Psy 594I: Designing and Conducting Focus Groups  
Fall 2011

Mondays 9-11:50, Aug 22 – Sept 26  
Lagomarcino E165  
Draft 8/1/11

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COURSE INTRODUCTION

What is this course about?  Focus groups are useful before, during, and after programs, events, experiences, or combined with quantitative studies. This course will emphasize practical approaches to determining the appropriate use of focus group studies, choosing design options, developing questions, recruiting participants, moderating skills, and analyzing and reporting results.

Textbooks: One book is required for this course:


The book is available through the University bookstore and can also be ordered on the Internet. The book is available in hardcover, softcover, and spiral bound (cheapest). There may be additional readings, which I will attempt to provide at no charge to you. If there is a cost, I will keep it as low as possible.

COURSE POLICIES

Class Meets: Mondays, 9:00 – 11:50 a.m., March 29-April 26  
Lagomarcino E165

The nearest restrooms are on this level. If you need to leave class for any reason, please try to do so quietly.

What is expected of students in this course?  You are expected to complete all required course readings BEFORE coming to class. Attendance is required. Your active participation in all areas of this class is expected. Because there is a group-work component in this course, your colleagues will expect you to arrive at class prepared for the day’s topic. Please be considerate of your class members and allow them to rely on your preparation and attendance.

Because of the short, five-session nature of this course, all assignments must be completed as scheduled; there will be no extensions given for the completion of any assignment except in cases of documented illness or family emergency. If an assignment is not turned in by the due date, you will receive a grade of “zero” for that assignment unless prior arrangements have been made with me. **I do not accept assignments by email – please bring a hard copy with you to class.**
How will our classes be conducted? Our class meetings will be conducted as an advanced seminar, with demonstration and practice opportunities.

I encourage everyone to speak freely and respectfully. Controversies are bound to come up from time to time. Please review the ground rules for discussion attached to this syllabus. I expect all discussions to be conducted in accordance with those rules.

CLASS PROCEDURES

Work Expectations: Students will be evaluated on the basis of their participation during class sessions, in-class exercises, and written assignments. There will be no tests. As this class is largely taught with a participatory learning approach, all that is required to pass with a good grade is to participate in all aspects fully.

Grading: A/F letter grades will be determined by total effort, as follows:

- A: Represents enthusiastic and thoughtful participation in all aspects of the course, including being well prepared for each class session
- B: Represents participation in all aspects of the course, although perhaps not fully prepared for every class
- C: No graduate student should ever get a C.
- D: No graduate student should ever get a D.
- F: No graduate student should ever get an F. But if you miss a class, you will.

DEPARTMENT AND UNIVERSITY POLICIES AND REQUIREMENTS

Incompletes: In accordance with our department's policy, a grade of “I” or “incomplete” will not be given in this course except under extremely unusual circumstances. If you’re doing poorly in the course, see me for help. **Do not wait until the end of the session!** I will not give you an incomplete, but I will help you to focus your study of the material required for the course. If you are having problems with the material, see me right away.

Academic Dishonesty: As would be expected in any other course at the University, your conduct in this course should conform to the spirit as well as the letter of the code of student conduct and honesty. Scholastic dishonesty is defined as any act that violates the rights of another student with respect to academic work or that involves misrepresentation of a student’s own work. Scholastic dishonesty includes (but is not limited to) cheating on assignments or exams; plagiarizing, which is misrepresenting one’s own work any part of work done by another; submitting the same work, or substantially similar works, to meet the requirements of more than one course without the approval and consent of all instructors concerned; depriving another student of necessary course materials; or interfering with another student’s work. Any case of scholastic dishonesty will result in a grade of zero for that assignment, and may result in a failing grade for the course. All cases of scholastic dishonesty will be reported to the Dean of Students. Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated in this course.

As you will be doing at least one written assignment in this course, I strongly encourage you to conform to the following guidelines regarding plagiarism: Plagiarism is presenting another person’s ideas as your own. A good rule to follow is: if you use five or more words in a row from some source, you should put them in quotation marks and give the reference. If you paraphrase someone else’s words, you do not need quotation marks, but you still need to give the reference. There
is no stigma for using someone else’s ideas—you cannot come up with every good idea on your own! It is dishonest, however, to have taken an idea from someone else and to then pass it off as your own. If you are in doubt, give the reference. If you worked with a partner and co-wrote parts, then both names should be on the paper.

**Disabilities:** It is University policy to provide, on a flexible and individualized basis, reasonable accommodations to students who have disabilities that may affect their ability to participate in course activities or to meet course requirements. Students with special needs are invited to contact me to discuss any arrangements that may be needed to facilitate successful completion of this course.

**COURSE SCHEDULE**

**Readings should be completed BEFORE coming to class on the day each topic is to be discussed.** (Leniency granted only for the first day of class.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Required Reading</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aug 22</td>
<td>Syllabus review; Introduction to FGs; Example Group</td>
<td>Ch 1-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug 29</td>
<td>Focus Group Guides</td>
<td>Ch 3-4</td>
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<td>Sept 5</td>
<td>Holiday – no class</td>
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<td>Sept 12</td>
<td>Focus Group Guides 2; Moderating</td>
<td>Ch 5, 9, 10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sept 19</td>
<td>Moderating 2</td>
<td>Ch 8, 13, 14</td>
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</table>
| Sept 26| Working with qualitative data; how to use FG results to feed into quantitative questionnaire design; Affinity Process | Ch 6, 7            

**Ground Rules for Classroom Discussions**

1. We can (and will!) criticize ideas, but not the people who state them.
2. Our goal is to arrive at sound and carefully considered decisions. Our goal is not to “win.”
3. Everyone is encouraged to participate.
4. Everyone’s ideas are worth listening to, even if we do not agree.
5. If someone’s comments are not clear, we should either paraphrase or ask them to clarify.
6. We will try to understand and explore both sides of each issue.
7. We should acknowledge that racism, classism, sexism, and other forms of oppression exist.
8. We should recognize that the perpetuation of “-isms” has much to do with misinformation about both our own group and members of other groups.
9. We should not blame ourselves or other people for the misinformation we (or they) have learned.
10. We should not repeat misinformation once we have learned otherwise.
11. We will not “blame victims” for the condition of their own lives.
12. We will assume that people always do the best they can in the situation at hand.
13. We will actively pursue information about our own group and other groups.
14. We will combat myths and stereotypes about our own groups and those of other people.
15. We will create a safe atmosphere for open discussion.
16. We will protect confidences for our colleagues in class and will not repeat personal information about them outside of class.