

Methods of Social Inquiry

Soc 357

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Office Hours: Thursday 12-2 pm

Section 8: Tues. & Thurs. 4-5:15
Section 9: Tues. & Thurs. 2:30-3:45

This course gives a broad overview of methods used to conduct sociological research. In it, you will learn how it is that we can claim to “know” something, even when this thing is outside the realm of personal experience. In addition, you will learn how to formulate a research question, decide on the best methods to answer your question and develop the research design necessary to carry out this research project. At the completion of this course, students will be able to...

- Describe and compare various research techniques used in the social sciences.
- Assess the usefulness of research methods for answering a variety of empirical questions.
- Evaluate/critique published research articles on the basis of methodological merits.
- Construct a testable research hypothesis.
- Design an appropriate analytical approach for testing this hypothesis.

I intend this course to be useful for majors in sociology as well as non-majors. Ideally, you will learn to think more critically about scientific research, in addition to being poised for job opportunities that require familiarity with basic social research concepts and techniques. This should not be thought of as a statistics course, and requires no background in statistics. You will use a small amount of statistics in your assignments, which will be easier if you have already had elementary statistics, but you can learn what you need to know for these projects in this course. If you have already taken any other research methods course, please talk to me, as this course will probably cover what you already know.

Required Readings:

Babbie, Earl. *The Basics of Social Research*. Fourth Edition.
Gladwell, Malcolm. *Outliers: The Story of Success*. New York: Little, Brown and Company.

In addition to the two books, the course will include a series of readings. These readings will be available on the course website at learn@UW.

Course Requirements:

Your grade for this course is made up of in-class assignments and participation, reading reactions, exams and projects. There are 400 points that you can get during the semester, and your grade will be based on the percentage of points you get.

Point Breakdown:

Exam 1: 10 % (40 points)

Exam 2: 10% (40 points)

Assignment 1: Content Analysis Project 12.5% (50 points)

Assignment 2: Fieldnotes 12.5% (50 points)

Assignment 3: Quantitative Analysis in Lab 12.5% (50 points)

In-class participation (includes reading responses and in-class assignments): 15% (60 points)

Presentation: 7.5% (30 points)

Final Project: 20% (80 points)

Reading Responses: Before each class, you will be required to submit a reading response to the course site at learn@UW. Each response should include the central argument of the reading for that day, one thing you found interesting and a question. The question might be something you did not understand or it might be a critique of the reading. In addition, you need to respond to at least one other person's reading response in a thoughtful way. I will hand out guidelines for online communication. You will be excused from four reading responses throughout the semester without penalty.

Exams and Projects: There will be two exams in the early part of the semester. Throughout the semester, there will be three projects, all of which I will describe in more detail as we approach the due dates for the projects. The first project will be a content analysis project, in which you replicate a previous study of personal ads. Then you will create your own coding scheme and do an analysis on your own. The second project will consist of taking field notes. For this project, we will do a "test run" together and then you will observe and write field notes on your own. The third project will consist of quantitative secondary data analysis. We will meet in the computer lab for this where you will learn the basics of a statistical software program and run basic statistical analyses.

Final Research Proposal In lieu of a final exam or term paper, the culmination of this methods class will be a research proposal, in which you present your idea for an original research project, taking into consideration the major concepts presented in the course. The proposal will include a topic that you have identified as worthy of study. It will then compare and contrast two different methodological approaches to studying this topic, noting the different questions that you can ask and answer when using different methods. It will include a discussion of the variables, hypotheses, sampling strategy, proposed methodology, and plan for analyzing the results. In essence, the first 5 weeks of the course, which will introduce you to all of these concepts, will give you a chance to start thinking through this project. By the end of the semester, you will have had enough practice and experience to be able to write the proposal (and maybe one day) carry out the research. To be clear: this is not a standard term paper or presentation of original research. Instead, this is your chance to *design* a social scientific research project, which is the first step in actually conducting original research.

Course Policies:

Attendance: Attendance is important for this class. You will get one free absence before I start to deduct points from your participation grade. You do not need to tell me why you missed a class. Instead, I expect you to take responsibility for your missed class. This means that if you miss a class, you will not be able to make up the points. It also means that I expect you to ask your classmates for any material that you missed on that day – do not ask me for this material.

Due Dates: All assignments are due during class, with the exception of reading responses, which are must be posted to learn@UW by noon on the day of class. Anything that is not turned in on time will be penalized 5 points for every day that is late.

Email: Email is an important form of communication, and as such, there are certain guidelines that I expect you to follow. First, I expect you to communicate with me in a respectful way. This means that your emails need to contain a salutation and need to be grammatically correct. If your email does not address me (as in “Dear Sarah”) or contains grammar mistakes I will not answer it. In return, I will address you respectfully in all of my communications with you. Second, there are some questions or concerns that cannot adequately be addressed in an email. For these questions, I will ask you to see me in person. Finally, before writing me an email, please check other resources: 1) the syllabus; 2) other classmates. We will be using learn@UW a lot for class, and much of the material will be posted there. Learn@UW is also an easy way to get in touch with other people in the class if you have a question. If you cannot find an answer after looking in these places, then email me. I am not at my computer all of the time, nor do I think of emailing as instant communication. You can expect that I will answer you within a day.

Miscellaneous:

Writing Resources: Although I will not have much time to teach writing skills in this class, I expect the assignments and research proposal to be proofread, grammatically and mechanically sound, and logically coherent. None of these things come naturally to anyone; everyone has to work at it. If you think I’m not talking about you, think again. Your grade will be determined not only by how smart you are, but by the quality of writing you submit. I am happy to work with anyone who wants to improve their writing skills; but you should also consider going to the pros. The Writing Center on campus is available to all students who want to improve their writing. It has been my experience that almost everyone who goes to the Center finds it to be a positive experience. They offer classes for improving your writing skills, or you can receive individual assistance on a particular assignment. For more information, visit their website, www.wisc.edu/writing. The Writing Center is located at 6171 Helen C. White Hall, and you should check out the website for their hours (which vary throughout the semester). To schedule an appointment, call 263-1992.

Plagiarism: The University takes plagiarism *very seriously*. It can result in disciplinary action by the University and a record that will follow you throughout your academic career. Even “good” people are often found guilty of plagiarism. It doesn’t have to be just turning in someone else’s work with your name on it; it is also forgetting to put quotation marks in your paper when you are quoting from a text. All kinds of plagiarism can result in disciplinary action, even if it was an accident. **BE CAREFUL WHEN YOU WRITE!** The department of sociology is also now checking papers using anti-plagiarism software. Please be warned that your papers may be checked for plagiarism (don’t take it personally; it doesn’t mean I don’t like you!).

Class Email List: If you are in the 2:30 class, the class email list is soc357-9-f09@lists.wisc.edu. If you are in the 4:00 class, the class email list is soc357-8-f09@lists.wisc.edu. I will periodically send out reminders, updates, and information about the course (and probably some miscellaneous articles, too). In order to receive these emails (and be able to send emails to the list), you must be registered for the course. In addition, I will post information on our course site at learn@UW. You should all be going to the site regularly to post your reading responses. When you do, be sure to read the opening page, where I will post news and updates.

Calendar:

****Note: This calendar is subject to change. If the syllabus changes, I will provide you with the changes in class and electronically.**

Part 1: Knowledge and the Use of Social Research

Week 1

Th Sept. 3 – Course Introduction and Overview

Week 2

Tue Sept. 8 – Scientific Knowledge

Read: Babbie Chapter 1

Read: Gladwell “Introduction” p. 3-11

Th Sept. 10 – Paradigms, Theories and Social Research

Read: Babbie Chapter 2

Week 3

Tue Sept. 15 – Using and Evaluating Social Research

Read: Gladwell Part I: pp. 15-158

Th Sept. 17 – Using and Evaluating Social Research

Read: Gladwell Part II: 159-299

Read: One of the following depending on your group:

- Lareau, Annette. 2002. *Invisible Inequality: Social Class and Childrearing*

in Black Families and White. *American Sociological Review*, 67 (5): 747-776.

- Barnsley, Roger, A.H. Thompson and Philippe Legault. 1991. Family Planning: Football Style. The Relative Age Effect in Football. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 27 (1): 77-88.
- Cohen, Dov, Joseph Vandello, Sylvia Puente and Adrian Rantilla. 1999. "When You Call Me That, Smile!" How Norms for Politeness, Interaction Styles, and Aggression Work Together in Southern Culture. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 62 (3): 257-275.

Week 4

Tue Sept. 22 – Ethics in Research

Read: Babbie Chapter 3

Read: Humphries, Laud. 1974. Tearoom Trade: Impersonal Sex in Public Places. In *The Research Experience*, edited by M. Patricia Golden.

Th Sept. 24 – Research and Objectivity

Read: Gray, Paul et al. 2007. "Feminist Methods" in *The Research Imagination*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Read: Judge Sotomayor's 2001 Lecture

Week 5

Tue Sept. 29 – Research Design

Read: Babbie Chapter 4

Read: Eichler, Margrit. 1988. Chapters 1 and 7 in *Nonsexist Research Methods*. Boston: Allen & Unwin.

Th Oct. 1 – **Exam 1**

Part II: Designing and Conducting Research

Week 6

Tue Oct. 6 – Conceptualization, Operationalization, and Measurement

Read: Babbie Chapter 5

Read: Maxwell, Joseph. 1996. Validity: How Might You Be Wrong? In *Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach*.

Th Oct. 8 – Indexes, Scales and Typologies

Read: Babbie Chapter 6

Week 7

Tue Oct. 13 – Logic of Sampling

Read: Babbie Chapter 7

Th Oct. 15 – Unobstrusive research

Read: Babbie, Chapter 11

Read: Davis, Simon. 1990. Men as Success Objects and Women as Sex Objects:
A Study of Personal Advertisements. *Sex Roles* 23: 43-50.

Week 8

Tue Oct. 20 – Content analysis

In-class: Group activity re-creating Davis research

Th Oct. 22 – Survey Research

Read: Babbie Chapter 9

Week 9

Tue Oct. 27 – Survey Research

Read: Schaeffer, Nora Cate and Stanley Presser. 2003. The Science of Asking
Questions. *Annual Review of Sociology* 29: 65-88.

Due: Assignment 1 (Content Analysis)

Th Oct. 29 – Qualitative Research: Interviewing

Read: Lareau, Anette. Chapter 1 and Appendix A from *Unequal Childhoods:
Class, Race and Family Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Read: Best, Amy L. 2003. Doing Race in the Context of Feminist Interviewing:
Constructing Whiteness through Talk. *Qualitative Inquiry* 9 (6): 895-914.

Week 10

Tue Nov. 3 – **Exam 2**

Th Nov. 5 – Qualitative Field Research

Read: Babbie Chapter 10

Part III: Conducting Research – Analysis

Week 11

Tue Nov. 10 – In-class activity: Observation at the Union & taking good fieldnotes
(Beginning of Assignment 2)

Th Nov. 12 – Analyzing Qualitative Research

Read: Babbie Chapter 13

Read: Duneier, Mitchell. 1999. Preface and Appendix from *Sidewalk*. New York:
Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Week 12

Tue Nov. 17 – Quantitative Data Analysis

** Meet in Computer Lab

Read: Babbie Chapter 14

Th Nov. 19 – Quantitative Data Analysis

**** Meet in Computer Lab**

Due: Assignment 2 (Fieldnotes from Observation)

Due: Research Topic for Final Project

Week 13

Tue Nov. 24 – Computer Lab: Open Session for work on Assignment 3

Th Nov. 26 – Thanksgiving Break; No Class

Week 14

Tue Dec. 1 – Experiments

Read: Babbie Chapter 8

Read: Pager, Deva. 2003. The Mark of a Criminal Record. *American Journal of Sociology* 108 (5): 937-975.

Due: Assignment 3 (Quantitative Analysis)

Th Dec. 3 – Evaluation Research

Read: Babbie Chapter 12

Week 15

Tue Dec 8 – In-class student presentations

Th Dec 10 – In-class student presentations

Week 16

Tue Dec 15 – Last day of class

In-class student presentations

Wrap-up and final review

Final Proposal due on Exam day