

**Syllabus**  
**GSEM730 Field Research for Ministry**

Instructor: Monte Sahlin / Paul Richardson

Credits: 2

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**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

This course will guide clergy professionals in developing the capacity to utilize information and research skills in the practice of pastoral ministry, including congregational studies, systems analysis, program evaluation, structured organizational experiments, surveys, focus group research, participant observer methods and community assessments. Students will gain an understanding of the principles of the research process, ethical concerns in research, and the elements of research design as applied to the practical issues of leading a congregation, planting a church or directing a faith-based organization. As principles and methods are learned they will be applied to the students individual context through the review of relevant action-research materials, reflection and discussion.

**OBJECTIVES:**

Upon completion of this course, the student should be able to:

1. Understand the terminology and key principles of the research process as it is applied in the practice of ministry.
2. Locate and interpret published research findings, form a research question, and gather and analyze relevant information.
3. Describe a research design appropriate to a particular problem or issue in ministry.
4. Use a range of research methods, including probability sample surveys, program evaluations, focus group research, key informant interviews, congregational studies, systems analysis, structured social experiments, participant observer techniques, and community assessments.
5. Identify the ethical issues related to particular research projects and know how to seek the necessary counsel and assistance.
6. Manage the implementation of a research project within a defined time frame.
7. Analyze and interpret raw data.
8. Present research findings in the narrative and graphic forms that best convey them to the users of the information.

## **REQUIREMENTS:**

1. Attend and participate fully in each class session during the scheduled intensive.
2. Complete a multiple-choice test on terminology and concepts at the end of the intensive.
3. Complete all reading assignments, including handouts.
4. Conduct two interviews and write verbatim field notes.
5. Write a paper describing the context of your ministry, your current ministry situation and particular challenges or opportunities about which more information is needed in order to act effectively.
6. Select one particular research method and write a plan for the implementation of this method in response to a simple ministry situation that you currently face.

## **REQUIRED TEXTS:**

Nancy T. Ammerman, Jackson W. Carroll, Carl S. Dudley, and William McKinney (eds), *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook* (1998, Abingdon Press, Nashville)  
Arlene Fink, *The Survey Handbook* (1995, Sage, Thousand Oaks CA)  
David L. Morgan, *The Focus Group Guidebook* (1998, Sage, Thousand Oaks CA)  
Monte Sahlin, *Adventist Congregations Today* (2003, Center for Creative Ministry, Lincoln)  
Monte Sahlin, *Understanding Your Community* (2005, Center for Creative Ministry, Lincoln)  
Handouts from the instructor.

## **SCHEDULE:**

Day 1, AM — Overview of Course, Research Design and Ethical Issues in Research  
Day 1, PM — Congregational Typologies, Demographics and Generational Dynamics  
Day 2, AM — Information Sources and Practices, Statistical Significance and Sampling  
Day 2, PM — Quantitative Research Methods: Surveys, Program Evaluations, Interviewing, etc.  
Day 3, AM — Qualitative Research Methods: Focus Groups, Participant-Observer, etc.  
Day 3, PM — Concepts of Action-Research and Social/Organizational Experiments  
Day 4, AM — Analyzing and Interpreting Data; Describing and Displaying Research Findings  
Day 4, PM — Research Project Management

*Note: Schedule may vary in some situations, starting on the afternoon or evening of the first day, but the number of half-day sessions and the order of topics will remain the same.*

## **ATTENDANCE:**

By the time a student gets to graduate study, it is assumed that s/he possesses the maturity to recognize the importance of class attendance. No attendance record will be taken. However, because of the intensive schedule and seminar format of the course, students are expected to be present and take an active part in all discussions of the readings and materials presented. Participation in the discussions will make up 20% of the final grade. Being present “in spirit” will not count toward participation.

*Since this is presented on a short, intensive schedule and is primarily a seminar/discussion module you cannot pass this module without faithful attendance in class to participate in the discussion. Non-attendance will have an impact on your overall grade. Learn from the experience of others. Therefore, a word to the wise: Do not test this policy!*

## **ASSIGNMENTS:**

1. Reading Assignments—Before you begin to write the papers required in this class, make sure that you complete reading the required textbooks, the handouts distributed in class and at least another 500 pages from the supplementary reading list. Because this is scheduled as an intensive, the reading is crucial to achieving the learning objectives for the course and to many of the future classes you will take in the Doctor of Ministry program.

2. Interview Field Notes—The student will keyboard a verbatim report within 24 hours after each interview conducted.

3. Major Paper—Write a ten to 20-page paper describing the congregation(s) or ministry organization(s) where you serve—including basic statistics such as typical attendance and total participation, community context, demographics, growth/decline trends, involvement of volunteers, financial giving, regular activities and programs, etc.—as well as a situation analysis of your ministry (goals, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) and include a concise listing of some challenges or opportunities about which you would like more information.

4. Research Implementation Plan—Write two or three pages in which you select one research method and apply it to a simple ministry situation, outlining specific steps necessary for you to implement a data collection and analysis.

Papers are to be sent to:

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Burtonsville MD 20866  
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OR: Fax to (800) 858-1513

*Writing assignments are to be typewritten, single-spaced with a double space between paragraphs and may be submitted in hard copy or electronic form. Electronic submissions must*

be in one of the following three programs: MS Word, Word Perfect or PDF (Adobe Acrobat). Since this is a graduate course, correct spelling, proper grammar, non-sexist and non-racist language usage are basic requirements. Electronic submission of papers is preferred!

### **GRADING:**

The final course grade will be based on the following:

Attendance and participation in class meetings	20% of grade
Field notes on two interviews	20% of grade
Major paper	30% of grade
Research implementation plan	10% of grade
Test on terminology and concepts	20% of grade

### **ADDITIONAL READING:**

Nancy T. Ammerman, *Congregation and Community* (1997, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick NJ)

Nancy T. Ammerman, *Pillars of Faith: American Congregations and Their Partners* (2005, University of California Press, Berkeley)

Peter H. Ballis, *Leaving the Adventist Ministry: A Study of the Process of Exiting* (1999, Praeger, Westport CT)

George Barna, *The State of the Church 2002* (2002, Issachar Resources, Ventura CA)

Paula Berinstein, *Finding Statistics Online* (1998, Information Today, Inc., Medford NJ)

Irene Isabel Blea, *Researching Chicano Communities: Social-Historical, Physical, Psychological and Spiritual Space* (1995, Praeger, Westport CT)

Malcolm Bull and Keith Lockhart, *Seeking a Sanctuary: Seventh-day Adventism and the American Dream* (1989, Harper & Row, San Francisco)

Jean Bystedt, Siri Lynn and Deborah Potts, *Moderating to the Max: A full-tilt guide to creative, insightful focus groups and depth interviews* (2003, Paramount Market Publishing, Ithaca NY)

Mark Chaves, *Congregations in America* (2004, Harvard University Press, Cambridge)

Roger L. Dudley and Edwin I. Hernandez, *Citizens of Two Worlds: Religion and Politics among American Seventh-day Adventists* (1992, Andrews University Press, Berrien Springs)

Carl S. Dudley and Nancy T. Ammerman, *Congregations in Transition: A Guide for Analyzing, Assessing and Adapting in Changing Communities* (2002, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco)

Roger L. Dudley and Des Cummings, Jr., *Adventures in Church Growth* (1983, Review & Herald Publishing Association, Hagerstown MD)

William H. Frey, Bill Abresch and Jonathan Yeasting, *America by the Numbers: A Field Guide to the U. S. Population* (2001, The New Press, New York City)

Arlene Fink, *The Survey Kit*, Nine Volumes (1995, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks CA)

Paul Fussell, *Class: A Guide Through the American Status System* (1983, Simon & Schuster, New York City)

George Gallup, Jr., and Timothy Jones, *The Next American Spirituality* (2000, Cook Communications, Colorado Springs)

V. Bailey Gillespie, Michael J. Donahue, Ed Boyatt and Barry Gane, *Valuegenesis Ten Years Later: A Study of Two Generations* (2004, Hancock Center, Riverside)

Anthony E. Healy, *The Postindustrial Promise: Vital Religious Community in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (2005, The Alban Institute, Herndon, Va.)

James W. Hughes and Joseph J. Seneca (eds), *America's Demographic Tapestry: Baseline for the New Millennium* (1999, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick NJ)

Cushla Kapitzke, *Literacy and Religion: The textual politics and practice of Seventh-day Adventism* (1995, John Benjamins Publishing Company, Philadelphia)

Carole Kayrooz and Chris Trevitt, *Research in Organizations and Communities: Tales from the real world* (2005, Allen and Unwin, Crows Nest NSW, Australia)

Eva Keller, *The Road to Clarity: Seventh-day Adventism in Madagascar* (2005, Palgrave Macmillan, New York City)

Barry A. Kosmin and Ariela Keysar, *Religion in a Free Market* (2006, Paramount, Ithaca)

Richard A. Krueger, *The Focus Group Kit*, Six Volumes (1998, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks CA)

Alven Makapela, *The Problem of Africanity in the Seventh-day Adventist Church* (1996, Edwin Mellen Press, Lewiston NY)

Hy Mariampolski, *Ethnography for Marketers: A Guide to Consumer Immersion* (2006, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks)

Johnny Ramirez-Johnson and Edwin I. Hernandez, *Avance: A Vision for a New Manana* (2003, Loma Linda University Press, Loma Linda)

Paul Richardson and Carmen Rusu, *Public Perceptions of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America* (2003, Center for Creative Ministry, Lincoln NE)

John L. Ronsvalle and Sylvia Ronsvalle, *The State of Church Giving through 2003* (2005, Empty Tomb, Inc., Champaign)

Wade Clark Roof, *Spiritual Marketplace* (1999, Princeton University Press, Princeton)

Monte and Norma Sahlin, *A New Generation of Adventist Families* (1997, Center for Creative Ministry, Lincoln)

John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (2006, SCM Press, London)

William Strauss and Neil Howe, *Generations: The History of America's Future, 1584 to 2069* (1991, William Morrow and Company, New York City)

Laura L. Vance, *Seventh-day Adventism in Crisis: Gender and Sectarian Change in an Emerging Religion* (1999, University of Illinois Press, Urbana)

Roland L. Warren, *Studying Your Community* (1965, The Free Press, New York City)

Michael J. Weiss, *The Clustered World: How We Live, What We Buy, and What it All Means About Who We Are* (2000, Little, Brown and Company, Boston)

Cynthia Woolever and Deborah Bruce, *A Field Guide to U.S. Congregations* (2002, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville)