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Abstract

This article describes a departmental initiative designed to integrate the teaching of graduate and undergraduate sociology through research methodology and the completion of actual research projects. The goal was to develop a multilevel team approach within which faculty, graduate students, and undergraduates would view their work as part of a connected project. The authors describe the three central components of the multilevel approach: a newly required research seminar for graduate students, an approach to teaching research methods in a joint seminar of graduate and undergraduate students, and an approach to teaching undergraduate research methods that includes having graduate students model research techniques for undergraduates. The authors then assess each of these components based on course evaluations and additional data gathered from participants. The authors conclude with a series of suggestions about how this model might be expanded and developed further in their own and other institutional contexts.

Keywords

research methods, department initiatives, undergraduate education, graduation education, collaborative learning

Classes in research methods are some of the most regularly taken courses in sociology departments across the country (American Sociological Association 2001-2002). While these courses vary significantly based on the students, course formats, materials, and departmental requirements, many instructors seek to teach undergraduates the basic ideas and techniques needed to read and understand sociological research. Graduate courses, in contrast, tend to teach students how to conceptualize research questions, gather and analyze data, and move through the research process—in short, to transition from being consumers to producers of sociological knowledge. While some departments with master's and doctoral programs employ graduate students as instructors or teaching assistants in undergraduate research methods courses, others teach research

methods separately to graduate and undergraduate students even though upper level undergraduates, particularly those conducting independent research or writing theses, often draw on some of the same research skills taught to first-year graduate students.

Given the centrality of methodology to the discipline and our belief that students learn best by doing, the faculty members who regularly teach research methods courses at Brandeis University weigh multiple priorities when designing courses.

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For undergraduates, we aim to have students orient to the research process through single-semester courses focused on research design and conceptualization as well as techniques of interviewing or quantitative analysis. With graduate students we emphasize similar skills, alongside a stronger focus on engagement with disciplinary norms such as intellectual exchange among scholars, the experience of peer review, and the role of research in the discipline. Because of the small size of our graduate program, the department has long integrated certain aspects of undergraduate and graduate teaching, offering some courses to both sets of students. We decided to try building on and extending this model by developing a series of initiatives that aimed to combine the teaching of undergraduate and graduate research methods while enhancing the skills and professionalization of our graduate students. We aimed to do so in ways that maximize student learning, reflect the collaborative and interactive work of professional sociologists, and result in products that reflect students' knowledge of disciplinary standards.

We describe here a model developed in the past year that integrates our graduate and undergraduate programs, centered pedagogically on research methodology and the completion of actual research projects. Our goal is to develop a multilevel team approach within which faculty, graduate students, and undergraduates view their work as part of a connected project. Ideally, undergraduates benefit from hands-on experience with research, which complements the theoretical and substantive foci of many conventional sociology courses. Graduate students likewise gain valuable direct experience with the research process, learning from faculty while simultaneously serving as mentors to undergraduate students. Ideally, faculty members ideally are able to integrate their research and teaching tasks, which otherwise have a tendency to remain as separate—and sometimes competing—spheres. All groups, including faculty, benefit from an understanding that they are part of a broader research team, promoting a feeling of collegiality across the department.

This article proceeds in three sections. First, we outline extant approaches to teaching research methods in the sociological literature, which tend to focus more on how to develop specific techniques through class exercises than on ways of integrating research methods into a department curricula that combines the teaching of undergraduate and graduate methods. Second, we briefly describe

our institutional context and detail the three central components of our multilevel approach: a newly required research seminar for graduate students, an approach to teaching research methods in a joint seminar of graduate and undergraduate students, and an approach to teaching undergraduate research methods that includes having graduate students model research techniques for undergraduates. Third, we evaluate each of these components based on course evaluations and additional data gathered from participants. Based on our evaluations, we conclude with a series of suggestions about how this model might be expanded and developed further in our and other institutional contexts.

LESSONS FROM EXISTING RESEARCH

In the sociological literature, existing studies of how to teach research methods have focused largely on class exercises designed to teach particular skills rather than on more synthetic or pedagogical approaches. Sociologists using these techniques in research methods classes, for example, describe activities focused on drunk-driving laws designed to teach students how to operationalize variables (Taylor and McConnell 2001) and on using candy M&M's to illustrate various sampling methods (Auster 2000). Some techniques reoccur in the literature; personal ads are cited in two different exercises for their ability to teach sampling and measurement (Rushing et al. 1999) as well as to practice coding (Stalp 2001), and feature films are described as effective tools in teaching observation and honing interpretative analytic skills (Leblanc 1998; Tan and Ko 2004). Overall, most of these examples are designed for use with undergraduates, although Huehls's (2005) work offers simulation exercises for graduate students learning grounded theory. Some also describe ways to enhance research methods courses by integrating real-world examples and creative illustrations of concepts (e.g., Schumm et al. 2002; Takata and Letting 1987).

In addition, a number of studies describe ways of teaching research skills in non-research methods classes. Students in social stratification courses have been shown to benefit from exercises in coding the backgrounds of political elites (Johnson and Steward 1997) and from experiential research on corporate communities (Tenenbaum and Ross 2006), urban and suburban malls (Manning, Price,

and Rich 1997), and purchase power at a rent-to-own store (Folse 2002). Callaghan (2005) has introduced court ethnography assignments as a way to enhance learning of both the legal process and research methodology, thus highlighting the dual benefit of this approach: bringing to life sociological concepts related to course topic while introducing and familiarizing students with research practices. These works demonstrate the transportability of research methods-based exercises and practices across courses as well as the benefits of incorporating them throughout the sociology curricula (Charmaz 1991).

In addition to these articles focused on specific exercises, a smaller body of literature considers ways of structuring research methods courses within sociology curricula. Several scholars emphasize practice-based knowledge and argue that research methods should be taught throughout the curricula, from introductory sociology courses (Markham 1991) to applied courses for graduate students (Simon 1987). Scholars writing and designing curricula in this spirit tend to focus on the value of creating a real-world context for research methods, introducing new pedagogical practices such as team-based research and collaborative learning, and using research methods as an anchor for the discipline (Kain, Buchanan, and Mack 2001; Singleton 2007; Weiss 1987).

Gregory Weiss's work is an early example of this approach. Concerned about the disjuncture between content and method in undergraduate curricula, Weiss (1987) draws from the lab model of the natural and physical sciences to call for increasing exposure to research methods through the use of local research centers. Subsequent articles in this tradition have focused on identifying and analyzing effective contexts for research to take root, citing institutional bases such as campuses (Kain et al. 2001; Singleton 2007), service learning projects (Potter, Caffrey, and Plante 2003), local agencies such as housing groups (Schmid 1992), and non-institutionally based survey projects of larger communities (Forde et al. 1991). In addition, some scholars advocate a team-based or collaborative learning approach to research methods. Longmore, Dunn, and Jarboe (1996) develop and discuss strategies for group-based collaborative learning in research methods courses as a way for students to support each other and successfully engage in a complex, long-term project. Kain (1987) describes the use of small research teams and current technology,

whereas Keen (1996) offers an example of organizing classes around one large-scale ethnographic project wherein students work as one team and engage in all steps of the research process. These collaborative approaches have the benefit of including students at all skill levels while introducing a healthy mentoring partnership between professors and students, thus aiding in professional socialization (Kain 1999).

In addition to Weiss, a number of other scholars have argued that research methods should be a structuring force in sociology curricula as the bridge between content and method, teaching and research, and as a connecting thread throughout a sociology student's career (Charmaz 1991; Kain 1999). The importance of experiential learning (Schmid 1992), facility with research processes, and mentorship are cited as reasons to consider research methods as a core part of teaching sociology. Kain (1999), in particular, emphasizes the need for a cumulative curriculum organized around research methods, which he sees as essential for professionalization and stimulation of the sociological imagination. Charmaz (1991) cites the ways in which centering the curricula on research methods, in her case through intensive interviewing, can serve to competently train graduate students who can then carry that experience into their future teaching of undergraduates.

While existing research points to a number of exercises to use in the classroom and highlights the need to fully integrate research methods into sociology curricula, sociologists have written less about how departments might orient their curricula around research methodology. In addition, Charmaz (1991) is unique in her attention to the dynamics between undergraduate and graduate training in research methods. For those departments that may want to orient around the teaching of research methods, few examples exist of how to do that in ways that include both undergraduate and graduate students.

A MULTILEVEL TEAM APPROACH

Our Context

Brandeis University describes itself as both a research university and a liberal arts college. Located outside of Boston, the university enrolled approximately 3,200 undergraduates from across the United States in the College of Arts and Sciences in the fall of 2007 and approximately

2,100 graduate students in the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, Brandeis International Business School, Heller School for Social Policy and Management, and Rabb School of Continuing Studies. Undergraduate admission is highly selective, as is admission to the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, which offers both master's and doctoral degrees.

The sociology department includes nine full-time faculty and several part-time and jointly appointed faculty. As in many sociology departments, faculty have administrative positions in sociology and provide leadership in programs across campus such as in women and gender studies; social justice and social policy; peace and conflict studies; and health, society, science, and policy. We have approximately 70 sociology majors in each graduating class, many of whom double major in other departments. Approximately 500 undergraduates take courses taught by sociology faculty each semester, and between 5 and 10 sociology majors write senior theses each year. Our graduate program is small, enrolling two or three students each year in our doctoral program in sociology and two or three additional students in joint doctoral programs in sociology and social policy or in Near Eastern and Judaic studies. We also enroll between two or three students in master's degree programs in sociology or in a related dual program in sociology and women and gender studies each year. Overall, we have between 20 and 25 master's and doctoral students in residence at any time. Doctoral students in sociology are required to serve as teaching assistants for one course each semester in each of their first four years in exchange for full tuition waivers and living stipends from the graduate school.

The department offers approximately 12 courses for undergraduates, 2 courses for graduate students, and one or two courses open to both undergraduate and graduate students each semester. The majority of courses are taught by faculty members rather than graduate students. Balancing the types of courses offered is a challenge, as is figuring out how to regularly teach research methods to undergraduates and graduate students while meeting other curricular needs. During the 2007–2008 academic year, we developed a model that integrates graduate and undergraduate teaching, centered pedagogically on research methodology and with a strong applied focus. We aimed to do so in ways that maximized student learning, reflected the collaborative and interactive work

of professional sociologists, and resulted in products that enhanced students' knowledge of disciplinary standards. This model built on work between graduate and undergraduate students in previous years that has taken place in courses open to graduate and undergraduate students, graduate student mentoring of senior theses, and other endeavors. Our model centered on three interlocking new initiatives.

I. A Required Graduate Methods Seminar

In the 2007–2008 school year, the department launched a new graduate methods seminar, Approaches to Social Research (ASR). The purpose of the ASR seminar is to bring doctoral students in the first three years of the program into a sustained and productive conversation about research methods, techniques, and projects and to support their transition from being consumers to producers of sociological research. The seminar is further designed to strengthen graduate students' ability to publish papers prior to their dissertations, thereby contributing both to their socialization into the discipline and preparation for the job market. The course meets every other week throughout the academic year and is co-led by Wendy Cadge, David Cunningham, and Sara Shostak, who are centrally involved in teaching the methods curriculum throughout the department.

The ASR seminar was designed to build upon several key strengths of our department. First, our department has a longstanding commitment to training in research methods, particularly in Chicago School–inspired fieldwork and qualitative research (Reinharz 1995; Thorne 1997).¹ Second, the ASR seminar operates within a long departmental tradition of open exchange of ideas between faculty and graduate students (Reinharz 1995). Third, the small size of our program enables us to enact an approach that builds and sustains a culture of collective, cooperative engagement with data collection, analysis, and writing.

In 2007–2008, the ASR seminar included presentations of works in progress by two eminent guest speakers, an analysis of the structure of sociological research articles, a review of causal reasoning in the social sciences, and a workshop on the peer review process. In support of the meetings focused on reasoning and argumentation in sociology, students completed assignments

including analyzing the structure of research articles in one (complete) issue of the *American Journal of Sociology* and “mapping” the structure of an argument in one of several selected articles from the peer-reviewed literature. At the end of the year, each student completed an analytic paper that applied the concepts discussed in the seminar to one of his or her independent research projects.

The majority of seminar sessions were centered on graduate students’ presentations of their research in progress. Generally, these presentations were based on research the student started in a separate research methods class during an earlier semester and was now developing into an independent research project. Each student project was reviewed by two classmates who served as formal discussants; in addition, the presenter received comments from other seminar participants and from faculty. To recognize that each student in this course is at a different moment in his or her process of becoming a social scientist, we encouraged students to bring to the class research projects in any stage of development. Moreover, this design allows advanced students to receive intensive support for their ongoing work and entering students to benefit from participating in the constructive critique of research in process. Because the course is required of graduate students for three consecutive years, participants have multiple opportunities to contribute to each other’s ongoing projects, to learn by observation about the trajectory of successful research projects, and to be a part of mentoring relationships with faculty that provide models for those they might develop with undergraduates in the other two prongs of this initiative.

2. Teaching Research Methods in Joint Seminars of Graduate and Undergraduate Students

During the 1990s, Brandeis University developed a model for bringing graduate and undergraduate students together in the context of small, upper level seminar courses. Formally titled “joint seminars,” these courses have limited enrollment (generally no more than 12 students) and are equally divided between graduate and advanced undergraduate students. Overall, results have been mixed, based on student evaluations and discussions among faculty. While some faculty members cite the difficulty of organizing a course to meet the

needs of both student groups, the courses have functioned to expose research-active undergraduate students (such as those who choose to complete a year-long senior honor’s thesis) to advanced perspectives on particular topics.

One successful sociology joint seminar offering was a research methods course titled *Evaluation of Evidence*. As a course intended to provide an overview of design and analysis issues associated with a broad range of methodological approaches, the course had a clear complementary role within a department whose methodological offerings otherwise focused on fieldwork and ethnography. In past years, it had been taught as a conventional methods seminar employing a textbook and pre-prepared secondary data from the General Social Survey and other standard sources.

In 2007, the department revamped the course, organizing it around the team-based approach advanced here. The overall goal was to expose students to the entire research process: selecting research questions, identifying relevant data, collecting and coding the data, and deploying the data in analyses designed to answer particular research questions. Students collectively decided on a broad research topic early in the semester, and subsequent discussion of broader methodological topics (e.g., related to causal logic, conceptualization and operationalization, sampling, etc.) was organized to enable and support collaborative work on a large-scale research project tied to that topic. During each class meeting, discussion was divided between general methodological concepts and the application of those concepts to the specific research project.

The topic selected for this particular semester involved the community-level legacy of racial violence, with a particular focus on the impact of the killing of five participants in an anti-KKK march in Greensboro, North Carolina, on November 3, 1979. The students were interested in how such issues continue to be discussed, both publicly and privately, in Greensboro, and how memories of the event have changed over time. As such, their research efforts were tied to the work of the Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission (GTRC), which in 2004 became the first Truth and Reconciliation Commission initiated in the United States. Via the instructor’s existing contacts, the GTRC supplied members of the class with various primary data, including hundreds of hours of recorded interviews with community members, a number

of police and governmental reports, and a complete set of local newspaper articles about the event. Members of the class worked collaboratively throughout the semester. Their final product was a set of coauthored papers, each in the format of a refereed journal article. A revised version of one of these papers is currently under review, and another is in preparation for submission later this year.

3. Integrating Graduate Students into an Undergraduate Research Methods Course

In addition to the required graduate methods seminar and a new approach to teaching joint seminars, the department reimaged the way it teaches its main research course for undergraduates during the 2007–2008 year. Previously titled *Quantitative Methods of Social Inquiry*, the undergraduate course was retitled *Methods of Social Inquiry* and redesigned around modules focused on research design and the techniques of participant observation, interviewing, and quantitative analysis. Because this course meets a university-wide quantitative reasoning requirement, it attracts a wide range of students, from sociology majors who are preparing to write theses to seniors from other departments looking to fulfill the quantitative requirement. Sociology majors in the course themselves range in their research methods backgrounds, abilities, and interests. The course is capped at 25 undergraduates.

In tandem with the new graduate methods seminar, the department applied for and received a grant from the Teaching Enhancement Fund of the American Sociological Association to pilot a technique for including graduate students in the teaching of this newly designed undergraduate methods course. Our goal was to give graduate students the opportunity to better understand and apply the research methods imparted through the new graduate seminar by providing opportunities for them to serve as research consultants or project leaders for undergraduates. We also aimed to give undergraduates in the course the chance to hear about research projects in process, not just from the professor and teaching assistant but from graduate students actually using the research methods they are learning as part of broader research projects.

The course instructor asked three graduate students with well-developed research projects based primarily on three different methodologies to assist with the teaching of this class. Each student agreed to present a lecture about her or his main research method and be available for in-class consultations with students working on their own projects using that method. The graduate student assigned to teach about participant observation, for example, visited the class after the technique had been introduced by the instructor and the undergraduates had completed exercises designed to teach them how to observe. The undergraduates then read a paper this student had written, based on participant observation of high school wrestlers, and he gave a lecture in class about his research process and experience. By modeling the process by which he established research questions, got entry to a field site, did observation, recorded his observation, and so on, the graduate student helped the undergraduates learn how research is actually completed. In exchange, he had a chance to practice teaching a research method and talk about his research in process.

In the interviewing and quantitative analysis modules of the course, a second graduate student spoke about her experience conducting interviews with labor organizers, while a third student spoke about her project based on survey data about contraceptive use among teen mothers. In addition to having the undergraduates read a paper in progress and listen to the graduate students speak about their own research projects, the graduate students each attended a second class meeting designed as a workshop in which the undergraduates were working on their own projects, on a theme of their choice, which corresponded to each of the methods being taught in the class. With the assistance of the graduate students, the undergraduates worked in small groups during these workshops reviewing each other's field notes, interview guides, and quantitative analyses in process. The graduate students circulated with the instructor and course teaching assistant, providing guidance and answering questions. Each graduate student received a small stipend for her or his assistance with the course.

EVALUATING THE APPROACH

Our assessment of each of the above initiatives comes from students' written evaluations. For the joint seminar course, students completed these

evaluations during class, with anonymity ensured through several means: Students included no identifying information on their evaluation forms, faculty members were not present in the room while evaluations were being completed, and evaluation results were not released to faculty until final grades had been submitted. Due to a shift in university procedure, evaluations for the ASR and Methods of Social Inquiry seminars were completed online rather than in class.

In all cases, however, the evaluation form consisted of the same two sets of questions: (1) 29 five-point Likert-type scale responses focused on the course's "general structure," grading criteria, content and workload, student responsibilities, instructor skills and responsiveness, and overall contribution to student learning; and (2) requests for narrative assessment of overall positive and negative aspects of the course. These latter questions were phrased as follows: "Please identify those aspects of the course you found most useful or valuable for learning," and "What suggestions would you make to the instructor for improving the course?" In addition, in the Methods of Social Inquiry seminar, students completed separate in-class, anonymous written assessments at the end of the semester focused specifically on the positive and negative aspects of the graduate student presentations. Here, we draw primarily from students' narrative responses in each assessment to represent each key theme included in evaluations of the three initiatives described above. We appreciate that more direct assessments of student learning would be a preferable means of assessing the outcomes of our efforts, and we plan to gather such data as our efforts move forward. However, the narrative responses of students offer an important window onto their experiences of learning research methods in this new format, arguably a key indicator of the process now under way in our department.

I. A Required Graduate Methods Seminar

Students completed written evaluations of this course each semester. In the fall, 10 out of 10 students completed evaluations. In the spring, only six of eight possible evaluations were completed; both the reduction in course size and, we believe, the lower response rate are a consequence of several students taking medical leaves during the

spring semester. The highly interactive format of the seminar and its focus on the research process seem to have met two primary needs of our graduate students.

First, the ASR seminar provided a space in which the process of doing empirical sociological research was demystified. In open-ended comments about the aspects of the course that most supported their learning, the students consistently focused on the benefits of getting "a good glimpse at the research process" and its "different stages" and being able to discuss strategies to "solve different problems" that arise therein. Related, students commented on how helpful it was to see "the process of writing a paper deconstructed" and to read work that was "not yet in final draft," as this helped them to "understand what goes into writing these papers." Students clearly recognized that they could learn from the accounts of the guest speakers and from each other's experiences of doing research, noting that "it helps to see the process unfolding for others." Several students commented that being exposed to projects at different stages of development was particularly valuable: "It was helpful for us to take in various projects on various topics, which were all in different degrees of completion."

Second, students were excited about the opportunity to "read and critique work of classmates" in a "comfortable space." Students found it "hugely helpful" to "hav[e] one's project critiqued" and expressed appreciation for the "comments and suggestions" from each other and the course instructors: "I am thankful for the opportunity to share my work with other students and faculty and to benefit from their comments and suggestions." However, they seemed just as enthusiastic about the opportunity to learn more about each other's work, commenting that the seminar was "a wonderful space to hear what other students in the department are working on." One student stated that she "looked forward to each class" for its "collegial discussions and engagement." Similarly, students noted that they appreciated the opportunity for "gaining insights into the work of other students" and "being able to read and critique work of classmates," which helped to "build camaraderie among sociology doctoral students."

The students' enthusiasm for the collaborative aspects of the course was reflected also in their suggestions about how to improve the course in the coming years. Specifically, they suggested

altering the course format to include “small break-out groups to discuss research in its infancy, something informal that gives everyone a chance to talk out their possible research ideas or projects.” They also requested that we “build in check-ins around people’s research projects, since that way, we’d all be engaged on a bi-weekly basis around what research we’re all up to . . . allow us to all get an idea of what others are working on, and offer up potentials for collaboration.” We are encouraged by the observation that the first year of the seminar has generated an ethos of collective engagement and collaboration among the graduate students.

Based on these early assessments, it seems reasonable to hope that a research methods-oriented seminar provides a forum that will significantly enhance students’ ability to produce fully realized research projects, thereby facilitating their positive integration into the department and the discipline. At the same time, the seminar provides an effective means to build solidarity across cohorts and a productive, collaborative overall graduate student culture.

2. Teaching Research Methods in Joint Seminars of Graduate and Undergraduate Students

Fifteen of the 16 students enrolled in the Evaluation of Evidence course completed end-of-semester written evaluations. When asked to identify “those aspects of the course you found most useful or valuable for learning,” a significant majority (12 of 15) of the students cited its applied nature, meaning its focus on an actual research project. The fact that the project provided a collaborative hands-on illustration of general methodological concepts appears to have benefitted students in two primary ways.

First, the project imparted a sense of purpose that lent clarity to the overall research process. Several students cited the utility of “seeing how a research project is conducted, from beginning to end,” with one graduate student referring to the experience of pursuing a project “from the idea stages to the writing stages . . . [as] a wonderful and helpful experience.” Another noted that the “clear goal” of the collaborative project “really helped me feel like each thing we did had a purpose.” Similarly, a student expressed that the project “filled in a lot of holes” related

to research work, emphasizing that “everything had a particular use or value, not only for our overall project but also for further work in this discipline.” Echoing this sentiment, a graduate student also noted that exposure to the overall process allowed the scope of the class to expand: “This course was a great way to learn the process of writing a paper for publication—start with idea, work with data, generate analysis, and write article. For me, it was my first experience with statistics, so it was beneficial. . . . There was so much we covered—which is a good thing.”²

The second benefit of the class’s focus on the research project cited by multiple students was the fact that the collaborative nature of the project increased their motivation in the course generally. The Greensboro topic was especially rich, and the scale of the data available for coding created a considerably larger workload than otherwise would have been required in a standard sociology joint seminar. At times, the class was able to apply ideas related to sampling and case selection to reduce their coding work in appropriate ways, but the structure of the course itself also seemed conducive to student motivation. As one undergraduate expressed, “[E]ven though . . . we were doing so much more than one would in a normal class, [the project] pushed us to learn.” Another cited that “this class was a lot of work and challenging but I felt it was worth it—we worked toward a definite goal and I was able to develop different skills.” Similarly, several other students noted that the “hands-on aspect” of the course (“[W]e had a *real* project to work on!”) increased their engagement in the overall class.

A significant benefit here is the fact that the collaborative structure of this project appears to have met the needs of both graduate and undergraduate students. While issues related to the level at which joint seminars are taught have historically plagued these course offerings, not a single student cited this concern. This important outcome, we feel, was primarily a product of the organization of the course, in particular the way in which students’ “tiered” roles provided multiple opportunities for mentorship of other participants. While there was significant heterogeneity in students’ prior research experience, engagement in the large-scale project allowed students to differentiate their roles when necessary, assisting with tasks that they knew well and deferring to others when appropriate. Combinations of graduate and undergraduate students met frequently

outside of class to organize various data-coding and analysis tasks, and much of the learning that went on occurred within these groups, when particular students (usually, but not always, graduate students) were able to serve as mentors to others in the group.

But while these out-of-class meetings were crucial to the collaborative structure of the course, they also signaled a central challenge: how best to manage the substantive focus of the class alongside an ambitious project without overwhelming students. In course evaluations, when asked to make suggestions for improving the course, approximately half (8 of 15) of the responses cited this issue. In particular, certain students cited their concern over the “manageability” of the course and the fact that they felt “rushed” or “cramped” when trying to complete the project.

Adjusting specific components of the course’s organization—such as ensuring that the project is selected and initiated soon after the start of the semester, mandating that particular sections of the research papers (such as the literature review) be written well before the semester’s end, and allocating sufficient time to the project during each class session—would certainly help to minimize such problems, although it is important to note that the mutual collective engagement in the project by graduate students, undergraduates, and faculty members provides the primary mechanism through which to manage these logistical issues. One student noted, as a general caution to initiating applied courses, that “taking on a large research project with so many people is a difficult task, and needs to be done with a lot of communication between the professor and the students.” Another was clear that motivation for engagement in the project stemmed from the feeling that he or she was “treated more like a colleague than a student.”

3. Integrating Graduate Students into an Undergraduate Research Methods Course

Twenty of the 25 undergraduates in this course completed in-class questionnaires designed to evaluate the experience of having graduate students assist with the class (the five missing students were either absent from class that day or completed the class on an extended timeline due to medical issues). The three graduate students

who participated also completed written evaluations of the experience. In addition, 15 of the 25 undergraduates completed the online course evaluations, as described above, at the end of the semester.

When asked what they learned from the graduate students’ involvement in the course, undergraduates’ comments focused on the amount of work required to complete research projects and ways of negotiating access and making decisions in the midst of projects. “I learned how much work goes into even the smallest scale projects and the process behind them,” one student wrote, and another wrote, “Just what it is actually like to be doing research on a full-scale.” Several students described learning how to gain entry to settings, writing that they learned about the “work that went into gaining data and how to deal when things don’t go as planned” and “the process of accessing groups and creating relationships with individuals involved.” A number of students mentioned better appreciating that research is a process, after hearing the graduate students’ presentations. For example, “It clarified the research process for me in terms of logistics. . . . It showed me that there wasn’t a ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ way to research as long as the methodology was well thought out and consistent.”

About three quarters of the undergraduates also reported that hearing the graduate students talk about their research influenced their thinking about their own class assignments. Students mentioned thinking differently about “feasibility,” “time commitments,” “how to take notes and what information is important,” the “common pitfalls of research,” and the “complexity of making decisions about what to record” (when doing interviews) after listening to the graduate students. Several said these presentations also helped them to think generally about the direction of their assignments and projects, writing, “I got a better idea about what sort of scope I should attempt,” and “It gave me confidence. I felt if they could do it, I could do it too.” A number of the undergraduates also incorporated examples from the graduate students’ presentations into the exercises and written assignments they completed for the course.

All but two of the undergraduates felt that having the graduate students participate in the class enhanced their own learning. As one student explained, “It was very helpful to hear about real, current, and interesting examples of each

method. Asking questions directly helped me understand certain aspects of the class in an interesting way.” Others mentioned the value of “seeing people immersed in the work that we were learning about” and said that the exposure to these people and projects “made the whole process of doing this work much more tangible—meaning it gave us the context for where the projects that we’re currently doing could lead us.” All but one of the undergraduates said they would advise the sociology department to continue having graduate students present their research in this class. Several students suggested, however, that the presentations be shortened, that they be focused more on the research process, and that more time be allotted for questions and answers.

When asked what they learned from this process, the graduate students emphasized the value of preparing a full lecture and of developing their teaching skills in the process. One wrote, “[T]he presentation was useful both for the development of my own research and in developing my teaching skills and strategies,” and another wrote, “[I]t was great to prepare a full lecture, especially on quantitative material. It was challenging, but I was happy to have the opportunity to organize my notes into a coherent presentation.” They mentioned learning about PowerPoint, effective time management in the classroom, and more (and less) successful ways of engaging students in the classroom through this experience. Each thought that graduate students should be integrated into future undergraduate research methods courses, if possible, and suggested changes such as “receiving clearer guidelines about what should be included in the presentation” and finding ways of “incorporating the undergraduate class material with our graduate projects.”

In addition to their formal interactions in the classroom, a few of the graduate and undergraduate students reported talking outside the classroom about particular research projects and/or about graduate school and the experience of being a graduate student. A number of the seniors in the course mentioned better understanding what graduate school is like after interacting with the graduate students in these ways. At least some of the students who participated appreciated the team approach of this initiative, with one graduate student writing,

This was a great opportunity for PhD students to work with professors and undergrads—so it was like the whole “sociology

team” was together and (ideally) the younger students get to look up to the older PhD students and the PhD students get to feel like a real professor giving a lecture, and the professors get to see how their “coaching” has led to the development and progress of their students, grads and undergrads.

LESSONS LEARNED AND NEXT STEPS

The model we have described emphasizes the benefits of centering curricular efforts on research methods by integrating undergraduate and graduate teaching through a collaborative team-based approach. In assessing our efforts to implement this sort of program at Brandeis, we find that the initiative has been successful overall. Our evaluation of each component suggests that the collaborative structure enhanced student learning by creating a space for learning by doing and team-based work that strengthened students’ engagement with general concepts and practices. This approach was not without its weaknesses, however, which included finding ways to balance methods versus content topics in coursework, not overwhelming students in joint seminars with the amount of time actual research projects take, and creating an environment for graduate students in the ASR seminar that is both supportive and intellectually challenging. Overall, however, we found that the interwoven components functioned to orient students to disciplinary standards, as graduate students became accustomed to critically reading each other’s work in the ASR, drafting portions of papers that would ultimately be submitted to peer-reviewed journals in the joint seminar, and engaging with the research process in the undergraduate methods course in a manner that exposed students to the intricacies of sociological research at the graduate level.

Our experience to date has highlighted particular areas that seem especially important to consider when initiating a collaboratively organized methodology program. First, considerable upfront organization is required for courses intended to impart generalized training in research methodology through students’ active engagement with the research process. The fact that students learn by doing—that is, that they collect and analyze

real-world data in the joint seminar or consider tangible research design dilemmas presented by more experienced graduate students in the undergraduate methods course—is something that builds upon rather than replaces discussion of foundational methodological issues. As such, it is important to consider how to incorporate applications of research methods in a manner that is both pedagogically sound and sensitive to issues of time management. To maintain an ideal balance between these course objectives, it is important to strategize about how—and how frequently—to relate general concepts to students' ongoing work on research projects. Similarly, to ensure that ambitious collaborative projects are completed alongside other course work, it is helpful to pace project assignments so that certain key components (such as the literature review and the conceptualization and operationalization of variables) can be completed even while students are simultaneously engaged in data collection and coding tasks.

Finally, we intend the discussion of our particular initiative at Brandeis University to be illustrative of an overall approach, which can take many forms. Given the centrality of research methods to many departments' undergraduate and graduate curricula, we assert that there is considerable benefit to employing a unified "multipronged" model that emphasizes the capacity of faculty, graduate students, and undergraduates to simultaneously mentor and learn from each other as they collectively engage in the research process. The ideal shape of these efforts, however, will almost certainly differ based on department size, resources, and culture. The program described in this article emerged through our struggles with how to staff graduate research methods courses in a department with small incoming master's and doctoral cohorts and a strong commitment to undergraduate teaching. In other settings, like-minded efforts might build on, expand, or replace some of the components described here with capstone seminars, undergraduate thesis symposia guided by graduate students, or long-term research projects through which cohorts of students can filter each year (e.g., Senier et al. 2006 or <http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/nsfreu/>). Institutions without graduate programs might consider parallel initiatives that utilize outstanding students as peer teaching assistants the next time the course is taught or invite students from

advanced methods courses or those who are writing theses to share their newly acquired expertise in an introductory methods seminar. In each case, the ideal outcome is the training of students in a manner that models the interactive and collaborative work of professional social scientists.

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NOTES

Author's names are listed in reverse alphabetical order. Responsibility is shared equally among us.

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1. When Everett C. Hughes left the University of Chicago, he joined the Brandeis faculty and helped to found the doctoral program in sociology (Reinharz 1995).
2. Note that because the evaluations were anonymous, there is no way to differentiate whether comments were offered by undergraduate or graduate students. When this distinction is noted, it is because the student comment in question included information explicitly referencing his or her status.

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