

University of Michigan at Dearborn

URST 450: Senior Capstone in Community-Based Research [Independent Studies Winter 2017]

Professor: Lara Rusch

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Office hours in 2154 SSB, Mon. and Wed. 2-3pm or by appt.

Class meets in 2205 SSB

Course Description

As the senior capstone course for the Urban and Regional Studies (URS) Program, this course is designed to involve you intellectually with the surrounding urban community in a rigorous research project. The specific research topic of the course changes from year to year.

For Winter 2017 we will conduct an action-research project in collaboration with *Street Democracy*, a nonprofit legal aid organization running the Street Outreach Court of Detroit: <https://www.streetdemocracy.org/> Our work will include reviewing research on the criminalization of poverty and the development of specialty courts as a response to social problems. We will research the costs of the justice system for misdemeanors in the state of Michigan and learn the history of the Street Outreach Court of Detroit and its founding partner, the Detroit Action Commonwealth: <http://www.detroitaction.org/>. You will develop skills in developing an action-research project, collecting secondary data and interviewing, organizing and synthesizing data, and drawing appropriate conclusions based on the research.

A key learning objective for this course is that students apply an understanding of urban issues to the development and critical analysis of programs and policies appropriate to addressing contemporary social and economic problems. For all URS Program Goals, go to <http://www.casl.umd.umich.edu/urbanstudies/>

The Semester Research Project – 2 components

1. *Reporting on the costs of sentencing the poor for misdemeanors*

The first half of this semester we will be gaining background knowledge to carry out an action-research project during the second half, in collaboration with Street Democracy. Our specific project goal is to research and diagnose the costs to the public of ticketing and sentencing indigent people for non-violent misdemeanors in Michigan, for example, the cost to the city of enforcing tickets for “driving without insurance” or “driving while license suspended” on insurance rates city-wide, on employment, and income tax and property tax revenue.

2. Collecting testimonies from DAC members/clients

During the semester as time allows, we will speak with and interview DAC members who have been or are clients of the Street Outreach Court, in order to document their experiences on behalf of the community organization.

Note to students: *This course does not satisfy the community-based research requirement in Urban and Regional Studies. This capstone is a separate requirement for the Urban and Regional Studies Program.*

Readings

The following text is required:

Berman, G., & Feinblatt, J. (2005). *Good Courts: The Case for Problem-solving Justice*. New York: New Press.

All other readings are available as links on the syllabus or will be shared as pdf documents electronically.

Expectations

This course is unique in that you are being trained in both the theory and the practice of community-based research. Our collaborations between campus and community are evolving. Therefore for this collaboration to be successful we will all need to be:

- **Flexible and adaptable:** expect conditions to change, take initiative to talk with others about the organizations and community
- **Attentive:** listen carefully to community members
- **Responsible:** attend meetings and follow through on your commitments
- **Creative:** be open to new situations and ideas and seek input from others
- **Respectful and Appreciative:** we are guests in the community

The usual academic expectations also hold for our class meetings:

- Attend class and required events
- Turn off cell phones and beepers before class and meetings
- Read assigned materials and be prepared to discuss them
- Be attentive and participate with thoughtful comments and questions
- Take notes and review them after class
- Complete the required assignments by the due dates
- Maintain contact with the instructor about your progress in the class and any questions or concerns you may have. Email: lrusch@umich.edu

Grading Breakdown:

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| ➤ Participation in class discussion and activities | 10% |
| ➤ Leading discussion & posing questions to class | 5% |
| ➤ 5 Reading Reflection papers | 40% |

- Individual draft sections of final report(s) 15%
- Final group report(s) and peer evaluation 30%

Grade Determination

Your **participation** is required in all portions of the course, which means coming prepared to discuss the readings and have completed. If you miss more than one class without evidence of a documented medical condition, your participation grade will be affected. This is a small seminar that depends on your continued presence and participation, so students with ongoing attendance problems may be asked to withdraw from the class.

Each student will sign up to **lead discussion** of the readings one day this semester. As part of your grade, **bring at least three questions to pose to the class** that spur discussion on the readings. Avoid asking factual questions that are directly answered by the reading. Instead, ask questions based on what you find most compelling in the readings, or on aspects that you would critique. To get started think about the main arguments made by the authors and their findings. Look for points of potential disagreement across authors or areas where more research is needed. **Submit your questions and briefly discuss possible answers by email on the day before the class discussion.**

Short **Reading Response Papers** will require you to keep up with the readings in the first half of the semester. Be sure to proofread these and bring them to class to hand in. More specific questions and guidelines are forthcoming.

Missed or Late Assignments

Not completing one of the major assignments for this course will automatically result in a failing grade for the course. Late assignments will be accepted, although they will lose points for every day they are late. If you are having trouble meeting a deadline contact the professor as soon as possible so that reasonable accommodations can be made.

Accommodating Disabilities

Please speak with the instructor if you have any needs or concerns regarding disabilities. The University will make reasonable accommodations for persons with documented disabilities. Students need to register with Disability Resource Services every semester they are taking classes. To be assured of having services when they are needed, students should register no later than three weeks after the first day of classes. For more information contact Disability Resource Services Assistant; University of Michigan Dearborn, 313-593-5430.

Academic Honesty

This professor, the Social Sciences Department, and the University of Michigan – Dearborn value academic honesty and integrity. Each student has a responsibility to understand, accept, and comply with the University's standards of academic conduct as set forth by the Code of Academic Conduct, as well as CASL's policies. Cheating, collusion, misconduct, fabrication, and plagiarism are considered serious offenses. Violations will not be tolerated and may result in penalties ranging from receiving a failing grade for the course to expulsion from the University.

I will provide specific guidelines for citing other sources on written work. Please speak with me if you are uncertain about the meaning of academic integrity or plagiarism.

SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS

- Readings are marked by bullet points. *Note: additional readings or materials may be assigned to assist with the final research project as the project develops. Also location may change for meeting with community partners or other fieldwork.*

1/13 Introductions to each other and the course

- Familiarize yourself with the purpose and process of the Street Outreach Court of Detroit: <https://www.streetdemocracy.org/socd/>

1/20 Costs of poverty in the court system

- <http://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2016/03/departments-of-justice-open-letter/473742/>
- <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/09/us/rights-battles-emerge-in-cities-where-homelessness-can-be-a-crime.html?ref=us&module=Ribbon&version=context®ion=Header&action=click&contentCollection=U.S.&pgtype=Multimedia>
- <http://www.npr.org/2014/05/19/312158516/increasing-court-fees-punish-the-poor>
- <http://www.npr.org/2015/10/21/450546542/lawsuits-target-debtors-prisons-across-the-country>
- <http://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/wayne/2016/03/09/eastpointe-judge-pay-or-stay-sentencing-carl-gerds/81551972/>
- Dropbox: “Did debtors’ prison ever really go away?”
- <http://miccd.org/michigan-draws-the-line-on-reasonable-criminal-court-fees/>
- NPR special series, Guilty and Charged: <http://www.npr.org/series/313986316/guilty-and-charged>. In particular, listen to this audio news report: <http://www.npr.org/2014/05/21/314607003/court-fees-drive-many-poor-defendants-underground>

Reading Reflection 1 due: How does the court system create uniquely problematic challenges for low income people? Do the readings offer any solutions? Also discuss how topics from another URS course relate to this issue or inform your understanding.

1/27 Problem-Solving Courts

- Dropbox: “The Homeless Court Program: Taking the Court to the Streets” (*Federal Probation Journal* 2003, 3rd article)
- Berman and Feinblatt, Introduction and chapter 1
- Dropbox: Drug and Other Specialty Courts – Oxford Handbooks

Reading Reflection 2 due: TBA

2/3 Problem-Solving Courts, continued

- Berman and Feinblatt, Chapters 2-5
- Dropbox: “Livability Courts for Problem-Solving and Mediation”, the Urban Institute

2/10 Evaluating Problem Solving Courts

- Dropbox: Brank and Haby 2013, “The Intended and Unintended Consequences of Problem-solving Courts”
- Berman and Feinblatt, Chapters 6 through Conclusion

Reading Reflection 3 due: What challenges should we be aware of when trying to assess the impact of a specialty court? Do they save money for the city/state, cost additional money, or does it vary? If problem-solving courts cost more money how can a case best be made for them in austere times?

2/17 Planning the research

An example of assessing costs of poverty:

- “Where We Sleep: the costs of housing and homelessness in Los Angeles”:
<https://economicrt.org/publication/where-we-sleep/>
- Reread section of the SOCD website on “estimated benefits to society”,
<https://www.streetdemocracy.org/socd/>
- Dropbox: selections from *Qualitative Methods in the Social Sciences* on the process of Action Research

Reading Reflection 4 due: How does this report measure the costs of poverty and homelessness for the City of LA? What lessons can we draw from it for our project?

2/24 Information on Michigan’s System

- “The People’s Court?” *American Prospect*: <http://prospect.org/article/peoples-court>
- Dropbox: D36 Restructuring Report
- Dropbox: NCSC Report on the 36th District Court
- Dropbox: MI Problem Solving Courts
- Dropbox: Criminal Fines Cost Assessment (MCL769.1k)

Reading Reflection 5 due: What information from these documents is useful for assessing any savings for the state by the SOCD? What further kinds of information are needed?

3/3 Spring Break – no class

3/10 Introduction to the Detroit Action Commonwealth

- Dropbox: Markus, “Organizing in Detroit Soup Kitchens for Power and Justice”
- Dropbox: “DAC—Who We Are What We Do”
- Dropbox: Selections from *Qualitative Methods in the Social Sciences* on interviewing
- The Detroit Action Commonwealth: <http://detroitaction.org/>

TBD: Meeting at 4390 Conner Ave. or another Capuchin soup kitchen

3/17 Data collection

3/24 Data Collection

3/31 TBD

Report section drafts due.

4/7 Data Analysis and Writing

4/14-4/21 Location TBD – presenting results

Final group report due.