

Vanguard University  
School for Professional Studies  
Degree Program

“RESEARCH METHODS FOR THE  
STUDY OF CHRISTIAN  
ORGANIZATIONS”  
MILD #369

Student Guide

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## CATALOG DESCRIPTION

An introduction to research methods used to study life and ministry of a local congregation, including research design, collection of data, data analysis, and interpretation of data.

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

An introduction to research methods used to study the life and ministry of a local congregation that includes: an epistemological understanding of human inquiry, conducting a literature search through library and internet resources, an overview of research design and selected methods, collection of data, data analysis and the interpretation of data.

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students will be able to demonstrate:

1. an epistemological understanding that attempts to integrate theology and other disciplines through a research framework;
2. how research can be used in the service of the church or religious organization;
3. an understanding of research vocabulary as it relates to the scientific method, research process, research proposal, design strategies and measurement.
4. an awareness of ethical issues and behavior in research;
5. necessary skills to conduct library and internet research used for exploring secondary data sources and the beginning development of a literature survey;
6. an elementary overview of the following research methods (modes of observation): participant observation, interviews, focus groups and survey design;
7. the beginning steps to analyze data obtained in the various methods of observation; and
8. examine how empirical research relates to spiritual discernment in the service of decision making in religious organizations.

## TEXTS AND MATERIALS

Nancy Jean Vyhmeister (2001). *Quality Research Papers For Students of Religion and Theology*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

*REML #369: Research Methods for the Study of Christian Organizations Packet.*  
Weekly handouts have been assembled into a packet to be picked up at Vanguard University's Bookstore (located near the Café and Cove).

## SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

Nancy T. Ammerman, Jackson W. Carroll, Carl S. Dudley, and William McKinney (1998). *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook*, Nashville: Abingdon Press.

Earl Babbie (2001). *The Practice of Social Research (9<sup>th</sup> Edition)*, Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company.

Edward S. Balian (1994). *The Graduate Research Guidebook: A Practical Approach to Doctoral/Masters Research*, Lanham: University Press of America.

\*\*George Barna (1992). *Church Marketing: Breaking Ground for the Harvest*, Ventura, CA: Regal Books.

Carol Taylor Fitz-Gibbon and Lynn Lyons Morris (1987). *How to Analyze Data*, Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Gerald Kranzler and Janet Moursund, (1995). *Statistics for the Terrified*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Louis M. Rea and Richard A. Parker (1992). *Designing and Conducting Survey Research*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

\*\*Mildred L. Patten (2005). *Proposing Empirical Research: A Guide to the Fundamentals*, Glendale, CA: Pyrczak Publishing.

\*\*Russell K. Schutt (1999). *Investigating the Social World (Second Edition)*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press.

**\*\*These items have been placed into a “Student Reading Supplement” to be purchased in the bookstore.**

## COURSE POLICIES

- **ATTENDANCE AND TARDY POLICY**

You must attend class on time and remain present until dismissed. Class attendance is necessary in order to complete the course. The School for Professional Studies relies on the dynamics of class interaction and group processing in order to integrate and apply the learning of academic content. This model also emphasizes the development and practice of interpersonal communication skills and teamwork (e.g., group problem solving and negotiation). The format therefore necessitates class attendance. In practical terms, one course session is equivalent to three weeks of traditional semester course work.

*Due to the concentrated scheduling and the emphasis upon participatory learning, students need to be in attendance every week. Students who miss more than one class meeting (or more than five class hours) in any given course will automatically receive a failing grade and need to retake the course to obtain a passing grade. If an instructor deems that a student's second absence was under extremely unavoidable and unusual circumstances (i.e., an auto accident), the professor may file an academic petition on behalf of the student to the Dean of SPS. If the academic petition is approved, the instructor may give the student a "W" (Withdrawal) grade in place of a failing grade. The student will still be required to retake the course.*

Students who arrive late disturb the class. At the professor's discretion, students who arrive late may not receive participation points for the unit covered. Students who are habitually late may be asked to drop the course.

- **CLASS PARTICIPATION**

You must be prepared and participate in all discussions. Criterion: Is the student engaged in classroom discussions? Does the student demonstrate an ability to handle assigned material with a degree of proficiency? (E.g., demonstrate the type of questions and issues consistent, and reflecting a familiarity with the assigned material). Participation evaluated according to quality, not quantity, of participation. Attendance will be scored, and no participation points will be awarded if the student is absent.

- **LATE PAPER POLICY**

You are responsible for submitting assignments on time (by 6:00 pm). Unless authorized by the Professor in advance, no credit will be given for assignments not turned in when due.

- **ACADEMIC DISHONESTY**

Work submitted for assessment purposes must be the independent work of the student concerned. Plagiarism, or copying and use of another's work without proper acknowledgment, is not permitted. Nor is it permissible for any former or present student to allow another student to refer to, use as a sample, or in any way copy or review their work. If a student needs guidance, he or she must seek the Professor's assistance.

- **DISABILITY SERVICES**

For students with documented medical or psychological disabilities, please contact the Coordinator of Disability Services to request reasonable accommodations. The Coordinator

of Disability Services is located in the Counseling Center on the second floor of the Scott Academic Center and can be reached at extension 4489 or by email at [disabilityservices@vanguard.edu](mailto:disabilityservices@vanguard.edu)

For students with a documented learning disability who would like to request appropriate accommodations, please contact the Director of Learning Skills, located upstairs in Scott Academic Center at extension 2540 or by email at [disabilityservices@vanguard.edu](mailto:disabilityservices@vanguard.edu)

## STUDENT EVALUATION

Students will receive a grade for the course based on the evaluation of their performance in the following areas:

1. *Class Attendance and Participation* (100 points). Attendance is expected. Since this is a highly participatory class, absences are strongly discouraged. In accordance with the Student Handbook, if you are absent from class more than one session, you will fail the class. You cannot get participation points for a class which you are not present. The professor will grade you on how actively you participate in small group activities and class discussions.
2. *Completion of Required Course Reading* (100 points). At the end of the module, you will be asked what portion of reading you completed. You will be given points based on the portion you finished.
3. *Weekly Written Assignments* (100 points). You will receive points for each assignment that is completed and turned in at the beginning of the class session. It is important to ensure the quality of each project. Each project will be graded on content as well as style. Make certain your projects have been typed and carefully edited.

**NOTE: Late papers will be reduced by 50%.**

Students will be evaluated by the Vanguard University's 4.0 grading system. The criteria for determining the final grade is as follows:

WEEK 1: Information Objectives Worksheet	20 points
WEEK 2: Literature Review	20 points
WEEK 3: Participant Observation	20 points
WEEK 4: Interviews or Focus Group	20 points
WEEK 5: Questionnaire and Analysis	20 points
Attendance/Participation	100 points
Reading	100 points
<b>TOTAL POINTS</b>	<b>300 POINTS</b>

**STUDENT EVALUATION**

<b>Percentages</b>	<b>Points</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Significance</b>	<b>GPA</b>
93-100%	279-300	A	Exceptional	4.00
90-92.9%	270-278	A-		3.67
87-89.9%	261-269	B+		3.33
83-86.9%	249-260	B	Above Average	3.00
80-82.9%	240-248	B-		2.67
77-79.9%	231-239	C+		2.33
73-76.9%	219-230	C	Average	2.00
70-72.9%	210-218	C-		1.67
67-69.9%	201-209	D+		1.33
63-66.9%	189-200	D	Below Average	1.00
60-62.9%	180-188	D-		0.67
00-59.9%	00-179	F	Failure	0.00

NOTE: There is no final examination for this course.

## OVERVIEW

We approach the complexity of research as seekers of truth and as a service to the church and her ministry. This has not always been the case. Since the Age of Enlightenment in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the church and science have not always been partners in the mutual pursuit of truth. There has been distrust on both sides, and for good reasons.

While methods of empirical research can be used in many different contexts, the problems formulated by students in this class will mostly be grounded in the life of the church or in a parachurch organization.

Our assumption in this class is simply stated, “God is on the side of all truth.” God communicates truth through the Scriptures (You learned how to interpret this truth of Scriptures in course three, the study of hermeneutics). As such, theology is a discipline in which there is yet so much to learn about God and God’s relationship to humanity and the world.

Approaching investigation another way is the pursuit of human truth, which is attained through rigorous inquiry and study of culture, society, organizations, relationships and experiences. It is important to note, however, that science by definition is self-correcting. That is, the conclusions reached through human inquiry are always held as the present state of what is known which later can be falsified, corrected or further explained.

With this in mind church leaders must be learners of God’s truth in Scriptures and learners of human truth from human experience in various types of environments. Repeated mistakes or downward spirals of self-defeating behaviors demonstrate that experience is not always the best teacher. Reflection upon experiences and a disciplined inquiry of truth in those experiences are necessary.

Research methods become tools for the church leader to do these things -- to learn from human experience.

Roger Heuser, Ph.D., Professor of Religion, Vanguard University of Southern California  
Craig Rusch, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Anthropology, Vanguard University of Southern California

## STUDENT ASSIGNMENTS

### WEEK ONE

#### Introduction to Research

1. Read Vyhmeister (Intro, Chapters 1-6); and Week One Study Notes in Syllabus.
2. Read Barna Handout, “A Sea of Facts: What you Need to Know,” in George Barna, Church Marketing, Ventura: Regal Books, 1992, pp. 33-44.

#### 3. WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

Choose one of the Case Studies provided at the end of the Barna article and complete the Information Objectives Worksheet.

### WEEK TWO

#### Research Design and Literature Review

1. Read Vyhmeister (Chapters 7-12); and Week Two Study Notes in Syllabus.
2. Read Patten Handout (given to student on week one of class). Mildred L. Patten, Proposing Empirical Research, Glendale: Pyrczak, 2005, pp. 19-21, 37-40, 93-94.

#### 3. WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

- a. Literature Review. The purpose of this assignment is for you to develop the tools to conduct a literature search, which helps you determine what others have done in their own studies about a particular research topic. The literature search places your study in context of other theories and studies. Here is your assignment:
  - ❑ Conduct a subject search on a subject of your choosing. If you can't decide, try “Leadership and Character” or “Appreciative Inquiry.” Browse through hard copies of academic journals or utilize on-line database programs available in the library. Also conduct an INTERNET search on a search engine (e.g., Yahoo, Google or AltaVista).
  - ❑ Submit a 1-2 page description of what you learned about conducting a literature search, and the questions you still have about a literature search.

### WEEK THREE

#### Qualitative Research: Participant Observation

1. Read Barna Handout (given to student in week two), “Qualitative Information: Tapping into People’s Passions,” in George Barna, Church Marketing, Ventura: Regal Books, 1992, pp. 57-76.
2. Read Week Three Study Notes in Syllabus.

2. **WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT: PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION.** The purpose of this exercise is for you to visit a new congregation (try a different denomination) or group within a congregation that you have never visited before (e.g., Sunday School class or youth meeting). Take field notes according to the following categories:

1). Describe the physical setting:

- ❑ Describe the exterior and interior of the building. How does the architecture compare to surrounding buildings? Are there clearly marked signs? What is the landscaping like? How does it compare with surroundings? Is the building “user-friendly” with greeters, ushers etc?
- ❑ How would you describe the “spirit” or “atmosphere” of the buildings and grounds? How do you respond to the lighting, décor, religious icons, baptistry, windows, color scheme and furnishings? What is the seating arrangement like?

2). Describe the people and demographics:

- ❑ What the social composition—age, sex, ethnicity, family composition and social class?
- ❑ How do congregates compare and relate to clergy? ...to the community?
- ❑ Are there well-defined groups, such as singles, single parents, high school age, children, ethnic groups, seniors, and so forth?
- ❑ What is the dress of the participants? How does the dress of congregates compare to clergy?

How would you describe the social class when looking at dress, vehicles in parking lot, ski or gun racks, bumper stickers, and so forth?

3). Describe the main event itself:

- ❑ What happened in the worship/class event itself: format, length of time, who participated, distinct segments (announcements, singing, prayer, sermon, and so forth), informality or ritualized behaviors?
- ❑ What are the roles of leaders and participants?
- ❑ Are there programs or worship guides for outsider (e.g., bulletin or prayer book), or is the event dependent upon “insider” knowledge?

What other events happen during the week? Who presides over these, and who participates?

4). Describe interactive patterns:

- ❑ Before the event, how and where do people congregate? Are some people left out? Are people hospitable, friendly and enjoying themselves, or are they reserved and rigid?
- ❑ What is the style, tone and language of the worship leaders, speakers, preacher/teacher? What is the content of hymns, comments and sermon?
- ❑ Are people focused and engaged in what is happening or do they seem distracted? Are they singing, praying, taking notes and so forth? Are some sleeping, whispering, being preoccupied with children, and so forth?
- ❑ How are visitors treated?

- After the event, can you overhear anyone as they are leaving the event, in the halls, and so forth? Are people hospitable, familiar with each other, taking their time with each other? Are people serious, more formal with each other, in a hurry or reserved? Are there events afterward to invite visitors?
  
- 5). Interpret the meaning:
  - How would you describe the health of the congregation or group? What criteria are you using?
  - What ethical codes, theology and spirituality are you picking up from this group?
  - What is overall message: judgment, encouragement, comfort, challenge and so forth?
  - From what you experienced and observed, how would you put into words the identity, mission and vision of this church?
  - Would you return to this church or event, or desire that your children would return? Explain.
  
- 6). On the same day, put your full notes on the computer (or at least type them), preparing them for next week's class.

## **WEEK FOUR**

### **Qualitative Research: Interviews, Focus Groups and Content Analysis**

1. Read Vyhmeister (Chapters 15-17)
2. Read Schutt Handout (given to student in week three), "Data Analysis," in Russell Schutt, *Investigating the Social World*, Thousand Oaks: Pine Forge Press, 2001, pp. 347-378.
3. INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS OR FOCUS GROUP ASSIGNMENT (2-3 pages). The purpose of this exercise is for you to conduct a minimum of three interviews or a focus group, write up your notes and bring them to class. The strength of an interview or focus group is the quality of questions you ask, how you facilitate quality interaction, and how accurately and clearly you write up the report. Review the Week Three Study Notes before you conduct an interview or focus group.

## **WEEK FIVE**

### **Analysis and Presentation of Data**

1. Read Vyhmeister (Chapters 18-21); and Week Five Study Notes in Syllabus.
2. DESIGN YOUR OWN QUESTIONNAIRE (2-3 pages). The purpose of this exercise is for you to design a questionnaire that addresses something you wish to find out in your work or ministry setting. It may be a follow up of what you discovered in your interview or focus group.

3. Based on a research question or statement of your own, construct a 15 item questionnaire.
  - ❖ Include two different types of scales
  - ❖ Include open and closed types of items
  - ❖ Include instructions for the respondent to follow
  - ❖ Note: Consider the order of questions and the layout of the questionnaire. A simple and attractive questionnaire is more likely to be completed by the respondent. Be sure and leave plenty of “white space” making the questionnaire less confusing and more appealing.

### LOGISTICS CHART

Hour	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5
1	<p>Overview of Course</p> <p>How research can serve the church and religious organizations</p> <p>Epistemology, integration of theology and human inquiry, and science</p>	<p>Literature review, including reports of assignments</p> <p>Library research and tutorial</p>	<p>Report assignments</p> <p>Qualitative research:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Personal interviews</li> </ul>	<p>Report assignments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Questionnaire continued</li> </ul>	<p>Report assignments</p> <p>Bivariate analysis:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Percentages and tables</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Constructing and reading tables</li> </ul>
2	<p>Foundations of social science:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Styles of Thinking</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Deduction/induction,</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Theory, concepts, constructs</li> </ul>	<p>Library research and tutorial continued</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Focus groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Questionnaire continued</li> </ul>	<p>Other statistics and ways to report them</p>
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Unit of analysis</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Qualitative and quantitative data</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Reliability/validity</li> </ul>	<p>Exploratory, descriptive, causal, experimental and quasi-experimental studies</p> <p>Nominal, ordinal, interval and ratio data</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Content analysis</li> </ul>	<p>Statistics introduction</p> <p>Univariate analysis:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Organizing data</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Distributions: shape and central tendency</li> </ul>	<p>The research report and style guide</p>
4	<p>Ethics in research</p> <p>Research proposal</p>	<p>Measurement scales</p> <p>Participant observation</p>	<p>Quantitative research:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Intro to design of questionnaire</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Variability</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Interpreting scores</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Histograms</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Frequency polygon</li> </ul>	<p>The research report and style guide continued</p> <p>Course evaluation</p>

## WEEK ONE: Study Notes

### Introductory Notes

In the previous course, Research Methods for the Study of Scripture, students were introduced to formal methods of exegeting the scriptures. This course is about “exegeting” congregations and religious organizations, and their environments as well. While research is no substitute for spiritual discernment in knowing God’s will for a congregation, neither are we to disregard our responsibility to learn how to be more effective in expanding the mission of the church. For example, Christian Schwarz, in his monumental study of over 1,000 churches from different denominations in 32 countries, has demonstrated the benefit of solid, empirical research on church health and effectiveness.<sup>1</sup>

For nearly two millennia the church has found ways to continue the ministry of Christ. In darker periods of church history, the founder’s influence is less than dim--in fact, one wonders if there is any connection at all. In brighter moments the church has made undeniable impact in the lives of individuals as well as society itself. It is easy hindsight to see how effective or ineffective the church has been in different times and places and with different generations of people.

There are some who believe the church is on the threshold of major change, if she is to survive and thrive in the future. While most of us would admit that there are some things only God can do to bring the renewal necessary for this change, we might also consider what we must learn to do in order to minister effectively in Christ’s name.

Those congregations and religious organizations who survive and thrive in the future will be those who learn what it takes to partner with Christ and minister effectively. The simple tools of service (towel and basin), combined with the more sophisticated tools used in research, can help Christian organizations be more reflective about their ministry and be more responsive in ministry.

### Integration of theology and human inquiry

- a. All truth is God’s truth, or God is on the side of all truth.
- b. God communicates God’s truth through special and natural revelation.
- c. The data for special revelation are 66 books and the data for natural revelation are the results of human inquiry (or science).
- d. If God is the source of all truth, then there is no contradiction among data; however there is normal conflict in the interpretation of data among theologians and scientists.
- e. Therefore, we need to have dialogue about common interests of theology and human inquiry, knowing that the scriptures are not meant to be science textbooks, etc.

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<sup>1</sup> Christian A. Schwarz, *Natural Church Development: A Guide to Eight Essential Qualities of Healthy Churches* (Carol Stream, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 1996).

2. Science is an exercise in the philosophical discipline known as epistemology (study of how we know what we know). How epistemologies are built:

- a. There are propositional statements about something that is knowable (by some source).
- b. Propositional statements are either true or false
- c. Propositions or assertions must meet at least 3 criteria to be considered valid:
  - It must be true
  - You must believe it to be true
  - It must be substantiated by evidence

\*Our question is what constitutes sufficient evidence: therefore, we need an epistemology to judge sufficiency of evidence of knowledge claims.

3. Epistemologies rest upon some source of authority:

- a. *Sense experience*: hearing, seeing, touching, tasting and/or smelling. Limited by perception and the limits of our conceptualization of said experience
- b. *Logic*: this is only concerned with validity of inference & tells whether a conclusion is justified by its premises. It is a set of rules for determining validity (More will be said later about validity).
- c. *Consensus*: knowledge based on agreement. This is unreliable for objective knowledge, but is satisfactory and measurable for social or cultural knowledge.
- d. *Intuition*: unanalyzed inference.
- e. *Revelation*: insight acquired by supernatural means. Testing truth claims in this domain is very difficult.
- f. *Faith*: rest upon some authority (person, book, deity) and strength of belief.
- g. *Tradition*: inherited culture made up, in part, of firmly accepted knowledge about workings of the world.
- h. *Authority*: judgment of a person who has training, expertise, and credentials on the matter, especially in face of contradictory positions on given question.

4. Errors in Personal Human Inquiry

- a. *Inaccurate observation*: must know what before why; observation is conscious activity.
- b. *Over-generalization*: assumes a few similar events are evidence of general pattern. Sample size and replication are safeguards in research.
- c. *Selective observation*: a danger of over-generalization includes the temptation to pay attention to future events that correspond with earlier patterns and ignore those that don't correspond.
- d. *Deduced information*: rationalizing, ignoring events that contradict your general conclusions.
- e. *Illogical reasoning*: handles contradictions of our conclusions.
- f. *Ego-involvement in understanding*: links our understanding of how things are to the self-image we present to others. Disproof may suppose we are stupid, gullible, etc.
- g. *Premature closure of inquiry*: over-generalization, selective observation, deduced information, and defensive uses of illogical reasoning all conspire to produce a premature closure of inquiry.

- h. *Mystification of residuals*: we will never understand so never mind working toward that end.

*Remember: To err is human!*

#### 5. Epistemological Responsibility:

The first principle of science roughly states that the real objective world actually exists, and that we will take as knowledge only those things that are empirically verifiable.

- a. By this principle, science is constructed as a foundation belief system that is in competition with all other explanatory (belief) systems. Since it is grounded in falsification as the basis for determination of the truth rather than positive proof, it only has to discover one counter example. This principle drives science; however, it is not the only principle from which one can establish a scientific epistemology. Science does not have to be an exclusionary belief system if the first principle is modified. It is possible to hold on to parts of other belief systems as long as epistemological responsibility exists, and one is willing to continually correct his or her system in light of new knowledge.
- b. Modified first principal: We affirm that a real objective world actually exists, and we will take as knowledge everything that is empirically verifiable. This statement acknowledges both general empirical concerns, and specifically scientific methodology, but it does not become an exclusionary statement, which says that empiricism is the only possible valid foundation for knowledge. All sources of knowledge, however; must be honest about their foundation and humble about how far their assumptions can legitimately push their implications.
- c. No source of knowledge is totally reliable all the time; not even science (In regard to scriptures, conservatives believe the original sources are inspired, not their theology about the original data).

#### 6. Why science is a good method for discovering human knowledge.

- a. It is rooted in skepticism of humans as “knowers.” It has external criteria.
- b. It is self-correcting because science is a social activity. Scientific knowledge is the current consensus codified in textbooks, journals, via scholarly activity and conferences.

#### 7. Philosophy of science suggests we can only falsify, not verify theories because we can never be sure that a given theory provides the best explanation for a set of observations.

## WEEK TWO: Study Notes

1. Participant observation involves establishing a rapport with a group of people, learning to act so that people go about “business as usual” while you observe the social setting, and learn about your research question.<sup>2</sup> There are several aspects unique to the participant/observation that make it a worthwhile research method.
  - 1). Participant/observers have a dual purpose.
    - a. The participant/observers first participate in the situation as normally as possibly.
    - b. The participant/observers observe the activities, relational interactions, physical aspects of the social environment.
  - 2). Participant/observers build explicit awareness.
    - a. Ordinary participants exclude a lot from conscious awareness.
    - b. Participant/observers overcome selective awareness by tuning in, seeing, and allowing themselves to hear what is going on in the social environment.
  - 3). Participant/observers develop meta-vision.
    - a. Participant/observers study the tacit rules for using and interacting with social stimuli (e.g., greeting & physical setting).
    - b. Participant/observers have a wide observational focus (e.g., observing situations across the room while remaining present in the context).
  - 4). Participant/observers experience as being both insider and outsider.
    - a. As an insider we experience the emotions and stimuli just as other participants do.
    - b. As an outsider we objectify the situation’s events and objects.
    - c. Doing participation/observation involves alternating between the inside/outside experience and having both experiences simultaneously.
  - 5). Participant/observers enter into regular and systematic periods of introspection
    - a. Participant/observers reflect on how they feel about salient experiences.
    - b. Participant/observers reflect on ordinary experiences as a matter of trained habit.
  - 6). Participant/observers keep a detailed record of objective observations and subjective experiences.

Beyond the activities of the participant/observer he or she also must decide what level of participation to take in a given situation. There are five levels of participation

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<sup>2</sup> Adapted from James P. Spradley *Participant/Observation* (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc. 1980), pp. 53-62. Also see H. Russell Bernard *Research methods in Cultural Anthropology*, (Sage Publications, Newbury Park, 1988).

- 1). Non-participation. This is making observations on a social situation without participating in the situation (e.g., making observations about a television program).
- 2). Passive participation. The observer in this case is present in the social situation, but does not interact with others. The role the observer takes is that of a loiterer, or a bystander.
- 3). Moderate participation. This is a research strategy in which the researcher works at maintaining a balance between 'insider' and 'outsider' (e.g., emic/etic).<sup>3</sup>
- 4). Active participation. In this case the researcher seeks to enter into the social situation by doing what others are doing not merely to gain acceptance, but to more fully learn the cultural rules that are being used to negotiate the social environment.
- 5). Complete participation. This is when the researcher uses participant/ observation skills to investigate a social situation of which the researcher is already an ordinary participant.

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<sup>3</sup> The emic perspective deals with knowledge and experience as understood by the indigenous population. It is in fact how they experience and see reality both tacitly and explicitly. The etic perspective involves our own interpretive framework or grid which we use to bring understanding to the domain in question. Therefore, by definition most academic work, as a reflection on a topic, is an etic exercise.

## WEEK THREE: Study Notes

### Interviews<sup>4</sup>

1. Scheduled-structured interviews are interviews in which the wording and sequence of questions are fixed and identical for every respondent. Accordingly, it is assumed that the variations among responses can be attributed to the respondents and not to variations of the interview. There are important assumptions regarding the scheduled-structured interview:

- a. Respondents have enough common understanding and vocabulary to have the same meaning for interpreting each question.
- b. It is possible to phrase all questions in a form that is equally meaningful to each respondent.
- c. If the meaning of each question is identical for each respondent, then the context of the questions must be identical, including the sequence of questions asked of the respondents.

2. Nonscheduled-structured interviews are those in which the researcher is able to obtain details of personal reactions, specific emotions, etc. (the meta-communication or body language) in addition to the content of the questions asked in the study. There is considerable liberty in the respondents' expressing their opinions and feelings to the researcher.

Nonscheduled-structured interviews have four characteristics:

- a. Respondents have been involved in a particular experience and, thus, are familiar with the experience and settings.
- b. Situations have been analyzed prior to the interview.
- c. The interviewer has a guide that specifies topics related to the research hypotheses.
- d. Focus includes the subjective experiences relating to the situations under study.

3. Nonscheduled/non-structured or nondirective interviews are those in which there are no pre-specified set of questions and no order for questions. With little or no direction from the interviewer, the respondents are encouraged to related their experiences, those significant to them, and their own definitions as they see fit. The interviewer may probe different areas and raise different issues, but what is important is what and how the respondent chooses to respond.

A foundation for all survey research, interviews and questionnaires, is asking the right questions. One of the best sources for asking questions is Stanley L. Payne, *The Art of Asking Questions* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1951).

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<sup>4</sup> See David Nachmias and Chava Nachimias, *Research Methods for the Social Sciences* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), pp. 236-240.

## Focus Groups

Focus groups require an open ended question discussion with individuals who do not know each other, and facilitated by a leader who has competency of small group process.

1. Focus group definition: A focus group is 7-10 (sometimes as few as 4 and as many as 12) persons, usually unfamiliar with each other, but have certain characteristics in common relation to the topic of the focus group. For example, if you wish to find out about the needs of singles in order to design some aspect of singles' ministry, an important characteristic common of all focus group members would be the single status of the focus group participants. Commonality is more important than diversity in selecting focus group participants (diversity in their perceptions, views, etc. is a different matter).

The facilitator of a focus group carefully plans a discussion designed to obtain perceptions of a specific area of interest in a nonthreatening environment.<sup>5</sup> An important reason for a focus group to be made up of members who do not know each other is to encourage members to share their views without political or social consequence.

The intent of a focus group is to encourage members to self-disclose their views, observations or even feelings about events, issues or problems. Therefore, the encouragement to be in a permissive environment that promotes different points of view and perceptions is crucial to a focus group. While members do influence one another as in any normal group, there is no consensus, vote or final plan from the discussion. With differing points of view among participants there are no right or wrong answers -- some remarks may be positive while others may seem negative. At times the negative remarks may even be most helpful feedback to an organization.

Focus groups may be a more structured interview format with carefully prepared questions or the discussion may be unstructured. Focus groups provide qualitative information into attitudes, views, perceptions, and opinions of the participants solicited largely through the open-ended questions by the facilitator, one who is skilled in moderating, listening, observing and analyzing. Avoid dichotomous questions and "why" questions; instead use "how" or "what" questions.

Careful content analysis of the discussion will help provide clues and insights as to how a ministry, service, or event is perceived. Focus groups have been used for recruitment, used to assess a new program or ministry, used to follow up a telephone survey, used to help develop a questionnaire, and used to understand an organization's image.

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<sup>5</sup>See Richard A. Krueger, *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, (1988).

Steps for a focus group include the following:

- a. Why this study? Review or develop a purpose for the study.
- b. What information is important?
- c. Who wants the information?
- d. Who will provide the information; who will we enlist to be part of the a focus group? e.g., organizational decision-makers; employees (e.g., pastors, staff--those who minister); and customers or clients (e.g., single moms whom we want to be part of a new ministry).

## Content Analysis

Content analysis is “any technique for making inferences by systematically and objectively identifying specified characteristics of messages.”<sup>6</sup> As such, content analysis is both a *method of observation* and a *method of data analysis* that can be either qualitative or quantitative (e.g., an exegete does qualitative content analysis on a passage). Data analysis may include archival records as well as the content of diaries, journals, letters, newspaper articles, books, paintings, periodicals, minutes of meetings, television programs -- all of these examples are sources for content analysis.

Content analysis involves the interaction of two processes: 1) the specific content characteristics to be measured (e.g., how women are viewed in church leadership positions); and 2) the application of the rules for identifying and recording the these characteristics (e.g., how many women are represented in what positions, or committees in local church, or in denominational structures).<sup>7</sup>

In addition to these two processes, the recording unit is the smallest body of content in which a reference (a single occurrence of the content element) is counted; the context unit is the largest body of content that may be examined as a recording unit. While a single term may be the recording unit, it is necessary to place it in the context in order to analyze and record its meaning.

## Questionnaire Design and Construction

The design of a questionnaire is not as simple as it seems at first glance. There are important guidelines and issues to consider:

1. The kinds of questions to avoid. The questions you ask determine what information you can get from respondents. They will determine the quality of “operationalizing” the variables in your study. In order to increase the reliability and viability of your answers, avoid the following:

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<sup>6</sup> Ole Holsti, *Content Analysis for the Social Sciences and Humanities* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1969), p. 601.

<sup>7</sup> See David Nachmias and Chava Nachimias, *Research Methods for the Social Sciences* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), p. 336.

- a. *Avoid questions that are vague, ambiguous, confusing to respondents.*<sup>8</sup> For example, the question, “What is your salary?” could mean different things such as weekly, monthly, annual, family, personal, including housing allowance, etc. Another source of ambiguity is using indefinite words. For example, “Do you pray regularly?” Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ “regularly” could be defined for some as weekly and for others as daily. Instead, ask specially if a person prays “about once a day” or “once a week” or “a few times a week.”
- b. *Avoid emotional language.* For example, “Do you think that heretics who don’t believe in a literal Adam and Eve should be allowed to have membership in our congregation?”
- c. *Avoid double-barreled questions.* For example, “Do your churches provide health insurance and retirement plans for clergy and staff?” Or, “Do young people rate youth pastors who tell many jokes in a sermon higher than those youth pastors who don’t?”
- d. *Avoid leading questions.* For example, “Shouldn’t the church spend even more money on youth ministry by hiring an additional youth staff -- a Jr. High pastor --when we don’t even have a staff member for children?”
- e. *Avoid asking questions that are beyond the capabilities of the respondent.* For example, “How much money did you give to missions in the last ten years?”
- f. *Avoid asking about future intentions.* Specific, concrete descriptions of behavior are more reliable than hypothetical abstractions. The best predictor of future behaviors is past behaviors.
- g. *Avoid double negatives.* For example, “Children should not be required to not wear shorts at camp.”
- h. *Avoid overlapping or unbalanced response categories* (e.g., 5-10, 10-20, 20-50 versus 5-9, 10-19, 20-49).

## 2. Open-ended and closed questions.

Open-ended (unstructured, free response) questions leave freedom for the respondent. For example, “What changes would you like to see in our worship services?”

A closed-ended or fixed response questions asks a question and then gives the respondent fixed responses from which to choose. For example, “Do you believe we should make changes in our worship services?”

Yes

No

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<sup>8</sup> To obtain more information on questionnaire construction, see W. Lawrence Neuman, *Social Research Methods* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1991), pp. 233-249.

If yes: what areas need to change?

- worship music
- announcements
- prayer time
- sermons
- special music
- other \_\_\_\_\_

Explain:

The above closed-ended questions is also known as a contingency question (a 2 part question) since the follow up questions follow, depending upon a response to an earlier question.

**Advantages of closed-ended questions:**

- \* Quicker for respondent to answer
- \* Can clarify meaning for respondent
- \* Respondents are more likely to answer sensitive topics
- \* Answers are easier to compare, code and analyze
- \* Replication is easier

**Advantages of open-ended questions:**

- \* They permit unlimited number of possible answers
- \* Respondents can answer in detail, and can qualify/clarify responses
- \* Unanticipated findings can be discovered
- \* Permit adequate answers to complex issues
- \* Permit creativity, self-expression, richness of detail
- \* Respondents express their own logic, thinking processes and frame of reference.

**Disadvantages of closed-ended questions:**

- \* They may suggest ideas that respondent may not have
- \* Respondents may be frustrated if their desired answer is not one of the choices
- \* Force simplistic answers to complex issues
- \* Force choices that may not be made in real world
- \* Misinterpretation of question can go unnoticed

**Disadvantages of open-ended questions:**

- \* Different respondents give different degrees of detail in their answers
- \* Comparisons and analysis is more difficult
- \* Articulate and literate respondents have an advantage
- \* More time, thought, and effort by respondents are necessary
- \* Answers take up a lot of space on the questionnaire
- \* Questions may too general for respondents who lose direction

3. Examples of a matrix question format:

	Strongly Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't know
1. Our church acknowledges first-time visitors in the worship services.	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
2. First-time visitors feel at home in our church.	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
3. There are clear directions to sanctuary from the church parking lot for first-time visitors.	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]

Other examples of response category choices:

Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor		
Approve	Disapprove				
Favor	Oppose				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Too Much	Too Little	About Right			
Better	Worse	About the Same			
Regularly	Often	Seldom	Never		
Always	Most of the Time	Some of the Time	Rarely	Never	
More Likely	Less Likely	No Difference			
Very Interested	Interested	Not Interested			

#### 4. Format of questionnaire

The format of the questionnaire is just as important as the questions asked; Babbie states, “As a general rule, questionnaires should be “spread out and uncluttered.”<sup>9</sup>

The length of the questionnaire depends upon the format and the respondents’ characteristics and commitment to the research project.

Researchers should sequence the questions to minimize the discomfort and confusion of the respondents. There is usually an introduction that explains the survey; an opening section with pleasant, non-threatening questions; and then the questions that get to the heart of your research questions.

A pilot study is absolutely necessary to get feedback to the content of questions, how they are worded as well as the format of the questionnaire. Finding out what is unclear, what is frustrating or offensive will help ensure reliability and viability of the questionnaire results of the sample respondents.

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<sup>9</sup> Earl Babbie, *The Practice of Social Research* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1995), p. 147.

## WEEK FIVE: Study Notes

### Evaluation Research

The purpose of evaluation research is to measure the outcomes or effects of a program against the goals it set out to accomplish. If a program is intended to accomplish something, then you must be able to measure that “something.”

Four key features of evaluation research:

1. "To measure the effects" refers to the research methodology that is used.
2. "The effects" primarily emphasizes the outcomes of the program and their side effects.
3. The comparison of effects with goals stresses use of explicit criteria for judging how well the program is doing.
4. The contribution to subsequent decision making and the improvement of future programming denote the social purpose of evaluation.
5. More specifically, the purposes are:
  - a. To continue or discontinue the program.
  - b. To improve its practices and procedures.
  - c. To add or drop specific program strategies.
  - d. To institute similar programs elsewhere.
  - e. To allocate resources among competing programs.
  - f. To accept or reject a program approach or theory.

There is difference between evaluating the effects of a Latin American Child Care film and the entire LACC program in Latin America with its potential diversity of goals, methods, actions. What to consider in program differences in order to choose evaluative approaches:

1. *Scope*. The program being evaluated may cover the nation, region, state, city, or one specific sight (classroom).
2. *Size*. Programs can serve a few people or reach thousands or even millions.
3. *Duration*. A program can last a few hours, days, or weeks, a specified number of months or years, or go indefinitely (e.g. Royal Rangers).
4. *Clarity and specificity of program input*. What the program actually does may be well-defined and precise (attendance and building programs). Many programs have some degree of clarity (particular course in curriculum); at extreme there are programs that are diffuse, highly variable, and difficult to even describe (spiritual growth).
5. *Complexity and time span of goals*. Some programs are intended to produce a clear-cut changes (e.g., improvement in giving). Others are more complex (training for lay caregivers).

### Evaluation process

1. Find out program's purpose and goals.
2. Translate goals into measurable indicators of goal achievement.
3. Collect data on the indicators for those who participated in the program (and, if possible, for control those who did not. If there is a control group, compare the data on participants and controls with the goal criteria.

### Collection of data

1. Interviews
2. Questionnaires
3. Observation
4. Ratings by peers, staff, experts
5. Psychometric tests of attitudes, values, personality, preferences, norms, and beliefs
6. Institutional records
7. Government statistics
8. Tests of information, interpretation, skills, application of knowledge
9. Projective tests
10. Situational tests presenting respondent with simulated life situations
11. Diary records
12. Financial records
13. Documents (minutes of board meetings, newspaper accounts of policy actions, transcripts of trials, etc.)

Quasi-experimental designs are often used in evaluation research (See Babbie, Chapters 9, 13). Ingredients in all quasi-experimental designs are the independent and dependent variables. In other designs, there may be pre-testing and post-testing. Finally, in the most viable of designs, there are randomly selected experimental group and control group.

Different specific quasi-experimental designs:

1. One-shot case study
2. One-group pretest-posttest design
3. Classic experiment
4. Solomon four-group design
5. Time-series design

Internal invalidity is the possibility that conclusions drawn from experimental results may not accurately reflect what has gone on in the experiment itself. Such sources for invalidity include:

1. History/length of time; another event may affect the dependent variable.
2. Maturation; subjects change over period of time.
3. Testing; people usually score higher when taking a test the second time around.
4. Instrumentation; different raters, or same ones are fatigued or have different standards.
5. Statistical regression; extreme scores tend to gravitate toward the mean when repeated.
6. Mortality; loss of subjects between pretest and posttest.

External invalidity relates to the generalizability of experimental findings to the "real" world. Such sources include:

1. Population validity concerns the validity the generalization of the results to other subjects:
  - a. Experimentally accessible population vs. target population. The population from which the experimenter can select subjects may or may not be the same as the target population.
  - b. Interaction of treatment effects and subject characteristics. Your treatment may be more valid with certain characteristics of some subjects than other subjects. For example, can you measure leadership styles using a complicated instrument when subjects don't know how to read?
2. Ecological validity concerns the generalization of the results to other settings or environmental conditions similar to the experimental setting or condition:
  - a. Describing independent/dependent variables so that the experiment can be replicated.
  - b. Degree of reliability and validity of the instrument.
  - c. Degree of reliability of judges or observers who rate/measure the dependent variable.
  - d. Incorrect analysis of data.
3. Strengths and weakness of experimental design:
  - a. The great advantage is the isolation of the variable and its impact over time. Relatively little time and money and few subjects often make it possible to replicate study with different groups of subjects at different times.
  - b. The greatest weakness lies in their artificiality. What occurs in the laboratory setting might not occur in more natural settings.

