11.237 Participatory Action Research (PAR) 2
Spring 2018

Tuesdays and Thursdays from 5:00 to 6:30 PM in 9-451

Prerequisite: Permission of the instructors
Units: 3-0-3

Instructors

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STELLAR SITE:

http://stellar.mit.edu/S/course/11/sp18/11.237/

First class will meet on Tuesday, February 6, 2018 and the course will run for 6 weeks.

COURSE OVERVIEW

This course introduces students to Participatory Action Research (PAR), which is an approach to research and inquiry that enables communities to examine and address consequential societal problems. In bringing together community researchers and academics to investigate a consequential social problem and determine what ought to be done, PAR seeks to transform existing unequal power relationships between marginalized groups and those traditionally considered “expert” researchers. This six-week module builds on Participatory Action Research (PAR) 1. This module seeks to deepen our exploration of knowledge co-production with communities, focusing on: co-designing and co-conducting research with community partners at various stages of the research process; actual cases in which PAR-like methods have been used with greater or lesser success; and interaction with community members, organizations, and individuals who have been involved in PAR collaborations. As part of this course, students will be expected to produce a PAR research proposal together with a community partner. (Students may take PAR 1 and PAR 2 in any order.)

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Class meetings: The class will meet for 1.5 hours every Tuesday and Thursday from 5:00 to 6:30 PM from February 6th through March 22nd. Students are expected to attend all class sessions and participate actively in class discussions and activities.
**Reading Assignments:** Readings will be available on Stellar. Please check the Stellar site and email communications from the teaching team on a regular basis; additional readings may be posted as the semester progresses.

**Assignments & Expectations:** The teaching team and the MIT Community Innovator’s Lab are involved in building a body of knowledge about PAR as a core democratic capacity and a critical practice in efforts for building economic democracy and self-determination. Through active engagement in class discussions and through quality written assignments/presentations, we expect students to play a role in helping to explore and build this body of knowledge. Over the course of the semester students will be expected to produce the following:

1. **Reflection Papers:** Students will write two brief reflection papers on the co-production process they engage in with community partners. (Length: about 1 page).

   **Reflection 1 Due:** 1 week after first team meeting with community partner
   **Reflection 2 Due:** April 12 (three weeks after last day of class, along with Final PAR Proposal)

2. **PAR Proposal:** Students will work in teams to co-produce a PAR research proposal with a community partner, oriented toward addressing a consequential question in the partner’s work. While it is not possible to actually carry out PAR within a 6-week course, the purpose of this assignment is to think through the design of a PAR process and apply that to the specific context and questions of a community partner. We expect students to draw on class readings and discussions, any of their own experiences with participatory research or planning, background materials on the partner’s work, as well as co-production sessions with the partner to craft a proposal that responds to the specific needs, priorities, and interests of the partner.

   **Draft Due:** Student teams and community partners will agree on a date to submit a draft proposal for the partner to review. The draft should be submitted to both the partner and the teaching team.
   **Final Due:** April 12 (three weeks after the last class session)

3. **Final Presentation:** Student teams will present the PAR proposals they developed with community partners. The presentation should include an overview of the proposal’s content, reflections on the co-production process, and references to the PAR theory and cases we discuss in class.

   **Presentation Date:** March 20 or 22

Further directions for each of these assignments will be given in class.

**Grading:**
Active participation: 25%
Reflection Papers: 20%
PAR Proposal (draft & final): 35%
Final Presentation: 20%

Office Hours: Office hours with members of the teaching team are available by appointment. Please reach out via email to schedule a time.

Disabilities: If you have a documented disability or any other problem you think may affect your ability to perform in class, please see one of the instructors early in the semester so that arrangements may be made to accommodate you.

Academic Misconduct: Plagiarism and cheating are both academic crimes. Never (1) turn in an assignment that you did not write yourself, (2) turn in an assignment for this class that you previously turned in for another class, or (3) cheat on an exam. If you do so, it may result in a failing grade for the class, and possibly even suspension from MIT. Please see Dayna Cunningham if you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism. Anyone caught cheating will be reported in line with recognized university procedures.

Final Exam: There will be no final exam.

Syllabus

CLASS 1. Tuesday, February 6:
WHAT IS PAR & WHAT IS ITS RELATIONSHIP TO DEMOCRACY?

A core belief in PAR is that we study the world in order to transform it, and we understand society by trying to change it. What is Participatory Action Research, and what is its relationship to democracy? Overview of syllabus and course expectations.

Required Reading:

CLASS 2. Thursday February 8:
IS PAR SCIENCE?

Does PAR have merit as a scientific enterprise? We will explore questions of objectivity, scientific versus value rationality, and criteria for research credibility, in relation to PAR.

Required Reading:


CLASS 3. Tuesday February 13:
GUEST SPEAKER – ADITI MEHTA

Required Reading:


CLASS 4. Thursday, February 15:
THE PAR PRACTITIONER

What are the roles of the co-researchers engaged in a PAR process? How do we engage identity and positionality? What considerations, challenges, and potentials does an activist approach to research raise for PAR practitioners?

Required Reading:


**Optional Reading:**

CLASS 5. Thursday February 22:
THE PAR PRACTITIONER (continued)

Reflective practice is a crucial tool in the PAR researcher’s toolkit. The PAR practitioner must be able to turn the beam of observation back on herself to better understand her own role and responsibilities in efforts to shape reality and contribute to social justice. How does the researcher shape the social system she studies? What practices can PAR researchers draw upon to understand and situate themselves in the research?

Required Reading:


Handout: Theory U. “Matrix of Social Evolution: Four Fields of Awareness; Four System Levels” (Levels of Listening & Levels of Conversation).

CLASS 6. Tuesday February 27:
CO-PRODUCTION & EXPERTISE

What does co-producing knowledge between community and academic researchers entail in practice? What needs to be in place to enable genuine co-production of knowledge? How do PAR researchers address and engage issues of power, perceived legitimacy, and difference? Who brings what type of knowledge and expertise to a PAR process?
Required Reading:


**Optional Reading:**


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**CLASS 7. Thursday, March 1**

**ETHICS & ACCOUNTABILITY**

What ethical dilemmas arise in research and the practice of PAR? What is the role of the Institutional Review Board and what tensions/differences exist between IRB protocols and the agreements and practices developed with community partners? How do PAR practitioners deal with differences in power and incentives? What practices and mechanisms do academic PAR researchers use to stay accountable to community researchers?

**Required Reading:**


“A Community Approach to Research Partnerships” Engagement Lab @ Emerson College. Accessed: [https://elab.emerson.edu/projects/a-community-approach-to-research-partnerships-carp](https://elab.emerson.edu/projects/a-community-approach-to-research-partnerships-carp)


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**CLASS 8. Tuesday, March 6**

**METHODS: QUANTITATIVE & QUALITATIVE**

**GUEST SPEAKER: ASSATA RICHARDS**
PAR involves and requires disciplined inquiry. How are qualitative and quantitative methods used in the co-production process? How do PAR practitioners determine methods appropriate to the specific context they are working in? In PAR, how do academic and community researchers make sense of their findings collectively and collaboratively?

**Required Reading:**


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**CLASS 9. Thursday, March 8**

**METHODS: NARRATIVE**

As some of the most basic forms of human communication, storytelling and narrative are powerful tools for communicating and making sense of reality, as well as advancing struggles for social justice. How can we harvest knowledge from storytelling and what challenges arise in relation to interpretation and meaning-making?

**Required Reading:**


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**CLASS 10. Tuesday March 13**

**METHODS: OTHER WAYS OF KNOWING**

What can a research orientation that recognizes epistemological diversity open up in terms of production of knowledge and the ability of communities to take action on consequential problems? What methods allow PAR practitioners to engage these “other ways of knowing” that have been historically marginalized by the academy and excluded from the research enterprise?

**Required Reading:**

de Sousa Santos, B. “Opening Up the Canon of Knowledge,” *Another Knowledge is Possible: Beyond Northern Epistemologies*. Verso: London.


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CLASS 11. Thursday March 15  
**WORKSHOP SESSION ON PAR PROPOSALS**

**Required Reading:**

N/A

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CLASS 12. Tuesday March 20  
**FINAL PRESENTATIONS**

**Required Reading:**

N/A

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CLASS 13. Thursday March 22  
**FINAL PRESENTATIONS**

**Required Reading:**

N/A