

Spring term 2026
USP 430 Participatory Research Methods for Community Development
Portland State University – School of Urban Studies and Planning

Instructor: Moriah McSharry McGrath, PhD, MPH, MSUP

What we're studying

From the PSU catalog:

“This course introduces students to participatory methods, placing special emphasis on research ethics, the positionality of the researcher, and embedding research within community development practice. It focuses on research design, data collection, data analysis, and the dissemination of results. Various approaches to measuring urban phenomena are covered, including basis interview techniques, survey methods, and quantitative analytical methods.”

This syllabus builds on the work of [Kacy McKinney](#).

Assignments and activities may change!

The instructor reserves the right to modify course content and/or substitute assignments and learning activities in response to institutional, weather, or class situations. Please keep up to date with the latest syllabus on Canvas.

Learning outcomes

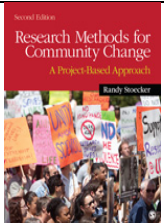

The course activities will help work toward achieving the following course-specific outcomes:

- 1) discuss the ethical challenges and political power of community-based research
- 2) critique examples of research in community development drawing on concepts of *knowledge, validity, and ethics*
- 3) situate yourself as a researcher using “active reflexivity” that considers your identities and the context in which you are working
- 4) design research processes that are practical as well as relevant and responsive to the needs of specific communities

Course materials

Most of our readings are available to PSU students through the [PSU Library website](#), requiring you to log in with your PSU Odin ID. You may not be accustomed to searching the catalog for materials, but getting confident with this skill will help you in the long run. If you are having trouble locating a reading, please use the [Ask a Librarian](#) service for assistance. If that doesn't work, check with classmates. Finally, if it seems like the instructor made a mistake, please post to the Q & A forum on Canvas.

Our main texts are:

	<p>Stoecker, R. (2013). <i>Research methods for community change: A project-based approach</i> (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications.</p> <p>Access through PSU library, nickname in syllabus is “Stoecker.” APA format to use when citing chapters: “book,” since it’s all by the same author.</p>
	<p>Center for Community Health and Development. (n.d.). Community tool box. http://ctb.ku.edu</p> <p>Online resource with a wide variety of content, nickname in syllabus is “Toolbox.”</p>

APA style is very tricky for web resources like this! I'd use "Entry in an Online Dictionary, Thesaurus, or Encyclopedia with a Group Author" format.

Other materials are listed in the calendar at the end of the syllabus.

ASSIGNMENTS AND EVALUATION

Please keep PDF versions of all of your submitted assignments in the event of clerical errors.

The following final grades will be given for the following number of *TOTAL POINTS ACCUMULATED*:

Points	<60	60	64	67	70	74	77	80	84	87	90	94
Grade	F	D-	D	D+	C-	C	C+	B-	B	B+	A-	A

Expectations for assignments*

A general rubric for student work:

- A** assignments demonstrate original thought and synthesis of ideas; sophisticated, cogent analysis; and are clearly written or presented. Outstanding work.
- B** assignments present above average analysis with appropriate evidence to support the ideas and are clearly written or presented. Good work.
- C** assignments show a basic level of understanding, with analysis limited to the most obvious arguments. Writing is competent. Adequate work.
- D** assignments misunderstand or misrepresent the material, or are so poorly written or presented as to obscure the analysis. Inadequate work.

To address some common misconceptions about grades: Diligence and hard work are always appreciated and are generally necessary for a high grade, but they don't guarantee one. I evaluate what you turn in, not what you are capable of. Through your work, you earn points; I do not start from 100% and "dock" you for shortcomings.

All submitted assignments should include student name, date, and course number clearly visible on the first page, ideally in the top right corner. In all assignments, please follow American Psychological Association style (7th edition) for citations, reference lists, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization. Please do NOT use APA-style headings or include a document cover page.

Do not rely on citation generators, including the citation button in the PSU Library catalog. To learn how to use citation generators effectively, see this helpful article: [helpful article](#). Consult a librarian, the PSU Writing Center, or the Purdue Online Writing Lab ([OWL](#)) if you are unfamiliar with APA.

Ways to earn points

The table below lists the activities students are expected to complete, and the maximum number of points they can earn through each one. The course is designed with some wiggle room: there is one "freebie" each for attending class and submitting the repeat assignments, which means that there are more than 100 points "on the table," if you would like collect more.

* Adapted from Lisa K. Bates.

	points
<i>Engagement with readings</i> Weekly reading journal (2.5 points x eight) – required week two, then take off a week of your choosing	20
<i>Engagement with the class and community</i> Attendance and timeliness: 1 point per class, two “freebie” points = 17 points High quality participation: 5 points	22
Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR) training	5
<i>Research design project</i> Context brief: 5 points Engagement plan: 5 points Promising practices review: 5 points Research methods plan: 5 points Data collection plan: 5 points Dissemination plan: 5 points Final proposal: 15 points	45
Final “exam”: peer review/critique of research design	10
TOTAL:	102

To earn additional points, you can also:

	points
<i>Skip your freebies:</i> Attend all classes and mentor sessions and be on time: 2 points Do reading journal every week: 2.5 points	4.5 points available
<i>Do meaningful revision:</i> if you make significant improvements on your proposal, you will get bonus points on top of your grade	2 points available
<i>Extra credit:</i> Try out a wide variety of campus services (most offer remote appointments), participate in student activities, participate in community events related to the course content! Activities must be approved in advance, see spreadsheet on Google Drive.	maximum 5 points

Overview of assignments and activities—more details provided to be provided

Engagement with readings

Through weekly reading journals you will identify the main ideas in readings, reflect on how to apply them, and practice APA style reference list entries.

Responsible Conduct of Research training

This free online training takes about 2-5 hours and will introduce you to the legal requirements for doing research with human beings in the U.S. You can choose the “[CITI](#)” training that is managed by the National Science Foundation and you will end up with a credential that is accepted by any university or research organization. Alternatively, you can do the “[CIRTification](#)” training that is designed for community researchers; however, fewer institutions recognize this as a credential. If you previously completed this training for a job or another class, please let me know. You can either be excused from this assignment or complete a different relevant training.

Research design project

Over the course of the term, you build a plan for a participatory research project, working piece by piece. We will workshop these projects in class.

Final “exam”

Playing the role of a review panel for research funding, you will provide feedback on classmates' proposals.

Being late, missing class, getting sick, work and family pressures, misc. unanticipated events

Students are expected to attend all classes. However, it is understood that life sometimes intervenes. As soon as you know that you need to miss class for any reason, please fill out the Google Form (see link above). When you miss class, consult with another student about what was covered. You are responsible for knowing the material that was discussed and being up-to-date on changes to the syllabus. If you are confused about what happened when you were absent, make an office hours appointment.

Students have one “freebie” unexcused absence and two freebie late arrivals/early departures. If you are unwell or have been exposed to an infectious disease, please do not come to class. You will not be unduly penalized for health-related absences; there is no need to provide proof of illness unless requested. You can do extra credit activities to earn participation points to make up for classes that you miss due to illness, athletics, religious observance, professional opportunity etc.

If you miss class 6+ times or are late/leave early 10+ times you will fail the class unless we have had a chance to discuss the situation and make alternative arrangements.

If you have any feeling of difficulty keeping up, or there are things going on in your life that could affect your performance, contact the instructor by e-mail immediately. I will work with you to figure out ways to support your success. I try hard not to pass judgment on the barriers you face to success; instead, I want to work with you to mitigate them. If you are struggling with an assignment, get in touch BEFORE it is due.

Extensions-Grace periods

Deadlines are meant to keep you moving through the course material without getting bogged down. Instead of giving people extensions when they encounter difficulties, I include a grace period on most assignments. If you are having trouble completing something within the grace period, please e-mail me to let me know what is going on. I may propose an alternative assignment to help you stay on track. Do not try to “catch up” on your own without consulting me, this inevitably results in people getting further behind.

There is a grace period until Friday at 5pm for reading journals and most of your other assignments; after that point, Canvas and extensions are not possible. If you are getting behind on the research project, contact me immediately. The research project assignments are designed to build on each other, so an extension will not help matters—but we can talk about other things that will!

Incomplete grades due to personal emergencies

When students who were previously on track in the experience an event that prevents them from completing the course in a timely manner, the instructor has the discretion to issue an Incomplete (“I”) as the course grade. This extends the timeline the student has to complete the course, and has no impact on their GPA. Students do not have a right to receive or demand an Incomplete grade. The Office of the Registrar’s website has [the full Incomplete Grades policy](#).

Expectations for assignments

I subscribe to the Dr. Bates categorization of student work:

- A** assignments demonstrate original thought and synthesis of ideas; sophisticated, cogent analysis; and are clearly written or presented. Outstanding work.

- B** assignments present above average analysis with appropriate evidence to support the ideas and are clearly written or presented. Good work.
- C** assignments show a basic level of understanding, with analysis limited to the most obvious arguments. Writing is competent. Adequate work.
- D** assignments misunderstand or misrepresent the material, or are so poorly written or presented as to obscure the analysis. Inadequate work.

Universal accommodations

Following the principles of Universal Design, my courses incorporate a variety of accommodations that are necessary for people with certain needs (disability, religious observance, personal situation), but may be helpful to others as well. These include the attendance and grace period policies as well as the use of untimed and open-book assignments. Each week, I provide a PDF of slides that I anticipate using in the course Google Drive folder so that students may follow along.

SUSTAINING A LEARNING COMMUNITY

We all play a part in creating and maintaining a positive shared learning environment. Below are some of the major expectations for this course.

Learning in unprecedented times

Every term, this section of the syllabus needs updating due to the latest crisis. Epidemics, political divisiveness, wars, strains on the higher education system . . . we are all going through a lot! I aim to create space for inquiry and excellence, but also to acknowledge the intense logistical challenges and cognitive load we are experiencing. If you are struggling, let me know so that we can discuss accommodations.

Our shared challenge is building a space where all students in this class feel psychologically safe to learn—which is hard, because sometimes one person’s needs come into conflict with another’s. Peace and justice begin with how we treat each other in this space. I hope that we can begin from a place of mutual respect and being gentle with each.

Meaningful conversations†

In this class we will deal with perspectives that are controversial, thought-provoking and which may challenge your worldview. In order to address these issues in a scholarly manner, we will operate with a foundation of respect for all persons, acknowledging that there are a variety of viewpoints to be considered. While you are free to express your opinions, you must be ready to consider those opinions using a social science lens. You also have an obligation to consider how the way that you express your opinion will affect others in the class. You are always free to disagree with the conclusions of your instructors, your peers, or the authors you read. Disagreeing with the material does not excuse you from engaging with it, however.

Participation and professionalism

Professionalism takes many forms. Being a good academic citizen requires that you:

- Prepare fully for class (review readings, write down questions you’d like to discuss)
- Foster a supportive learning environment by engaging in respectful dialog—this includes active listening and awareness of classroom power dynamics!
- Connect your comments to classroom materials; when bringing in life experience or other courses, make the links explicit

† adapted from independent scholar Beth Duckles

- Recognize and anticipate a wide range of perspectives, backgrounds, experiences, identities, and ways of being in the world.
- Use technology responsibly

Communication

Time-sensitive communication from the instructor will occur via Canvas announcements or e-mail.

PSU e-mail should be checked at least daily and messages answered within one business day whenever possible.

Students should be proactive about communicating with each other both inside and outside the class. If you have a simple logistical question (What are we supposed to read this week? When is the assignment due?), you should ask a colleague—after checking the syllabus. Google Chat is a great tool for instant communication for PSU peers – without giving out your personal cell phone number! Our class has a shared Google Chat space if you would like to use it. By all means, if students are confused after consulting each other, let the instructor know! If the issue cannot wait until the next class meeting, please post to the Canvas Q &A forum.

Questions about assignments should be asked in class, well before the due date. E-mails with questions whose answers can easily be found in the syllabus, Canvas shell, or assignment instructions will go unanswered.

Speaking of Canvas . . .

To keep track of important information, make sure that your Canvas notification settings are appropriate to your needs. For example, you probably want to get notifications of announcements from the instructor and maybe of posts to the Q & A forum.

If you get a notification that a grade changed or disappeared, wait a while and check back before following up. Sometimes the instructor is fiddling with the gradebook and Canvas sends you a notification that she doesn't know about; usually the weird item will clear up after the fiddling is complete.

My face-to-face courses use Canvas lightly. If you have set up the notifications described above, you will only need to log into the course shell when you have assignments due.

UNIVERSITY POLICIES AND RESOURCES FOR STUDENT SUCCESS (SAME FOR ALL COURSES)

Academic integrity

The PSU Student Code of Conduct and Responsibility can be found at: <https://www.pdx.edu/dos/psu-student-code-conduct>. We are all responsible for upholding it!

It states, in part:

“Academic Misconduct includes, but is not limited to: (a) cheating, (b) fraud, (c) plagiarism, such as word for word copying, using borrowed words or phrases from original text into new patterns without attribution, or paraphrasing another writer’s ideas; (d) the buying or selling of all or any portion of course assignments and research papers; (e) performing academic assignments (including tests and examinations) in another person’s stead; (f) unauthorized disclosure or receipt of academic information; (g) falsification of research data (h) unauthorized collaboration; (i) using the same paper or data for several assignments or courses without proper documentation; (j) unauthorized alteration of student records; and (k) academic sabotage, including destroying or obstructing another student’s work.”

Dr. McGrath's take

Please be mindful of academic standards, particularly when it comes to writing. Do not try to pass off other people's work (including uncited photos from the internet!) as your own. Not only is it unethical, it could result in failing an assignment or course, or getting suspended or expelled from the university. The Writing Center is available to support you as you learn appropriate practices of scholarship and attribution. You can also post to Canvas or come to office hours for help. Instead of being freaked out that you are going to plagiarize by accident, ask for help! **I reserve the right to give a failing grade for the course to any student with multiple academic integrity issues in the class.**

Turnitin

Students agree that by taking this course all required papers may be subject to submission review for textual similarity for the purpose of detecting unoriginal writing, including plagiarism. All submitted papers will be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database solely for the purpose of detecting unoriginal writing, including plagiarism of such papers. Use of the Turnitin.com service is subject to the Turnitin Acceptable Use posted on the Turnitin.com website.

Sharing course materials

It is unacceptable to copy or share course materials, text, or images from/of your classmates or the instructor in any space outside of this course. This includes social media and commercial websites such as Course Hero or Chegg. Recording and photography are not permitted in the classroom without prior consent of the instructor and/or documentation by the DRC.

Artificial intelligence tools[‡]

Using computers to check your spelling or grammar, draft a citation or reference list, or read an essay aloud is an amazing feature of modern life that can help you clarify your skills or understanding. It is acceptable to use these tools to verify or deepen your understanding, but never forget to proofread and review the work that the software has done.

Using generative AI tools to write essays or e-mails, summarize readings, etc. is not permitted in this course—because doing so will slow your learning at the synthesis and analysis skills that you are honing.

If we do end up using any AI-based assistance should be treated the same way as collaboration with other people: you are welcome to talk about your ideas and work with other people, both inside and outside the class, as well as with AI-based assistants. However, all work you submit must be your own. You should never include in your assignment anything that was not written directly by you without proper citation (in-text citation, reference list at the end of the document, and quotation marks for any verbatim). Tips for avoiding trouble:

- Never hit “Copy” within your conversation with an AI assistant. You can copy your own work into your conversation, but do not copy anything from the conversation back into your assignment. Instead, use your interaction with the AI assistant as a learning experience, then let your assignment reflect your improved understanding.
- Do not have your assignment and the AI agent itself open on your device at the same time. Similar to above, use your conversation with the AI as a learning experience, then close the interaction down, open your assignment, and let your assignment reflect your revised knowledge.

Access and inclusion for students with disabilities

My goal is to create a learning environment that is accessible, equitable, inclusive, and welcoming. I am committed to fostering mutual respect and full participation for all students. If any aspects of instruction

[‡] adapted from David Joyner at Georgia Institute of Technology

or course design result in barriers to your inclusion or learning, please notify me. If you have, or think you may have, a disability that may affect your work in this class and feel you need accommodations, contact the [Disability Resource Center](#) to schedule an appointment and initiate a conversation about reasonable accommodations. The DRC works with students who have physical, learning, cognitive, mental health, sensory, chronic illness, and other disabilities. If you already have certified accommodations, please contact me to make sure that I have received your DRC Faculty Notification Email so we can discuss your accommodations.

Sexual misconduct

Title IX[§] and PSU policies prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex/gender, including sexual harassment, domestic and dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking. For more information about PSU's expectations of our campus community standards and resources for sex/gender discrimination and sexual violence, please complete the required student module Understanding Sexual Misconduct and Resources at <https://www.pdx.edu/diversity/understanding-sexual-misconduct-and-resources-student-module>.

Please be aware that PSU's policies require instructors to report any instance of sexual harassment, sexual and relationship violence and/or other forms of prohibited discrimination to university officials, who will keep the information private. You may also contact other confidential employees found on the sexual misconduct resource webpage at <https://www.pdx.edu/sexual-assault/get-help>.

Cultural Resource Centers

Find social, professional, and academic opportunities at the Multicultural Student Center, La Casa Latina Student Center; Pan African Commons; Pacific Islander, Asian, Asian American Student Center; Middle Eastern, along with North African, South Asian Student Center Initiative; and Native American Student & Community Center.

Other resources

PSU has a Women's Resource Center, Queer Resource Center, Veterans Resource Center, and a Resource Center for Students with Children.

The Dean of Students office has information about assistance with food, housing, legal issues, finances, and more.

Problems, concerns, complaints

If something is not going well with a classmate, instructor, staff member, your first step is to approach that person for a constructive dialogue. If that does not resolve the matter or seems impossible due to power dynamics or the level of harm you have experienced, there are many avenues for getting support. A helpful rundown of options from the School of Urban Studies and Planning [here](#).

[§] of the federal Education Amendments of 1972

TENTATIVE COURSE CALENDAR

<i>week of/topic</i>	MONDAY	WED. LAB ACTIVITY	OTHER
1 – Mar. 30th Intro		<i>Read:</i> Stoecker Ch. 1	Think about what communities/issues you'd be interested in researching
2 – Apr. 6th Power & research ethics	<p><i>Read:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stoecker Ch. 2 • Milner, H. R. (2007). Race, culture, and researcher positionality: Working through dangers seen, unseen, and unforeseen. <i>Educational Researcher</i>, 36(7), 388-400. <p><i>Read but don't need to summarize:</i> Community Toolbox Ch. 3, sections 1, 5, 8, 8, 14</p> <p>DUE at 9am: reading journal</p>	Start responsible conduct of research (RCR) training in class	
3 – Apr. 13th Positionality and reflexivity	<p><i>Read:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thomas, L. (2024). The researcher's gaze: Positionality and reflexivity. In J. Cyr & S. W. Goodman (Eds.), <i>Doing good qualitative research</i> (pp. 23-36). Oxford University Press. • Thambinathan, V., & Kinsella, E. A. (2021). Decolonizing methodologies in qualitative research: Creating spaces for transformative praxis. <i>International Journal of Qualitative Methods</i>, 20, 1-9. <p>DUE at 9am: reading journal</p>		DUE Friday 9am: Context brief
4 – Apr. 20th Best practices	<p><i>Read:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stoecker Ch. 5 • Bardach, E. (2012). <i>A practical guide for policy analysis: The eightfold path to more effective problem solving</i> (4th ed.). Sage. <u>Part III only.</u> [PDF on Google Drive] <p>DUE at 9am: reading journal</p>		DUE Friday 9am: Engagement plan

<p>5 – Apr. 27th Field notes and observation</p>	<p><i>Read:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cahill, C., Rios-Moore, I., & Threatts, T. (2008). Different eyes/open eyes: Community-based participatory action research. In J. Cammarota & M. Fine (Eds.), <i>Revolutionizing education: Youth participatory action research in motion</i> (pp. 89-124). Taylor & Francis Group. Silverman, R. M., & Patterson, K. L. (2022). Ch. 4: “Field notes and observations.” In <i>Qualitative research methods for community development</i> (2nd ed.). Routledge. Roberts, A. L. (2015). Critical sankofa planning: Mobilizing Texas freedom colony memories. <i>Not this but that</i>. https://www.nathanieldonnett.com/critical/sankofa/planning <p>DUE at 9am: reading journal</p>		<p>DUE Friday 9am: Best practices brief</p>
<p>6 – May 4th Research methods</p>	<p><i>Choose two of the following readings that seem most relevant to the research methods you’re interested in:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> From: Silverman, R. M., & Patterson, K. L. (2022). <i>Qualitative research methods for community development</i> (2nd ed.). Routledge. Ch. 5 Interviewing, Ch. 6 Focus Groups, or Ch. 8 Content Analysis Gordon, E., Elwood, S., & Mitchell, K. (2016). Critical spatial learning: participatory mapping, spatial histories, and youth civic engagement. <i>Children's Geographies</i>, 14(5), 558-572. <p>DUE at 9am Monday: reading journal</p>		<p>DUE Friday 9am: data collection plan, last chance to submit RCR certification</p>
<p>7 – May 11th Data sovereignty</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read briefs on Indigenous data sovereignty (PDF on Google Drive), just summarize them all as one work Review website (don’t need to summarize) Te Mana Raraunga: https://www.temanararaunga.maori.nz/ <p>DUE at 9am: reading journal</p>		<p>DUE Friday 9am: data analysis plan</p>
<p>8 – May 18th Dissemination</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coon, J. T., Orr, N., Shaw, L., Hunt, H., Garside, R., Nunns, M., Gröppel-Wegener, A., & Whear, B. (2022). Bursting out of our bubble: Using creative techniques to communicate within the systematic review process and beyond. <i>Systematic Reviews</i>, 11(1). Fenge, L.-A., Hodges, C., & Cutts, W. (2016). Performance poetry as a method to understand disability. <i>Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research</i>, 17(2). <p>DUE at 9am: reading journal</p>		<p>DUE Friday 9am: dissemination plan</p>

<p>9 – May 25th Acting on your research</p>	<p>No classroom session on Monday! (University closed Monday for Memorial Day)</p>	<p><i>Read:</i> • Stoecker Ch. 6-7 DUE at 9am: reading journal</p>	<p>DUE at 9am: project proposal</p>
<p>10 – Jun. 1st Movement research</p>	<p><i>Readings (just read them on the “plain old” internet - can summarize the 2 together):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seidman, D. (2017, May 12). The hidden history of the SNCC Research Department. <i>Little Sis</i>. https://littlesis.org/news/the-hidden-history-of-the-sncc-research-department Seidman, D. (2017, October 24). Researchers against the war machine: The story of NARMIC. <i>Little Sis</i>. https://littlesis.org/news/researchers-against-the-war-machine-the-story-of-narmic <p>DUE at 9am: reading journal</p>		<p>Friday 5pm is last chance for extra credit</p>
<p>EXAM WEEK</p>	<p>Final exam due Monday, June 8th @ 3.20pm – no extensions!</p>	<p>DUE Wed., June 10th at 9am: revised proposal</p>	