EAS 559 (3 credits) Methods and tools for studying people and the environment

Winter 2018 Syllabus

Time and Location: Fridays 9AM to 12PM, Dana 3556

Instructor: Dr. Paige Fischer, Assistant Professor, SNRE, apfisch@umich.edu, 734-763-3830

Office hours: TBD

Course overview: Understanding how and why people think and behave in the ways that they do is critical for designing policies and plans that harness their capacities to contribute to environmental sustainability. This course trains students in key methods for applied research on human behavior. Through lectures, role play activities, studio critiques, and field projects, students will learn techniques and tools for gathering and making sense of social data. The course will focus on three primary methods: individual and focus group interviews and questionnaires/surveys. A fourth method will be taught on a rotating basis, for example, social network mapping, cognitive mapping, Q-method, or scenario planning. Students will also learn how to conduct basic data analysis through software-aided coding, analytical memos, and matrix and network displays. Statistical analysis will not be a part of this course.

Expectations: This is a graduate level course geared toward master’s project and thesis students who are interested in research and practice in the fields of sustainability management and environmental conservation. The course will entail reading, writing, and hands-on work collecting and analyzing social data gathered from individuals. Students will develop and field test their own data collection instruments for use in their master’s project or thesis research. Class meetings will involve lectures by the instructor, in-class interviewing activities, and studio-style group feedback. Each student is expected to complete weekly reading and writing assignments, and conduct a term project involving the collection, analysis and interpretation of social data.

Learning outcomes: Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Explain the utility of key methods and tools for collecting and analyzing social data
2. Decide which methods and tools are beneficial for answering different types of questions
3. Identify key techniques and tools for eliciting data from people
4. Develop and administer high quality data collection instruments
5. Analyze interview data using software-aided and other techniques
6. Interpret the results of qualitative analysis to answer a project question

Assessment: Progress toward learning outcomes will be assessed through evaluation of weekly assignments. Each week students will submit an assignment in a progressive applied social research project. These assignments are due 24 hours before the class period to allow time for other students to review them in preparation for in-class studios. One point will be deducted for every day late. See templates for suggested formatting.

Week 1. Project proposal with research questions and rationale for methodological approach
Week 2. Draft individual interview guide
Week 3. Revised individual interview guide
Week 4. Draft focus group interview guide
Week 5. Revised focus group interview guide
Week 6. Individual or focus group interview transcript
Week 7. Coded interview transcript
Week 8. Analytic memo with figure and table
Week 9. Draft questionnaire/survey
Week 10. Revised questionnaire/survey
Week 11. Frequency tables, measures of central tendency and narrative interpretation
Week 12. Draft of method 4
Week 13. Revised draft of method 4
Week 14. Interpretation of results from method 4

Class participation: Students are expected to participate actively in class discussions and to attend every class unless arranged ahead of time.

Grading scheme: Minimum for A+=97, A=93, A-=90, B+=87, B=80, B-=80, C+=77, C=73, C-=70, D+=67, D=63, D-=60, F=40

Accommodations for students with disabilities: Accommodations are collaborative efforts between students, faculty and Disability Access Services (DAS). Students with accommodations approved through DAS are responsible for contacting the faculty member in charge of the course prior to or during the first week of the term to discuss accommodations. Students who believe they are eligible for accommodations but who have not yet obtained approval through DAS should contact DAS immediately.

Academic Honesty: Students are expected to be honest and ethical in their academic work. For more information about academic integrity and the University’s policies and procedures in this area please refer to the Student Conduct web site.

Readings: Under revision

Schedule: Under revision