SOC 403: APPLIED RESEARCH PRACTICUM

Our SOC 403 research practicum immerses students in real-world projects with local community organizations, schools, federal agencies and businesses. Projects address real issues, and their outcomes have a direct impact on the organizations and the communities they serve.

The course format combines a seminar with field work outside the classroom. Research methodology is tailored by students to serve the research question proposed by the partner organization. Past projects have prepared students for on-site work, conducting interviews, focus groups, surveys, content analysis and ethnographic research (to name a few.) In every practicum, students will conduct data analysis, write reports and present work based on findings and current research. Previous Methods coursework is strongly recommended but not required.

SPECIAL NOTE FOR RESEARCH PRACTICUMS:

In a research practicum, everyone is expected to work together, as a research team, to accomplish the research goals. The instructor will act as a supervisor, guiding your work throughout the quarter. Ultimately, however, you as a class are responsible for the direction of this research and you will be expected to take quite a bit of initiative in order to solve problems and get things done.

When doing research, students should not expect a rigid timeline. By nature, practical research is not predictable; tasks may be more or less difficult to complete than originally anticipated, and sometimes initial findings might lead a researcher to generate new ways to answer the research question. Students will not necessarily know what work they will be expected to do from one week to the next. If you need structure, this class is probably not for you. If you need room to slack, this class is definitely not for you. Though the expectations are high, the rewards are also high if you are willing to put in the effort.

PAST PROJECTS IN APPLIED RESEARCH PRACTICUM

WINTER 2013: TEEN PREGNANCY AND “DROP OUT”

When teens get pregnant, most drop out of school. When they drop out of school, they likely face a life of economic insecurity. This winter we will partner with the American Civil Liberties Union of Washington on a new research project to investigate how schools officially and in practice work to either support or push out teen parents. As part of their research, students will analyze school discipline policies in multiple districts, specifically looking at variables associated with pregnancy and parenthood. At the end of the quarter, students will present the results of their findings to ACLU-WA staff. Previous methods coursework is strongly recommended but not required.

SUMMER 2011: IMPROVING HOMELESS SERVICES

In this practicum, students designed and piloted an evaluation tool for Noel House Programs, the largest women-only shelter service provider in King County. Students designed and tested an evaluated measure that Noel House staff can use to assess the benefits of the services they offer homeless women within their facility. Specifically, this measure will be used to assist Noel House staff in determining how their model compares to the emergency shelter model on outcomes. Noel House will also use the results of this study to show the impact of their unique service model to help better educate community foundations and donors who support Noel House.
SUMMER 2009: P-PATCH TRUST

This summer we partnered with the P-Patch Trust to assess the efficacy of their services in relation to the needs of Seattle's community gardeners. Students created a study design involving data collection through interviews, surveys, ethnographic research and focus groups of study participants (gardeners). Students coded and analyzed data, and presented a report of study findings. The P-Patch Trust will use this program evaluation to assist in their strategic planning and programming development.

P-Patch Trust is a nonprofit organization working to acquire, build, preserve and protect community (“p-patch”) gardens in Seattle’s neighborhoods. Through advocacy, leadership and partnerships, the Trust expands access to community gardening across economic, racial, ethnic, ability and gender lines. They promote organic gardening and build community by providing opportunities for people to garden together, learn from each other, develop a sense of neighborhood and create a more livable urban environment. For more information, go to www.ppachtrust.org/

SUMMER 2008: CAST FOR KIDS EVALUATION TOOL

In summer 2008 we partnered with C.A.S.T. for Kids, a non-profit, national organization that runs educational fishing expeditions for disabled and disadvantaged children. For this course, enrolled students designed, tested, and published an evaluation tool with a database component which will be used by C.A.S.T. nationally to help assess and improve services, as well as help generate new funding opportunities. For more information on C.A.S.T., go to www.castforkids.org

WINTER 2008: HELPING LINK

See featured article from Summer 2008 A&S Perspectives: "Students Become Consultants for Helping Link"

This practicum partnered with Helping Link to assess the effectiveness of their community services in relation to the needs of Seattle Vietnamese community. Helping Link is a grass-roots organization located in “Little Saigon” serving the local Vietnamese community with referral services, ESL, computer literacy, citizenship training, and anti-violence programs. Students enrolled in this course learned how to create a study design involving data collection through interviews, surveys, and focus groups of study participants. Students also learned how to code and analyze data, and write and present a report of study findings. Helping Link will use this report to further its mission and efforts to improve its services.

AUTUMN 2009: SUMMONING AID FOR DRUG OVERDOSES

The ACLU’s Drug Policy Project is dedicated to the development and implementation of reform strategies aimed at replacing over-reliance on criminal sanctions with approaches that treat drug use as a public health concern. As part of this effort, the ACLU is interested in better understanding the extent to which fear of prosecution is a deterrent to drug users' seeking help for someone who is overdosing. Student researchers will design and implement a research agenda that will help the ACLU in learning what it needs to know about drug overdosing and factors leading to the failure of contacting 911 for life-saving treatment.

Interviews and focus groups will be conducted with members of the following groups: social service providers, drug users, emergency medical personnel and police officers. Results of this work will be included in a final report and presentation to the ACLU. The report will also include recommendations for future data collection and/or next steps.