

# THE EAST ST. LOUIS ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT



## **Taking Action With/Through Homelessness Research**

*Course offering by the East St. Louis Action Research Project (ESLARP)*

FAA 391

Fall 2009

**Instructor:** Abbilyn Harmon

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**Meeting time:** Tuesdays 11:50 – 1:50 and trips to East St. Louis as needed (Approximately 2 trips to ESL, all expenses covered by ESLARP).

**Meeting place:** 322 Noble Hall

**Office hours:** 11 am Tuesdays

This course is designed to offer undergraduate students the opportunity to develop research skills that are applied to real life needs in the community. It is a semester-long course that approaches research from the participatory action research (PAR) paradigm, which seeks to transform societal injustice through changing power relations in society. PAR principles include the following:

- research should act as a vehicle toward social change,
- research should use bottom-up analysis,
- participants should shape the research, and
- real life experience and tangible actions are important pieces of research.

In this course, it is important that we understand these principles. We will explore PAR through readings, discussion, and practice to gain an understanding of PAR as a research paradigm and as a way of being in the world.

### **Course Objectives:**

FAA 391 is designed to achieve the following educational objectives:

- 1.) Offer undergraduate students the opportunity to reflect on how their worldviews are tied to the types of social change projects in which they choose to engage. The goal is for students to generate an understanding of different methods of social change and their philosophical groundings.
- 2.) Introduce students to the principles and practice of Participatory Action Research, with particular emphasis on (a) working *with* (not for) community partners, (b) valuing the knowledge and diversity of all partners, and (c) working for social justice.

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- 3.) Introduce students to the perspectives and issues of those members of the community who are homeless, and incorporate this knowledge into critical thinking about addressing homelessness in the community.
- 4.) Create an active learning environment where students can develop skills to link higher theory with on-the-ground action, extract meaning from experiences, and explore their personal values and ideologies about what it means to be a citizen of the world.

## **Course Structure:**

This course meets weekly for a total of 2.5 hours. In class, you can expect that some portion of the time will be devoted to critical reflection on readings and/or field experiences. The other portion of the time will be devoted to working on current projects. A few weeks of the semester will be spent outside the classroom, likely at a different time than class normally meets. No regular classtime will be held those weeks.

\*\*\*A note on out-of-class expectations\*\*\*

Assigned readings are essential in this course for your engagement in the series of lectures and discussions. To ensure that your time (and mine) is not wasted, I have worked to provide you with worthwhile, relevant readings.

*\*\*Required texts will be provided to you either as a pdf on the course website or in hard copy\*\**

## **Course Requirements:**

- 1.) Regular attendance to class, defined as no more than 2 absences during the semester. Each additional absence will result in a 1/3 letter grade deduction per absence.
- 2.) Attendance on both trips to East St. Louis. Missing either/both of the trips will result in a letter grade deduction per absence.
- 3.) Equitable and tangible contribution to all projects and reports that are produced. This course involves group work.
- 4.) Completion of all out of class assignments. Assignments are to be turned in at the beginning of the class period that they are due. If you are absent, you are expected to take steps to get the assignment turned in on time, either via a classmate or email (also by the beginning of the class period). Late assignments will receive a ½ letter grade deduction per class period that they are late.

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5.) Active participation in the classroom, defined as being prepared with readings and assignments, and engaging as a productive member of the classroom discussion (generating ideas, listening to others, responding thoughtfully, taking notes)

## **Grade Percentage Breakdown:**

Engagement during Class time: 25%  
Engagement in Outreach Weekends: 25%  
Final Project: 50%

Engagement in class is most easily recognized as 1) taking notes during lectures and presentations, 2) having questions prepared for presenters, 3) demonstrating note-taking from your readings with questions generated from your grappling with the readings, and 4) verbally engaging with the presenter(s) and your fellow students. Engagement will be evaluated at the end of each class by the instructor using a scale of 1 to 5, with 5=A, 4=B and so on. You will receive a participation grade before the last day to drop so that you are aware of your standing in the course.

## **Grade Breakdown:**

This course utilizes a “process evaluation,” an alternative grading system that places value on 1) sustained student effort, 2) steady improvement of skills, and 3) student responsibility and initiative. The traditional style of grading relies on fixed grades accrued throughout the semester. This class is unlike the traditional classroom—students are introduced to new skills in the classroom that they must use in the field as a means of mastery. This form of “learning through doing” is ineffective when accompanied by the pressure of grades, so process evaluation focuses on improvement of skills and open communication between the instructor and students. The instructor must communicate expectations to the students as well as guidance and instruction on how to meet those expectations. Likewise, the students must communicate any questions or thoughts that develop from the course activities.

The instructor will maintain records on student performance, detailing whether students are putting forth effort, engaging in critical reflection, preparing for class, attending class, and developing research and projects appropriately. These records allow the instructor to respond to individual student needs and issues. They also document whether students are actively seeking to improve their performance. The instructor will clearly communicate to a student if she or he is not performing up to expectations on projects. Rather than earn a fixed grade, though, the student will be given an opportunity to improve her/his efforts as many times as she/he wishes **within a timeframe defined by the instructor.**

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Final student grades are based on each student's efforts to produce quality work throughout the semester, and a conscious effort to improve on individual skills as the course progresses, as evidenced by improvements to projects.

## **Weekly Schedule**

### Week 1 (August 24-28)

Introduction, laying out course

### Week 2 (August 31 - September 4)

What is homelessness? Roundtable discussion

\*To prepare, read: Vanderstaay "Life on the Street"

DePastino "Conclusion"

Rosenthal and Foscarinis "Responses to Homelessness"

### Week 3 (September 7-11)

Doing Research: How do citizens do research? What types of research?

Assign different venues to do research

To prepare, read selections TBD

### Week 4 (September 14-18)

Compiling information; what do we know? Presentations by groups of research findings

### Week 5 (September 21-25)

Strategies and tactics of social change: an overview

Range of philosophies/epistemologies behind social change work

\*To prepare, read selections TBD

### ***First Outreach Weekend (September 25-26)***

### Week 6 (September 28 – October 2)

Do we work within the system or outside the system? Pros and cons (Leigh and Carl?)

\*To prepare, read selections TBD

### Week 7 (October 5-9)

Direct action

Lester Pritchard, Jen Knapp as presenters and facilitators

\*To prepare, read selections from "Midwest Academy Organizing Manual", "Chapter x" from Rules for Radicals

### Week 8 (October 12-16)

With professional knowledge comes great power—how to use it

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Mike Andrejasich, Laura Lawson as guest respondents

\*To prepare, read “Confessions of a Desk-Bound Radical” and TBD

## Week 9 (October 19-23)

Writing for social change—how do citizen journalists do what they do?

\*To prepare, read June/July 2009 issue of Public I and “Poverty” article in News-Gazette

\*Public I meeting Thursday, October 22, from 5:30-7:00 p.m. at IMC in Urbana

## Week 10 (October 26-30)

Art for social justice—creative resistance tactics and visual messaging

Brett Bloom, Ryan Griffis as presenters and facilitators

\*To prepare, read Zald “Faces of Homeless”, watch “Faces of Poverty”, look through Picture The Homeless website

## Week 11 (November 2-6)

Choosing a project and group—using our statistics and crafting a social change project

***Second Outreach Weekend (November 6-7)***

## Week 12 (November 9-13)

Work week

## Week 13 (November 16-20)

Work week

## ***Week 14—Thanksgiving!***

## Week 15 (November 30 – December 4)

Work week

## Week 16 (December 7-9)

Presentation of projects