

“Advanced Tutorial in Interdisciplinary Research Methods”
 Course Description – Winter of 2009
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This is an advanced tutorial for students who want to use history, anthropology and social science research in their work on community organizing, social change efforts or public policy advocacy. Human ecological approaches to such problems and studies require using interdisciplinary methods to integrate different points of view and different theories in a more comprehensive understanding of a person, text, situation or problem. But how can we do that? What sorts of things are “methods”, “theories” and “disciplines” and how can they be integrated? How is theoretical research related to practical action? How should we deal with the ethical issues that come up in research? How do modern vs. post-modern or neo-liberal vs. neo-Marxist or hermeneutic vs. quantitative views of these things differ?

The aim of this tutorial is to cultivate students’ abilities to deal with these questions in sophisticated and effective ways in the context of ongoing research and action projects in human ecology. It deals with challenges in choosing and using **methods** of research, the construction and application of **theories** in interdisciplinary contexts, and the negotiation of issues arising in **planning and pursuing a research process or action project** and dealing with **ethical issues** that arise in it. It is specifically designed to support student work in internships, residencies, senior projects and masters theses. It presupposes familiarity with the practice of at least two disciplines in the humanities and public policy areas (e. g. history and political science, literature and economics or ethnography and agro-ecology).

This tutorial is designed to allow for distance learning for students who are off campus. They will be able to take part in both the tutorial sessions and the one on one meetings through use of Skype. Students will meet normally once a week as a learning group and also once a week (or as the term progresses, biweekly), independently, with the professor. Tutorial sessions will focus on two kinds of readings: 1.) a selection of articles and chapters dealing with methodological, theoretical, ethical and other aspects of research processes and action projects and 2.) case study materials focused on the projects students are working on including writings by students or pieces directly relevant to understanding their work. Readings from the first category will be selected to be most appropriate for student projects and may range widely but will in any case include a core of texts dealing with the challenges of ethnography, quantitative social studies, and historical narratives in the context of working in participatory ways on community based projects.

READINGS: The two primary texts for the tutorial sessions will be THE EVALUATION OF CULTURAL ACTION by Howard Richards and INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH: PROCESS AND THEORY by Allen F. Repko. Richard’s book is a very interesting example of an attempt to address the issues the tutorial focuses on – combining both a very concrete case study with systematic

philosophical reflections on key issues. It will provide a very useful case to begin with in order to raise basic issues and provide a common point of reference for discussions. Repko's text synthesizes a broad range of recent research and thinking on the challenges of doing interdisciplinary work. It will provide a useful comprehensive text for reviewing a broad range of issues as students work on their own projects. Material from those individual projects will provide the other primary reading for the tutorial. Some other occasional readings may also be assigned depending on student interests and concerns.

Written work for the tutorial will include keeping a journal from which excerpts will be shared, short weekly writing assignments (usually involving exercises applying the readings to your individual project), and the writing of a draft of a methodology section for your project (e. g. as a chapter or appendix for a senior project or residency report). Journal excerpts and the short writing assignments should be completed ahead of the scheduled tutorial session and emailed to Gray and the other members of your tutorial group so they can read them over and have them as a point of reference for discussion. A preliminary first draft of the methodology section will be due about mid-term and then a revised version at the end of the term.

The people taking this tutorial will be divided into small groups of 2 to 5 and the weekly tutorial sessions will be set at a time convenient for the small group to convene on Skype. If a Skype connection fails or someone is unable to make a meeting (which can happen when we are spread over multiple countries and working in the field) then at your earliest convenience you should respond by email to the reading, the comments sent by other students and the agenda of key questions and passages Gray will provide to frame tutorial session discussions. This way if the Skype is a problem we can still keep to our weekly plan of work by using email as a substitute. NOTE: It may also turn out that logistically it will work better to share documents through a wiki. Gray will set one up so we will have this as an option. (It may be easier for folks who access things on line at internet cafes and have no simple way to keep back up copies.)

In the journal that you keep, you should feel free to write whatever you like, and let it be as personal as you choose. You will not need to turn it in as a whole. Rather, you will simply need to submit excerpts that you select that help the other folks in your small group learn about what you are thinking and what challenges you are facing and what strategies you are adopting. These will provide material for discussion. In general, you should make a point of using a mix of prompts to add content to your journal – which may, depending on your project, include descriptions of people, events, cultural themes, food, personal emotions and traumas, special delights, et cetera. One prompt to use weekly and share at least some of the resulting writing from is the following: What is most exciting and what is most challenging in your work this week? You should be sure to write something on this each week and send it in the email to everyone else because it discussion of this will normally be the first point on the agenda for tutorial sessions.

Evaluation: Final evaluations will be based on class participation and one on one meetings, (25%), journal writing and short exercise papers through the term (35%), progress on individual project as evidenced by methodology chapter draft and other writings (40%).

HS, lab fee of \$25, intermediate to advanced, permission of the instructor required.

Group 1:

Bonface Omudi -- Kenya
 Helena Shilomboleni -- Namibia

Group 2:

Michelle Soto -- Cuba and Oaxaca
 Galen Ballentine -- Oaxaca
 Mirza Alas Portillo -- Costa Rica

Group 3:

Olivia Rodriguez Bobadilla -- Bar Harbor, Maine and Guatemala
 Josh Howard – Bar Harbor
 Michelle Lawrence – Bar Harbor and Boston

Schedule by Week

1 (1/5) Reading: Richards, Foreword and pp. 1-50

Short Writing Exercise: Reflection on key informants – how chosen, merits, challenges, strategies for building the relationship and working with them

2 (1/12) Reading: Richards, pp. 51-119

Short Writing Exercise: Qualitative Methods” Native language questions, “deconstructed I”, participatory method
 Verbal Image (First)

3 (1/19) Reading: Richards, pp. 120-189

Short Writing Exercise: Ethical Research Review – ERRB application

4 (1/26) Reading: Richards, pp. 190- 243

Short Writing Exercise: * “Quantitative Methods” -- Causal Hypotheses and quantitative tests, Data gathering

5 (2/2) Reading: Repko, pp. 1-48

Short Writing Exercise: Matrix of previous courses and field work – and review its connections to the current project
 First Draft Due for Methodology Chapter

6 (2/9) Reading: Repko, pp. 49-134

Short Writing Exercise: SWOT analysis of one of the institutions you are examining (or a variation on Rapid Rural Appraisal)

7 (2/16) Reading: Repko, pp. 135-216

Short Writing Exercise: * Analysis of theories being used
 conflicts and complementarities
 in juxtapositions, connections, systematic integrations

- 8 (2/23) Reading: Repko, pp. 217-270
Short Writing Exercise: TBA
- 9 (3/2) Reading: Repko, pp. 271-326
Short Writing Exercise: TBA
- 10 (3/9) Reading: Sharing methodology chapter drafts
DUE: Final draft of methodology chapter

Assignment for first week:

- a. Read Richards, Foreword and pp. 1-50
- b. If you have not already, share the final proposal for your senior project, residency, internship, thesis or other work you are doing this term with your group members
- c. select some material from your journal to share. It should include, at a minimum, some notes in response to the prompt: "What is most exciting and what is most challenging in your work this week?"
- d. Write and share a short reflection on key or types of people you are working with or are hoping to work with – how are you choosing (or being chosen by) them, their merits and challenges as informants, and your strategies for building the relationship and working with them.
- e. email Gray and the other members of your group your preferred email address and your Skype account address AND the times that you are available -- and those you would most prefer -- for Skype sessions.