

## Sociology 357 - Methods of Sociological Inquiry Fall 2006

TR 4:00 - 5:15 pm  
6116 Social Science

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**Office Hours:** Tuesdays and Thursdays 2-3 pm, and by appointment

**Course website:** <http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/~alang/357.htm>

### Introduction

Sociology 357 is a basic course on how to do social science research and how to evaluate the research of others. This is a course where you will learn by doing. After an introduction to the elements of research, you will spend most of the semester working on a variety of projects, applying the concepts we cover early on as you conduct your own research, and as we evaluate the research of others. Many heads are better than one when it comes to designing and evaluating social research, so the course will involve group work and a lot of discussion. Coming prepared and being willing to participate are key prerequisites for joining the class.

My goals in teaching this course are (1) to introduce you to the language and logic of research design in order to provide you with a good foundation for future learning; (2) to teach you how to read a research report with a critical eye, so that you can know how to tell how trustworthy its information is; (3) to expose you to a variety of research methods that you may encounter in the future; (4) to convince you that social scientific research is not a highly esoteric activity, but rather a relatively straightforward, systematic set of procedures that will allow you to answer your questions about the world; (5) to have you learn first hand about the successes and problems of research by trying out several data collection methods on a small scale; (6) to show you that research is both an intellectual and emotional activity that can both frustrating and highly rewarding .

Soc 357 is not a statistics course and assumes no background in methods. You will do a small amount of statistics in your projects, 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 without much difficulty. If you have already taken **any other** research methods course, please talk to me, as this course will probably cover what you already know.

In addition to keeping up with daily readings and assignments, you should plan NOW to set aside substantial blocks of time outside of class to work on projects during the semester. A detailed schedule of due dates is included below.

### Course Materials

There is one **required** book for the course, which can be bought at the University Bookstore. It is,

Paul C. Stern and Linda Kalof. Evaluating Social Science Research. Second Edition.

There is also a series of **required** readings and detailed assignment instructions available in coursepack form at the Social Sciences Copy Center (6120 Social Science), or individually on the course website: [www.ssc.wisc.edu/~alang/357.htm](http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/~alang/357.htm)

You will also need paper or cards in the 3x5" size. This is the smallest size note card, and is also a standard size note pad. You will need about 35 of these for the course (one for each day of class). You may also make them yourself, or recycle cards that have been written on one side.

## Requirements and Grading

The largest share of your grade is based on three major data collection projects and an article analysis. The data collection projects are a structured field observation, a simple questionnaire and a field experiment; these are worth 20% each. A detailed analysis of a professional research article is your "take-home exam" in this class and is worth 20%. A sampling exercise is worth 4%. There will be frequent homework assignments that will be worth a total of 14%. The last 2% is based on giving daily feedback on the class sessions.

The exercises in this class are not "real" research. As you will learn, real research is much too time consuming to fit into a course. You will be doing scaled-down projects that teach you important lessons about research without taking so much time. Everything you do in this class is solely for your education. You are not part of anybody's research project.

## Improving

This is a skills course, and if you work hard enough you can learn to do something you didn't get right the first time. You may redo any of the first four research projects in an attempt to improve your work. Redoing an exercise means starting completely over and doing all new work; it is not just correcting the mistakes on the first exercise. You must do better work to get a better grade: this is not extra credit and effort does not count. If you do more than one version of an assignment, your best grade will count. You must allow a week for the grading of any assignment. You must submit the old (graded) exercise and any grade sheets when you submit new work for regrading. I suggest that you speak with me to clarify these instructions before redoing any exercise.

## Homework

The homework gives you practice on major skills that are directly relevant to the graded exercises, particularly the article analysis. It is very important that you have read the articles we will discuss **before** you come to class; otherwise you will not be able to follow or benefit from the instruction in class. It is not necessary for you to write a lot: half a page is usually plenty. It is not necessary that you have studied the reading enough to master it before class. All you need to do is to have read it over so that when I start dissecting the methods in an article, you can follow what I am talking about. The written questions are a "warm up" to get you thinking. If you cannot figure out the answer to a particular question after reading an article, just say so and, if possible, say what your best guess is.

Homework is counted but not graded; if you do it you get credit. If you do 90% or more of the homework, you will receive an A; if you do 50% or less, you will receive an F; totals between these extremes will receive intermediate grades. **Homework must be submitted by email to me BEFORE class to receive full credit. In the subject line of the email, include your full name, the date the homework is due, and the word "homework."** Please type (or copy & paste) the homework directly into the email, rather submitting it as an attachment. Homework submitted by the next class session will be given half credit;

after that it will not be accepted at all. Missing class is not an excuse for late homework. The only exception is illness or other circumstances beyond your control (or a religious holiday), which you should explain in writing when you submit the late homework.

**A note on “faking” the homework: DON’T DO IT.** It is extremely obvious when a student tries to “fake” the homework. Lying in such an obvious way destroys the trust that’s required for a class like this, where students are given a lot of freedom in the execution of their own projects. If you are too busy or tired or lazy to do the homework, just be honest about it. If I think you are faking the homework, I will communicate this to you and you will get zero credit for that day’s work. If it happens a second time, you will get zero credit for any of the homework part of the course (14% of your grade).

## Daily Reactions

At the end of each class, submit on a 3x5 card your name, the date, and *at least* one sentence of reaction to that day's class, indicating what you learned, or something you liked or did not like, found interesting or controversial, found clear or too simplistic, or found confusing and in need of further (or better) explanation; you may also submit comments on the course in general. You can submit a "reaction" only if you were actually in class. You cannot "make up" a reaction, but tell me (in writing) if you are forced to miss several classes due to illness or other problem, and I will make an appropriate adjustment. The grading system will be the same as for homework. I read these after each class, but do not normally return them or comment on them.

## Procedural Matters

**Please bring your assigned readings and a copy of any submitted homework to class.** It is especially important to bring the instructions pertaining to course assignments on the days we discuss them.

I will record attendance starting your daily reactions. You are responsible for obtaining information you miss if you are absent. It is inappropriate to use office hours (or telephone calls) to compensate for instruction you missed more or less by choice, such as napping, staying warm, studying for other classes, or vacationing. But if you are attending regularly and making the effort to learn (or if your absence is for reasons beyond your control), I will do all that I can to help you.

**Your final article analysis is due on Monday December 18 by 1 pm.** This is also the last time for submitting any re-done exercises. Early papers will be gratefully accepted and hopefully graded early. If you wish to have your article analysis returned to you, please include a written note stating that you give permission for your graded assignment to be left in the hallway outside my office.

## Schedule of Topics and Readings

**Reading and homework due dates given in the syllabus are correct**, even if I do not remind you in class, unless a **written** note on the blackboard or a **written** schedule change sheet alters them. The readings for each day are indicated as follows: “Stern” refers to the book *Evaluating Social Science Research*. All other surnames refer to articles available in your coursepack and online.

**Homework is DUE on the date noted. That means the homework listed for 9/19 is due BEFORE CLASS on the 19<sup>th</sup>.**

## Part I : The Logic and Ethics of Research

- T Sept 5**      **Introduction to the class.**
- Th Sept 7**      **Scientific Knowledge.** What is science? How is it different from other forms of knowledge? Is social science “science”?  
**Read (for today):** Singleton & Straits, “The Nature of Science”  
**Homework (for today):**
1. List two or three things from the reading on sociology and science that you found especially interesting or that you disagree with or have a question about.
  2. Introduce yourself, and tell me what hopes or fears you have about this class. Tell me anything I should know that might affect your ability to participate in class (work schedule, course load, etc.).
  3. What, if any, background in statistics do you have? Don't worry if you have never taken a stats class.
- T Sept 12**      **Intro to ethics.**  
**Read:** UW Madison Human Subjects Protections Tutorial, modules 2 and 3.  
<http://info.gradsch.wisc.edu/research/compliance/humansubjects/tutorial/>  
**Homework:**
1. Go to the Online Ethics Center's case studies on deception in the Social Sciences at <http://www.onlineethics.org/reseth/appe/vol1/justify.html>. Read the three cases and take notes to answer the questions accompanying each case. (We will discuss these cases in class; the notes are intended to be a warm-up to get you thinking, not extended answers to each question). Note that as a member of an Institutional Review Board (IRB) you should use the three principles discussed in the UW Human Subjects Tutorial as a basis for determining whether the proposed deception was justifiable.
- Th Sept 14**      **Ethics cont'd.**  
**Read:** Haney, et al., "Interpersonal Dynamics in a Simulated Prison," and pp. 182-189 of the personal journal; Humphreys, "Tearoom Trade" and "Methods."  
**Homework:**
1. For each article, state the researcher's initial question – what are they trying to discover?
  2. Why did they choose the method that they did? Were there other options?
  3. Briefly give your opinion of the ethics of the research in the Humphreys and Haney et al. articles. What arguments did the authors give to support their research? Was the knowledge gained worth it?

**NOTE 1:** The Humphreys article contains some fairly explicit but not graphic descriptions of male homosexual sex. Past classroom debates about ethics have concerned the privacy issues of doing the research, and the question of whether gay men and lesbians are helped or hurt by articles like this one; there is also the concern that I am contributing to gay-bashing in assigning this kind of article in times like these. The ethical issues in the Zimbardo article are less controversial today, but are still important. I believe that vigorous discussion and debate about these issues is vital.

- T Sept 19**      **The Elements of Research:** Units of analysis, variables, relations, hypotheses, measurement, validity & reliability.  
**Read:** Stern, Ch. 2 and 61-64.  
**Homework:**  
1. For "problems" 1, 4, 5, 6, 7 on pages 55-60 in Stern, ignore the given instructions and instead:  
    a. list the variables;  
    b. state the result as a hypothesis;  
    c. if causal, identify which variable is independent and which is dependent;  
    d. classify its method.
- Th Sept 21**      **The Logic of Research:** Hypothesis testing and Causality. How to read published research.  
**Read:** Stinchcombe, "The Logic of Scientific Inference;" pp 15-38; and Doob & Gross, "Status of Frustrator as an Inhibitor of Horn-honking Responses," and "How We Did It."  
**Homework:**  
1. Give the major independent variable and dependent variable in the Doob and Gross article; tell how each was measured (operationalized).  
2. State the major theoretical hypothesis of the research and the operational hypothesis that flows from it.

## Part II: Observation of the Social World

- T Sept 26**      **Field Research:** Introduction to Field Research and Observation  
**Read:** Stern, 64-82; Adler & Adler, "Shifts and Oscillations in Deviant Careers," and "Stability and flexibility: Maintaining Relations Within Organized and Unorganized Groups."  
**Homework:**  
1. Based on the comments in their article and journal, discuss the roles played and methods employed by the Adlers.  
2. Which of Adler and Adler's findings do you think are most trustworthy? Why? Least trustworthy? Why?  
3. Stern identifies several problems confronting observers as they collect data. Which ones do you think the Adlers faced? Did they give adequate account of how they dealt with these problems?
- Th Sept 28**      **Observation Assignment:** Introduction to the project, time to form groups.  
**Read:** Observation Assignment in Coursepack. Review previous readings as necessary to be comfortable with the research terms used in this assignment.
- T Oct 3**      **Observation Assignment:** How to write up your report, how to prepare a statistical table summarizing results. Workshop with teammates.  
**Read:** Nothing for today.

**Th Oct 5**      **Sampling Theory I:** Sampling principles and terminology. How professional samples are done. What to look for in evaluating a sample. Sampling terminology exercise assigned and explained. (Worth 4% of your grade. **Due October 19.** We will be discussing sampling in every assignment from this point on.)  
**Read:** Glicken, "Sampling" and Sampling Assignment Instructions in Coursepack.

**T Oct 10**      **Sampling Theory II:** Continue sampling lectures.  
**Read:** Nothing for today.  
**Homework:** Observation Assignment Due. Each group should be prepared to give a short summary of your group's findings

### Part III: Asking Questions

**Th Oct 12**      **Intro to survey research and interviewing.** Comparing open & closed-ended questions.  
**Read:** Ransford, "Isolation, Powerlessness, and Violence," and the personal journal; and Ewick and Silbey, "Against the Law" and "Research Methods."  
**Homework:**  
1. List the major variables in each article and tell how at least one was measured, find the sampling details and be prepared to evaluate them in class, and list some of the findings of each article.  
2. Jot down a few notes comparing the strengths and weaknesses of each article's methods. We will discuss this in class.

**T Oct 17**      **Survey and Interview Research** . Survey instrumentation and use.  
**Read:** Schaeffer and Presser, "The Science of Asking Questions," and Handout example of a survey.  
**Homework:**  
1. Based on the reading, identify at least 5 problems with the survey in the handout and suggest improvements to the wording or the structure of the survey.

**Th Oct 19**      **Questionnaire Assignment.** Assignment explained; class used to form groups and brainstorm project topics.  
**Read:** The Questionnaire exercise in the Coursepack so you know what it involves. Start to think about possible project topics.  
**Homework:** Sampling Exercise Due

**T Oct 24**      **Question Writing Workshop.** Class will be a workshop on writing questions. I will give some general principles. You will sit with your groups and work on questions in class. Plan to collect your data as soon as possible after this class.

**Th Oct 26**      **Evaluating Survey Research.**  
**Read:** Rubin, "Measurement of Romantic Love" and journal  
**Homework:**  
1. Try to explain in your own words the relation between what Rubin is doing and the ideas of validity explained in the lectures.

2. List three facts that support the claim that the "love" scale is a valid measure.
3. In class we will discuss whether this kind of research is useful and whether the love scale seems to measure love. Jot down notes to remind yourself of relevant points in this article for this discussion.

- T Oct 31**      **Coding up Questionnaire Data**  
**Read:** The detailed example of coding and data analysis in the handout.  
**Homework:**  
1. Bring completed questionnaires to class. You will develop a coding scheme and code data together in class, so that it is ready to be entered into a spreadsheet.
- Th Nov 2**      **Computer Lab Workshop: Creating your dataset in SPSS.**
- T Nov 7**      **Computer Lab Workshop: Producing Statistical Results.**
- Th Nov 9**      **Workshop: Analyzing your questionnaire data.** We will go through your statistical results together.
- T Nov 14**      **Workshop: Writing up your report.** We will continue the discussion of analyzing your data, and discuss strategies for writing your report.

## Part IV: Experiments

- Th Nov 16**      **The Logic of Experiments.** Why experiments are the best way to establish causal relations. The logic of randomization and experimental control. Introduction of experiment exercise.  
**Read:** Aronson et. al. "Experimentation in Social Psychology"  
**Homework:**  
1. Read the descriptions of research results on p. 113-115 in Stern. For each example state:  
    a. Is the method used observational, correlational, or experimental?  
    b. What are the independent and dependent variables?  
    c. What are some extraneous [uncontrolled] variables that might explain the results?
- T Nov 21**      **Workshop: Setting Up Your Experiment.** Class will be devoted to forming groups and initial planning of your experiment. With experiments, you need to figure out everything in advance.  
**Read:** Experiment Assignment in Coursepack.  
**Homework:** Questionnaire report due. Each group should be prepared to give a short summary of its findings.
- Th Nov 23**      **\*\*\* Thanksgiving \*\*\***
- T Nov 28**      **The Problem of Internal Validity.** Threats to internal validity. Setting up your experiment right. You should leave the class knowing how to do your data collection. The actual data

collection will not take long, but you need to allow enough time for advance planning and for writing up the report. Checklist of things you need to know that are not usually obvious:

1. what a manipulated independent variable is and how to do it;
2. what randomization is and how to do it;
3. how to measure the dependent variable in a way that gives good experimental control.

**Read:** Nothing for today.

**Th Nov 30**

**Writing Up Experimental Results.**

**Read:** Darley and Batson, "From Jerusalem to Jericho" and the personal journal; and Pager, "The Mark of a Criminal Record."

**Homework:**

1. For each article, identify the independent and dependent variables and how each was measured.
2. Summarize the key finding in each article. Does it interest you? Why or why not?
3. For each article answer: What variables were held constant across all experimental trials? What variables were controlled for by randomization? What other possible explanatory variables were not controlled in the experiment?

## **Part V: Analyzing Published Articles**

**T Dec 5**

**Analyzing Published Articles.** Introduction to assignment.

**Read:** Article Analysis instructions.

**Homework:** Experiment Assignment Due. Be prepared to give a short summary of your findings.

**Th Dec 7**

**Analyzing Articles.** Statistics refresher. Practice analysis of articles.

**Read:** Stern, Ch. 4.

**Homework:**

1. Email or show me the article you would like to use by today.
2. Jot down the parts of Stern 4 you do not understand, or assure me that you understand it all.
3. Answer the questions p 172-173 in Stern in preparation for class discussion.

**T Dec 12**

**Analyzing Articles:** Practice analysis of articles.

**Read:** Oliver, "If you don't do it, nobody will" and your article for the assignment.

**Homework:**

1. Read your own article at least TWICE before coming to class. We will make time in class for you to discuss the methods with a partner.
2. In class, we will go over the Oliver article in fine detail, as if we were doing the article analysis. Jot down notes on the following:
  - a. the theoretical hypotheses,
  - b. how each variable was actually measured,

- c. whether you think these measures are valid,
- d. details of sampling & how generalizable you think the findings are.

**Th Dec 14**      **Last class.** Wrap-up and evaluations.

**Homework:**

1. Please write down what was good and what was bad about the course format, readings, lectures, content, or process. Suggestions for improvement are very welcome!
2. How useful do you expect the things we have studied to be for you in the future?

**F Dec 15**      **EXTRA OFFICE HOURS, Time TBA**

**Article Analysis due Monday December 18 by 1 pm**