UEP 304: Community Based Research Methods
(an introduction to social science research methods used in environmental and community engaged research)

Mondays and Wednesdays 3:30p-4:55p
Johnson Hall 101

Course Description
This course provides an overview of research methods used in the social sciences with an emphasis on community-based research and environmental research. We will cover commonly used qualitative methods and introduce you to some basic quantitative methods used in environmental and environmental health decision-making.

Examples of Social Science Research Questions
How can we document disparities in exposures to toxic contaminants? Does a freeway alter a community’s use and perception of the local park? Are citizens in the United States happier than the residents of other countries? Are higher income and highly educated women more likely to have access to paid leave for parental care than their lower wage counterparts? Does raising the “sin tax” on items such as cigarettes or alcohol reduce consumption of these products and improve public health? These are the kinds of questions that social scientists ask and address every day using established research methods. Knowledge about and experience with developing and implementing research studies is an important skill that is applied in a variety of sectors, including universities, non-profit organizations, government, and private-sector firms. In practical terms, this course is designed to prepare you for independent research projects you will conduct as a senior and perhaps encounter later on as an employee or engaged citizen.

Learning Objectives
The goals of this course are:

1. Learn how to use some of the most common social science research methods and understand what sorts of questions are best suited to which methods

2. Understand basic scientific methods for assessing the impacts of environmental hazards—key tools for environmental decision-making

3. Critically think about the research process—how we use and combine research methods, how we design and conduct our information/data collection, what we assume explicitly and implicitly, and the ethical dilemmas and particular challenges raised by community-based and fieldwork oriented studies.
4. Utilize a community-driven and community engaged lens as a primary focus in our research

5. Closer to home, we will learn how to understand and interrogate how our own positionality becomes implicated in the research process

We will approach each method from a variety of perspectives: learning about the method itself, considering examples of how it has been applied by other researchers, and engaging in discussion and group work with our student colleagues about the benefits and challenges of particular methods. Assignments will entail understanding, using, and applying each method. For your final project, you will choose a research question and apply one or more methods in depth to best answer your particular question. You also have the option of analyzing the utility of a method in-depth.

Course Policies
You are expected to be a respectful colleague in the classroom- meaning that you are curious and respectful of your colleagues and open to their ideas. You yourself should be prepared to actively engage in class discussion by reading material in advance of class and being an active and engaged listener and participant.

_Cheating and academic dishonesty will not be tolerated._ Course assignments are demanding and require critical and creative thinking. Please familiarize yourself with the nuances of academic dishonesty and Oxy’s policies regarding the penalties for academic dishonesty (http://departments.oxy.edu/library/research/health/citingsources.htm)

Required Texts
_Course Reader:_ Readings available via moodle

Assignments
Students are expected to keep up with the course reading and participate in class discussion. This is a reading and assignment intensive course. If you do not read, you will not be able to fulfill the expectations of participating in class discussions.

_Discussion/Participation:_ This includes class attendance, in-class discussion and participation in the online discussion prompts that we will talk about more in class. 10%

_Commentaries:_ You should prepare a _1-page commentary_ on each week’s readings. The commentaries should be an analysis, not just a summary of the readings. 10 commentaries are expected over the course of the semester. Please consider spacing these out over the course of the semester so preparing your commentaries as well as the final paper does not overwhelm you. 10%

_Analysis of a Current Event in Environmental or Land Use Decision-Making:_ Using a news article from a popular magazine or newspaper, analyze a recent environmental decision. These decisions often hinge on common methods for environmental decision-making we will learn about in class. We will discuss this assignment more in class and I will provide you with an example and a handout which will discuss expectations for this assignment in more detail. 10%
**Participant Observation Assignment or Survey Assignment.** This will be a group project. You will work in small groups to design, plan, and implement a survey or conduct a participant observation. We will narrow down topics to a few topics that are interesting to the entire class and embark on surveys and participant observations that are complementary to one another. This will be an opportunity to practice writing and reading good survey questions. It is also an opportunity to participate in ongoing public meetings and understand the ways in which public life and observing public spaces contributes to our research. We will discuss this assignment more in class. 20%

**Census/Online Data Assignment:** This assignment entails using an online data collection tool to find the answer to your research questions. There are a variety of tools you will be introduced to through the course and you will be expected to choose and apply one of these. 10%

**Final Paper:** 10-15 page paper that could be a research proposal that focuses on a particular methodological issue, a methodological critique, or discussion of a research problem. We will begin talking about the final paper early in the semester so you will have a firm grasp of the expectations. 40%

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**Wednesday August 31**
Course introduction, expectations, and syllabus review

**Monday September 5—No Class, Labor Day**

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**WHY WE USE A DIVERSITY OF METHODS IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES**

**Wednesday September 7**

**Qualitative Methods: Why They Matter in Environmental Studies**
Brown, Phil; “Qualitative Methods in Environmental Health Research”; *Environmental Health Perspectives*; v111, n14; November 2003


**Monday September 12: Knowledge and Explanation in the Social Sciences**
Lecture and readings focus on a very brief overview of the history of science debates that form a backdrop for today’s traditional scientific research methods as well as critiques, which have led to more participatory, inclusive, justice-oriented research methods.

Kuhn, Thomas S.; *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*; A Synopsis from the original by Professor Frank Pajares; From Philosopher’s Magazine


Donna Haraway. ‘Situated Knowledges.’ Ch 9 in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*
**Wednesday September 14: Thinking like a researcher**
Booth WC, Colomb GG, Williams JM; *The Craft of Research*—pages 1-27

I would like you to spend some time on the website Environmental Justice in the Central Valley. [http://ej.ucdavis.edu/cvdb/](http://ej.ucdavis.edu/cvdb/). Please look at the Community Research Inventory and the Academic Literature Review. We will discuss this website in class, the structure of the project, how both the academic goals and community goals for this research project are described and situated, as well as the different components of the project.

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**QUANTITATIVE METHODS IN ENVIRONMENTAL DECISIONMAKING**
(also known as regulatory science)

**Monday, September 19: Introduction to Toxicology Basics- Key Tools in Environmental Decision-making**
Richardson, JR and GW Miller; “Toxicology”. In *Environmental Health: From Global to Local*, Frumkin, H. ed.. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005; pp. 24-40

**Wednesday, September 21: Introduction to Risk Assessment- Key Tools in Environmental Decision-Making**
Cassaret and Doull’s Toxicology: The Basic Science of Poisons; Chapter 4; *Risk Assessment*; pp. 62-83

**Monday, September 26: Quantitative Methods Revisited: Academic and Community Responses to the Traditional Paradigms**
Vogel, Sarah; “From ‘the dose makes the poison’ to ‘the timing makes the poison’: conceptualizing risk in the synthetic age”; *Environmental History*; 13; October 2008

Montague, Peter; “Getting Beyond Risk Assessment”; *Rachel’s Democracy and Health News*; March 16, 2006

Myers, Nancy; “Debating the Precautionary Principle”; March 2000

Kriebel, David et al; “The Precautionary Principle in Environmental Science”; *Environmental Health Perspectives*; v109, n9; September 2001; 871-876

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**SURVEYS: CONCEPTUAL ISSUES AND PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS**

**Monday, October 3: Designing a Basic Survey**
Wednesday, October 5: Survey Diversity: Academic and Community Approaches to Surveys

Environmental Health Coalition; Reclaiming Old Town National City: A Community Survey; August 2005

Current Events in Environmental Decision-Making Assignment Due at start of class

Monday, October 10

Kugel, Seth. 2006; “People Watching: Here’s Looking at You”; Weekend in New York; New York Times; October 15, 2006

Wednesday, October 12
Behar, Ruth; The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology that Breaks Your Heart; Chapter 1

Monday October 17—No Class, Fall Break

Wednesday, October 19: Surveys and Participant Observation: Preparation for your assignment. TBD

ETHICAL ISSUES IN PARTICIPATORY/COMMUNITY-BASED RESEARCH

Monday, October 24; Ethical Issues and Key Concepts


**Wednesday October 26:** Surveys or Participant Observation Assignment Due in the UEP office to Sylvia by 4p.

**CASE STUDIES**

**Monday, October 31:** Case Study and Research Design
Charles Ragin & Howard Becker. *What is a Case?* Ch 2, 5, 6, 9 & 10

**Wednesday, November 2:** Case Studies in Community-Based Research


**Monday, November 7:** Case Studies on Controversies in Science: Key Debates
TBD collectively. Readings will be handed out in class or posted on moodle in advance and class discussion will entail reading a presenting on a few key controversies and the methodological reasons for these controversies.

**Wednesday, November 9:** Case Studies in Los Angeles Community Based Research
Readings will be handed out in class or posted on moodle in advance

**COLLECTING PLACE-BASED DATA; ONLINE RESEARCH TOOLS**

**Monday, November 14:** Collecting Census and Demographic Information
Please spend some time before class online on U.S. Census Bureau website American Factfinder
http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/index.xhtml

**Wednesday, November 16:** Collecting Environmental Toxics and Hazards Data
Graham, Mary and Miller, Catherine; “Disclosure of Toxic Releases in the U.S.”; *Environment*; 43, 8; October 2001

**Monday, November 21:** Collecting Information on Hazards in Everyday Products
“Is it In Us?”: Toxic Trespass, Regulatory Failure, and Opportunities for Action”; 2008


Please skim the following online: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Fourth National Report on Human Exposure to Environmental Chemicals—Summary. Available on moodle or at: http://www.cdc.gov/ExposureReport/
Wednesday, November 23: No Class Thanksgiving Break

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**LITERATURE REVIEWS**

**Wednesday, November 28: Literature Reviews**

*One page thoughts on your final paper topic due in class*

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**FINAL PROJECTS**

**Wednesday, November 30**: One on one meetings scheduled to discuss your final papers

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**Monday, December 5**: Film: Living Downstream, Sandra Steingraber

*Literature Reviews Due for your final papers. This will be one piece of your final project. This is a very short bibliography of ten sources you will be using to research your final paper topic.*

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**Wednesday December 7**: Peer to peer work on final research papers

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**Wednesday December 14**: FINAL PAPERS DUE IN MY OFFICE BY 5P