"'Method' has to do, first of all, with how to ask and answer questions with some assurance that the answers are more or less durable. 'Theory' has to do, above all, with paying close attention to the words one is using, especially their degree of generality and their logical relations. The primary purpose of both is clarity of conception and economy of procedure, and most importantly just now, the release rather than the restriction of the sociological imagination."

— C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination*, 1959

"The responsibility of the intellectual is to tell the truth and expose lies."


"I've learned more from the readings listed in your syllabus than I did in my two graduate methods courses at [other Ph.D. sociology program]."

— e-mail sent to your instructor from someone who found last semester's syllabus on the web, 12/5/2003

PREREQUISITES
An introductory course in social research methods and a course in statistics that provided extensive coverage of the linear regression model.

OFFICIAL COURSE DESCRIPTION (date of composition unknown)
Application of scientific methods to the analysis of social phenomena; methodological orientations in sociology; types of research procedure; nature of sociological variables; lectures and lab. [mercifully, there will be no lab]

OVERVIEW
Talk to people in graduate sociology departments around the country and you will find that a required course in research “methods” is often among the least popular offerings of the graduate curriculum. This is lamentable if you believe that good research practices have some association with good empirical work and that good empirical work has some association with the continued vitality of our discipline. Fortunately for you, however, 750 will be a course you adore, its meetings will serve as the weekly highlight of your forthcoming semester, and it will revitalize any flagging enthusiasm you may have about being in graduate school. Or, at least, this is the boundless optimism with which I always try to begin.

The course will survey major research designs and research techniques that provide the core of contemporary empirical inquiry into social phenomena. The “methods” of the course title are practices toward offering descriptions and drawing inferences about human life from observations of it, and much of the course will involve discussions of three themes: inferences about how phenomena are related (implying much consideration of causality), inferences from a part to a whole (implying much consideration of sampling), and generating appropriate representations of phenomena (implying much consideration of conceptualization and measurement). The extant research strategies used by sociologists are extraordinarily diverse—which is fitting given the extraordinary diversity of the research questions sociologists pursue—and the course will attempt to provide an appreciation of this diversity. Among the specific methodologies of which at least a spoonful will be served at the 750 feast are experiments, quasi-experiments, surveys, quantitative analysis of archival materials, meta-analysis, ethnography, in-depth interviews, historical
methods, the analysis of texts, and the analysis of interactional data. Although your instructor personally has an aversion to talking about the “unity of method” — or, worse, the “unity of science” — the course emphasizes fundamental principles and logic disciplining research design. This is much more a theoretical course than an applied one, even though plenty of practical examples will be discussed in the readings and in class.

This will consider both some basic general issues of method and some issues regarding specific methods that your instructor believes comprise important things for you to encounter somewhere, sometime in your graduate training (even should your own intellectual pursuits lead you down entirely different sociological avenues). This course is most emphatically not intended as a substitute for the more specialized training in a specific methodological domain that successful dissertations typically demand. Your instructor also believes passionately that gaining command of the methods of social inquiry — both as producer and consumer — is a continual, open-ended project, and he is quickly exasperated by those who embark on the course with the idea that they presently know nothing about methods and they will finish the course having learned all they need to know. While we are at it, I should also note there is a continuum of the philosophical and practical on which instructors approach a course like this; my own inclinations are more toward the former side than the latter.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS
Grades for the course will be based on student performances on exercises (54%), weekly reactions (36%), and class attendance/participation/manifested conscientiousness (10%). One should expect the final overall distribution of student grades for the course to resemble that of other required graduate courses.

Exercises
There will be 9-12 written exercises over the course of the semester, which will provide opportunities for you to further develop and articulate your thinking about methodological considerations, including as they pertain to the research you personally plan to pursue. For the purposes of planning, you should plan on having at least something small due every week. You will always be given a full week to do any exercise and more than one week to do any exercise worth a weight of three or more (see below).

Written exercises will all have a specified word count to which you must adhere; you might think this overly constraining and you are right — but I believe that it is good training since much of your subsequent writing (although not syllabi!) will be constrained by strict word counts. Due dates/times will be provided and late work not cleared with me in advance will either be penalized or not accepted. You will likely have a short exercise due finals week that concerns material covered in the final week or two of class.

Turning exercises in. Written exercises will be submitted to me via electronic mail (jfreese@ssc.wisc.edu). You should already know how to send documents as attachments as well as just as text in the body of an e-mail message. Details on the preferred format for submitting exercises will be provided. If asked to provide an assignment as an attachment, please send it in Microsoft Word regular (.doc) or rich text format (.rtf), with a filename that includes your surname (e.g., smith_ex3.doc).

Overall exercise grade. Exercises will either be graded using standard letters grades or (for some low weighted assignments) an analogue of the OK grading system that will be used for Weekly Reactions. A weighted average of your exercise grades will be used to provide a cumulative exercise grade for the course. Each exercise will have a weight of 1-4 points, with the # of points intendedly based on how demanding the exercise seems in terms of estimates about the amount of time it will take to do and the intellectual energy required.

Weekly reaction papers
One goal of the course is to promote exposure to (some of) the extraordinary diversity of research methods used by sociologists. Chief among the ways in which this specific goal will be pursued is through a Weekly Research Exemplar drawn from the annals of articles that have the imprimatur of validated sociology — that
is, those that have appeared in one of the discipline’s two flagship journals, *American Sociological Review* [ASR] or *American Journal of Sociology* [AJS]. (Articles written by anyone presently employed by UW were excluded from consideration.) The thirteen articles included have been deliberately selected for their methodological diversity and with almost no consideration of their substantive particulars. We will spend the first 15 to 30 minutes of each Tuesday class discussing the Weekly Exemplar.

One of your assigned tasks for this course is to provide written Reactions to the weekly readings. You are not required to do these every week (see below). These Reactions should be between 300 and 500 words (or so), and they should focus on the research conducted in the paper (reasonably broadly construed). You should write your Reaction presuming that I have also read the paper.

**Some ideas for what you can write about.** Your Reactions might consider, among other possibilities: (1) things you found praiseworthy about what the researchers did; (2) things you thought the researchers might/should have done differently; (3) things you thought the authors were mistaken about; (4) things that you see as advantages and limitations to the kind of data the researchers used; (5) things the researchers did that confused you; (6) things about how the research was conducted that you wished they had talked more about; (7) ways the authors might extend their research; (8) connections between the research discussed in the article and things discussed in class/other readings; (9) specific connections between the research discussed in the article and things you think should be considered in class/other readings; (10) questions the research raised for you about how research is conducted more generally; (11) things the paper inspired for you about some kind of research more generally; (12) ways the paper did or did not exemplify things you see as strengths and weaknesses of its kind of research.

Your Reactions can take the form of a few enumerated points rather than a single, flowing narrative. Your Reactions should evince that you have thoughtfully read the paper.

**Due date/time of Reactions.** Reactions are due by the stroke of midnight (11:59:59.999...) on the Monday before the Tuesday class in which that reading is assigned. This is so that I will be able to read the Reactions prior to that day’s class. Late assignments, for whatever reason, will receive a half-point penalty (see below) and can be turned in no more than four days after the due date. You may turn Reactions in as far in advance as you like.

**Format of Reactions.** Reactions should be e-mailed to your instructor at jfreese@ssc.wisc.edu. Reactions should be sent in the body of the message, not as an attachment, and with the subject line “Weekly Reaction.” If your e-mail address is something like purplejellybean@aol.com, your name must be evident from either the header or body of the e-mail. Failure to submit your Reaction according to these not-unreasonable formatting guidelines will result in a half-point deduction.

**Grading.** Reactions will be given a grade of “OK” (1 point; this will be the massively modal grade), “OK-plus” (1.5 points), or “OK-minus” (.5 points). Overall grades for this course will be assigned according to the following scale: 11 and above – A; 9 to 10.5 – AB; 7.5 to 8.5 – B; 7 and below – BC and below.

**Stern paragraph about academic integrity and propriety**

(Your instructor recognizes that this paragraph is likely unnecessary, but, just in case, he wishes to be extremely clear about his policy.) Section 14.03 of the University of Wisconsin System Administrative Code defines academic misconduct as “an act in which a student: (a) seeks to claim credit for the work or efforts of another without authorization or citation; (b) uses unauthorized materials or fabricated data in any academic exercise; (c) forges or falsifies academic documents or records; (d) intentionally impedes or damages the academic work of others; (e) engages in conduct aimed at making false representation of a student’s academic performance; (f) assists other students in any of these acts.” If you have any questions about what constitutes academic misconduct generally, you must consult http://www.wisc.edu/students/amsum.htm before proceeding in this course. Lack of familiarity with these rules in no way constitutes an excuse for acts of misconduct. Any instance of cheating, plagiarism, or other
misconduct will be dealt with strictly according to University policy, and the penalties recommended to the
Dean of Students will be severe.

Readings
No books will be assigned for this course in their entirety. The reading list for the course is included at the
eend of this syllabus. You will note that the reading list is very long; moreover, amendments to this list may
be made over the duration of our semester together. Many of the readings are included as supplemental
readings (denoted by the leisurely symbol 📚). Some of these are readings which will find their way into
lectures; others are articles/books that I believe are interesting or provocative and cannot resist sharing at
least the reference with you. In this regard, the appended list is as much a bibliography as reading list, and
should not freak anyone out.

You should make every effort to do the primary readings for the course (denoted by the more
imperative ☑). All of the primary readings, and many of the supplemental ones, are available on the web
(denoted by the symbol 🌐) through the Social Science Reference Library.

Attendance
If you not going to be able to attend, it would be courteous of you to e-mail me to let me know. The
instructor reserves and will likely exercise the right to reduce the grades of students with inadequate
attendance. Of course, so as not to distract your colleagues and instructor, appropriately professional
behavior—e.g., not passing notes, falling asleep, etc.—is expected.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TENTATIVE SCHEDULE</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wk 1 - Jan 20/ 22</td>
<td>Pre-prefatory</td>
<td>Prefatory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wk 2 - Jan 27/ 29</td>
<td>Prefatory</td>
<td>Causal inference, basic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wk 3 - Feb 3/ 5</td>
<td>Causal inference, basic</td>
<td>Causal inference, elaborations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wk 4 - Feb 10/ 12</td>
<td>Causal inference, elaborations</td>
<td>Experiments</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wk 5 - Feb 17/ 19</td>
<td>Experiments</td>
<td>Regression to the mean</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wk 6 - Feb 24/ 26</td>
<td>Causal inference, non-experimental</td>
<td>Causal inference, non-experimental</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wk 7 - Mar 2/ 4</td>
<td>Causal inference, non-experimental</td>
<td>Inferences from ethnographic data</td>
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<td>Wk 8 - Mar 9/ 11</td>
<td>Inferences from ethnographic data</td>
<td>Inferences from ethnographic data</td>
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<td>spring break</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wk 9 - Mar 23/ 25</td>
<td>Numbers, models, narratives</td>
<td>Sampling and generalization</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wk 10 - Mar 30/ Apr 1</td>
<td>Sampling and generalization</td>
<td>Sampling theory, nuts and bolts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wk 11 - Apr 6/ 8</td>
<td>Sampling theory, nuts and bolts</td>
<td>Sampling w/ knowledge of outcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wk 12 - Apr 13/ 15</td>
<td>Incomplete information</td>
<td>Conceptualization/ Operationalization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wk 13 - Apr 20/ 22</td>
<td>Conceptualization/ Operationalization</td>
<td>Representation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wk 14 - Apr 27/ 29</td>
<td>Measurement</td>
<td>Measurement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wk 15 - May 4/ 6</td>
<td>Scaling/ Factor Analysis</td>
<td>Scaling/ Factor Analysis</td>
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READING LIST

I. Weekly Research Exemplars


II. Topical readings

1. Prefatory


The Science Question in Sociology


The Conjunction of Method and Substance


Treating the question of what is and is not science as a matter for sociological inquiry.


Being sociological about debates between the qualitative and quantitative

Relationship between existing literature and original research


Additional readings


2. Causal inference, basic notions

Standard criteria of causality and counterfactual conditionals


Mill's methods


Goodwin, Jeff. 1998. "How to Become a Dominant American Social Scientist: The Case of Theda Skocpol." Pp. 31-37 in Required Reading: Sociology's Most Influential Books, edited by D. Clawson. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press. Okay, not so much about methodology, but some interesting speculation on the massive fame of Skocpol's State and Social Revolutions.


Lieberson, Stanley. 1991. "Small N's and Big Conclusions: An Examination of the Reasoning in Comparative Studies Based on a Small Number of Cases." Social Forces 70:307-320. A n often-noted, albeit pretty predictable, critique of historical studies that draw conclusions from a small number of cases.

3. Causal inference, elaborations


Causal mechanisms

Link, Bruce G. and Jo Phelan. 1995. "Social Conditions as Fundamental Causes of Disease." Journal of Health and Social Behavior Supplement: 80-94. Considering how causes of causes might be seen as more “basic” or “fundamental” than the more proximate causes; has spawned a line of work in medical sociology.


4. Experiments

Experimental methodology


Experiments in survey research


External validity in experiments


5. Regression to the Mean


6. Causal inference without the luxury of experimentation

Natural experiments


Control by design versus statistical control

Freedman, David A. 1991. "Statistical models and shoe leather." Sociological Methodology 21: 291-313. This is an article by a statistician that basically argues that the virtues of multiple regression for causal inference in the real world have been greatly exaggerated.

Quantitative analysis of data from observational studies


Empirical comparisons of experimental results with results of observational study


Instrumental variables


Propensity-score adjustment

Smith, Herbert L. 1997. "Matching with Multiple Controls to Estimate Treatment Effects in Observational Studies." Sociological Methodology 27: 325-353. This is a fairly accessible introduction to propensity-score adjustment for sociologists; other virtues are that it talks about many-to-many matching and the idea of using a panel-type regression model instead of explicit matching.


Rubin, Donald B. 1974. "Estimating the causal effects of treatments in randomized and non-randomized studies." Journal of Educational Psychology: 688-700. E arly paper that anticipates the propensity score method; an easier read than the Rosenbaum and Rubin paper.

The importance of getting important things right

Debate concerns the validity of the most widely cited statistic from W etzman’s The D ivorce Revolution, 1986 W inner of the A SA D istinguished Scholarly Publication award. Can be read as a cautionary tale, both for research-producers and research-consumers


Stata Corporation. 1998. "What are some of the problems with stepwise regression?" From their Frequently Asked Questions webpage. Basically sums up the reasons why stepwise regression is regarded with disfavor by many social scientists for many applications.


7. Inference in ethnographic data


Miles, Matthew B. and A. Michael Huberman. 1994. Qualitative Data Analysis (2nd Ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. Although parts of this book are less compelling, I like its discussion of all the different types of displays it presents as methods of realizing patterns in your data or of thinking more carefully through what your data show.

Strauss, Anselm and Juliet Corbin. 1990. Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques. Newbury Park, CA: Sage. Chapters 5-12. This book is a maybe oversimplified rendition compared to the G laser and Strauss book on grounded theory. Anyway, you should read some kind of primary source on grounded theory before you (a) actually do any work that claims to employ grounded theory methodology (seems obvious, but the available literature suggests otherwise), or (b) take too seriously some of the characterizations of grounded theory that are made by its detractors.


8. Combining numbers, models, and narratives

Either the Laitin or Goldthorpe article below. The Laitin article is more applicable for people interested in comparative work; the Goldthorpe article is more applicable for people interested in survey or other secondary quantitative analysis.


9. Sampling and generalization, orienting considerations

Sampling in qualitative research


Romney, A. Kimball. 1999. "Culture Consensus as a Statistical Model." Current Anthropology 40:S103-115. Beyond the particular method described, a reason I like this paper is the general point about how usual ideas about sample size are dramatically transformed when what one is trying to get at as some shared conception (e.g., cultural knowledge) of respondents.


Purposely narrow samples


10. Sampling theory, nuts and bolts

Sampling theory for statistical research


Significance testing and power

McCloskey, Deirdre N. and Stephen T. Ziliak. 1996. “The Standard Error of Regressions.” Journal of Economic Literature 34: 97-114. What they call the “standard error” is the confusion of statistical and substantive significance; includes systematic examination of ways in which regression results are discussed in a sample of papers by economists.

On the misuse of significance testing


11. Sampling with knowledge of outcome


Lustick, Ian S. 1996. "History, historiography, and political science: Multiple historical records and the problem of selection bias." American Political Science Review 90:605-618. If one is going to use the work of historians as "facts" for comparative inquiry, and historians themselves disagree, does this open itself up to the possibility that one can pick and choose the histories that happen to confirm one's theory?

12. Incomplete information

- Winship, Christopher and Larry Radbill. 1994. “Sampling Weights and Regression Analyses.” Sociological Methods and Research 23:230-257. A ride that quantitative researchers are likely to be told to read when they start asking questions about weights.


13. Conceptualization and Operationalization


- Clayman, Steven E. and John Heritage. 2002. “Questioning Presidents: Journalistic deference and adversarialness in the press conferences of U.S. Presidents Eisenhower and Reagan.” Journal of Communication 52:749. Especially interesting for the different ways in which authors try to conceptualize how the “deference” and “adversarialness” is done in interviews.


14. Representation

A curacy in ethnographic research


Critique and response regarding the methods and interpretations of Sidewalk, interesting for both the issue of the adequate representation of subjects and the adequate representation of the work of other researchers.


Reactivity in ethnographic research


Problems of self-report in survey research


15. Measurement

Overview of measurement


Question design in survey research


Reliability


Levels of measurement


Velleman, Paul F. and Leland Wilkinson. 1993. "Nominal, ordinal, interval, and ratio typologies are misleading." The American Statistician 47:65-72. (Title is its own best annotation.)

Coding in historical research

16. Scale development and factor analysis