

Sociology 357: Methods of Sociological Inquiry (Honors)

Fall 2012

Instructor:

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Lectures: TR 2:30p.m.-3:45p.m.
SOC SCI 6228

Office Hours: TR 4p.m.-5p.m.

Overview:

This is a basic course on social science research methods. The course has two goals: 1) developing skills as a more informed and critical reader of social science research (the “consumption goal”); learning basic skills to conduct your own social science research (the “production goal”). It requires no background in research methods or statistics. It provides a general overview of the ways sociologists (or social scientists in general) collect information about social phenomena with a special emphasis on what can be done to yield information that is *trustworthy and useful* for our theoretical understanding of social life. If you have had any other research methods courses you will probably find this course to be too elementary and should discuss alternatives with me.

Required Textbook:

Babbie, Earl. *The Practice of Social Research* (12th edition). Wadsworth, Cengage Learning.

Web Resources:

The course website is available through learn@UW. If you enrolled in the course, you can access the site by going to <http://learnuw.wisc.edu> and entering your NetID and password. Once there, click on the link to SOC357 under “My Madison Courses.” All reading materials (other than the textbook) and lecture slides will be available at the course website.

Requirements:

- 1) Weekly reading (assigned textbook chapters and additional readings)
- 2) Attendance and participation
- 3) Homework (see the class schedule below for details)
- 4) Three data collection projects (see the class schedule below for details)

Grading:

Attendance and contribution to class discussion: 10%

Homework: 30% (3% X 10)

- These are brief memos or summaries, which will serve as the basis for our class discussions on course materials and data collection projects. These will be counted but not graded. In other words, you receive the full credit as long as you submit the homework on time.

Three data collection projects: 60% (20% each)

- You will do three data collection projects throughout the semester: structured field observation, a field experiment, and a questionnaire survey (see the course schedule for more information; I will also provide more detailed instructions in class). You can do the data collection parts of these assignments either individually or collectively. However, you will write your own report individually, even if you collected the data as a team. Each project is worth 20% of your final grade. Each project will be evaluated on the basis of the quality of the report as well as your contribution in the data collection process.

Submission of homework and reports:

- Homework must be submitted on time to receive full credit. Homework submitted by the first class session after the deadline will receive half credit; after that it will not be accepted at all.
- The data collection project reports must be turned in on time to receive full credit. Credit will be deducted for late assignments. ***You will lose 2 point out of 20 for each day an assignment is late, unless extended.***

Special Needs Arrangements:

To make special arrangements for testing, assignments, or other aspects of the course you must qualify for disability services through the McBurney Center. Their website has detailed instructions on how to qualify: <http://www.mcburney.wisc.edu/>. Please notify me within the first 2 weeks of class if you have or anticipate having authorization from the Center and we will be happy to make the necessary arrangement.

Academic Honesty:

As with all courses at the University of Wisconsin, you are expected to follow the University's rules and regulations pertaining to academic honesty and integrity. Students are expected to know and follow the standards outlined by the Offices of the Dean of Students. See their website (<http://www.wisc.edu/students/conduct/uws14.htm>) for a complete description of behaviors that violate the University's standards as well the disciplinary penalties and procedures.

Department Notice:

The Department of Sociology regularly conducts student evaluations of all professors and teaching assistant near the end of the semester. Students have more immediate comments,

complaints, or concerns about Sociology 360 should report them to me or to the Chair or Associate Chair of the Department of Sociology.

Feedback:

I am interested in hearing your reactions to the course, and your suggestions for improvement. Please feel free to e-mail me about comments or suggestions or make an appointment to see me.

Class Schedule and Reading Assignments

NOTE: The schedule below may change. All announcements regarding schedule changes will be emailed to you or announced in lecture. You are responsible for keeping up to date on these changes.

9/4, 9/6 *Introduction to sociological research*

- Course mechanics
- What is sociological research?
- Does sociological research show what is obvious?
- Why and how does our common sense fail us?

Reading:

- Babbie, Ch. 1
- Duncan Watts. "The Importance of Studying the Obvious."
(http://blogs.hbr.org/cs/2012/06/the_importance_of_studying_the.html)
- David Brooks. "Social Science Palooza"
(<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/07/opinion/07brooks.html>)

9/11, 9/13 *Basics of social science research*

- Basic concepts in sociological research
- Designing sociological research

Reading:

- Babbie Ch. 2&4

9/18 *Discussion: Research design exercise*

HW #1:

- Read the following newspaper article (or another newspaper article of your choice) and use it as inspiration for a research question. Design a research to answer the question. Summarize your research question and design (1-2 pages) and **email it to the class by midnight on 9/16**. Your memo should include: 1) clearly stated research question; 2) what your key outcome (dependent variable) and explanatory variables (independent variables) are; 3) hypothesis on how the variables would be related; 4) a rough plan on how you would test the hypothesis. Read all memos before you come to the class.
 - o "Peril in the crosswalk! It's open season on pedestrians in Madison." *The Isthmus* (07/12/2012) (<http://www.thedailypage.com/isthmus/article.php?article=37240>)

9/20, 9/25 *Observing and measuring the social worlds*

- Conceptualization and operationalization
- Levels of measurement
- Validity and reliability
- Sampling (part I)

Reading:

- Babbie Ch. 5; Ch 7 (Pp. 187-200; Pp. 211-224)
- Malcolm Gladwell "The order of things"

HW #2:

Read the following article: “UW-Madison named among ‘top party’ and ‘least rigorous’ schools” (http://host.madison.com/ct/news/local/education/campus_connection/campus-connection-uw-madison-named-among-top-party-and-least/article_23762d7a-dfdd-11e1-b960-001a4bcf887a.html). Find the source(s) cited in the article and discuss their methodology. Offer your evaluation on how trustworthy the rankings discussed in the article. Write up your findings and evaluation (1-2 pages) and **email it to the instructor by midnight on 9/18.**

HW #3:

Go to the following website: <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/runtdown/2012/03/white-educated-and-wealthy-congratulations-you-live-in-a-bubble.html>. Read about Charles Murray’s “bubble” test. Try the test yourself and record your score. What do you think about the test? Does test measure what Murray argues it measures? Why or why not? How would you improve the test? Report your test score and your thoughts in a short memo (1-2 pages, double spaced) and **email it to the class by midnight on 9/18.**

9/27 Discussion: Planning observation exercise

HW #4

Read the following articles and use them (or any other article of your choice) as inspiration to plan your observation exercise. Write a short (1 page) proposal for this exercise and **email it to the class by midnight on 9/24.** Read all proposals and be prepared to comment on them.

- Candice L. Odgers et al. “Systematic social observation of children’s neighborhoods using Google Street View: a reliable and cost-effective method.”
- Robert Sampson, “The Lost Letter Experiment”

10/2 Quantitative data analysis I

- Structure of quantitative data
- Basic concepts in quantitative data analysis

Reading:

- Babbie. Ch. 14

10/4 Sampling

- Population, sample, parameter, statistics
- Sampling distribution, sampling errors, generalization
- Hypothesis testing

Reading:

- Babbie Ch. 7 (Pp. 200-210)

10/9, 10/11 Experimental research

Topics to be covered:

- Causality in social science
- Experimental design
- Validity

Reading:

- Babbie Ch. 8

HW #5: Read one (or more) of the following articles and prepare a short memo (1-2 pages) that 1) summarizes the key research question and its research design; 2) key findings; 3) potential issues (especially regarding its validity and generalizability). **Email the memo to the instructor by midnight on 10/7.**

- Marianne Bertrand and Sendhil Mullainathan. "Are Emily and Greg more employable than Lakisha and Jamal? A field experiment on labor market discrimination." *American Economic Review* 94: 991-1013
- Max Ernest-Jones et al. "Effects of eye images on everyday cooperative behavior: a field experiment"
- Mark Levine et al. "Identity and emergency intervention: How social group membership and inclusiveness of group boundaries shape helping behavior"
- Matthew Salganik et al. "Experimental study of inequality and unpredictability in an artificial cultural market." *Science* 311: 854-856 (also read the supporting online material)

10/16 Presentation and discussion: Observation exercise

Email your report by midnight on 10/14. Read all reports and be prepared to offer your comments.

10/18 Planning Experiment exercise

HW #6: Use the articles or other studies we discussed in class (or any other experimental study of your choice) as inspiration to plan your own experiment exercise. Write a short (1-2 page) proposal for this exercise and **email it to the class by midnight on 10/15.** Your proposal should include: 1) research question(s); 2) hypotheses; and 3) outline of research design.

10/23, 10/25 Survey research

- Questionnaire design
- Modes of survey
- Issues in survey research
- Using existing survey data

Reading:

- Babbie, Ch. 9.

HW #7

Read the following articles. Write a short memo (1-2 pages) that 1) summarizes how it operationalizes and measures the key concept of interest; 2) evaluate its validity; 3) makes some suggestions for improvement. **Email the memo to the instructor by midnight on 10/21.**

- Zick Rubin, "Measurement of Romantic Love"
- Daniel Kahneman et al. "Would you be happier if you were richer? A focusing illusion."

10/30, 11/01 Planning survey research exercise & design questionnaire

HW #8: Think of an issue/topic that you are interested in for your survey research exercise. Develop a hypothesis that involves at least two variables. Define your population and discuss

your sampling strategy. Looking up existing surveys to see how the variables you are interested in have been measured. Revise the existing questions or write your own questions to measure the variables of your interest. **Email your memo (1-3 pages) to the class by midnight on 10/28.** Read all memos and be prepared to offer your comments before the class.

11/6, 11/8 ***Quantitative data analysis II/Introduction to STATA***

Reading:

- Babbie. Ch. 16 (Pp. 467-476)

11/13 ***Introduction to STATA (continued)***

HW #9: STATA exercise. Download the dataset(s) on the course website. Use STATA to calculate the requested statistics and offer brief interpretations. Bring your report (with the printed log file) to class.

11/15 ***Presentation and discussion: Experiment exercise***

Email your report by midnight on 11/11. Read all reports and be prepared to offer your comments.

11/20 ***Survey research exercise: progress report***

We will discuss the progress of the survey research exercise. Be prepared to report your progress and bring your questions.

11/27, 11/29 ***Qualitative field research***

Reading:

- Babbie. Ch. 10
- Jennifer Lee. "From Civil Relations to Racial Conflict: Merchant-Customer Interactions in Urban America."

HW #10: Read Lee's article and write a short memo (2 pages, double-spaced) that discusses: 1) key research question(s); 2) sampling strategy; 3) interview methods; and 4) how convincing and generalizable you find the conclusions of the study. **Email the memo to the instructor by midnight on 11/25.**

12/4 ***Content analysis***

Reading:

- Babbie. Ch. 11

12/6 ***Ethics in research***

Reading:

- Babbie Ch. 3

12/11, 12/13 ***Presentation & Discussion: Survey research report (Email the report to the class by midnight on 12/9.)***

Course evaluation & celebration