

BRANDEIS UNIVERSITY
SOCIOLOGY 182A
APPLIED RESEARCH METHODS

SPRING, 2006 INSTRUCTORS:

DAVID CUNNINGHAM

dcunning@brandeis.edu

x62633 (office – Pearlman 207)

781-752-6062 (cell)

CLARE HAMMONDS

hammonds@brandeis.edu

Class: MW 2:10-3:30

in Pearlman 202

Office hours (in Pearlman 207):

M 4:00-5:00

Th 10:00-11:00 & by appointment

This course provides hands-on training in social science research methodology. It assumes no prior knowledge of the research process, and covers issues related to research design, data collection, and causal analysis within the context of a large-scale collaborative research project. Each of you will operate as a member of a “research team,” with responsibility over a component of the broader project. This endeavor will require you to coordinate your efforts with other members of the class to identify research questions, define the data necessary to answer those questions, gather and code that data, and begin the process of analysis. While the substantive focus of this research work will vary from semester to semester, projects are intended to support real-world social justice-related endeavors, and as such this course will count toward the “research internship” requirement in the Social Justice and Social Policy (SJSP) program. The class also fulfills Brandeis’ Writing Intensive (WI) requirement, which means that we will spend a significant amount of time focusing on how to effectively communicate ideas related to our research topic, the data we compile, and the significance of our findings. We will also spend some time in the computer lab, working with the statistical software package SPSS. As an “applied” course, we will divide our time roughly equally among three tasks: 1) gaining substantive background on the particular topic that defines the semester’s research project; 2) discussing key general issues in research design and data analysis; 3) applying those issues to our particular research topic to produce findings of use to real-world social justice initiatives.

Spring 2009 research project: This particular semester, we will engage in work supporting the Mississippi Truth Project, a grassroots effort to form a statewide truth and reconciliation commission focused on racial violence in Mississippi between 1945 and 1975. Our goal is to provide research support for the commission, by building a database and conducting analyses that allow its members to better understand and convey the institutional bases of support for the violence that emerged throughout this period. Throughout the semester, we will be partnering with the University of Mississippi’s William Winter Institute for Racial Reconciliation, and we hope to have Winter Institute Director Susan Glisson visit us at some point. Our efforts will be collaborative, evolving according to the research questions that the commission deems relevant to its work, as well as to the data available to us.

Readings

The following books are required for this course:

Dark Journey: Black Mississippians in the Age of Jim Crow, by Neil R. McMillen
Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi, by John Dittmer
The Basics of Social Research (4th edition), by Earl Babbie (available on Latte)
Discovering Statistics Using SPSS (2nd edition), by Andy Field (available on Latte)
1 foundational institution text (to be announced)

Assignments and grading

- Writing and research exercises 15%

- Nested writing assignments:
 - Historical synthesis 15%
(5 pages, focused on key themes associated with racial control and contention in Jim Crow-era Mississippi)

 - Institutional study 25%
(10 pages, building from your historical synthesis to focus on conceptualizing the level of “repressive capacity” associated with your institution)

 - Final integrative analysis paper 30%
(15 page discussion of your research work, integrating background related to your institutional case, the conceptualization and operationalization of your variables, and preliminary analysis of your data)

- Participation 15%

This is a “writing intensive” class, and all of these assignments are designed to build toward your final integrative paper. To that end, you will complete a handful of exercises (both in-class, and on your own) throughout the semester, focused on writing and research skills. These exercises are intended to provide tools to improve particular aspects of the organization and content of your formal writing assignments. As stated above, the three major writing assignments in the class are “nested,” meaning that each paper will serve as the foundation for the next assignment (in other words, you do not need to write 10 or 15 pages of new material for your final two papers; instead, revised passages from your 5-page historical synthesis will be part of your institutional study, and that in turn will serve as the basis for your final paper). As your written work is part of our collective Mississippi project, you can expect lots of collaborative support and encouragement throughout the semester – in this class, we are all mutually accountable for producing high-quality data, and we intend this work to be carried out in a spirit of support that should properly characterize a “research team.” Obviously, this team-based model requires that everyone take their role in the project seriously – we will always place a high value on your engagement and participation, both in class and with related outside work.

If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please see me immediately.

Course Outline

Week 1 (14 January):

- Introductory business
 - overview of class structure and the Mississippi Truth Project
- Introduction to the Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi
 - film: *Eyes on the Prize*

Week 2 (20-21 January):

- Foundations of sociological research: data and inquiry
 - reading: Babbie, Ch. 1: "Human Inquiry and Science" (L)
- Mississippi: the logic of Jim Crow I
 - reading: McMillen, *Dark Journey*, Chs. 1-4

Week 3 (26-28 January):

- Theory and the principles of (causal) explanation
 - reading: Babbie, Ch. 4: "Research Design" (L)
- Mississippi: the logic of Jim Crow II
 - reading: McMillen, *Dark Journey*, Chs. 5-8

Week 4 (2-4 February):

- Constructing variables and measures I
 - reading: Babbie, Ch. 5: "Conceptualization, Operationalization, and Measurement" (L)
- The rise of the Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi
 - reading: Dittmer, *Local People*, Chs. 2-6

Key theme exercise due

Week 5 (9-11 February):

- Constructing variables and measures II
 - reading: Babbie, Ch. 6: "Indexes, Scales, and Typologies" (L)
- Civil Rights in Mississippi
 - guest speaker: tba

Week 6 (16-18 February): No class (midterm recess)

Week 7 (23-25 February):

- Populations and samples I
 - reading: Babbie, Ch. 7: "The Logic of Sampling" (L)
- The Movement in Mississippi: growth, decline, and enduring impact
 - reading: Dittmer, *Local People*, Chs. 7-13

Week 8 (2-4 March):

- Populations and samples II
- Research project: institutional regime assignments

Historical synthesis paper due

Week 9 (9-11 March):

- Comparative/historical research design
-reading: Babbie, Ch. 11: "Unobtrusive Research" (L)
- Research project: discussion of issues related to institutional regimes
-reading: foundational institution text

Week 10 (16-18 March):

- Introduction to data analysis
-reading: Field, Ch. 2: "The SPSS Environment" (L)
- Research project: working with institutional data

Source exercise due

Week 11 (23-25 March):

- Exploratory data analysis I
-reading: Field, Ch. 3: "Exploring Data" (L)
- Research project: conceptualizing repressive capacity
-reading:
Amenta, Edwin, Neal Caren, Tina Fetner, and Michael P. Young. 2002. "Challengers and States: Toward a Political Sociology of Social Movements." *Research in Political Sociology* 10:47-83. (L)
Dirks, Annelieke. 2006. "Between Threat and Reality: The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the Emergence of Armed Self-Defense in Clarksdale and Natchez, Mississippi, 1960-1965." *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 1:71-98. (L)

Lens essay exercise due

Week 12 (30 March - 1 April):

- Exploratory data analysis II
- Research project: conceptualizing institutional variables

Institutional study due

Week 13 (6-8 April):

- Causal analysis
-reading: Field, Ch. 4: "Correlation" (L)
- Research project: applying analysis techniques to institutional data

Exploratory data analysis exercise due

Week 14 (13-15 April): No class

Weeks 15-16 (20-29 April):

- Research project: in-process presentations and strategies for effective revision

Final integrative analysis paper due (tba)

Mississippi Truth Project: Draft Declaration of Intent

From 1945 to 1975, racism cast a shadow over the experiences of all Mississippians.

This time period encompasses the transition between the height of Jim Crow and a post-segregation society. It was characterized by increased and organized resistance to white supremacy, as well as the development of more subtle methods of institutional racism. Many practices consciously and unconsciously oppressed a large segment of the population. These practices resulted in crimes against the body, crimes against property, the collusion of public and private institutions in preventing access and opportunity to all people, and conspiracies of silence.

We still feel the effects of that dark time.

As a part of a dominant culture of racism, Mississippi's economic, environmental, legal, political, educational and social systems have shackled our potential and promise. Racial disparities in the areas of housing, health care, education, criminal justice, and employment not only continue to have disproportionate effect on the state's African-American population, but also limit the shared quality of life for all citizens.

The courageous struggles of many have yielded progress, but a full and accurate measure of our state's history and its lasting impact has been obscured.

Too often stories are told of this time focusing on individuals and not institutions. While it is true that vigilantes terrorized the night, it is also true that public officials and community leaders shaped the daily experience of oppression. Moreover, the white establishment enabled the violence that occurred. The failure to understand this connection has allowed the premature declaration of closure following instances of individual justice that have happened.

A just and inclusive future can only be ensured by a comprehensive inquiry of this unjust and segregated past.

There are still living eyewitnesses from this era who can help Mississippi face and tell its own stories in an honest, unflinching fashion. This opportunity allows the collection of detailed stories and records about this era. This is a unique moment, wherein we have attained a measure of distance and insight into this period while still having living participants and observers of this time.

The establishment of a Mississippi Truth and Reconciliation Project will allow us to develop appropriate remedies and to create a culture of equity, harmony, and prosperity.

Acknowledging and working to understand our deliberate, insidious and systematic racism can set us free to understand our past and to create opportunities to heal our wounds. It is hoped that citizens will use these findings to help raise Mississippi up to its potential and serve as a model for other states and communities struggling with their racial legacies. A Mississippi Truth and Reconciliation Commission will allow the state to constructively engage the confusion, division, and bitter feelings related to this time period. A truthful engagement will lead to greater reconciliation and multiracial support for restorative justice among individuals, sectors, and institutions within the state of Mississippi.

We, the undersigned, commit ourselves to work diligently and honestly with the people and institutions of Mississippi to carry out this project with integrity, promoting truth, understanding and reconciliation.

Notes on process, from Susan Glisson (9/10/08):

“an ad hoc steering committee met during the summer, overseeing the work of a declaration of intent committee. the group received some seed money from the andrus family fund and hired 3 part-time organizers. those organizers have been trained and will now canvas the state with the attached draft declaration of intent, in order to get feedback and endorsement of its principles. the hope is to have a large meeting ... in january to get official signees. those signees and constituents then would constitute the permanent body that would elect a steering committee to work through all of the potential issues necessary for a truth and reconciliation commission and then craft a mandate to call it into being.”