

THE EAST ST. LOUIS ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT



Community Engagement and Action Research in East St. Louis

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

FAA 391
Spring 2009

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Meeting time: Tuesdays & Thursday 12-1:15PM and trips to East St. Louis as needed (Approximately 3 trips to ESL, all expenses covered by ESLARP).

Meeting place: 322 Noble Hall

Office hours: TR 11-12 in 325 Noble Hall

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 is situated into a longer-term partnership between ESLARP and The Eagle's Nest of St. Clair County, a non-profit organization that provides housing and services to homeless veterans in East St. Louis. The course 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:

- knowledge is socially produced,
- research should act as a vehicle toward social change,
- collective capacity-building is essential,
- 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 six 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. We will also create short reflections throughout the semester to facilitate our PAR learning process.

This course is situated in a two-year long community engagement project. The end goal of the two-year project is to create physical spaces and social programs at The Eagle's Nest that facilitate interaction between residents of The Eagle's Nest and between the residents and the surrounding community. These implementations will facilitate the creation of the veterans' social networks as well as create a stronger sense of efficacy and connectedness among each other and in the neighborhood. Last semester, students began the design phase of this project, enabling you to begin research this semester.

THE EAST ST. LOUIS ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT



This semester, students will initiate two applied research projects, focusing on two major aspects of The Eagle's Nest. The first project focuses on empowerment programming development for The Eagle's Nest, based on 1) interviews with homeless men, and 2) review of empowerment program evaluation literature. Students will work with the director of The Eagle's Nest to develop programming based on the data collected from the interviews and literature. The second project focuses on designing for "home" within The Eagle's Nest, based on 1) interviews with homeless men, and 2) review of home-making literature. Students will use the knowledge gained from these research activities to create designs and physical materials for The Eagle's Nest.

Course Objectives:

FAA 391 is designed to achieve the following educational objectives:

- 1.) Offer undergraduate students the opportunity to gain qualitative research experience working in collaboration with each other and our community partners to address important issues in community life. The goal is for students to generate knowledge that can be applied to the real world.
- 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.
- 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 homeless service provision.
- 4.) Nurture and develop leadership and other personal skills through partnerships with local East St. Louis leaders.
- 5.) 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.
- 6.) Foster critical thinking about economic, social, environmental, and political problems confronting residents of our state's most distressed urban neighborhoods, and provide students with the research skills to address these problems.

Course Structure:

This course meets twice a week for a total of 2.5 hours. In class, you can expect that some portion (about half) of the time will be devoted to critical reflection on readings or field

THE EAST ST. LOUIS ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT



experiences. The other portion of the time will be devoted to working on current projects. Particularly complex pieces of the projects will be completed in class so that students can work closely with the instructor and other students to achieve better understanding of the information. Other pieces of the projects will be completed outside of class. In addition to class time, you are expected to travel to East St. Louis two times during the semester (see dates below) to conduct fieldwork and meet with our community partner(s) to discuss the project.

A note on out-of-class expectations

You are expected to complete all assigned readings, and to ensure that your time (and mine) is not wasted, I have worked to provide you with worthwhile, relevant readings. Beyond the readings, you will also complete work for projects outside of class. This semester we will be engaging in qualitative research, which requires you to conduct interviews outside of class time and transcribe them. Be prepared to commit time to this research project, as it will require quite a bit of out-of-class work.

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.
- 2.) Attendance on both trips to East St. Louis
- 3.) Equitable and tangible contribution to all projects and reports that are produced
- 4.) Completion of all out of class assignments, including (but not limited to) interviews, transcriptions, reflections, and readings
- 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 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

THE EAST ST. LOUIS ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT



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 skills 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. The instructor and student will decide on an appropriate task to make up for previous substandard work. This may include either of the following: 1) a task that benefits the class as a whole, e.g. paperwork, transcription, making calls, or 2) a task designed to improve skills of student, e.g. extra interview or reading/writing assignment.

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 and research skills as the course progresses.

Weekly Schedule

** Indicates preparatory work for class or assignment due*

Week 1 (January 20&22)

Tuesday: Syllabus/set-up of class—intro to community service learning venn diagram
IRB Certification
Introduction to The Eagle's Nest and Martha Watts

Thursday: Introduction to East St. Louis and ESLARP
*Reardon (1997). "State and Local Revitalization Efforts"
*Reardon (2000). "An Experiential Approach"

Week 2 (January 27&29)

Tuesday: Working With, Not For
Personal histories; Importance of experiential knowledge
*Stoecker (2005). "Head and Hand Together" p. 59-64
*Koopman (2008). "Imperialism Within"
*Written reflection on personal history due
*IRB Certification due for new students

Thursday: Introduction to Orange Thumb project
Orange Thumb brainstorming (with call to Martha)
Landscape plans from Gale's class incorporated

THE EAST ST. LOUIS ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT



Week 3 (February 3&5)

- Tuesday: Structural perspectives on homelessness
Conference call with Martha
*Rosenthal and Foscarinis (2006). “Responses to Homelessness” p. 316-325
*Minnery and Greenhalgh. “Approaches to Homelessness Policy” p. 641-645
*<http://www1.va.gov/homeless/> Read “Overview of Homelessness”
- Thursday: Encountering homelessness—individual level accounts of homelessness
Clips of “When I Came Home” and symposium video
Check in/work on Orange Thumb project
*Written reflections on experience due
* Zald. “Faces of the Homeless”
*Vanderstaay. “Street Lives” excerpt

Week 4 (February 10&12)

- Tuesday: Homeless programs in the U.S.—function and operations
Preparation for veterans—conference call with Martha
*Rosenthal and Foscarinis (2006). “Responses to Homelessness” p. 325-339
*Shay (1994). “Achilles in Vietnam” p. 165-193
*Eagle’s Nest letter of inquiry
- Thursday: Introduce first semester projects and insights
Check in on Orange Thumb video progress
Revisit course goals—are we achieving them?

Week 5 (February 17&19)

- Tuesday: Fiskars Orange Thumb grant application due
Reflection on collaborative experience of video
- Thursday: Projects intro
Introduction to home-making and homelessness
Introduction to empowerment program development and needs assessment
*Moore (2007). “Toward a Fuller Understanding of Home and Homelessness”
*Cox (2001). “BSW Students Favor Strengths”

Week 6 (February 24&26)

- Tuesday: No class
- Thursday: Set up outreach weekend
Further discussion of projects
*Individual readings on home-making—article synopsis due

Outreach Weekend 1 (February 27&28)

- Activities: Meet with Martha on program needs and explanation of services**
Applying home-making to The Joseph Center
Taking pictures of site for home-making project

THE EAST ST. LOUIS ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT



Passing out brochures

Week 7 (March 3&5)

- Tuesday: Interviewing methods
Developing question specificity—avoiding cultural assumptions in interviewing
Development of interview schedule
*Zeisel (2006). “Focused Interviews” p. 227-243, “Case Study: House Counseling” p. 251-256, “Visual Responses” p. 270-275
- Thursday: Finalizing interview schedule
Assignment to interview time slots
Practicing interview techniques

Week 8 (March 10&12)

- Tuesday: Continuing interviews
Revisit course goals—are we achieving them?
- Thursday: Reflection and adjustment from first round of interviews
Continuing interviews
*Written reflection on interview successes and challenges due

Week 9 (March 17 & 19)

- Tuesday: Continuing interviews
- Thursday: Stepping Back: Reflections on the intersections of race, poverty and homelessness
Preparation for beginning interviews
*Aspen Institute (2004). “Structural Racism and Community Building”
*DePastino (2003). “Citizen Hobo” concluding chapter
*Final interview transcriptions due, printed out on single-sided pages

Week 10 (March 24&26)—Spring Break!

Week 11 (March 31 & April 2)

- Tuesday: Introduction to data analysis
Compilation of data
Initial data analysis—what does the data tell us?
- Thursday: Developing themes
Conference call with Martha
Develop follow-up questions for focus group
*Individual data analyses due
*Focus group with guys at TIMES at 7 p.m.

Outreach Weekend 2 (April 3&4)

- Activities: Empowerment Programming Workshop
Introduction to literature review; assignment of articles**

THE EAST ST. LOUIS ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT



Home-Making Design Charettes—incorporating practicalities into design **Passing out brochures**

Week 12 (April 7 & 9)

- Tuesday: Reflection on weekend activities
Revisit course goals—are we achieving them?
Constructing a design portfolio
- Thursday: Interviewing and literature review—benefits of multi-methods
Synthesis—putting interview data, literature, and needs together
*Literature reviews due

Week 13 (April 14&16)

- Tuesday: Work on synthesis assignment
- Thursday: Work on design assignment

Week 14 (April 21&23)

- Tuesday: Creating the report
*Written synthesis and empowerment programming recommendations due
- Thursday: Discussion on local context—embedding recommendations in MetroEast area
Conference call with Martha
Get back synthesis and recommendations
*Revised designs due

Week 15 (April 28&30)

- Tuesday: Creating the portfolio—workshopping our designs
Get back revised designs
- Thursday: Workshopping reports
*Empowerment programming report rough draft due

Week 16 (May 5)

- Tuesday: Reflections on course—evaluating our goal achievements
Get back rough drafts
- Thursday: No class

Monday, May 11 by 5:00 p.m.—Empowerment Programming report final draft due
Final Design Portfolio due