Ecological-Community Psychology (Research Methods)  
Psychology 870  
Fall 2017

Instructor: Rebecca Campbell, Ph.D.  
Office: 127C Psychology Building  
Contact: rmc@msu.edu  
Class: Mondays 12:40pm – 3:30pm  
Location: 134C Psychology Building  
Office Hours: By Appointment

Course Objectives:

The purpose of this class is to provide students with an introduction to research methods appropriate for community-based research settings. The first three weeks of the course will focus on understanding the broader theoretical context of applied research, including a review of epistemologies, methodologies, and approaches to community-based research. Then, we will examine how to formulate research questions, operationalize variables, and identify reliable and valid measures at multiple levels of analysis. With this grounding, we will then explore sampling designs and quantitative research designs in community-based research. We will conclude with a discussion of research ethics and ethical responsibilities in applied work.

Required Texts & Readings:


Additional readings for each unit, as assigned; please see course schedule for citations.

For each of course topic, the assigned readings address will cover core concepts as well as the *application* of these concepts to the field of community psychology. The readings include both older, classic papers in the field, as well as current exemplars. The readings were carefully selected to provide students with a broad understanding of methodological issues in applied social research and insight into how these ideas play out in the context of community-based research. *Please do the readings in the order in which they appear in the syllabus.*

Class Discussion:

Students are expected to be active participants in class discussion. Whereas I will be doing *some* lecturing/instructing, more class time will be devoted to discussion. For this format to be successful, it is critical that students read (and think about) ALL of the weekly readings before class. If something was unclear or confusing in the reading assignments, prepare some questions to bring to class for discussion.
Assignments:

1. “Locating the Self” Essay

In qualitative inquiry, it is common for researchers to reflect upon (and write about) their epistemological beliefs, methodological stance, and approach to social inquiry in order to “locate” themselves and their work. Unfortunately, this thought exercise is less commonly undertaken in quantitative and mixed methods research. Therefore, the purpose of this assignment is to have students reflect upon (and share in writing) where they see themselves and their work—which epistemology resonated the best with you, which methodology seemed like a good fit with your work, which approach to social inquiry captured how you envision your work with community stakeholders? There are no right or wrong answers for this assignment, and do not concern yourself with whether the Instructor might agree with you and your choices. Students will develop a 5-6 page paper (double spaced, 12 point font, one inch margins) that addresses the following issues:

   a) Which epistemological framework resonated best with you and your beliefs about what constitutes knowledge? Why?

   b) Which methodology (quantitative, qualitative, mixed) do you envision using the most in your work and why?

   c) Which approach to social inquiry (action/participatory action research, community-based participatory research, program evaluation) do you imagine would be a cornerstone in your work and why?

   d) Try these ideas out: write a brief “pitch” for a research project in your area of inquiry. Briefly describe the idea for the study/project and then describe the underlying epistemology that would guide this work, its methodological framework, and the proposed approach to social inquiry.

   **DUE DATE: 9-25-17 (email Word file to Instructor, by noon on due date)**

2. Formulating Research Questions and Hypotheses

Select a social problem (e.g., homelessness, poverty, domestic violence, juvenile delinquency, school achievement gap, etc.) and develop a 5-6 page paper (double spaced, 12 point font, one inch margins) that addresses the following issues:

   a) Concisely explain your social problem (no more than 1-1½ pages).

   b) Provide two distinct, testable research questions about your problem. Remember, specificity is important when constructing research questions.
c) Provide a justification for the importance of these two research questions. Why are these questions important? Don’t just say “because they’ve never been addressed before in prior research”—lots of questions haven’t been examined, why should these questions be examined?

d) Describe each of the variables that pertain to each of your two research questions. Break your questions down into the variables that are “embedded” with them. Then, describe how you will operationalize each variable. Remember, there is more than one way to operationalize any variable, so include some discussion about why you decided to operationalize your variable as you did. What are the benefits and trade-offs of your chosen approach?

e) Describe two specific, directional hypotheses that correspond to each research question. Remember to state your hypotheses in terms of the variables and operationalizations previously outlined.

DUE DATE: 10-16-2017 (email Word file to Instructor, by noon on due date)

3. Developing a Sampling Frame

For this assignment, you will develop a sampling design for ONE of the research questions that you developed in Assignment #2. Develop a 5-6 page paper (double spaced, 12 point font, one inch margins) that addresses the following issues:

a) Describe a population in which your research question might reasonably be addressed. Be sure to justify why this particular population is appropriate for your study.

b) Explain your sampling frame. That is, what criteria will you use to decide who is to be included in the study? What criteria will you use to decide who is not going to be in the study?

c) Describe the strengths and limitations of your sampling frame. Assuming that your sample perfectly represents the sampling frame, who can and can’t you draw conclusions about?

d) Describe your sampling design. Do you plan to use probability or non-probability sampling? What is the sampling method you are planning to apply? Be sure to justify why your chosen approach is appropriate for this particular study. What are the strengths and limitations of this method in terms of the kinds of conclusions you might draw?

e) Describe how you would recruit participants for your study. Be sure to justify your choice of recruitment strategies. Include a discussion of how your choice of recruitment strategies might impact the composition of your sample relative to your sampling frame.

DUE DATE: 11-6-2017 (email Word file to Instructor, by noon on due date)
4. Developing a Research Design

For this assignment, you will develop an experimental or quasi-experimental design for ONE of the research questions that you proposed in Assignment #2. NOTE: You will likely need to revise this question, based on grading feedback from the Instructor for Assignment #2. Also, you may need to modify the question to make it fit this assignment—that’s fine too. This design needs to provide a basis for testing the hypotheses that you proposed in relation to this research question. However, this design does not need to assume that you would sample in the same way as you proposed in Assignment #3. Develop a 5-6 page paper (double spaced, 12 point font, one inch margins) that addresses the following issues:

   a) Describe the design that you have selected. Be sure to provide a detailed justification for why this design is the most suitable choice for testing the hypotheses associated with your research question.

   b) Describe precisely how you plan to operationalize and manipulate the independent variable(s) associated with your hypotheses.

   c) Provide a detailed explanation of the research procedures. What are the key steps of the study? What will a research participant do as part of the study?

   d) Discuss possible threats to validity. Which threats to validity are most pressing in your study? What steps can you take to minimize these threats or rule them out as plausible alternative explanations for your study findings?

**DUE DATE: 12-4-2017** (email Word file to Instructor, by noon on due date)

5. In Class, Closed-Book Cumulative Final Exam

All questions will be essay format. You will not be allowed to use your notes, books, or readings for the exam. You will NOT be allowed to use a laptop computer—just old-fashioned writing out your answers (unless another testing format has been pre-arranged in conjunction with the Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities).

**EXAM DATE: 12-11-2017**
Grading:

Locating the Self Essay 40 pts
Formulating Research Questions and Hypotheses 40 pts
Developing a Sampling Frame 40 pts
Developing a Research Design 40 pts
Final Exam 40 pts

TOTAL 200 pts

The final grades will be based on a percentage of total points earned:

- 90% of 200 points 180 points and above 4.0
- 85% of 200 points 170 points to 179 points 3.5
- 80% of 200 points 160 points to 169 points 3.0
- 75% of 200 points 150 points to 159 points 2.5
- 70% of 200 points 140 points to 149 points 2.0
- 65% of 200 points 130 points to 139 points 1.5
- 60% of 200 points 120 points to 129 points 1.0
- less than 60% of 200 points less than 120 points 0.0

A grading rubric for the written assignments can be found at the end of this syllabus.
Policy On Missed Classes And Late Work:

You are expected to attend every scheduled class session and participate in class discussion. If you cannot attend class, you must let the Instructor know via email by noon the day of the missed class (and explain why you cannot be in class). All written assignments must be turned in by noon the date they are due, via email to the Instructor, file in Word format. Assignments will be graded down 5 points if they are turned in after 12:00pm on the day that they are due; an additional 5 points will be deducted for every day thereafter that the assignment is late. Absence from the final exam may be excused by documentation from a health care provider or evidence of an extreme emergency; otherwise, you will not be able to make up the exam. You must contact the Instructor via email as soon as possible if you believe there is some reason why you cannot take the final exam as scheduled.

Other Important Reminders:

Academic Honesty: Article 2.3.3 of the Academic Freedom Report states that "The student shares with the faculty the responsibility for maintaining the integrity of scholarship, grades, and professional standards." In addition, the Department of Psychology adheres to the policies on academic honesty as specified in General Student Regulations 1.0, Protection of Scholarship and Grades; the all-University Policy on Integrity of Scholarship and Grades; and Ordinance 17.00, Examinations. (See Spartan Life: Student Handbook and Resource Guide (http://www.vps.msu.edu/SpLife/index.htm) and/or the MSU Web site: http://www.msu.edu.). Any instance of academic dishonesty will result in receiving a failing grade for the class.

Accommodations for Disabilities: Students with disabilities should contact the Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities to establish reasonable accommodations. For an appointment with a counselor, call 353-9642 (voice) or 355-1293 (TTY).

Observing a Major Religious Holiday: You may make up course work missed to observe a major religious holiday only if you make arrangements in advance with the Instructor.

Participation in a Required Activity: To make up course work missed to participate in a required activity for another course or a university-sanctioned event, you must provide the Instructor with adequate advanced notice and a written authorization from the faculty member of the other course or from a university administrator.
Course Schedule & Reading Assignments:

Week 1 (8/30)* Introduction to the Course (*Off-cycle date because of Labor Day)

Epistemology


Week 2 (9/11) Methodologies: Quantitative

Singleton & Straits (2018), Chapter 2: *The Nature of Science*.


Methodologies: Qualitative


Methodologies: Mixed Methods

Week 3 (9/18)  **Approaches: Action Research & Participatory Action Research**


**Approaches: Community-Based Participatory Research**


**Approaches: Program Evaluation**


Week 4 (9/25)  **Research Questions, Hypotheses & Operationalizing Variables (PART I)**

Singleton & Straits (2018), Chapter 4: Elements of Research Design.

Singleton & Straits (2018), Chapter 5: Measurement (pp. 116-130).

Week 5  
(10/2)  
Research Questions, Hypotheses & Operationalizing Variables (PART II)  
(Also: Discuss Research Question & Hypotheses Assignment)  


Week 6  
(10/9)  
Research Questions, Hypotheses & Operationalizing Variables (PART III)  
(Also: Discuss Research Question & Hypotheses Assignment)  

Measurement, Reliability, & Validity

Singleton & Straits (2018), Chapter 5: Measurement (pp. 131-145).


**Week 7**
*(10/16)*

**Sampling, Recruitment, & Retention (PART I)**

Singleton & Straits (2018), Chapter 6: *Sampling*.


**Week 8**
*(10/23)*

**Sampling, Recruitment, & Retention (PART II)**

*(Also: Discuss Sampling Assignment)*


Week 9  
(10/30)  
**Sampling, Recruitment, & Retention (PART III)**  
(Also: Discuss Sampling Assignment)

**Survey Designs (PART I)**

Singleton & Straits (2018), Chapter 9: *Survey Research*.

Singleton & Straits (2018), Chapter 10: *Survey Instrumentation*.


Week 10  
(11/6)  
**Survey Designs (PART II)**


Week 11  
(11/13)  
**Experimental Design (PART I)**

Singleton & Straits (2018), Chapter 7: *Experimentation*

Singleton & Straits (2018), Chapter 8: *Experimental Designs*.


| Week 12 | Experimental Designs (PART II)  
<p>|        | (Also: Discuss Research Design Assignment) |
| (11/20) |                                            |
| Week 13 | Quasi Experimental Designs |
| (11/27) |                                            |
| Week 14 | Research Ethics |
| 12/4    |                                            |
|        | <em>(As of 8/21/17, these papers are still in publication production; more details about this reading assignment will be provided after the semester begins)</em> |
| Week 15 | Final Exam |
| (12/11)* | Exam is Monday 12/11, NOT Thursday 12/14 as stated by Registrar's Office |</p>
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<tr>
<td>Epistemology</td>
<td>Did the essay define and explain a guiding epistemology for the author’s work? Did the paper explain why the author felt this epistemology was the best fit for his/her work?</td>
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<td>Methodology</td>
<td>Did the essay define and explain a guiding methodology for the author’s work? Did the paper explain why the author felt this methodology was the best fit for his/her work?</td>
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<td>Approach to Social Inquiry</td>
<td>Did the essay define and explain an approach to social inquiry for the author’s work? Did the paper explain why the author felt this approach was the best fit for his/her work?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research Example that Specifies Epistemology, Methodology, and Approach to Research</td>
<td>Did the essay provide a coherent summary of the research idea? Did the essay explain how this work would be guided by the chosen epistemological framework? Does that epistemology actually FIT that kind of research? Did the essay explain how this work would be guided by the chosen methodological framework? Does that methodology actually FIT that kind of research? Did the essay explain how this work would be conducted within a specific approach to social inquiry? Does that approach actually FIT that kind of research?</td>
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**Comments:**
# GRADING RUBRIC: FORMULATING RESEARCH QUESTIONS & HYPOTHESES

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<td><strong>Definition and Explanation of Social Problem or Construct</strong> (10 points)</td>
<td><strong>Description:</strong> Did the paper include a concise definition and explanation of your social problem or construct that was grounded in the literature (no more than 1-1 ½ pages)?</td>
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<td><strong>Research Questions</strong> (10 points)</td>
<td><strong>Description:</strong> Did the paper offer 2 distinct research questions about the social problem or construct that could be addressed empirically? Was the significance of each research question well justified? Did the paper include a compelling description of what each research question would add to the literature? Is the unit of analysis for each research question clear?</td>
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<td><strong>Hypotheses</strong> (10 points)</td>
<td><strong>Description:</strong> Did the paper offer 2 directional hypotheses for each research question (4 total)? Were these hypotheses clearly linked to the research questions and did you offer a clear rationale for each? Did these hypotheses reflect what you learned in class about specifying predicted relationships between variables in your research questions?</td>
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<td><strong>Variable Operationalization</strong> (10 points)</td>
<td><strong>Description:</strong> Were each of the variables in your 4 hypotheses clearly conceptualized and described in the paper? Did you present a clear plan for operationalizing and measuring each variable that matched its conceptualization? Did you include a thoughtful discussion of the strengths and limitations of your choices for operationalizing each variable?</td>
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| Defining Your Population (5 points) | **Description:** Did the paper include a detailed description of the target population for your research question? Did you provide a well-justified explanation for why the particular population you selected is appropriate for your study?  
**Comments:** |
|---|---|
| Sampling Frame (15 points) | **Description:** Did you provide a detailed explanation of how you plan to build your sampling frame that reflects what you learned in class? Did you include adequate descriptions of your inclusion and exclusion criteria? Did the paper include a thoughtful reflection on the strengths and limitations of your sampling frame? Is it clear from your description of your sampling frame, who you can and can’t draw conclusions about?  
**Comments:** |
| Sampling Design (15 points) | **Description:** Did you provide a detailed explanation of your sampling design that would allow for replication and reflects what you learned in class? Did you discuss whether your sampling design involved probability or non-probability sampling and why? Did you justify why your sampling design is appropriate for your study? Did you include a thoughtful reflection of the strengths and limitations of your design?  
**Comments:** |
| Participant Recruitment (5 points) | **Description:** Did the paper include a description of how you plan to recruit participants? Did this description include details about how participant recruitment might impact the composition of your sample relative to your sampling frame?  
**Comments:** |
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### GRADING RUBRIC: DEVELOPING A RESEARCH DESIGN

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<td><strong>Description of Research Design</strong></td>
<td><strong>Description:</strong> Did the paper include a detailed description of the research design that reflects what you learned in class? Did you provide a compelling justification of why your chosen design is the most suitable alternative for testing the hypotheses associated with your research question?</td>
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<td><strong>Operationalization and Manipulation of IV</strong></td>
<td><strong>Description:</strong> Did the paper include a precise description of how you plan to operationalize and manipulate the IV associated with your hypotheses? Did this description reflect what you’ve learned in class?</td>
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<td><strong>Description of Research Procedures</strong></td>
<td><strong>Description:</strong> Did the paper include a detailed explanation of the procedures? Did the paper present a clear picture of what a participant would do as part of the study? Did the key steps of the study clear enough for another researcher to replicate?</td>
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<td><strong>Reflection on Threats to Validity</strong></td>
<td><strong>Description:</strong> Did the paper include a thoughtful reflection on possible threats to validity present in the design and outline which threats to validity are most pressing for the study? Did the paper provide compelling steps for how to minimize these threats or rule them out as plausible alternative explanations to the study findings?</td>
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