Course Syllabus

Course Information

SOC/PA 4317 Field Research Practicum                        Section 001

Spring 2018

Professor Contact Information

Bobby C. Alexander, Ph.D.

Office Phone:  972-883-6898
E-mail: bealex@utdallas.edu                               PLEASE use regular UTD e-mail instead of eLearning to reach me. Thank you.

Office: GR 2.532

Office Hours:  12:45 – 1:30 p.m. Tuesdays and Thursdays, and by appointment if these times do not fit your schedule

Course Pre-requisites, Co-requisites, and/or Other Restrictions

None

Course Description

This course builds upon SOC/PA 3381 Field Research Methods, specifically the Research Design students created in Field Research Methods as they use their Research Design to conduct interviews, focus groups, and/or observations in the field. Students who already have a Research Design from another course or research project are welcome to use it.

NOTE: If you did not take SOC/PA 3381 Field Research Methods in a previous semester, or do not have a Research Design, I will help you develop your Research Design.

Students are encouraged to conduct research related to their qualitative or mixed methods Senior Honor thesis.

The instructor will provide individual, hands-on guidance and supervision as students gather data in the field, analyze, and interpret them.
The instructor also will guide and supervise individual students in completing their IRB application to UTD’s Office of Research to conduct research involving human subjects.

The course introduces students to NVivo, one of the popular Qualitative Data Analysis software suits, as they analyze and interpret their data. Students will learn the software by applying it to their own research data.

Students can expect to complete a significant part of collecting and analyzing their data during the semester.

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**Student Learning Objectives/Outcomes**

The first course objective is to use field research, specifically one or more of its main methods – interviews, focus groups, field observations, historical documents – to collect data in the field, analyze, and interpret them.

The second objective is to do so toward the completion of a significant piece of research related to students’ Senior Honors thesis, or other research projects.

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**Required Textbooks and Other Readings**

For those who have not taken SOC/PA 3381 Field Research Methods or an equivalent course, I recommend the book, *A Guide to Qualitative Field Research* (Pine Forge Press), by Carol A. Bailey, especially Chapters 6 and 7 on field observations and field interviews.

To help us think about the policy relevance of our research projects, and in order to address the section of the Written Report on the relevance of your research project to public policy, I recommend you read the short excerpt from Charles Wheelan’s introduction to public policy I have placed on Electronic Reserve in the McDermott Library. The URL for our course webpage is: [http://utdallas.docutek.com/eres/coursepage.aspx?cid=2242](http://utdallas.docutek.com/eres/coursepage.aspx?cid=2242). The password for the EReserve reading is *policy*.

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**Assignments and Academic Calendar**

- **Institutional Review Board (IRB) Application/Research Design.** Before any of us can begin her or his research project, each of us is required by UTD’s Office of Research to submit an IRB Application to conduct research involving human subjects. The IRB application essentially is an abbreviated Research Design.

  Students who have completed SOC/PA 3381 or an equivalent course already will use the Research Design they created in that course to help them complete the IRB Application. For students who do not have a Research Design, I will work with you individually to develop your Research Design. You will do so using the instructions for the Research Design from SOC/PA 3381.
I will read drafts of your IRB Application before you submit it to help you communicate your research plans clearly and fully.

• **Written Report.** The main course product is the Written Report. You will write a 12-to-15-page report discussing your Research Problem, Research Purpose, Research Question, Methods, Theory, and other research design elements (your Research Design), data analysis and interpretation of your data, and their relevance to public policy.

• **Small Group Discussion.** Students will divide up into small groups and discuss and critique one another’s Research Design and Research Process. The goal of group discussion and the critiques is to help one another improve our Research Designs and Research Process.

• **Class Presentations.** Students will make two informal, short Class Presentations on their progress in gathering data in the field through their interviews, focus groups, observations, and or historical documents, and in analyzing and interpreting their data.

I will provide and go over all instructions. All instructions will be posted on e-Learning.

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**January 9**

**Orientation to the Course**

**January 11, 16, and 18**

**Organization of Research Projects and IRB Application**

**Work on IRB Application and Research Design**

UTD’s Office of Research requires all of us to complete online training in research involving human subjects through the link below and receive a certificate of completion before submitting an IRB application. Students who have taken SOC/PA 3381 Field Research Methods under me already have completed the training and can submit their certificate of completion you submitted for that course with your IRB Application. If you have not completed the training, please do so on your own. Print your certificate of completion and have it ready to submit with your IRB Application.

[http://www.utdallas.edu/research/compliance/irb/training.html](http://www.utdallas.edu/research/compliance/irb/training.html)

I propose that those of us who have a Research Design in hand give me a hard copy of your draft IRB Application on Tuesday, January 16th in order for me to work with you individually should any changes need to be made before you submit your application. You can slide your draft under my office door if I’m not in when you come by. Ideally,
you will be able to do this by the end of the week of January 15th or early during the week of January 22nd.

Once I have approved your draft, you can submit it to the Office of Research. You can expect a staff member in that office to approve your IRB Application or request revisions within one week. This timetable will put our going into the field around the end of January.

For those of us who have not completed a Research Design, you likely will need longer to create the elements of the design required in the IRB Application. I propose that you give me your draft application when you have finished it and that we work individually to get it ready to submit.

Small Group Discussion #1, #2, and #3

Share draft IRB applications or completed applications in small groups.

Critique one another’s statement of the Research Problem and Research Question, Interview Questions, and strategies to gain access/permission.

Individual Work with Me

January 23 and 25

Work on IRB Application and Research Design

Self-Assessment on IRB Application and Research Design

Small Group Discussion #4

Share draft IRB applications or completed applications in small groups.

Critique one another’s statement of the Research Problem and Research Question, Interview Questions, and strategies to gain access/permission.

Individual Work with Me

January 30 and February 1

Follow Up on IRB Application

Preparing to Go into the Field: Issues and Concerns

Small Group Discussion #5
Individual Work with Me

February 6 and 8

First Class Presentation

February 13 and 15

Self-Assessment following Entry into the Field and Adjustments to Research Design

First Class Presentation continued

February 20 and 22

Self-Assessment following Entry into the Field and Adjustments to Research Design continued

Follow Up with IRB Application

Small Group Discussion #6

Individual Work with Me

February 27 and March 1

Introduction to NVivo

Small Group Discussion #7

Individual Work with Me

March 6 and 8

Work on Applying NVivo to Our Initial Field Data

Small Group Discussion #8

Individual Work with Me

March 13 and 15 NO CLASS: Spring Break

March 20 and 22

Work on Data Analysis

Small Group Discussion #9
Individual Work with Me

March 27 and 29

Work on Data Analysis continued

Small Group Discussion #10

Individual Work with Me 8

April 3 and 5

Self-Assessment of Field Data and Data Analysis

Writing the Research Report

Small Group Discussion #11

Individual Work with Me

April 10 and 12

Self-Assessment of Writing the Research Report

Small Group Discussion #12 and #13

Individual Work with Me

April 17 and 19

Second Class Presentation

April 24 and 26

Second Class Presentation continued

May 3

Written Report due

Note: Students will turn in their Research Designs in my office (GR 2.532) between 11 a.m. and 12 noon during the scheduled final exam period.
Grading Policy

The points distribution for each of the graded assignments and attendance for the course grade follows. Our TA – Ms. Jewell Love– has created the distribution and is responsible to record all grades, along with attendance. You can check your grades on eLearning after she enters your grade.

Jewell welcomes you to contact her to discuss your recorded grades as well as missing grades. She also is responsible for reading one of everyone’s two Written Reports. I will read the other.

**TA Email:** jnl140330@utdallas.edu

**Office:** GR 2.512

NOTE: Jewell uses a 0 (zero) as a placeholder for grades on eLearning she has yet to record. The zero does NOT mean you made a 0 on an assignment. If you see a zero, check back later to see your recorded grade.

**Points Distribution for SOC/PA 4317**

- IRB Application= 50 points
- 13 Small Group Discussions= 130 points @ 10 points each
- 2 Class Presentations= 100 points @ 50 points each
- Written Report= 150 points
- Attendance= 20 points
- Total points allocated= 450

The grading scale follows. Jewell will convert our letter grades and the numbers they represent into the point system above.

A  = 94-96  
A- = 90-93  
B+ = 87-89  
B  = 84-86  
B- = 80-83  
C+ = 77-79
Additional Course and Instructor Policies

Attendance is required. Students automatically will be excused from one class; no documentation is required if students miss only one class. Students who miss more than one class will be excused if they have a legitimate reason (for example, being out sick) and provide documentation.

The intent of this policy is to help students perform well on assignments by keeping up with lectures and discussion.

Students must submit hard copies of all assignments on the due dates. Electronic submissions will not be accepted, unless the student has a legitimate reason for being absent from class to turn in assignments. Late papers will not be accepted without my prior approval, with the exception of emergencies.

This requirement is intended to help students turn in their work on time and to promote fairness among students who submit their work on time.

University Policies

To view university policies on Student Conduct, Grade Appeals, Disability Services, Religious Holy Days, Campus Carry, Resources to Help You Succeed, and others, please go to the link that follows. http://go.utdallas.edu/syllabus-policies