

University of Massachusetts/Amherst
Social Thought and Political Economy (STPEC)
STPEC 493 H: Research Methods for Social Change
Thursday 4-6:30 PM

Prof. Ramón Borges-Méndez, PhD

(617) 287-6935

rborgesm@admin.umass.edu

rfborges@comcast.net

Office Hours: Thursdays Afternoon by Appointment.

Course Description

The main objective of the course is to expose students to some of the most important problems on methodological and applied research design. Policy makers and practitioners in the public, non-profit and private sectors frequently face the need of balancing "science" with the uncertainties and complexities of their practice (incomplete information, difficult causalities, exceptions, outliers, conflicting constituencies), while working in politically and economically shifting environments. Meeting such analytical and applied challenge requires using multiple methodological tools, such as surveys, needs assessments, case-studies, focus groups and interviewing, and combining qualitative and quantitative strategies. The course/seminar will, first, compare and contrast approaches to scientific inquiry: induction/deduction; interpretive-qualitative vs. quantitative research. In this section, we also highlight the implications of these different approaches for selecting topics of research, framing questions, choosing tools, and managing and analyzing data. Secondly, the course shows what are the main components of adequate research designs, and what tools are best suited to attain legitimate research results. Finally, we will address the methodological implications of distinct conceptualizations of poverty and inequality in different policy realms: human capital disparities by race and gender; housing discrimination; asset disparities; Sen's capabilities approach; income inequality; non-income driven measurements of poverty. No previous experience with research or research methods is required, although helpful.

Course Requirements

The course will require active class participation and four assignments which will be discussed at the introductory session (see attached descriptions).

Assignment #1: Observation—20% of the grade

Assignment #2: Dissection and Reverse Engineering of Cases—20%

Assignment #3 & 4: To be Discussed

Class participation and attendance are taken into consideration in the final grade.

Most readings will be available in electronic format. At times we will be reading significant

portions of the following texts. So it is appropriate you buy them on-line. They are good additions to any personal library:

- Marshall, Catherine & Gretchen B. Rossman. (2006). **Designing Qualitative Research**. Sage Publications. Thousand Oaks: CA.
- Van Evera, Stephen. (1997). **Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science**. Cornell University Press. Ithaca: NY.
- Yin, Robert K. (2009). **Case Study Research: Design and Methods**. Sage Publications. Beverly Hills: CA. (Older Editions are also available).

Note on Resources

Much of becoming a good policy researcher is developing a sense of the dimensions and scope of the research in your area of interest. Among other things, this includes knowing about the types of methods being used, data sources, research outlets and journals, governmental agencies involved, and funding agencies. I am sure that there are many sources of information on all of those things. However, one important and particularly useful is:

The Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR). Mostly focused on quantitative research, it is large bank of “data sets”, references, technical documentation, and announcements on all sorts of domestic and international research topics and problems. It is a good starting place when struggling with the question of “what is the research available”, especially for applied data-driven research. Visit their site at: www.icpsr.umich.edu.

Late Assignments, Academic and Human Integrity, and Other Problems

Late papers will be usually penalized with a half-grade deduction for every two days of delay. Please consult the professor for specific problems in regards to late assignments. Obviously, special circumstances may require an exception to the rule.

Being a member of this academic community entitles each of us to a wide degree of freedom and the pursuit of scholarly interests. With that freedom, however, comes a responsibility to uphold the high ethical standards of scholarly and human conduct. Academic violations include but are not limited to: plagiarism, inappropriate collaboration, dishonesty in examinations whether in class or take-home, dishonesty in papers, work done for one course and submitted to another without consulting professors, deliberate falsification of data, and interference with other’s students work. Uncivil behavior—racist, sexist, or other offensive behavior/statements-- will not be tolerated. If other problems arise in the course of the semester, please consult the professor.

Class Schedule and Readings

Week 1-Jan. 29 Introduction to the Seminar

Week 2-Feb. 5 The Research Process I: The Cognitive and Normative Framework of the Researcher

Becker, Howard S. (1998). **Tricks of the Trade: How to Think About Your Research While You're Doing It.** The University of Chicago Press. Chicago: Illinois. Chapter 4: Concepts. (pp.109-145).

Gardner, Howard, Mihaly Csikszentmihaly & William Damon. (2001). **Good Work: When Excellence and Ethics Meet.** Chapter 1: Good Work in Difficult Times. Chapter 2: The Conditions of Good Work. (pp.3-36).

Week 3-Feb. 12 The Research Process II: Applied vs. Pure Research

Kuhn, Thomas. (1970). **The Structure of Scientific Revolutions.** The University of Chicago Press. Chicago: Illinois. Section: "Postscript 1969."

Schön, Donald A. (1983). **The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action.** Basic Books. N.Y.: N.Y. Part 1 (pp.3-69): "Professional Knowledge and Reflection-In-Action."

Week 4-Feb.19 Theory Generation and "Field Research"

Clifford, James. (1997). **Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century.** Harvard University Press. Cambridge: MA. Chapter 3: Spatial Practices: Fieldwork, Travel, and the Disciplining of Anthropology. (pp. 52-91).

Dick, Bob. (2005). **Grounded theory: a thumbnail sketch.** [On line] Available at: <http://www.scu.edu.au/schools/gcm/ar/arp/grounded.html>. (Also in the reading files)

Van Mannen, John. (1988). **Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography.** The University of Chicago Press. Chicago: IL. Chapter 2 (pp.13-44): "In the Pursuit of Culture."

Week 5-Feb.26 Views of Public Policy and Implications for Applied Research

Schneider, Anne Larason & Helen Ingram. **Policy Design for Democracy.** University Press of Kansas. Lawrence: Kansas. Chapter 2: A Pluralist View of Democracy; Chapter 3: Alternatives to Pluralism. (pp.13-65).

Stone, Deborah A. (1988). **Policy Paradox and Political Reason.** Scott, Foresman and Company. Glenview: IL. Introduction (pp.1-10): "Policy Paradox."; Conclusion (pp.305-310): "Political Reason."

Assignment # 1 Due: Observation.

Week 6-March 5 Research Design I

Van Evera, Stephen. (1997). **Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science**. Cornell University Press. Ithaca: NY. Complete Booklet.

Week 7-March 12 Research Design II

Marshall, Catherine & Gretchen B. Rossman. (2006). **Designing Qualitative Research**. Sage Publications. Thousand Oaks: CA. Chapters 2-3.

NO CLASS on March 19-Spring Break

Week 8-March 26 Case-Studies

Yin, Robert K. (2009). **Case Study Research: Design and Methods**. Sage Publications. Thousand Oaks: CA. Chapters 2-3.

Week 9-April 2 “Reverse Engineering” of Interpretive Cases

Yin, Robert K. (2009). **Case Study Research: Design and Methods**. Sage Publications. Thousand Oaks: CA. Chapters 4-5.

Assignment # 2 Due: Dissection and Reverse Engineering of Cases

Geertz, Clifford. (1992). “The Bazaar Economy: Information and Search in Peasant Marketing.” In **The Sociology of Economic Life**. Mark Granovetter and Richard Swedberg, (eds.). Westview Press. Boulder: Co. 1992.

Jacobs, Jane. (1961). **The Death and Life of Great American Cities**. Vintage Books. N.Y.:NY. Chapter 2-4 (pp.29-88): “The Uses of Sidewalks”.

Lipset, Seymour Martin. (1981). **Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics**. The Johns Hopkins University Press. (Expanded Edition). Baltimore: MD. Part IV. Chapter 12 (pp.387-436). “The Politics of Private Government: A Case Study.”

Week 10-April 9 Contrasting Measures of Welfare: The Power of Indicators

Clark, David A. (2005). “The Capability Approach: Its Development, Critiques and Recent Advances.” Global Poverty Research Group. GPRG-032.

UNDP. (2003). NY.NY. **Human Development Report: Millenium Development Goals**. Oxford University Press. Chapter 3.

Visit the following Website of the Chronic Poverty Research Center of the University of Manchester, UK. Read the Section **Designing Research** under **Methods Tool Box**. Available at: <http://www.chronicpoverty.org/toolbox/toolboxcontents.php> [Browse the Website. It is quite interesting for those of you with interests on development, poverty alleviation, etc.]

Optional:

Amartya Sen: Autobiography. Available at:

http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/economics/laureates/1998/index.html

(Also available in the electronic reading package).

Week 11-April 16 Evaluations and Needs Assessments

National Science Foundation. (2002). **User-Friendly Handbook for Mixed Method Evaluations.** NSF. Arlington: VA. Sections I-II. Available on-line:

http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/2002/nsf02057/nsf02057_1.pdf

Rothman, Jack & Larry Gant. (1987). "Approaches and Models of Community Intervention." In **Needs Assessment: Theory and Methods.** Donald Johnson, Larry R Meiller, Lorna Clancy Miller and Gene F. Summers (Eds.). Ames: Iowa. Iowa State University.

Optional:

Campbell, Donald T. (1999). "An Inventory of Threats to Validity and Alternative Designs to Control Them." In **Social Experimentation.** Donald T. Campbell & M. Jean Russo, (eds.). Sage Publications. Thousand Oaks: CA. 1999.

Week 12-April 23 Surveys

Czaja, Ronald & Johnny Blair (1996). **Designing Surveys: A guide to Decisions and Procedures.** Thousand Oaks: CA. Pine Forge Press. Chapter 8.

Fowler, Floyd, Jr. (1998). "Design and Evaluation of Survey Questions." In **Handbook of Applied Social Research Methods.** Leonard Bickman & Debra J. Rog, (eds.).1998. pp. 343-374.

Optional:

Lavrakas, Paul J. "Methods for Sampling and Interviewing in Telephone Surveys." In **Handbook of Applied Social Research Methods.** Leonard Bickman & Debra J. Rog, (eds.).1998. pp. 429-472.

Mangione, Thomas W. (1998). "Mail Surveys". In **Handbook of Applied Social Research Methods.** Leonard Bickman & Debra J. Rog, (eds.).1998. pp. 399-427.

Week 13-April 30 Interviewing and Focus Groups

Marshall, Catherine & Gretchen B. Rossman. (2006). **Designing Qualitative Research.** Sage Publications. Thousand Oaks: CA. Chapters 4-5.

Weiss, Robert S. (1994). **Learning from Strangers: The Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies.** The Free Press. NY:NY. Chapters 1-3.

Optional:

Gubrium, Jaber F. & James A. Holtein. (2003). "From Individual Interview to the Interview Society." In **Postmodern Interviewing.** Jaber F. Gubrium & James A. Holtein (Eds.)

Thousand Oaks: CA. Sage Publications.
Mann, Chris & Fiona Stewart (2003). "Internet Interviewing." In **Inside Interviewing: New Lenses, New Concerns**. Jaber F. Gubrium & James A. Holtein (Eds.) Thousand Oaks: CA. Sage Publications.

Week 14-May 7 Critical Tales, Thick Descriptions, Practice Stories

Geertz, Clifford. (1973). **The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays**. Basic Books. N.Y.:N.Y. Chapter 1 (pp.3-33): "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture."
Forester, John. (1993). "Learning from Practice Stories: The Priority of Practical Judgement." In **The Argumentative Turn in Policy Analysis and Planning**. Frank Fischer and John Forester (eds.). Duke University Press. Durham: NC.1993. pp.186-210.
Van Mannen, John. (1988). **Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography**. The University of Chicago Press. Chicago: IL. Chapters 3-5. pp. 45-124.

Description of Assignments

Assignment #1: Observation—20% of the grade.

The most basic instruments of research are your senses and "cognitive equipment." Obviously, they can be complemented by other paraphernalia and tools: recorders, computers, photographic instruments, multimedia and digital devices (video, GIS, etc.), X-Ray and MRI devices, satellites, etc. The objectives of this exercise are: (1) to assess the status of your own "basic observational equipment" and to start using it effectively; (2) to find and to reflect about "your path" into the development of ideas and hypotheses regarding any particular problem, issue, place, organization or situation.

Select a place or situation out of your regular, daily/routine household activities: park, museum, sports activity, church, shopping mall, metro, special favorite landscape/hangout place, etc. Your workplace may serve the purpose if you include behavioral/organizational dynamics in the observational exercise: do not describe your "Dilbert cubicle." Observe, hear/listen, talk to people, sketch, smell, taste, touch, check for patterns of behavior and attitudes, check for how people relate to their environment, characteristics of the physical environment (built and natural), characteristics of the people (age, class, race/ethnicity, gender, etc.). Take "field notes", make diagrams, and gather material/evidence about the place. For example, if you go to the museum, they have programs about exhibits, or if you are watching a fast food take-out window at a restaurant they may have a menu. Do not try to include or discuss everything. Be selective. If you go more than once, record the time of the day.

What could be some of the elements of your account?: (1) inventory/organization of your observations and data; (2) description the specific situation, patterns, problem, issue, or place; (3) selection of your vantage point (or point of view)--first person account vs. third person/"objective scientist"; (4) connection between a pre-defined question or hypothesis and your data; (5) special recommendations; (6) further observation or research. These are not the only elements you might use. To the contrary, be creative: include other ones. However, be clear and explicit

about what they are. **The account should be no longer than 5-double spaced typed pages. I will be strict with page limit.**

Assignment #2: Dissection and Reverse Engineering of Cases—20% of the grade.

Chose two of the three cases on WEEK 9. Compare them. Organize your comparison by creating a comparative table with the following columns: (1) what is the author’s challenge to their discipline/ paradigmatic community; (2) main hypothesis; (3) main variables and/or unit of analysis; (4) indicators; (5) data sources; (6) findings. After the general comparison, select two of the cases and discuss how they define and construct their “unit of analysis.” **The account should be no longer than 5-double spaced typed pages (plus the one-page table). I will be strict with page limit.**