

## **Course Brief URP800\_QUALITATIVE METHODS\_F20\_Murray**

The purpose of this course is to critically explore ways of conducting theoretically-informed and empirically grounded social research through an examination of different approaches to knowledge production. In specific, the course is designed to develop skills in research design for social inquiry with a particular emphasis on policy analysis and urban planning. The course focuses on some basic features of qualitative methods (case studies and comparison, ethnography, field research, interview strategies and techniques, surveys) in conjunction with a series of practical exercises aimed at "giving substance to theory." The goal is acquire a solid understanding of various approaches to establishing a sound methodology as a logical tool to reach valid conclusions when we investigate the social world. These basic elements of research design include (1) selecting a compelling topic (the subject-matter of research), (2) posing meaningful questions (identifying the objects of research), and (3) defining a problem (developing a grounded research design project to address what it is we want to know). Research design involves establishing ways of gathering appropriate evidence and synthesizing and adjudicating between compelling arguments. It also includes setting the scope conditions (i.e., the spatial spread and the temporal frame of the object of research, that is, how far can we generalize?), elaborating the qualitative and quantitative dimensions, and locating sources of evidence.

The course is more or less divided into four parts:

1. How to bring "theory" (ideas) and evidence together.
2. Case Studies: what are "cases" good for?
3. The value of comparative analysis -- when "two or three (or even four) are better than one" in terms of making claims that can be generalized
4. Data and Evidence:  
Transforming information (data) into evidence