

## **33-830 Methods of Research in Congregations:**

**Research that seeks to understand people and faith**

**Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary**

Spring, 2014, Wednesdays, 9:00 am – 12:00 noon

Dr. Margaret Ann Crain

Pfeiffer Room 324

(847-866-3973) or MargaretAnn.Crain@garrett.edu

**Tentative schedule: This will evolve!**

**DESCRIPTION:** This practical theology course presupposes that research in ministry settings is undertaken in order to contribute to the vitality of the Church and its people for the sake of its mission in the world. It will examine theological and philosophical bases, goals, and methods of qualitative research in congregations and draw on the fields of congregational studies, Christian education, evangelism, practical theology, sociology, anthropology, and educational evaluation. The course will consider the epistemologies of differing approaches to research, read and evaluate the work of other researchers, practice and evaluate methods of data gathering, and write a proposal for a research project. For doctoral students, this course may provide an opportunity to explore a context and method leading to a dissertation research project.

### **LEARNING GOALS FOR THE COURSE:**

1. Explore qualitative approaches to research that seek to understand people and cultures and its use in building grounded theory in practical theology. Consider the interdisciplinary nature of practical theology and qualitative research.
2. Practice disciplined participant observation with field notes. Reflect on issues related to this work.
3. Practice skills of interviewing.
4. Explore the intersection of practical theology and the social sciences.
5. Practice describing and critiquing ethnographic studies.
6. Learn about and practice qualitative research methods for practical theology.
  - a. Consider epistemological assumptions in various approaches to qualitative research.
  - b. Explore attachment vs. detachment as research issue. What is observation? Whose world do we see? How does the social location of the researcher both help and hinder the research?
  - c. Learn to look at a congregation in its context and how its congregational life embodies theology.
  - d. Practice searching for and uncovering a question for research
  - e. Practice preparing for fieldwork including defining a problem, readiness, role, entry, power issues, gender issues, first days in the field, informants
  - f. Practice data collection techniques. Evaluate their usefulness, the kind of data they produce, and how to choose the appropriate data collection method for your research question.
  - g. Practice participant observation in a congregational worship setting or a context for intentional learning including field notes and initial analyses.

- h. Practice doing an unstructured interview and learn about the types of interview and their advantages and disadvantages for data collection.
  - i. How do you collect, manage, analyze, protect, and write your data?
  - j. Consider issues of writing and the potential audience. What do you include? What do you exclude? What is the relationship between the observer, the culture observed, and the way it is represented?
  - k. Consider ethics. What is informed consent? How can the researcher protect confidentiality? What is owed to the research participants?
7. Produce a research proposal as preliminary to a doctoral project or to enhance the practice of ministry in your congregation.

**PREREQUISITES:** This course is for Ph.D. students and advanced Masters degree students. Ministry experience in a congregation is preferred.

**CLASS LIMIT:** 15

**REQUIREMENTS AND EVALUATION:**

1. The class functions as a seminar. Each student is expected to be present in class – physically, mentally, and spiritually. Careful preparation and full participation will be essential for a healthy learning ecology. Participation includes preparation for class, constructive verbal contributions to class discussions, attentive listening, and facilitating the participation of others. Attendance at all class sessions is expected. Notify the instructor in case of absence.
2. All assignments, both written and oral, must be completed in order to receive a passing grade in the course.
3. Reading provides a range of theoretical grounding and examples of congregational research. Class members are expected to have completed readings by the class session for which they are assigned. The right to participate in class discussion is based on having read the assigned texts for the session.
4. Grades will be 25% for the participant observation of a field site with field notes and reflection papers on topics to be assigned (assignment A), 10% for the book review and teaching session on a published qualitative study from the book list IV (assignment B), 15% for the data collection technique report (assignment C), 25% for the report of an unstructured interview (assignment D), and 25% for the research proposal (assignment E).

**ASSIGNMENTS**

- A. Participant observation is a fundamental method for qualitative research. Learning to do disciplined observation and reflection in the flow of congregational life is a crucial learning goal. Choose a ministry field site for your participant observation and identify a preliminary research question. Plan to observe in this site at least 1 hour a week. Collect artifacts such as a worship bulletin that contain data to consider later. Write field notes immediately after each observation. These will be turned in each week. Consider your membership role in this community (to what degree are you "participant" and/or "observer"). Be self-reflexive about your

presence and your relationship to the culture being studied. What are you enabled to see or not see because of your membership role or social location? Field notes are due each class meeting, along with a short “memo” on specific topics to be assigned occasionally. The field notes and memos will be the basis of discussion in class each week.

- B. Ethnography/Congregational Studies Analysis Assignment:** Analysis of one of the published examples of qualitative research chosen from list IV, the books or dissertations on special two-week reserve in the library (or another with instructor approval), reported orally to the class (20 minutes) and in a paper (500-1000 words). Consider critically the epistemology the project employed, the research methodology, and its usefulness. Early in the course, we will agree on which text each student will choose.
- C. Data Collection Assignment:** Each student will lead a teaching session for the class on a data collection technique. According to Denzin and Lincoln, data collection “involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials- case study; personal experience; introspection; life story; interview; artifacts; cultural texts and productions; observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts- that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals’ lives.” (*Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry*, 5)
- Focus groups
  - Case Study
  - Autoethnography
  - Congregational Time line
  - Neighborhood walk
  - Census data and other public documents
  - Digital ethnography (blogs, etc. as text to study)
  - Artifacts (such as furniture, art, and other materials that are in or on the building)
  - Video
  - Survey
  - Or ???

Choose a data collection strategy to learn. Do research to learn what the “experts” advise about this method. Find an appropriate site and try it out. Teach it to the class in 20 minutes. What is it? How do you do it? How have previous qualitative researchers and/or students of congregations made use of this technique? What kind of data does it produce? What practical insights did you gain from practicing this technique? Provide a handout for the class that includes 3 or 4 bibliographic sources of information about this method.

- D.** Think of a question you have that will be best addressed by a one-on-one interview. Choose the type of interview that you believe will be most appropriate for this research question. Prepare carefully and conduct the interview including preparing a method for obtaining informed consent. Write a short reflection on what you learned about interviews as a method for data collection and about yourself as research tool for interviews. (3-5 pages).
- E. Research Proposal Assignment:** Written and oral presentation for the class of a research plan and “first days in the field.” Presentation should include issues of

problem selection. Upon what literature will your research build? How does this project contribute to the vitality of the Church and/or development of practical theology? Discuss your epistemological approach to research. What writers enhance your theoretical sensitivity to see and hear the experience in the field? How do you envision choosing a site? How do you envision data collection? How does who you are both resource and limit the research project? What will be your role as researcher and how will that relate to the research? How do you plan to enter the site? What are relevant ethical considerations? How do you plan to process and analyze the data? What thoughts do you have about writing the project? A one-page description of the intended research question and site is due no later than week 4. (Masters level students' papers should be 6-8 pages; Ph.D. students' papers should be 12-15 pages and should relate to your major research interests.)

### **I. REQUIRED READINGS FOR ALL STUDENTS:**

- John Swinton & Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*. London: scm press, 2006. ISBN 0-334 02980 5 (paperback) (Amazon price: \$19.68).
- Mary Clark Moschella, *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice*. Pilgrim Press, 2008. ISBN 978-0-8298-1774-4 (Amazon price: \$18.32)
- Ruthellen Josselson, *Interviewing for Qualitative Inquiry: A Relational Approach* The Guilford Press, 2013. ISBN-13: 978-1462510009 (Amazon \$26.60)
- Readings to download from the library:
  - Deborah Court, "Qualitative Research As Cultural and Religious mirror: What Do Researchers Really Learn?" *Religious Education* 103:4, 410-426
  - Elizabeth McIsaac Bruce, "Narrative Inquiry: A Spiritual and Liberating Approach to Research," *Religious Education*, 103:3, 323-338.
  - Margaret Ann Crain, "Redefining the Fundamental Questions" in *Religious Education*, (Fall 2006) 101:4, 438-442.
  - Margaret Ann Crain & Jack L. Seymour, "The Ethnographer as Minister; Ethnographic Research in Ministry," in *Religious Education*, Summer 1996, p. 299-315.
  - S. Steve Kang, "Reflections upon Methodology: Research on Themes of Self Construction and Self Integration in the Narrative of Second Generation Korean American Young Adults," in *Religious Education*, Summer 2001, p. 408-415.
  - Elizabeth Conde Frazier, "Participatory Action research: Practical Theology for Social Justice," in *Religious Education*, Summer 1996, 299-315.
  - Dori Grinenko Baker, "Future Homemakers and Feminist Awakenings: Autoethnography as a Method in Theological Education and Research," in *Religious Education*, Summer 2001, p. 395-407.

### **II. RECOMMENDED TEXT FOR PH.D. STUDENTS:**

- Alice McIntyre, *Participatory Action Research*. Sage Publications, 2007. ISBN-10: 1412953669 (Amazon: \$17.53).

- Robert M. Emerson, *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes (Chicago guides to Writing, Editing and Publishing)*. Univ. of Chicago Press, 1995. (paperback) **ISBN-10:** 0-226-20681-5
- Norman K. Denzin and Michael D. Giardina eds. *Qualitative Inquiry and Social Justice*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2009. [United Library HM671 .Q34]. Full of interesting articles about risk and advocacy. **ISBN-10:** 1598744224

### **III. SUPPLEMENTAL TEXTS/Also on Regular 2 hour Reserve**

- Nancy T. Ammerman, Jackson W. Carroll, Carl S. Dudley, and William McKinney, *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook*. Abingdon Press, 1998. **ISBN:** 0-687-00651-1
- James P. Wind and James W. Lewis, *American Congregations Volume 1: Portraits of Twelve Religious Communities*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.
- Ruth Behar & Deborah A. Gordon, *Women Writing Culture*, University of California Press, 1996..
- Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln, *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*. Sage Publications, 2007. **ISBN-10:** 1412957575
- Norman K Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln, eds., *The Landscape of Qualitative Research: Theories and issues*, Sage Publications, Third Edition, 2007. **ISBN-10:** 1412957583
- Thomas E. Frank, *The Soul of the Congregation*. Abingdon, 2000. **ISBN:** 0-687-08717-1
- Yvonna Lincoln & Egon Guba, *The Constructivist Credo*: Walnut Creek, California: Left Coast Press, 2013. **ISBN** 978-1-59874-690-7

### **IV. RESERVE TEXTS/SPECIAL TWO-WEEK RESERVE**

#### **Texts for ethnographic/congregational analysis, Assignment B**

- Dissertations by Carol McPherson, Denise Janssen, Cheryl Magrini, Mai-Anh Le Tran, Evelyn Parker, Jeffery Tribble, Steve Kang, Sinai Chung, Leah Gunning Francis, UnChu Kim, Jo Ann Deasy, Michelle Holley, Marlea Gilbert
- Michael Sadowski, *In a Queer Voice: Journeys of Resilience from Adolescence to Adulthood*. Temple University Press, 2013. ISBN: 1439908028
- Carol K. Ingall, *Down the Up Staircase: Tales of Teaching in Jewish Day Schools*. The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 2006. ISBN 0-87334-102-3
- *Beyond Establishment: Protestant Identity in a Post-Protestant Age, 1993*  
Edited by Jackson W. Carroll, Wade Clark Roof. Chapter 2, “Denominational Identity and the Church School – Teasing Out a Relationship, is by Mary Elizabeth and Allen Moore.
- *Vanishing Boundaries: The Religion of Mainline Protestant Baby Boomers, 1994*. [Dean R. Hoge](#) , [Benton Johnson](#) , [Donald A. Luidens](#) . The study is based on a nationwide selection of persons confirmed in Presbyterian churches who were between 33 and 42 years old in 1989.
- Josselson, Ruthellen. *Revising Herself : The Story of Women's Identity from College to Midlife*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996. **ISBN-13: 978-0195108392**

- Dori Greninko Baker, ed., *Greenhouses of Hope: Congregations Growing Young Leaders Who Will Change the World* (Alban Institute: 2010). ISBN 978-1566994095
- Jeffery L. Tribble Sr., *Transformative Pastoral Leadership in the Black Church*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. ISBN: 1-4039-6608-7
- Mark Chaves, *Congregations in America*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2004. ISBN: 0-674-01284-4
- Ruth Behar, *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology that Breaks Your Heart*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1996.
- Claire Chow, *Leaving Deep Water: Lives of Asian American Women at the Crossroads of Two Cultures*. New York: Plume of Penguin Putnam Inc. 1998.
- Margaret Ann Crain & Jack L. Seymour, *Yearning for God: Reflections of Faithful Lives*. Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2003.
- Laurent Parks Daloz, Cheryl Keen, James P. Keen, and Sharon Daloz Parks, *Common Fire: Lives of Commitment in a Complex World*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1996..
- Roland D. Martinson, David W. Anderson, and Paul Hill, *Coming of Age: Exploring the Identity and Spirituality of Younger Men*. Augsburg press, 2006. **ISBN-13:** 978-0806652245
- Elaine Lawless, *Holy Women, Wholly Women*. Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1993.
- Mary Patillo-McCoy, *Black Pickett Fences: Privilege and Peril Among the Black Middle Class*. University of Chicago Press, 1999.
- Evelyn Parker, *Trouble Don't Last Always: Emancipatory Hope Among African American Adolescents*. Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2003.
- Linda E. Thomas, *Under the Canopy: Ritual Process and Spiritual Resilience in South Africa*. University of South Carolina, 1999.
- Gerardo Marti, *A Mosaic of Believers: Diversity and Innovation in a Multiethnic Church*. Indiana University Press, 2005. ISBN: 0253344824
- Russell Jeung, with forward by Robert Bellah, *Faithful Generations: Race and New Asian American Churches*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005. ISBN: 0-8135-3503-44

## **TENTATIVE WEEKLY SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND READINGS:**

### 1. February 5, 2014: **What is qualitative research? ethnography?**

Negotiate the course schedule and timing of assignments. What does it mean to do disciplined study of a congregation or people in a ministry context? What do we mean by culture, qualitative research, practical theology and congregational studies? Human subjects research guidelines from G-ETS Academic handbook. What is informed consent? View ATS video on congregations in Ohio. Begin working on your participant observation (Assignment A). How do we identify a research question? How should one organize field notes? Reading assignments for discussion today:

- Margaret Ann Crain, "Redefining the Fundamental Questions" in *Religious Education*, (Fall 2006) 101:4, 438-442.
- Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, "Participatory Action Research: Practical Theology for Social Justice," in *Religious Education*, (Summer 2006), 101:3, 312-329.
- Swinton & Mowat, Introduction and chapter 1 (pages v to 27).
- Mary Clark Moschella, *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice*, pp vii-62 and 115-140.

### 2. February 12, 2014: **Qualitative Research, Feminist Epistemology, and Practical Theology**

Fieldnotes #1 due.

Reading assignments for discussion today:

- Deborah Court, "Qualitative Research as Cultural and Religious Mirror: What do Researchers Really Learn?" in *Religious Education*, 103:4; p 410-426.
- Swinton and Mowat, Chapter 2.
- Karen McCarthy-Brown and A Oakley article available in Moodle.
- Scharen and Vigen: Chapters 1-4.

### 3. February 19, 2014: **The Primary Research Instrument: You!**

Fieldnotes #2 due. Choose books/dissertations for Assignment B. Reading assignment due today:

- Elizabeth McIssac Bruce, "Narrative Inquiry: A Spiritual and Liberating Approach to Research" in *Religious Education*, 103:3, 323-338.
- Chapters 3 and 5 in Swinton and Mowat.

### 4. February 26, 2014: **Finding a Research Question**

Fieldnotes #3 due. What passion or concern for the church drives your research? How is your research question evolving as you do field notes? Consider epistemological assumptions in various approaches to research. How does your calling to ministry reflect the methodologies of practical theology? Reading for discussion today:

- Moschella, pp 63-114
- Margaret Ann Crain & Jack L. Seymour, "The Ethnographer as Minister; Ethnographic Research in Ministry," in *Religious Education*, Summer 1996, p. 299-315.
- Chapter 4 in Swinton & Mowat.

5. **March 5, 2014: Ash Wednesday, no class**

6. March 12, 2014: **How does a context embody theology?**

Fieldnotes #4 due. Consider how your calling to ministry is practical theology.

Obtaining informed consent. Reading for today's discussion:

- Chapters 6-7 in Swinton and Mowat
- Margaret Ann Crain, "Looking at People and Asking Why? An Ethnographic approach to Religious Education" *Religious Education*, Summer, 2001 p. 386-394.

7. March 19, 2014: **Book Reports**

Fieldnotes #5 due. How does my own culture and social location affect my ability to do research? How do we see this reflected in the work of the research projects reported in these books? Book reports on one of the books on reserve. (Assignment B). Class discussion will focus on these studies. Reading due:

- Chapter 8 and conclusion in Swinton & Mowat.

8. March 26, 2014: **Interviewing (MAC in VA)**

Fieldnotes #6 due. Having observed your ministry setting, what questions would you like to ask in an interview? Continued discussion of interviewing. Reading to complete for today's discussion:

- Robert S. Weiss, *Learning from Strangers: The art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies*.

9. April 2, 2014: **Data Collection Techniques**

Fieldnotes #7 due. Consider the experience of interviewing and power. Data collection technique reports (Assignment C) due.

10. April 9, 2014: **Data Collection Techniques**

Fieldnotes #8 due. Continuation of the data collection reports. Discussion of Participant Action Research. Also, assignment D (interview report) is due today. Reading due for today:

- S. Steve Kang, "Reflections upon Methodology: Research on Themes of Self Construction and Self Integration in the Narrative of Second Generation Korean American Young Adults," in *Religious Education*, Summer 2001, p. 408-415.
- Alice McIntyre, *Participatory Action Research*.
- Conde-Frazier from Course Pak.

10. April 16, 2014: **From Fieldnotes to Writing an Argument**

Memo: Look over your field notes from the whole semester. What possible categories for analysis do you find in them? Class discussion on managing data and software assistance. Visit <http://www.qualisresearch.com/> and do the demo. Discussion on the ethics of research.

- Moschella, pp 167-236.



April 23, 2012 – Spring Break

11. April 30, 2014: **Issues in Research**

What still troubles you? What do we need to know more about? Bring issues for discussion.

12. **May 7, 2014: Research proposals**

Each student will have 20 minutes to present their idea for a research project and 10 minutes for questions. Final discussion: So what is research anyway? How can we know? What do we know? For whom do we seek to know? What is practical theology?

13. May 12, 2014 **Final projects due by May 15th.**

The final project needs to focus on methodological considerations and should cite the books and articles that we have used as the basis of this course. You can write this in chronological order of the steps you imagine that you would take. Remember that qualitative research usually evolves as you do it and the original plan is only a plan, not a rigid rule. Your paper might follow an organization like this:

*Part One:* the research question and why you are interested in it as well as why it could contribute to the vitality of the church

*Part Two:* the prevailing theories about this question and how your work might contribute to understanding

*Part Three:* Methodology

*Section One:* Site Selection. How do you envision choosing a site? Why is this the right place to address this research question?

*Section Two:* Site Entry. How do you plan to enter the site? Whose permission will you need as you begin? Is there a policy group that you will need to meet with?

*Section Three:* Data Collection. How do you envision data collection?

*Section Four:* Researcher as Primary Instrument. How does who you are both resource and limit the research project? What will be your role as researcher and how will that relate to the research? In what ways are you a research instrument that is especially equipped to do this research project? For instance, are you an insider or outsider? Do you know languages that will allow you to do this work?

*Section Five:* Data Analysis. How do you plan to process and analyze the data?

*Section Six:* What thoughts to you have about writing the project?

*Section Seven:* Ethical Considerations and Informed Consent. This section should discuss the risks and benefits that you believe might be associated with this research for those persons you interview or observe. Write an informed consent form and include it in this section.