Syllabus
GSEM730 Field Research for Ministry
Spring 2011

Instructor: Monte Sahlin

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This course will meet in live web conferencing sessions over a Webinar system. It will convene on eight scheduled occasions, starting February 22 (2011) at 11 a.m. Eastern Time (10 a.m. Central Time, 9 a.m. Mountain Time, 8 a.m. Pacific Time) for about three hours each session. *You must contact the instructor by Email prior to February 15, 2011, in order to get the information on how to reserve space on the dedicated website for the Webinar system so that you can have access.*

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 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 scheduled Webinar session via web access on the Internet.

2. Complete the quizzes and similar assignments during Webinar sessions.

3. Complete all reading assignments, including handouts.

4. Write a paper (using available sources of information) which describes your congregation or ministry organization and its community context, analyzes its strengths and weakness, as well as the missional opportunities and threats in the context.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

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

Malcolm Bull and Keith Lockhart, *Seeking a Sanctuary: Seventh-day Adventism and the American Dream* (2006, Indiana University Press)

Arlene Fink, *The Survey Handbook* (1995, Sage, Thousand Oaks CA)

David L. Morgan, *The Focus Group Guidebook* (1998, Sage, Thousand Oaks CA)

Monte Sahlin, *Understanding Your Community* (2005, Center for Creative Ministry, Lincoln)

Handouts supplied electronically.

ATTENDANCE:

By the time a student gets to a terminal degree program, it is assumed that s/he possesses the maturity to recognize the importance of class attendance. An attendance record is automatically taken at each session by the Webinar system. 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 25% of the final grade. Being present "in spirit" will not count toward participation.

WEBINAR SCHEDULE:

Tuesday, Feb. 22 — Overview of Course, Research Design and Ethical Issues in Research
Tuesday, March 8 — Congregational Typologies, Demographics and Generational Dynamics
Tuesday, March 22 — Information Sources and Practices, Statistical Significance and Sampling
Tuesday, April 5 — Quantitative Research Methods: Surveys, Program Evaluations, Interviewing
Tuesday, April 19 — Qualitative Research Methods: Focus Groups, Participant-Observer, etc.
Tuesday, May 3 — Concepts of Action-Research and Social/Organizational Experiments
Tuesday, May 17 — Analyzing & Interpreting Data; Describing & Displaying Research Findings
Thursday, July 14 — Final Session and Deadline for Required Paper

ASSIGNMENTS:

1. Reading Assignments—The required textbooks and handouts are to be read on a prescribed schedule during the periods between the scheduled Webinars. 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. Quizzes and similar short writing and activity assignments will be included in many of the Webinar sessions. These must be turned by midnight the day of each Webinar.

3. Major Paper—Use available sources of information to write a 20 to 30-page paper describing the congregation(s) or ministry organization in which 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 the congregation/organization, its goals, its strengths and weaknesses, and the opportunities and threats in the context of the congregation/organization. This paper will provide a major section of the final project or dissertation for the Doctor of Ministry requirements. A detailed outline of what is expected in the paper will be distributed and explained during the first Webinar.

This paper is to be written according to the American Psychological Association (APA) Style Book and submitted in electronic form 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.

Papers are to be sent to: Monte Sahlin   msahlin@creativeministry.org
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                                                  Springboro OH 45066

GRADING:

The final course grade will be based on the following:

Attendance and participation in the eight Webinars	25% of grade
Reading and quizzes	25% of grade
Research paper	50% of grade

DEADLINES:

May 25, 2010 — Complete the reading for the course (Assignment 1).

During or between each session — Complete the quiz or similar task (Assignment 2).

July 14, 2010 — Complete the paper for the course (Assignment 3).