**\_\_\_\_\_ Research INquiry Group (RING) Project**

NCLC 203, Spring 2011

One of the primary assignments for this course is a research project you will conduct as a class. This is not a hypothetical project, but a real project that will provide needed information to the community organization working with you. That organization has identified a research question it would like you to investigate. As a class, you will inform yourselves about the organization and the community context it works in (a *needs/assets assessment*), find existing research that addresses that question (a *literature review*), and divide into sub-teams to conduct various studies to address the research question (your options will include *interviews, surveys, observations, content analysis*, and others).

Finally you will disseminate your findings through a group presentation to the class and your community organization and through a wiki site. You will receive information via email about signing up with an account in PBWorks, the wiki site provider.

The assignment divides the steps of a research project into sub-assignments, due throughout the semester. A separate assignment sheet will be distributed to clarify the expectations of each sub-assignment. Assignments will be created collaboratively on the on-line wiki. You will have some in-class time dedicated to working on this project, including some days allocated to field research. However, you should expect to find some out-of-class time to work in your teams. Keep in mind that an additional 50 points of your overall participation grade will be based on your participation in the RING project.

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| **Assignments** | **Guidelines and Expectations** | **Points** | **Due Date** |
| Communication Plan | A description of how you will manage communications in a collaborative assignment involving everyone in the class and a community partner. | 25 | 2/20, 11pm |
| Needs/Assets Assessment | An analysis of the community organization you will work with and the community context they operate in. | 25 | 2/27, 11pm |
| Literature Review | A thematized synthesis of the existing research on your research topic. Note: this assignment integrates with the *Praxis Assignment* – you will likely use the same articles for both. | 50 | 3/27, 11pm |
| Research Plan | A description of the research project each sub-team intends to conduct, including your sampling plan, final versions of the instruments you will use, researcher protocols, etc. | 100 | 4/3, 11pm |
| Data Analysis | A description of the findings from each research team. | 50 | 4/24, 11pm |
| Presentation | A formal presentation describing your study, including your findings and recommendations for action. | 50 | 5/3, in class |
| Dissemination of Results | A well-organized description of your study via an on-line wiki, including an executive summary, all of the above assignments, a final report of your findings and recommendations, and a reflection on what you learned from working the project. | 50 | 5/13, 11pm |
| TOTAL POINTS |  | 350 |  |

**RING Communication Plan**

A semester-long collaboration among more than twenty individual scholars requires careful planning to guarantee exceptional attentiveness to each other’s ideas and exemplary and equitable communication.  The crafting of a communication plan allows you, as a group, to establish the best procedures possible to facilitate your interactions as researchers throughout the semester.

Your plan should consider the following three critical elements of your collaboration.

* guidelines for interaction
* individual or small-group roles within the overarching research project
* procedures for fluid communication and the resolution of any conflicts that might arise.

**The Plan**
Develop a Wiki screen that addresses the following questions:

* How will the group promote dialogue and ensure civility?
* How, specifically, will the group go about making decisions?
* How will the group create space for considering minority/dissenting views?
* How will the group assign and document completion of tasks?
* What role will each individual play in their small group and larger group?
* How will work that isn’t completed by assigned individuals be completed?
* How will group members hold each other accountable for their assigned tasks and the ethics of the research?
* How will group members share information (i.e., blog, group, forum, wiki, email list, etc.)?
* How will group members communicate with faculty and community partners?

**Evaluation**
Faculty will evaluate the management plan and provide feedback using the following criteria:

* The clarity and practicality of the decision-making process outlined in the management plan
* The appropriateness of the group members’ allocated roles and responsibilities to the scope and nature of the assignment requirements
* The thoughtfulness and maturity with which the plan addresses key interaction issues such as accountability, tolerance of dissenting views, civility, acceptable research ethics, etc.
* The clarity and thoroughness of the procedures outlined to guarantee the completion of research tasks

**General Expectations**

To achieve the level of detail required to facilitate such complex research collaboration, your RING management plan will require at least 750 words.  In addition, you may integrate additional material which will clarify your plans, such as tables, relevant images, links, etc.

**Due: 2/20, 11pm. 25 points.**

**\_\_\_\_\_ RING Needs/Assets Assessment**

In order to fully understand a research project, it is important to understand the context. The nature of the organization you are working with, the community it operates within, and the issue it addresses are all factors that will inform the best approach to your inquiry project. As a group assignment, this will be a first test of your RING Communication Plan. The assessment should address each of these items:

1. **The Organization**

By reviewing its website, promotional literature, mission statements and other document, (as well as conducting interviews of any staff or volunteers if appropriate). Evaluate the extent of the organization’s ability to make change in terms of the issue being addressed for this project. In what ways have they already been successful? How can that be maximized? What resources/assets are available to the organization that can be used to make change?

1. **The Issue**

What is the issue being researched? What is the history and background of the issue? What are some of the root causes of the problem? Why is the problem important? What would be the consequences if the issue was never addressed? What needs or problems are created by this issue? Who does it most affect and why?

1. **The Community**

Describe the community the organization operates within. What is its relevant history, demographics, physical space and other characteristics that inform your project? What strengths does the community have that can be maximized to make change? In what way does the issue affect this particular community uniquely? What additional support might your community require to make change in this issue?

1. **The Stakeholders**

Who is most affected by the issue? Who has the power to influence change regarding the issue? Who stands to gain from amelioration of the issue? Link to at least two-three other community organizations that address this issue. How do they address the issue/community differently from your partner organization? What is the relevant information important to know about each of these stakeholders (characteristics, resources, strengths, needs, etc.).

**5. Executive Briefing**

Finally, create a “front page” for this set of wiki pages that synthesizes the findings from each team into an executive briefing that highlights the most relevant findings regarding the issue and the needs and assets in the community.

**General Expectations**

Each wiki page should be a minimum of 750 words. You should draw from sources (be sure to cite them), link to websites, articles and other sources of information that you gather. List the student authors at the top of each page.

**Due: 2/27, 11pm. 25 points.**

**\_\_\_\_\_ RING Literature Review**

The first step in any research project, is to review the existing literature in order to be informed of what knowledge already exists on the subject. Using the ICT skills you have learned (conducting searches for research articles, using social bookmarking, converting an online article to PDF, etc.) work as a team to explore the existing research on the issue your project addresses. Use your Communication Plan to coordinate efforts in order to maximize the variety of research articles on your topic.

On March 3rd we will be facilitating a process that will help create the group literature review. You should bring your Praxis Phase II worksheets with you to class that day. Each student will have reviewed two research studies on the topic. The group literature review will weave together the findings of those studies.

**Literature Review**

A literature review surveys the research that has already been done on your topic in order to inform the research you will conduct. The final literature review will be a collaboration of many authors, but should read as a single document. You should determine as a team how tasks can be divided and how the work can be combined in the end to have a clearly organized writing structure and a single voice.

A good literature review is not simply a list of research articles in a list, but has grouped the research into themes in order to create a picture of what is known and where there are gaps that have not been investigated. It also addresses what is known to be true in one context, with a certain set of people, or under certain conditions and what may or may not be true other conditions.

**General Guidelines**

Each wiki screen should be at least three pages long. You should draw from many sources (be sure to cite them). Since you are writing for a wiki, whenever possible you should link to a PDF of the article being cited. List the student authors at the top of each page.

**Literature Review due: 3/27, 11pm. 50 points.**

**\_\_\_\_\_ RING Research Plan**

In class you have developed expertise in methods particularly appropriate to action research, including: interviewing; rhetorical and descriptive analysis; observations and focus groups; and survey research and questionnaires. Each RING group will integrate at least three of these methodologies into its investigations and analyses. Your RING Research Plan should include a description of the research project each sub-team intends to conduct, including your sampling plan, final versions of the instruments you will use, and researcher protocols.

In your RING Wiki, develop a separate page for EACH of the sub-studies your RING group plans to conduct (so **a minimum of THREE new screens on your Wiki**). Each page (or sub-study) should describe the following:

* **Research question and any associated hypotheses** – What do you want to know and what difference will it make to know it?
* **Brief (two paragraphs) summary of any literature from your literature review** that directly or indirectly informs your research question (could have similar populations, variables, or methods).
* **Subjects and sampling plan** – Who or what do you plan to investigate? How will you gain access to this population? Do you need a consent form? Why or why not?
* **Instrumentation and any associated protocols** – Briefly describe the process used in creating or selecting your survey, interview, or observation questions. Attach complete versions of your instrument or questions, as well as any consent forms or observation sheets. Instructors will need to sign off on any instruments and forms before any research is conducted.
* **Timeline** – Provide details about when, where, and who will be conducting your research.
* **Initial plans for data analysis** – what will you do once you have completed your interviews, surveys, or observations? How will you go about making meaning of the data you have collected?
* **Ideas for connecting to other sub-studies** – How will the findings of your project inform the other research projects conducted by your group? What ideas do you have for synthesizing results?

**Due 4/3 at 11pm. 100 points.**

***IMPORTANT NOTE:*** *You must get the approval of your Research Plan from both your seminar instructor and the instructor who taught the method being used in each plan before you go into the field to collect data.*

**\_\_\_\_\_ RING Data Analysis**

In this section, you report the findings of each study identified in your RING Research Plan. The way to analyze your data will be covered in class, so do not be alarmed if some of the following terms are unfamiliar to you at first.

For a quantitative study, this will most likely involve a report of the frequencies and measures of central tendency. You are encouraged to use tables and graphs to help make your findings as clear as possible.

For a qualitative study, you will describe the categories and coding you did. You should be sure to include examples that illustrate these (quotations, pictures, etc.).

For each analysis you should report the limitations or any reasons that the data you found should be viewed with hesitancy. For example, if your sample of subjects is not as representative as it would ideally be, it is important to report that.

Like the RING Research Plan, the RING Data Analysis should be reported on the wiki, with a separate screen for each of the sub-studies (so a minimum of three new screens on your wiki).

Note that it is not necessary for this assignment for you to draw conclusions from the data that would recommend actions your organization should take. The Data Analysis is only a report that describes what your study found. It should be free of evaluation or implications (these will come later in your presentation and final Dissemination of Results.

**Due 4/24 at 11pm. 50 points.**

**\_\_\_\_\_ RING Final Presentation**

Your research doesn’t help inform change if no one knows about it. It is important to be able to describe the study you conducted and how you interpret the findings in a clear and organized way. As a team, you will present your research to the other NCLC 203 students and to your community partner, who will share feedback on your presentation to you and your instructor.

The parts of the presentation should include:

**Introduction:** Describe the issue your project addressed in a way that captures the attention of the audience. Provide an overview of what is to come in the presentation.

**Describe the issue:** Using your needs/assets assessment and what you have learned from your community partner, help the audience understand the issue and the context of your project.

**An Interactive Activity**: At some point during the presentation, you should conduct some activity that will engage the audience in an activity that will help them to either understand the issue you studied OR understand the implications of your research findings.

**Literature Review:** Briefly describe the themes of your literature review and what was generally known about your topic in the research literature.

**Describe each sub-study:** Include method, subjects, and findings.

**Interpretation of findings and recommendations:** Integrate the findings of the sub-studies into results and recommendations for action.

**Conclusion:** Review what was presented and what next steps for future research in this area might be.

**General Expectations:**

A professional and creative presentation is expected. The presentation should demonstrate a unified effort. Visual aids and audience interaction should be used to provide clarity to your points, make the issue compelling, and your presentation interesting.

All of your presentation materials should be posted to a screen on your wiki.

**Due: 5/3 during class time. 50 points.**

**RING Dissemination of Results**

**Introduction**
Each individual, or collaborative, project forms only a single part of progressive change.  As committed researchers, we need to leave behind a permanent record of our work as a marker for those who follow us.  They can thus refer to it and, more importantly, build creatively upon it.  A comprehensive wiki, process reflection, and executive summary offers multiple researchers and whole communities easy access to your research and recommendations, while scrutiny of your working papers and reflections helps others to avoid your mistakes or dead ends, and build more robustly on your successes. Your final wiki should integrate as rich a mix of media as you need to convey the full scope of your research.

**Final RING Products**

There are three components that will be evaluated as part of your RING Dissemination of Results final assignment. These include:

1. **Final Version of RING Wiki**
The most valuable workspaces are those that begin as a research project commences.  Your group should try to keep electronic copies of all your brainstorming, all your library searches (including the search terms you use), and all your composing, at every stage of your project. Each whole-group and sub-group meeting should work out, too, how to keep a permanent record of its meetings.  You might appoint a minute-taker, or you might decide to record in audio or via video, your whole-group and sub-group meetings.

Your final Wiki should include evidence of your RING’s process and project throughout the semester. Material should be labeled and easy to navigate for outsiders unfamiliar with the project. Each previous sub-element of the RING assignment should be included (Communication Plan; Needs Assessment; Literature Review; Research Plan; Data Analysis; and Final Presentation material) and updated to reflect your group’s actual process. In addition, the final version of your Wiki should include the following:

* a screen that weaves together the findings of all the studies in the project and offers recommendations to your community partner based on the data.
* copies of all research instruments you created (such as surveys, sets of interview questions, etc.) with a short reflection on the success of each
* a representative selection of your most important research resources (copies of/links to articles, book chapters, etc.)
* a new Wiki page called “Course Connections” that highlights how your RING has applied the ideas, themes, and texts covered in 203 that influenced your thinking on this project.
* a copy of any powerpoint slides, scripts, or exercises used in your final presentation.
* a complete bibliography in APA format (in which **all** URLs function).
1. **RING Process Reflection**

In addition to the above, you should create a new Wiki page that includes a 750-1000 word reflection on how your group functioned throughout the RING experience. This includes any insights from how you implemented your Communication Plan, as well as:

* a postscript, in which you recommend how future students might continue the action research cycles you have begun
* an identification of the most productive strategies a successor group might wish to follow, based on your experience, and the pitfalls you would advise that successor group to try to avoid
* a final reflection on your relationships, as a group, and as individuals, to the community(ies) within which you worked this semester, and on how those experiences might influence your community involvement in the future
1. **An Orientating Front Page Screen**

Finally, you should create a new wiki screen that offersan Executive Summary (750 – 1000 words) of your research as a whole, including your recommendations to your community partner. This should be a succinct summary of the highlights of your research process, findings, and recommendations for future research and applications that will be shared with community partners. It should also provide the links to the subsequent screens to help the user easily navigate the information you have provided in the wiki.

**Due: 5/13, 11pm. 50 points.**

Please electronically notify your instructor when the final wiki is ready for viewing.