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 design and 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 actual research endeavors motivated by questions and collaborations that relate to ongoing social justice initiatives, 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’ Quantitative Reasoning (QR) requirement, which means that we will focus on approaches to arraying, analyzing, and effectively communicating ideas related to our research topic and data. Related quantitative analyses will be carried out using the statistical software package SPSS, though again we assume no previous experience with this software or with statistical analysis generally. 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.

Fall 2014 research project: This particular semester, our work will further a longstanding research initiative supporting the Mississippi Truth Project (MTP), a grassroots restorative justice effort addressing systematic historical inequities, and highlighting their relationship to contemporary social opportunities and arrangements, in Mississippi and elsewhere. This work builds on the efforts of previous Brandeis students – including participants in the 2009 and 2012 versions of this course, 2011 and 2014 Mississippi-based JBS programs, and a sustained graduate student and faculty collaboration – to provide research support for the MTP and its institutional base at the University of Mississippi’s William Winter Institute for Racial Reconciliation. The focus of our efforts has evolved – and continues to develop – in collaboration with the Winter Institute, and this semester will center on tracing relationships between contemporary educational inequities and historical dynamics associated with public school desegregation trajectories.
Readings
We will make full use of the following books in this course:

- *Discovering Statistics Using SPSS* (2nd edition), by Andy Field
- *The Visual Display of Quantitative Information*, by Edward R. Tufte

While each is valuable and therefore recommended for you to purchase, given their high cost all readings from these books – along with various other supplementary chapters, articles, and essays – will be posted on our course Latte page.

Assignments and grading

- Data conceptualization and presentation exercises
  (most completed in class)  5%

- Data coding tasks
  10%

- 2 SPSS exercises (15% each)
  (Note that you can download SPSS onto your personal computer for free under the Brandeis site license, and/or use the versions installed in many computer labs around campus. For details, see: http://lts.brandeis.edu/techhelp/content/spss.html)  30%

- Research project, part I: historical synthesis
  (5 pages, focused on key themes associated with the desegregation trajectory of your chosen community)  15%

- Research project, part II: final integrative analysis paper
  (10 page discussion of your research work, integrating your background study with the conceptualization and operationalization of your research measures and preliminary analysis of your data)  30%

- Participation
  10%

A note about assignments and participation: As your written work will contribute to our collective 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 credible analyses, 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.
Accommodation policy
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

Weeks 1-2 (29 August - 5 September):
• Introductory business: overview of class structure – be sure to upload personal intros
• Overview of the Mississippi Truth Project and Brandeis’ Mississippi research initiative
• Data and inquiry as a collective endeavor: collective class-based research examples
  -readings (skim):
• Foundations of sociological research: data and inquiry
  -reading: Babbie, Ch. 1: “Human Inquiry and Science”
• The state of school desegregation in the U.S.

Week 3 (9-12 September):
• Introduction to data analysis in SPSS
  -reading: Field, Ch. 2: “The SPSS Environment”
• Garrity, Morgan, and busing in Boston
  -readings: Robert Coles, “Busing in Boston”
  Ronald P. Formisano, Boston Against Busing, Chs. 2-4
  Media accounts of the 40th anniversary of busing (tba)

Week 4 (16-19 September):
• Theory and the principles of (causal) explanation
  -reading: Babbie, Ch. 4: “Research Design”
• Brown, Green, Alexander, and the long arc of school desegregation in Mississippi
  -readings: Neil R. McMillen, Dark Journey, Ch. 3
  Charles C. Bolton, The Hardest Deal of All, Introduction and Chs. 7-8
Week 5 (23-26 September): No class! (Brandeis Thursday and Rosh Hashanah)

Week 6 (30 September - 3 October):
• Constructing variables and measures I
  -reading: Babbie, Ch. 5: “Conceptualization, Operationalization, and Measurement”
• Brown, Milliken, and school de/re-segregation in North Carolina
  -readings: Clotfelter et al., “Classroom Level Segregation and Resegregation in North Carolina”
  Flinspach and Banks, “Moving Beyond Race: Socioeconomic Diversity as a Race-Neutral Approach to Desegregation in the Wake County Schools”

Week 7 (7-10 October):
• The logic of comparison
  -reading: Charles C. Ragin, The Comparative Method (excerpts)
• Considering archival school data: yearbooks, surveys, and official documents
• Exploratory data analysis I (SPSS)
  -reading: Field, Ch. 3: “Exploring Data”

Historical synthesis paper due

Week 8 (14-17 October):
• Constructing variables and measures II
  -reading: Babbie, Ch. 6: “Indexes, Scales, and Typologies”
• Data coding workshop I
• Exploratory data analysis II (SPSS)

Week 9 (21-24 October):
• Populations and samples
  -reading: Babbie, Ch. 7: “The Logic of Sampling”
• Causal analysis I (SPSS)
  -reading: Field, Ch. 4: “Correlation”

SPSS assignment I (exploratory data analysis) due

Week 10 (28-31 October):
• Presenting and representing data visually
  -reading: Tufte, The Visual Display of Quantitative Information
• SPSS workshop: Tables and graphs
• Causal analysis II (SPSS)

Week 11 (4-7 November):
• Content analysis of qualitative historical data
  -reading: Babbie, Ch. 11: “Unobtrusive Research”
• Data coding and analysis workshop II
Week 12 (11-14 November):
• Narrating and analyzing experiences of school desegregation
  - readings:

SPSS assignment II (causal analysis) due

Weeks 13-14 (18-25 November; no class 11/28):
• Data presentations: MA, MS, and NC

Week 15 (2-5 December):
• Spillover and course wrap-up

Final integrative analysis paper due (tba)