulane University to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (Pub. L. No. 101-336), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Pub. L. No. 93-112, § 504, as amended), and state and local requirements regarding individuals with disabilities. Under these laws, no qualified individual with a disability shall be denied access to or participation in services, programs, and activities of Tulane University.”

More information is available on the Center for Educational Resources and Counseling (ERC) website at http://erc.tulane.edu/disability/index.html.

Academic Honesty:
Cheating or plagiarism will not be tolerated in this class and encourage you to familiarize yourself with Tulane University’s Unified Code of Graduate Student Academic Conduct if you have not already done so. This information is available online at http://tulane.edu/provost/policies-and-publications.cfm.

Required Texts:
All readings assigned in the course will be available on the Blackboard website via MyTulane.

Note: Additional reading assignments WILL be added periodically to supplement our work in the course.

COURSE SCHEDULE:

Monday 29 August - Introductions and Discussion of the Organization of the Course

Monday 5 September - Labor Day Holiday: Class will not meet
**Monday 12 September - Working with Human Subjects**

*Required Readings:*

- Miles and Huberman, Chapter 11
- “Laud Humphreys and the Tearoom Sex Study”
- “Racism and Research: The Case of the Tuskegee Syphilis Study” by Brandt
- “Sensitivity in Field Research: A Study of Policing in Northern Ireland” by Brewer

*Written Assignment:*

- Thoroughly familiarize yourself with all information relevant for doing research on Human Subjects at Tulane University. Go to http://tulane.edu/asvpr/irb/index.cfm and complete the CITI Training Program process; specifically, you should complete the Social and Behavioral (group2) Research for Investigators and Key Personnel course.

**Monday 19 September - Foundations of Research Design: Part One**

*Required Readings:*

- “How I Learned What a Crock Was” by Becker
- “British Cannibals: Contemplation of an Event in the Death and Resurrection of James Cook, Explorer” by Obeyesekere

*Written Assignment:*

- Write a short essay on your reaction to the assigned readings. The purpose of this assignment is to ensure that everyone comes to class ready for an informed, engaging discussion. To do that, it is vital for you to move beyond simply reading the assigned pages as preparation for our class sessions and to ponder the central tenets of the readings and your own reactions before class. In this essay, identify and discuss three points of interest that arise from your understandings and reactions to the assigned readings (e.g., what points did you find most interesting, challenging, provocative, disagreeable, informative, or intriguing, and why?). Write a maximum of three double-spaced typed pages, and place your name and the date at the end of the essay, with only a title at the
beginning of the essay. Do not exceed the page limit; an important skill is the ability to communicate ideas in an efficient, succinct manner.

**Monday 26 September - Foundations of Research Design: Part Two**

*Required Readings:*


*Written Assignment:*

- Select a somewhat broad research topic of interest (e.g., children’s status, women’s employment, work-family policy), and write a very short essay that describes the topic and justifies the need for further research on this topic. Limit your essay to two double-spaced typed pages. Start your essay with a title, and place your name and date at the very end of this assignment. Although it is unnecessary, you may use prior research to help frame your topic and justification, but remember that this is not a literature review. **This essay is the first step toward defining the boundaries of the literature review.** At the end of this essay (on the third page), list four specific research questions on this topic whereby each question assumes a different method of inquiry: surveys, documents (historical/archival or content analysis), observations, and interviews. Under each question, briefly explain the link between the question and its implicit method, i.e., explain how the question embraces a particular method of inquiry.

**Monday 3 October - Survey Methods**

*Required Readings:*

Written Assignment:

• Write a short essay that introduces, describes, and motivates an empirical research question on your chosen topic of interest. Implicitly craft this research question so that it can be investigated with survey data, but do not describe the potential research method. Imagine this essay to be the introduction of a research proposal. Limit your essay to two double-spaced pages, with an informative title at the beginning and your name and date at the end.

Monday 10 October - Survey Practicum

SURVEY PROPOSAL due by noon on Friday 7 October (Details on Blackboard)

Required Readings:

• secondary survey exemplar #1 → Jones, Rachel K. and April Brayfield. 1997. “Life's Greatest Joy?: European Attitudes Toward the Centrality of Children.” Social Forces 75(4):1239-1270. [Pay attention to the structure of the article, and carefully read the introduction, methods, and conclusion. You may skim the literature review and ignore the findings section.]
• secondary survey exemplar #2 → Arnett, Stephanie M. “Influences of National Education Policies on the Academic Achievement of High- and Low-Social Status Students.”
Currently under review at Sociology of Education. [Again, pay attention to the structure of the article, and carefully read the introduction, methods, and conclusion. You may skim the literature review and ignore the findings section.]


**Written Assignment:**

- Design a closed-ended survey that focuses on the research question you posed in the previous exercise. Format your survey for actual use, including instructions for potential respondents, and limit your survey to a maximum of two pages. You may consult the websites that I’ve listed below for ideas, but do not merely replicate pre-existing questions unless it is central to your research objective (such as, an empirical test of the reliability of a particular item within different cultural or rhetorical contexts). Bring three copies of your survey to class.

**Recommended Quantitative Data Sources:**

- Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research: http://www.icpsr.org
- National Opinion Research Center (NORC): http://www.norc.org
- General Social Survey cumulative codebook: http://webapp.icpsr.umich.edu/GSS/
- International Social Survey Programme: http://www.issp.org
- Integrated Public Use Micro Samples (IPUMS) [U.S. & International Census Data over Time]: http://www.ipums.umn.edu
- Fedstats compendium of U.S. government data: http://www.fedstats.gov
- Luxembourg Income Study (household income surveys in 25 countries): http://www.lisproject.org
- Population Reference Bureau: http://www.prb.org

**Monday 17 October - Documentary Methods**

**Required Readings:**

• Shacklock and Thorp’s “Life History and Narrative Approaches”

Written Assignment:

• Once again, write a short essay that introduces, describes, and motivates an empirical research question on your chosen topic of interest. This time, however, your research question will be investigated with archival or documentary data. Thus, your question will shift to coincide with the implicit methodological strategy. Remember do not describe the potential research method. Imagine this essay to be the introduction of your next research proposal. Limit your essay to two double-spaced pages, with an informative title at the beginning and your name and date at the end.

Monday 24 October - Document Practicum

CONTENT ANALYSIS PROPOSAL due by noon on Friday 28 October (Details on Blackboard)

Required Readings:

• Additional Readings to be announced… (Adams and/or Ortiz)

Written Assignment:

• Design a content analysis protocol that focuses on the research question you posed in the previous exercise. This protocol should include (1) an informative title, (2) a brief paragraph that describes the purpose of the project including the research question, (3) a description of sources and sampling strategy, (4) a paragraph that explains the general coding process, and (5) a coding form designed for actual use. You may place your name and date after the title.
Monday 31 October - Observation & Field Methods

Required Readings:


Written Assignment:

- For the third time, write a short essay that introduces, describes, and motivates an empirical research question on your chosen topic of interest. This time your research question will be investigated with observational data. Remember: your question will shift to coincide with the implicit methodological strategy, and do not describe the potential research method. Imagine this essay to be the introduction of your next research proposal.

Monday 7 November - Observation Practicum

OBSERVATION PROPOSAL due by noon on Friday 11 November (Details on Blackboard)

Required Readings:

- Emerson, Robert M., Rachel I. Fretz, and Linda L. Shaw. 1995. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. [Read chapters 1-4; these chapters focus on data collection, while chapters 5-8 are more relevant to analysis.]


Written Assignment:

- Design a participant or non-participant observation protocol that focuses on the research question you posed in the previous exercise. This protocol should include (1) an informative title, (2) a brief paragraph that describes the purpose of the project including the research question, (3) a description of the setting and “sampling” strategy, (4) a paragraph that explains the logic of the observation process, and (5) an observation guide designed for actual use. You may place your name and date after the title.

Monday 14 November - Interview Methods

Required Readings:


Written Assignment:

- Write a short essay that discusses challenges to (a) the recruitment of participants, (b) interview dynamics, and (c) validity in conducting in-depth, face-to-face interviews within your topical area of interest. Limit your essay to a maximum of three double-spaced typed pages, and place your name and date at the end of the essay, with only an informative title at the beginning of the essay.
Monday 21 November - Thanksgiving Week: Class will not meet

Monday 28 November - Interview Practicum

Required Readings:

- Pawluch, Shaffir, and Miall Chapters 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 (on Interviewing Strategies)
- Renzetti and Lee Chapters 11 and 12 (on Researching Sensitive Topics)

Written Assignment:

- Design a face-to-face interview protocol for your research topic. This protocol should include (1) an informative title, (2) a brief paragraph that describes the purpose of the project including the research question, (3) a description of sampling and recruitment strategies, (4) a paragraph that explains the structure of the interview agenda, and (5) an interview guide.

Monday 5 December - Research Design Presentations

**INTERVIEW PROPOSAL due at the beginning of class** (Details on Blackboard)

- Everyone will select one of his/her research designs and deliver a 10-minute formal presentation on its logic and anticipated challenges. After each presentation, audience members will respond with questions and comments to demonstrate their mastery of course material. This session requires thoughtful preparation and rehearsal in advance. Guidelines for the presentation will be posted on Blackboard.

Friday 16 December - Final Examination Period