Urban Studies 921: Research Methods in Urban Studies  
Fall 2014

Instructor: Joel Rast

Mondays, 4:30-7:10 pm  
Location: Bolton Hall, Room 702B

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Office Hours: Tues. 1:00-2:30  
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Course Overview

This course provides an introduction to the research methods that are most often used in the field of urban studies. All of you have undoubtedly engaged in some form of research at some point during your academic and professional lives. However, you may not always have been conscious or deliberate in your choice and use of research methods. There are a variety of methods that are useful and appropriate for conducting urban research. None is intrinsically better or worse than any other. Rather, the methodology (or methodologies) you use depends on the question you are asking. Some questions are best answered through qualitative research such as interviews or historical investigation. Other questions are better addressed through quantitative research techniques like regression analysis. This course will focus principally on qualitative research techniques. It is designed to help you think more deliberately and scientifically about your methodological approaches as you design and carry out social research.

Course Requirements

Class Participation: Weekly class sessions for this course will include discussions of the assigned reading material. Therefore, it is essential that you come to class each week well prepared. This means, obviously, that you **must** do the reading beforehand. Informed discussion of the material is one of the most important components of this class. Your participation in the class will be facilitated in two principal ways:

- **Presentations of readings:** Students will share responsibilities for presenting the readings each week. Presentations should consist of a brief (5-10 minute) overview of the reading and consider in particular methodological issues or questions raised by the reading.

- **Reaction pieces:** For each reading (excluding the text), all students are required to prepare a paragraph containing comments or questions that can be used as a basis for contributing to class discussions. You should pay particular attention to methodological issues, themes, or questions which are raised by the readings. Reaction pieces may include a brief summary of the reading, but they should focus principally on reacting to the material rather than summarizing it. Reaction pieces should be between 1 and 2 pages (single-spaced) in length. They will be due at the end of each class session.
Research Proposal: The final project for this course is a substantial research paper (see below). To facilitate the research and writing of this paper, you will be asked to prepare an 8-10 page (double-spaced) research proposal, due Monday, November 3. The proposal will identify a research question that interests you and describe in detail both how you intend to investigate this question and why it is worth exploring. I will provide additional guidelines for the research proposal early in the semester. All proposal topics must be approved in advance by me. Once you have selected a topic please schedule a meeting with me so that we can discuss it.

Research Paper: The research proposal will serve as your framework and guide for preparing a 12-15 page (double-spaced) research paper. I will provide additional guidelines for the paper later in the semester. Papers will be due during finals week.

Each of the above components will account for the following proportions of your final grade:

- Research Proposal 30 %
- Research Paper 40 %
- Reaction Pieces 20 %
- Class Participation 10 %

Required Books:

These books are available at the UWM bookstore. Full text versions of the additional readings are posted on the course D2L site.

Class Schedule

September 8: Course Overview; Introduction to Urban Inquiry
- Babbie, chapter 1

September 15: Paradigms
- Babbie, pp. 32-44; Kuhn (entire book)

September 22: Social Theory
- Babbie, pp. 44-59.
September 29: Research Design
• Babbie, chapter 4.

October 6: Measurement
• Babbie, chapter 5.

October 13: Survey Research
• Babbie, chapter 9.

October 20: Field Research
• Babbie, chapter 10.
October 27: Qualitative Data Analysis
• Babbie, chapter 13.

November 3: Data Sources Workshop (Meet in Library, Instruction Room A)
Research proposals due. No reading assignment.

November 10: Community-Based Participatory Research

November 17: Unobtrusive Research
• Babbie, chapter 11.

November 24: Case Studies; Comparative Research

**December 1: Evaluation Research**

• Babbie, chapter 12.
• Neighborhood Capital Budget Group, “Back to Basics: Fairness and Accountability for Our Neighborhood Public Works.”

**December 8: Research Presentations**

Class presentations of research papers. No reading assignment.