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 real-world 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’ Writing Intensive (WI) and Quantitative Reasoning (QR) requirements, which means that we will spend a significant amount of time focusing on how to array, analyze, and effectively communicate ideas related to our research topic and findings. During the latter half of the semester, we will work with 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 2012 research project: This particular semester, we will engage in work supporting the Mississippi Truth Project (MTP), a grassroots effort to “create a culture of truth telling that will bring to light racially motivated crimes and injustices committed in Mississippi between 1945 and 1975.” This work builds on the efforts of previous Brandeis students – including participants in the 2009 version of this course, the 2011 “Civil Rights and Racial Justice in Mississippi” JBS program, 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 how historical dynamics and trajectories associated with public schooling in the state impact contemporary educational inequities.
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)

Additionally, these main texts will be supplemented by a small set of chapters, articles, and essays posted on Latte.

Assignments and grading
• Writing and data conceptualization exercises  5%
  (most completed in class)

• Quantitative research exercise (using SPSS)  10%
  (Note that you can download SPSS onto your personal computer for free on a “first come first served” basis. For details, see: http://lts.brandeis.edu/techhelp/content/cssm-spss.html)

• Data coding tasks  10%

• Nested writing assignments:
  • Historical synthesis  10%
    (5 pages, focused on key themes associated with racial control and contention in Jim Crow-era Mississippi)
  • Theorized case background study  20%
    (10 pages, building from your historical synthesis to situate the topic of your later analysis theoretically and institutionally/geographically)
  • Final integrative analysis paper  30%
    (15 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)

• Participation  15%

As this is a “writing intensive” class, each of these assignments is designed to build toward your final integrative paper. To that end, you will complete a handful of exercises (mostly in-class, but periodically on your own) throughout the semester, focused on writing, research, and analytic fluency. As noted 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 five-page historical synthesis will be part of your case background study, and those ten pages 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 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 (30 August - 6 September):**
- Introductory business
  - overview of class structure and the Mississippi Truth Project
- The legacies of segregation and civil rights in Mississippi
  - film: *Neshoba: The Price of Freedom*
- Overview of Brandeis’ Mississippi research initiative

Optional event:
Jamaica Plain Forum: “Celebrating 80 Years of Civil Rights with the Highlander Center”
With Hollis Watkins and Pam McMichael
Sunday, September 9, 2012, at 4:30 PM; First Church Jamaica Plain, 6 Eliot St, JP

**Week 3 (11-13 September):**
- Foundations of sociological research: data and inquiry
  - reading: Babbie, Ch. 1: “Human Inquiry and Science” (L)
- Mississippi: the logic of Jim Crow I

**Week 4 (18-20 September):** No class! (Rosh Hashanah and Brandeis Monday)

**Week 5 (25-27 September):**
- 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. 4-7
**Week 6 (2-4 October):**

- 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**

**Weeks 7-8 (9-18 October; no class 10/9):**

- Constructing variables and measures II
  - reading: Babbie, Ch. 6: “Indexes, Scales, and Typologies” (L)
- 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 9 (23-25 October):**

- Race, inequality, and education in Mississippi
  - reading: Charles Bolton, The Hardest Deal of All (L)
  - film: The Intolerable Burden
- Research Project: data overview

**Historical synthesis paper due**

**Week 10 (30 October - 1 November):**

- Comparative/historical research design
  - reading: Babbie, Ch. 11: “Unobtrusive Research” (L)
- Research project: conceptualizing and operationalizing de/segregation

**Week 11 (6-8 November):**

- Introduction to data analysis
  - reading: Field, Ch. 2: “The SPSS Environment” (L)
- Research project: coding quantitative data

**Weeks 12-13 (13-20 November):**

- Exploratory data analysis I
  - reading: Field, Ch. 3: “Exploring Data” (L)
- Research project: theorizing de/segregation
  - readings:
• Optional guest speaker meeting (11/14):
  Doug McAdam, Professor of Sociology, Stanford University

Theorized case background study due

Week 14 (27-29 November):
  • Exploratory data analysis II
  • Research project: conceptualizing institutional variables

Exploratory data analysis exercise due

Week 16 (4-6 December):
  • Causal analysis
    -reading: Field, Ch. 4: “Correlation” (L)
  • Research project: applying analysis techniques to institutional data

Week 17 (11 December):
  • Research project: in-process presentations and strategies for effective revision

Final integrative analysis paper due (tba)