

# BEST PRACTICES CASE 2



## INTEGRATING UG RESEARCH INTO SOCIAL SCIENCE CURRICULUM: BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF TWO MODELS

JESSICA CROWE AND AUSTIN BOE

The Department of Sociology at Southern Illinois University implemented two models of undergraduate research. One was in the form of a volunteer-basis community research project, the other was in the form of an elective 400 level course involving a class research project. The community research project was advertised in the school newspaper. Those who entered the project were required to have a GPA of 3.0 or higher. At the end of the recruiting process, 32 upperclassmen decided to participate in the project with 60% of them being seniors and 40% of them being juniors. Everyone received 3-credit hours by participating in the project.

The project was interdisciplinary and was grounded in local issues that were of interest to residents and stakeholders. The objective was to collect public opinion information for policy debates.

Enrolled students participated in five training sessions during the first eight weeks of the semester. The meeting time was set in the evening when everyone could meet. The training involved briefings from local law enforcement about safety while surveying, disclosing information about surveying and sampling, and community-specific guidelines with regard to the community research project. When students were not taught about how to design a survey, they were made aware about local issues and the study's major research questions. They were educated in how to ask questions and other practical skills.

Students were paired up based on personal time availability. Each group was provided with a list of 118 residences to survey. There were 16 pairs in total. Students wore special t-shirts when surveying for the project.

Before heading out to conduct their survey, the groups had to report to their assigned graduate teaching assistant. Once they checked in with their graduate assistant, the pairs went door-to-door. A prompt was read to describe who they were and what they were doing in the area. They would proceed to ask the head of household to see if they could conduct a survey based on the community and its issues. If the head of household agreed to be surveyed, a consent form was given and the survey was conducted with one person asking the questions and one person writing the answers down. If the head of household deemed the survey too long, they were given the option to keep the survey questions and complete it at a later time. After the pair decided that they were done for the day, they would check-out with their graduate assistant and leave. Pairs made three attempts at a residence before declaring it unanswered.

Several safety measures were put in place to protect the students when conducting their survey. These rules were (1) Always work in pairs, (2) Never enter a respondent's house, (3) One person in the pair must carry a cell phone, (4) Call an emergency number when necessary, (5) Let the graduate assistant know when you are going into the community and when you are leaving, (6) Record the results with respondents on a printed address list, (7) Record the attempted contacts on a google spreadsheet and do this as soon as you can, (8) Make three attempts at each address, (9) Do not show anyone unaffiliated with the project addresses or maps of the respondents, (10) The person in the pair not recording the survey answers must show the other possible answers to the questionnaire during the survey process.

The senior seminar was the second model the university used to conduct research on course-based undergraduate research experiences (CURE). A total of 12 students participated in the 400-level course. The main goal of the course was to give students an opportunity to go through an entire social research process, including formulating empirical research questions, identifying appropriate methodology, sampling, designing questionnaires, obtaining the approval of human subjects, collecting data, analyzing the data, and presenting findings at a major sociological conference. The entire class was expected to do the following things. Students narrowed their research topics to two broad ones within the first two weeks of class. With help from the instructor, they formed two research questions that they thought the literature did not adequately address. The instructor asked each student to develop five survey questions. The questions could be taken from previous surveys, such as the Pew Research surveys or the General Social Survey, or come from their own creation. Then the instructor merged all of their questions into one document sorted by topic, eliminated all duplicate questions or questions that did not fit well with the survey. Questions were also rephrased until everything flowed well. At the end of the process, the class had a survey that was eight pages long. Each student tested the questionnaire with five students outside of the class to see if any amendments needed to be made. The survey was conducted online by reaching out to students of the university as well as distributing and collecting hard copies during class sessions.

OCT 14, 2021

---

Students participated in the data validation. The instructor performed statistical analyses of the data during the class, which included descriptive and inferential statistics. Afterward, the students presented their findings at a roundtable discussion of the Midwestern Sociological Society's annual conference.

For both research experiences, the instructor administered a survey with 11 Likert scale items to see how well the students responded to the projects. Of the eleven items, seven were included to survey both groups. Three open-ended questions were asked to see if the students had any opinions for improving the research experiences.

Overall, students enjoyed participating in the community research project. Many on average agreed that it was a great learning experience. They also claimed they had a positive experience interacting with community members. Students also had a positive experience with the learning survey methods. Many student groups realized that surveying was difficult and sometimes an adjustment of tactics was necessary in order to increase responses.

One of the biggest problems was getting respondents to complete the survey. This was partly due to the length of the survey. Students also had trouble with potential respondents declining to be surveyed.

Some students reported abnormal encounters when out surveying. These encounters mostly regarded the safety of the students. Finally, student feedback indicated that better coordination between graduate assistants, students, and professors was needed.

Students overall enjoyed participating in the senior seminar project. They had a positive experience with regard to learning survey methods. They greatly appreciated the step-by-step manner in which they were taught to conduct research both through online and face-to-face modes. They reported that the conference at the end of the course was very valuable and perhaps the most valuable part of the course. They enjoyed the discussions with other conference attendants and speakers of other plenary talks that spoke about socially relevant research.

OCT 14, 2021

Students reported that they would have enjoyed the project more if they were allowed to learn more about the statistical data analysis and had hands-on experience in the lab. Some students wished that the course was taught in the junior year so that the research experience would have been useful in applying for postgraduate opportunities.

Post-project Learning Survey Questions	Community Research Project	Senior Seminar Course
I enjoyed talking to residents about issues on the survey.	X	
I learned a lot about local issues through this experience.	X	
In general, I learned about research design through this experience.	X	X
I feel confident in being able to conduct my own survey in the future.	X	X
I felt safe administering the survey.	X	X
The survey was easy for respondents to complete.	X	X
My graduate assistant was helpful.	X	
The faculty directors/professor were helpful.	X	X
Overall, my participation in this project was a great learning experience.	X	X
I would do a project like this again in the future.	X	X
Presenting at the Midwestern Sociological Society was a valuable experience.		X

OCT 14, 2021

Rewritten from

Crowe, J., & Boe, A. (2019). Integrating undergraduate research into social science curriculum: Benefits and challenges of two models. *Education Sciences*, 9(296), 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci9040296>

Source of image on page 1: [https://www.clipartkey.com/view/wmxJw\\_st-georges-is-up-for-a-chance-to/](https://www.clipartkey.com/view/wmxJw_st-georges-is-up-for-a-chance-to/)

This summary has been provided by Kara Chan and Chak Hee Lo of Hong Kong Baptist University to allow educators a rapid appreciation of the content of the article.

This project was fully funded by UGC's Special Grant for Strategic Development of Virtual Teaching and Learning, Project title: Building the Capacity of Research-Informed Teaching and Learning in the Virtual T&L Context, 2021-22.

Project team: Professor Kara Chan (leader) of Department of Communication Studies, Professor Noel Siu of Department of Marketing, and Professor Gina Lai of Department of Sociology. Mr. Chak Hee Lo served as the project assistant.