

## Marie Kennedy Feb 2010 -- Research for Organizing and Empowerment

Learning goals of the course

Students will become critical consumers of social research, including.

- how to obtain research studies on topics of interest
- how to evaluate whether social research studies are well-designed and competently carried out
- how to determine whether studies are conducted rigorously, responsibly and ethically
- how to evaluate whether media reports on social research are accurate and fair.

Students will gain an understanding of the history and theory of action research and participatory action research (PAR), including:

- theoretical roots in adult education, and related developments in popular education, community organizing, leadership development and citizen monitoring
- how action research and particularly PAR differ from standard social science research
- how PAR can be used to give voice to marginalized groups and confront and unpack internalized oppression
- how action research and PAR can augment organizing and advocacy efforts in a community and contribute to leadership development

Students will gain familiarity with various research methods, including those utilized in standard social research and how to adapt these methods for use in action research and participatory action research, including:

- popular education methods (e.g., story-telling, popular theater)
- techniques of power analysis and analyses of decision-making processes, key actors and decision points, etc.
- qualitative methods (e.g., key informant interviews, field observation, focus groups)
- quantitative methods (e.g., survey, experiment)
- comparative (e.g., multiple case studies)

Students will gain understanding of the basic legal and ethical obligations of social researchers, including awareness of Institutional Review Board human subjects requirements and procedures.

Students will become aware of the tensions which may emerge between the research, action and participatory goals of participatory action research, and alternative ways of addressing these tensions in particular situations

Students will demonstrate their mastery of these learning goals by designing and carrying out a (limited) participatory action research project focusing on an issue of importance to the group of students or to a community with which the instructor is involved. In the process, students will:

- develop teamwork skills
- consider resource constraints, especially available time and money
- critique conventional research regarding the topic of the project
- participate in the entire process:
  - defining the problem to be researched
  - posing the research questions
  - deciding on data gathering methodologies
  - gathering and analyzing the data

- interpreting the findings
- deciding how the findings will be used and by whom
- mobilizing for action
- carrying out an action
- evaluating the process

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Note: Students will either have to already have basic descriptive statistics (mean, median, proportion, rate of change) or this will have to be built into the course.