Sociology 357: Methods of Sociological Inquiry

General Information:
Time: Tuesday and Thursday, 2:30-3:45
Room: 6112 Sewell Social Science Building
Instructor: Jim Raymo
Office: 4462 Social Science Building
Tel: 262-2783
Email: jraymo@ssc.wisc.edu
Office Hours: 3-5 Monday
Class Page: http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/~jraymo/soc357/syllabus.htm

Required Textbooks:
Note that this book has an accompanying study site (http://www.pineforge.com/isw6/).
This is a useful addition to the book that you may find helpful in preparing for tests or clarifying/supplementing your reading.

Objectives:
In this course, you will learn the basic research methods used by social scientists: observation, surveys, experiments, and statistics. You will also learn about the logic of reasoning in social science. There are several specific goals that we will work to achieve:

1) Develop a basic understanding of the elements of research design.

2) Develop an appreciation of the rather straightforward, systematic set of procedures and tools through which research can provide answers to questions about the social world.

3) Lay the foundations for an understanding of statistical analyses that you will encounter in subsequent courses in the methods sequence.

4) Recognize the limitations and problems of doing research on human behavior and the caution necessary when drawing conclusions from the results of any one study.

5) Learn how to work with individual-level data and use a common data analysis program (Stata)

6) Conduct your first empirical social science research study
Course Requirements:

Class participation: You are expected to complete the assigned reading before each class. Lectures will be given with the assumption that you have read the required readings and therefore will not go over basic materials that are adequately covered by the assigned readings. Valuable class time is reserved for analysis, synthesis, and discussion. Class participation will count for 5% of your final grade so it is in your best interest to attend all classes. If unable to attend for some reason, you should arrange to get class notes from another student.

Assignments: There are several assignments that you will be asked to submit (roughly one a week). Many of these assignments are steps in your research project and thus work that you should be doing anyway. I will give you feedback on all assignments related to your research paper. None of the assignments are particularly onerous and I hope that some (most?) will be enjoyable. Assignments count for 15% of your final grade and each will be graded simply as 1 (satisfactory) or 0 (not satisfactory) with late submissions getting a grade of 0. It is therefore in your best interest to pay careful attention to the syllabus and turn in all assignments on time. I would like to receive all assignments as email attachments (jraymo@ssc.wisc.edu) and will accept them up to the end of the day (midnight) that they are due.

Tests: There will be three in-class, closed-book tests. These tests will consist of multiple choice and short answer questions covering material from both the readings and the lectures. Each of the tests account for 20% of your final grade. There will be no final exam.

Paper/research project: There will be one written assignment (worth 20% of your final grade) due by December 15th (I will not consider an extension except in the most extreme circumstances). This paper will be based on analyses of data drawn from the General Social Survey. These data are available from a web-based analysis engine at the University of California-Berkeley (URL: http://csa.berkeley.edu:7502/archive.htm). Alternatively, you can analyze other publicly available data or data that you collect yourself (please see me as soon as possible if you think that you would like to do this). All papers will be presented in class at the end of the semester. With no restrictions concerning the topic, method, or data source, this project is an excellent opportunity in which to exercise your academic freedom. All papers will be evaluated based on both the content and the quality of writing. Specific instructions for this assignment are included below the class schedule.
Class schedule:

Class 1 (Thursday 9/3): Introduction - discuss syllabus, course objectives, and requirements

Class 2 (Tuesday 9/8): What is social science research?
   Reading: Schutt, Chapter 1
   Due: Print and take GSS sample survey
   (http://www.csub.edu/ssricrem/Other/gssweb/SampGSS.htm)

Class 3 (Thursday 9/10): Theory and research
   Reading: Schutt, Chapter 2
   Due: (a) Peruse full GSS codebook (http://sda.berkeley.edu/cgi-bin/hsda?harcsda+gss08)
      [1: click on “codebooks/standard codebook” at top, 2: click on “variable groups” for
      thematic listing of variables (there are a lot)]
      (b) Prepare and submit a few possible research questions.

Class 4 (Tuesday 9/15): Conceptualization and measurement
   Reading: Schutt chapter 4
   Due: Recoding data – pick a variable(s) in the GSS that is suitable for the construction of
   an index, a scale, or should simply be collapsed into a smaller number of categories –
   describe and submit your recoding procedure. Because the online analysis tool only
   allows for the most basic recoding, you do not need to actually do this (we will have a
   chance to do similar data manipulation later for your research project).

Class 5 (Thursday 9/17): Research design and causation
   Read: Schutt chapter 6
   Due: Draft of research proposal

Class 6 (Tuesday 9/22): Introduction to Stata (ROOM 3218 Social Science)
   Instructor: Doug Hemken
   Read: Stata for Students (http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/sscc/pubs/4-30.htm)

Class 7 (Thursday 9/24): Experiments and quasi-experiments
   Read: Schutt chapter 7
   Due: Go to http://tess.experimentcentral.org/introduction.html. Click on “TESS Studies
   and Data” Read a couple of examples and prepare a brief proposal for your own
   experiment. This does not have to be long. State one or two hypotheses and describe the
   experimental manipulation you propose to evaluate them (remember that these are web
   based surveys).

Class 8 (Tuesday 9/29): Sampling 1 – sampling theory
   Read: Schutt chapter 5

Class 9 (Thursday 10/1): Sampling 2 – sampling design
   Due: Answer Discussion Question #4 on page 186.
Class 10 (Tuesday 10/6) **Test 1**

Class 11 (Thursday 10/8): Survey research  
Read: Schutt chapter 8  
Due: Do Web Exercise #3 on page 311

Class 12 (Tuesday 10/13): Secondary data analysis – getting and using data  
Read: Schutt chapter 13  
Due: Go to the ICPSR web site (http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/). Pick a survey that sounds interesting to you (click “Data” tab at top left of page, click “Search” to look for a survey on a specific topic, or click “Browse” if you just want to see what is available). After picking a survey, look at the questionnaire and write one or two hypotheses this survey would be well suited to address. Note: You will need to create an account to access survey documentation. When taken to the “My Data Login” page, click on “create account” for new user and follow instructions. UW is a member of ICPSR so you have access to all of the data.

Class 13 (Thursday 10/15): Quantitative methods 1 – basic summary statistics  
Read: Schutt chapter 14, pp. 486-514

Class 14 (Tuesday 10/20): Quantitative methods 2 – bivariate, multivariate statistics  
Read: Schutt chapter 14, pp. 514-534

Class 15 (Thursday 10/22): Qualitative methods  
Read: Schutt chapter 9  
Due: Tabulations of data for research project – univariate and bivariate

Class 16 (Tuesday 10/27): Quest lecture  
Professor Marcy Carlson on the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study

Class 17 (Thursday 10/29): Qualitative data analysis  
Read: Schutt chapter 10

Class 18 (Tuesday 11/3) **Test 2**

Class 19 (Thursday 11/5): Defining (and refining) research questions and hypotheses

Class 20 (Tuesday 11/10): Literature review  
Due: Pick one attitudinal variable and one sociodemographic variable in the GSS (http://sda.berkeley.edu/cgi-bin/hsda?harc/sda+gss08). Construct 2 or 3 (potentially competing) hypotheses regarding relationships between the two. Conduct crosstabulations to evaluate your hypotheses – summarize your findings

Class 21 (Thursday 11/12): Summarizing and reporting research  
Read: Schutt chapter 15
Class 22 (Tuesday 11/17): Historical and comparative research  
Read: Schutt chapter 12  
Due: Draft of analysis paper (one copy to instructor, one to peer reviewer)

Class 23 (Thursday 11/19): Independent work on project (ROOM 3218 Social Science)  
Instructor: Doug Hemken  
Due: Brief literature review for project

Class 24 (Tuesday 11/24): Evaluation research  
Read: Schutt chapter 11  
Due: Peer reviews (one copy to instructor, one to author)

Class 25 (Thursday 11/26): Thanksgiving Break – No class

Class 26 (Tuesday 12/1): Research ethics  
(This paper is available electronically from the UW Library – being able to access the library’s electronic holdings is a fundamental research skill so I am leaving it to you to locate and download this paper on your own. You should do this on-campus rather than off campus).  
Due: After reading the article, answer the following questions: Do you think that the similarity of research ethics in physical and social science is appropriate? Why? Why Not? What modifications do you think would be helpful?

Class 27 (Thursday 12/3): Review, catch-up

Class 28 (Tuesday 12/8): Student presentations

Class 29 (Thursday 12/10): Student presentations

Class 30 (Tuesday 12/15): Test 3  
Due: Final paper – no extensions
Instructions for Paper

General Instructions:

This paper should demonstrate your understanding of the course material. There is no restriction concerning the topic, method, or data source. This paper should be written in a concise manner (10-15 pages).

This is an excellent opportunity for you to do some interesting work and write a real research paper. The results of the project will be presented to the class late in the semester. In addition to completing related assignments in a timely manner, you should arrange to meet with me at least once during the process of completing this project. I strongly encourage you to make use of office hours to discuss your project with me at an early stage.

Specific Instructions:

An extensive literature review is not necessary. The background should be sufficient to motivate your analyses. Emphasis should be placed on research design and interpretation of results. A possible outline is as follows:

1. What motivates your research project?
2. What is your central hypothesis (or hypotheses)?
3. What empirical source (either secondary or primary) do you use to test the hypothesis (or hypotheses)?
4. Describe your research design.
5. Are there confounding factors that you control (or wish to control)?
6. How do the results bear on the hypothesis (or hypotheses)?
7. What are the limitations of your study?

I assume that everyone is familiar with University guidelines regarding the quotation, paraphrasing, and representation of published sources. If not, a clear definition of plagiarism as well as information about disciplinary sanctions for academic misconduct may be found at the Dean of Students web site: http://www.wisc.edu/students/UWS14.htm. Knowledge of these rules is your responsibility, and lack of familiarity with the rules does not excuse misconduct.