

ARCH 401, Spring 2007 (CRN: 47423):
Action Research, field work and final products

Instructors:

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Supporting ESLARP faculty:

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Meeting time: Tuesdays 12-1:15PM and 1.5 h weekly group discussion session (time determined by group and RA/faculty). Trips to East St. Louis as needed (App. 3 times).

Meeting Place: 322 Noble Hall

Course gives Honors credits for James Scholars.

Course Description:

This course is designed to offer undergraduate students the opportunity to develop research skills and an appreciation for research activities as applied to real life needs in distressed urban communities. Unlike a traditional methods class, this course requires students to fully engage in the entire research process. Students are expected to establish a research question, conduct fieldwork using qualitative and/or quantitative methods, and to complete a project of sufficient quality that it will be submitted for publication or presentation. Students in ARCH 401 will conduct applied research within the social sciences and humanities with the subject of research being identified amongst partner organizations in the research setting of East St. Louis, Illinois.

The course is an interdisciplinary opportunity afforded by the existing structure of the East St Louis Action Research Project (ESLARP), offering a network of faculty in various disciplines with strong relationships to community based organizations in East St. Louis. In addition to faculty and staff, ESLARP employs 12 graduate assistants each year from various disciplines. This group of graduate students will serve as mentors and advisors for students in ARCH 401.

The class has a unique structure that combines the benefits of lecture/discussion style class work that is interdisciplinary in its delivery, with applied and discipline specific research projects (including service learning) facilitated by faculty and with required final products (papers and presentations).

Course Research approach:

The research approach applied in this course is known as Action Research (AR). Action Research sees research as a transformative activity to confront societal injustice, and recognizes power relations as a defining basis of society. It is therefore a particularly

useful paradigm when working in the research setting of an oppressed community. This is also a good approach when the goal is to convey a broad range of research methods to a diverse group of students (as in this interdisciplinary class) because it can encompass a wide range of methods, qualitative as well as quantitative. Action Researchers accept statistical analysis, surveys, interviews, focus groups, and participant observation methods etc. as equally valid methods. According to this tradition, research, in the positivist tradition, suffers from the assumption that “expert knowledge” is the only valid form of knowledge, and that peoples everyday knowledge and experiences is secondary. The philosophy of AR is that the production of knowledge happens through solving real problems, and the researchers and oppressed people work together, thinking, analyzing and acting to solve these problems.

In Summary, Action Research principles are:

- Commitment to the most marginalized groups
- The marginalized groups determine the research agenda and are involved as co-investigators throughout the process
- Researchers must commit to work with democratic values and respect the knowledge of the people
- Scientific investigation, education and political action to challenge social inequality are all part of the research process
- Emphasizing real life experience and tangible results of process.

This course will explore Action Research in detail and work with students to implement its methods within their disciplines and apply them to a real life project.

The research projects will be closely tied to the teaching and research agendas of ESLARP faculty and graduate assistants, thereby securing the necessary support for undergraduates to engage in real life research projects. ESLARP’s existing relationships with community members and the knowledgebase of East St. Louis conditions and needs make actual research possible within the timeframe of a semester.

This semester the research project will be centered on developing a comprehensive plan for the East St. Louis Park District. Included in this process will be:

- History of the parks in East St. Louis
- Current conditions/needs assessment
- Stakeholder needs and wishes for parks/recreation (Including children, youth, adults, seniors, marginalized groups within the community)
- Research of model programs in other cities
- Plan for implementation and phasing
- Design

Research setting:

Residents of East St. Louis have experienced the consequences of Post-war industrial abandonment which led to loss of blue-collar jobs; white households moved out in large numbers and the population were reduced by over half. With shrinking tax rolls, local

government has abandoned many services that are commonplace in other communities. Employed residents continue to move to other communities that provide these basic amenities, and population loss and distress continue. Over half the residents live below the poverty level, and unemployment is around 30%. Almost two-thirds of the children in school are eligible for a free or reduced-price lunch. Many have elevated lead levels in their blood stream that affects their ability to learn and develop. While some of the housing stock is in good condition, much of it is derelict and creates deplorable living conditions for the poorest residents. Despite this bleak picture, the people of East St. Louis have shown a tremendous will to address problems themselves. Many residents are actively involved in neighborhood revitalization, and have partnered with students, staff and faculty at the University of Illinois through ESLARP for the past 20 years.

Course Objectives:

ARCH 401 has been designed to assist students in achieving the following educational objectives:

- 1) Offer Undergraduate students the opportunity to gain research experience working in teams to address important urban problems undermining the quality of urban life. The goal is for student teams to generate research papers that will be submitted for presentation and/or publication. Research activities will include literature reviews, establishing a valid research question, qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis and the writing of a research paper.
- 2.) Introduce students to the principles and practice of Action Research as applied to real needs in the context of partnering with community based organizations in East St. Louis.
- 3.) Nurture and develop leadership skills in undergraduate students through partnerships with local East St. Louis leaders and mentor-relationships with ESLARP Graduate Assistants and Staff
- 3.) Expose students to critical economic, social, environmental, and political problems confronting residents of our state's most distressed urban neighborhoods, thereby encouraging continuous civic engagement.

Course Structure:

ARCH 401 will apply the following main methods of instruction:

- 1) Lecture/discussion sessions: A weekly class where all students will participate in a lecture followed by discussion including the following broad topics:
 - Action research (Methods and Theory)
 - The East St. Louis Context and History
 - ESLARP's model of service learning and action research

2) Weekly group sessions with ESLARP RA's allowing class time for the group projects. Students are also expected to work on projects outside of class. RA's will also facilitate trips to meet with research partners in East St. Louis and assist students in moving their project forward in a timely fashion.

3) Field-work in East St. Louis, including participation in data collection efforts (recording physical conditions, oral history interviews, surveys etc), participation in neighborhood and city-wide public meetings (including presentations and facilitation of discussions) and service projects aimed at relationship building with community partners.

4) ESLARP Faculty in Recreation, Sport and Tourism; History; Landscape architecture; and Urban and Regional Planning will work with students to support their research as it relates to involved faculties field of interest. This interdisciplinary group of faculty will also be available on a rotation schedule for the lecture sessions and groups of ARCH 401 student will be invited to visit graduate classes taught by ESLARP faculty when appropriate for their research projects.

Course Requirements:

- Must have Junior or Senior standing in respective departments to enroll.
- Regular attendance and active participation in each lecture/discussion class. Timely completion of all assigned readings and preparation for classroom
- Active participation in all East St. Louis fieldwork activities. (Travel expenses paid by ESLARP)
- Written contribution to the final paper and active participation in submitting the paper for presentation or publication. Written contribution to the planning document and presentation.

Course Grading:

Students will be graded based on the quality of their contribution to the two final products:

Research paper/presentation (35%)

Park district planning document (35%)

Active participation in all class activities including field trips accounts for 30% of the grade.

Course Texts:

-Reading packets available first day of class

Class Schedule:

Date:	Topic:	Lecturer:
January 16:	Class overview/syllabus	Bruce/Janni
January 23:	East St. Louis, Illinois <i>Weekly workday: Establish groups, internet search about ESL and ESLARP</i>	Bruce/Janni
January 30:	ESLARP <i>Weekly workday: ESLARP RAs visits to talk about their partner organizations and their priorities relating to parks (Park district, SENDO, Concerned Citizens, EPDC)</i>	Bruce/Janni
February 6:	Action Research origin and theory <i>Weekly workday: Discuss "How can this class work to address inequality" Research model programs (park district plans from other cities)</i>	Janni
February 13:	Action Research Methods <i>Weekly workday: Develop methods for reaching all stakeholders</i>	Janni
February 20:	Research paper/presentation (final product) <i>Weekly workday: Establish research question and begin literature review</i>	Bruce/Janni
February 27:	Student presentations of data collection methods (Reaching all stake holders) <i>Weekly workday: Plan and prepare data collection efforts</i>	
March 6:	Parks and recreation in East St. Louis <i>Weekly workday: Outreach weekend Friday/Saturday 9th-10th for data collection</i>	Bruce
March 13:	Participatory Planning Processes (General) <i>Weekly workday: groups work on History and Current condition parts of plan. Advertise the planning process (press release)</i>	Stacy
March 20:	<i>Spring break</i>	
March 27:	Parks and recreation planning and design <i>Weekly workday: continue/complete work on History and Current condition parts of plan</i> <i>Outreach weekend March 30-31st (community meetings for feed back)</i>	Laura
April 3:	Preparing the planning document (Content and layout) <i>Weekly workday: Summarize and analyze all data collected and develop goals and objectives.</i>	Laura

April 10: Plan implementation Bruce/Stacy
Weekly workday: groups write the program section of the plan (this will be in a very brief format to be taken over by a fall semester class for details and design). Prepare power point presentation.

April 17: Day trip to ESL for presentation to park district
Weekly workday: Make changes to plan based on Park district feed back

April 24: Campus presentation of Plan
Weekly workday: Complete plan based on campus feed back

May 1: Last day of class/student presentations of research project

May 8: Final exam: due date for the research paper.

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