SAMPLE SYLLABUS
PsTL 5206
Action Research Methods to Improve College Teaching and Learning
(3 credits)

This is a required core course for the Plan A and B Master's degree. Students must be enrolled
in the PsTL master’s program or receive permission from the DGS to take this course. There are
no other formal prerequisites.

COURSE DESCRIPTION
This course introduces students to action research as a method of improving teaching and
learning at the postsecondary level. Students will gain hands-on experience doing research in
college classrooms, learning assistance centers, and/or other college learning environments. The
course will explore the relative strengths and potential challenges of different approaches to
classroom research, as well as ethical issues. All students will be trained on how to ethically
conduct research involving human subjects.

PSTL conducts a variety of action-based classroom research and faculty have expertise in
assessing student learning and development outcomes. Students will have an opportunity for
hands-on work in this class.

COURSE OBJECTIVES
1. apply multicultural educational theories and best practices to identify, define, and solve
   problems in diverse postsecondary teaching and learning contexts
2. understand the nexus between theory, research, and practice by applying action research
   methods to college learning environments
3. understand the methodologies and ethics applicable to action research in college classrooms
4. gain effective communication skills

These course objectives mirror the learning objectives for the PsTL graduate programs. The
course requirements are designed to provide students with the opportunity to hone these learning
objectives.

REQUIRED TEXTS
Francisco: Jossey-Bass. (Second Edition). This is an expensive text, but it will be used in
other M.A. courses.
COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Class Participation
Your participation in class is highly valued. Our class will be a collaboration in which our efforts will depend on the exploration of a number of perspectives and viewpoints. Class participation therefore includes a variety of ways to contribute to the course development, including meaningful contribution to class discussions, small group work, oral and written reflections on our personal ethical philosophies, office-hour discussions, reviewing drafts of other students’ work and providing useful written and/or oral comments. As a class, we will draft our expectations for engaged participation and this “code” will be used to assess participation.

Please read the assigned reading prior to class in order to be able to fully participate. Bring this syllabus and the assigned reading to class. If the assigned reading is on-line, be sure to print out a copy and bring it to class. In addition, each week you will be required to write a discussion question on the required reading (or a recommended reading) and provide the discussion question in advance to the instructor. These questions will be utilized during our discussions and you will be expected to take the lead on at least three of your questions over the course of the semester.

Make Up Policy: If you know in advance that you must miss a class, contact the instructor. He will assign you a task (in addition to your weekly discussion question) to help provide your perspective during the seminar you will miss. If, due to unforeseen circumstances you must miss a class and are unable to contact the instructor in advance, meet with him prior to the next seminar to discuss a make-up assignment. If you chose not to “make-up” a seminar that you miss, half a letter grade will be deducted from your participation score.

Ethics Assignment
Every student must complete the University of Minnesota Human Subjects Training in order to pass this class. In addition, students must review the class protocol for conducting the classroom observation (approved in advance by the IRB) and take a short quiz demonstrating that they understand the requirements. In addition, working in small groups, students will complete an IRB human subjects form to conduct a classroom study. Each small group will present the ethical issues and proposed means to protect the human subjects, to the class. A detailed assignment guide will be provided in class, along with the assessment criteria for the group, and for each individual student.

Classroom Observation
We will have the opportunity to review a syllabus, course materials, and observe an undergraduate class. You must complete the University of Minnesota Human Subjects Training and pass the class protocol quiz prior to the observation-no exceptions. You will write a research report discussing your observation. A detailed assignment guide will be provided in class, along with assessment criteria.

Action Research Project
The final project requires a prospectus, a draft, and a final paper. In this assignment, you will gain experience conducting an action research project. We will work on this project over the
course of the semester so that by the end, you will have an entire plan to conduct an action research project (including a human subjects IRB application, where appropriate). You will chose whether you want to conduct classroom research or research in another type of college learning environment. A detailed assignment guide will be provided in class, along with the assessment criteria.

**GRADE DETERMINATION**
Grades will be determined according to the following weights:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Participation</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Ethics Assignment</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Classroom Observation</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Final Project</td>
<td>50</td>
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Total = 100
COURSE OUTLINE

All readings, class handouts, and this syllabus are available online at http://www.myu.umn.edu except for the required books, which are available for purchase at the campus bookstore.

UNIT ONE: ACTION RESEARCH IN DIVERSE COLLEGE CLASSROOMS

Week One: Introduction to the Course

Students will be put into action research teams, depending on interest area.

Week Two: What is Action Research?

Reading:
Banks & Banks; chapter 1: Banks, J. “Multicultural education: Historical developments, dimensions and practice.”
McNiff: chapters 1-4.

Week Three: Learning to Improve Practice

Reading:
McNiff: chapters 5-8.

Week Four: Developing an Action Plan

Reading:
McNiff: chapters 9-12. Each student should choose one example of an action research project from chapter 12 to present to the class.


**UNIT TWO: CLASSROOM ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION LEARNING CONTEXTS**

**Week Five: What is Classroom Assessment?**

Reading:
Angelo & Cross: chapters 1-3.


**Week Six: Choosing the Right Technique for course related knowledge and assessing learner attitudes**

Reading:
Angelo & Cross: chapters 6-8.


**Week Seven: Assessing Learner Reactions to Instruction: Examples of Classroom Assessment Projects**

Reading:
Angelo & Cross: chapter 5, and chapter 9.


Additional Readings available on-line—Instructor will post examples of action research projects and students will select at least one to discuss with the class in light of the assigned reading.
Week Eight: Testing and Critiquing Our Knowledge—engaging with the politics of knowledge

Reading:


McNiff: chapters 16-18; and chapter 21 “Writing a report for higher education accreditation.”


UNIT THREE: THE ETHICS OF ACTION RESEARCH

Week Nine: Introduction to Human Subjects Research Ethics

*All students should have completed the University on-line Human Subjects Training and read the class IRB protocol.

Readings:

Banks & Banks; chapter 42: Bennett, C.I. “Research on Racial Issues in Higher Education.”


Week Ten: Class Protocol and Conducting a Classroom Observation

Students will conduct an observation in a first-year college classroom. Note, all students must have completed the Human Subjects Training and passed the class protocol quiz prior to conducting the observation! No exceptions.

Readings:

UNIT FOUR: CONDUCTING YOUR ACTION RESEARCH

Week Eleven: Designing your Action Research Project and Human Subjects Protocol
IRB human subjects form to conduct a classroom study due. Each small group will present the ethical issues and proposed means to protect the human subjects, to the class.
Readings:
McNiff: chapters 23-35.

Week Twelve: Conducting Your Action Research Project
Students will work in teams inside and outside of class on their action research projects.

Week Thirteen: Writing the First Draft
Assignment: Complete a first draft of your Action Research Project--Students will work-shop the first draft of the final project in class.

Week Fourteen and Fifteen: Student Presentations of Action Research Projects
Course evaluation and student presentations.