

Summer 2002

SOCIOLOGY 357
METHODS OF SOCIAL RESEARCH
8:55 - 11:30 a.m. Mon, Tues, Wed, Thurs June 17-July 11
6102 Social Science

Instructor

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Course web site: <http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/~oliver/SOC357/SOC357.HTM> (you can navigate to the course page from my home page)

Office Hours: Immediately after class every day, and after a lunch break afternoons when you are doing something that is likely to need assistance. (On the day you turn a major assignment in, I will head home to spend the afternoon grading.) Ask me, and I will announce in class on a daily basis. I am readily available by email. This is an excellent way to get a quick question answered or to tell me about a problem. However, I get dozens of emails daily, and will not be able to engage in lengthy email discussions or debates with you. You are also welcome to call me at home at 829-3692, especially for those "quick questions" that can be answered in 2 minutes or if there is some kind of problem. Home calls are OK 7:00 am to 10 PM weekdays, 10 am to 10 pm weekends. Home life is not always interruptible; please be prepared to leave a name and number if I am not available.

There is an official email distribution list for this class which may be used for official announcements if necessary. Make sure you check your @students account every day, or forward it to an account you do check.

This is a basic course in how to do social science research and how to evaluate the research of others. It assumes no background in research methods or statistics. It provides a general overview of the ways sociologists 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.

My goals in this course are: (1) to introduce you to the elements of research design so that you will have 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 trustworthy its information is, (3) to convince you that research is not an esoteric or arcane activity that can be performed only by slightly eccentric professors, but rather a relatively straightforward, systematic set of procedures by which you can get answers to questions you have, (4) to let you experience some of the limitations and problems of doing research into human behavior, and (5) to show you that doing research can be fun, in the same way that learning about the world was fun for you before they spoiled it by making you do it in school.

There will be several blocks of lectures, but most of the class will be organized around discussions and workshops. Your active involvement will make this class better for you and others. This is a writing intensive course with a heavy workload. Each class session in the summer term is the equivalent of a week in a regular semester. You should not be planning any absences in a term this short. If you know you have to miss two classes or more, you should drop the class. You will need to do two to four hours of work outside of class most days, and will need blocks of time on the weekends for the long papers. It will be extremely difficult if not impossible to do this course while also trying to do any other time-consuming activity. If you become ill or some other crisis arises after the term is underway, please communicate with me as soon as possible.

Books and Supplies

You will need to buy a Workbook packet which will be sold at a location to be announced in class. This includes detailed instructions and examples for all methods projects, additional articles, and other important materials. Announcement will be made in class when the packet is ready for purchase. Bring the workbook to class every day, and the Golden reader when discussion of an article is on the agenda (or has been postponed from a previous class). It is also helpful to bring the methods text when it is the assigned reading of the day.

The following books have been ordered at University Bookstore and the Underground Textbook Exchange.

Royce Singleton, Jr. and others, Approaches to Social Research. Third Edition. A text in research methods. It is relatively sophisticated and explains the logic and significance of many important methodological practices.

Patricia Golden. The Research Experience. A collection of sociological research reports coupled with behind-the-scenes discussions of what really happened in the research. These articles are getting very old and dated, but they are still excellent learning tools, and I hope you will bear with them, because there is so far nothing available to replace them. You will learn a lot about the 1960s.

(Recommended, not required): Paul C. Stern and Linda Kalof. Evaluating Social Science Research. Second Edition. An excellent self-teaching guide to reading research reports. Also provides another treatment of basic methods concepts.

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 16 of these, one for each class session. 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 field experiment, and a simple questionnaire; these are worth 20% each (for a total of 60%). These are explained in the workbook. An objective final exam on methodological concepts is worth 20%. Study questions will be distributed during the term. There will be frequent homework assignments which will be worth a total of 18%. The last 2% is based on giving daily feedback on the class sessions.

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 ON TIME TO RECEIVE FULL CREDIT.** 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. 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. You will still get credit.

Although homework is rarely assigned from it, the Singleton text contains a great deal of material which you are required to know for the graded exercises and the final exam. Notations on the exercises indicate which chapters of the reading are most relevant.

Daily Reactions are submitted at the end of each class on a 3x5 card with 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. 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.

Managing the Summer Term Workload

Each class period is the equivalent of one week in a normal term. On many days, the class will be divided into two sections on two different topics. We will take a short break about half way through each class. I have given a great deal of thought to how to reorganize this course so it can be done in four weeks, allowing you enough time to write your papers and me enough time to grade them. The trick is to move quickly at the beginning and be working simultaneously on different projects at the same time, especially in the first two weeks. The reading is front-loaded. We will have time in the last week to return to the concepts with which we began the course, as part of preparing for the final exam.

For each of the three exercises, you have control over how long the data collection takes by your choice of sample and method. It is possible to collect the data for each exercise in two hours or less, if you make the right choices. One key is to plan thoroughly before collecting the data, and another is not to spend too much time changing your mind about what to do. I am prepared to help advise you to keep on the path of the possible rather than the impossible so you can get this work done and still sleep each night.

For the reading, you do not need to study it intensively before class, just read through it once so you can be ready to learn from class. Homework focuses on identifying variables and measures in articles. Do your best on this, but do not waste a lot of time struggling with it – just make a guess if you really do not know. Homework is counted for effort but not graded for correctness. Textbook reading gives you more depth on methodological concepts and information relevant to doing your exercises. Exam will focus on methodological concepts and will emphasize material discussed in class, not minor trivia from the readings.

Schedule of Assignments

Day	Work Due
Mon June 17	<p>Getting started with social science research.</p> <p>PREPARE:</p> <p>1) Read Singleton 1 (introduction), 2 (nature of science), and the Observation Exercise distributed in class and available on the web.</p> <p>CLASS SESSIONS: Introductions. Lecture on variables, propositions, measurement. Examples of research. Introduce Observation assignment. Explain the similarities and differences between observational research and experiments. Make a point of getting to know your fellow students, as you will do research in teams.</p>
Tues June 18	<p>Part I.</p> <p>More on the logic of research and measurement of variables; measurement validity, internal validity and external validity explained</p> <p>PREPARE:</p> <p>1) Read Singleton 4 (elements of design) and 5 (pp. 99-113 only, measurement). (Stern 1, 2 recommended. He uses the term "fact" where I say "empirical statement.")</p> <p>2) DO HW #2 Pick up a newspaper or magazine. Develop one or more propositions about some topic discussed in one article. State the concepts involved and try to operationalize them. Attach the clipping or copy of the article that is your "inspiration" to your homework. This will form the basis for discussion in class.</p> <p>3) DO HW #3 Doob & Gross. 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 which flows from it. 3) See if you can construct the logical framework leading from the theory to the specific prediction. (Hint: This involves the "frustration-aggression hypothesis," the theoretical hypothesis, and the measurement assumptions, and it is not obvious.) 4) Be prepared to discuss the results of this research, in terms of what it demonstrates (I never say "proves").</p> <p>Part II. Details on doing the observation assignment.</p> <p>3) Read Observation assignment distributed in class and available on the web. Singleton 11 (observation research); Also Singleton pp. 383-389, especially if you will study documents. Review Chapters 4 and 5 as necessary to be comfortable with the research terms used in this assignment. Also recommended is Stern pp. 61-88 (controlling for observation errors).</p>
Wed June 19	<p>Part I. Deal with problems/questions on observation assignment.</p> <p>Part II. Ethics. Matters of ethics come up in all research but are especially acute in participant observation.</p> <p>PREPARE:</p> <p>1) DO HW #4 Observation Pretest should have been done, turn in 2 paragraph report (see observation assignment for details)</p> <p>2) Read Singleton 17 (Ethics). Also look at the human subjects and ethics documents in the workbook and/or linked to on my web page.</p> <p>3) Read Humphreys, "Tearoom Trade" and "Methods" in Golden p. 85 AND Haney, et al., "Interpersonal Dynamics in a Simulated Prison," and "The Play's The Thing" in Golden p. 157.</p> <p>4) DO HW #5: (1) State which ethical issues raised (or not raised) in the text most concern you; (2) briefly give your opinion of the ethics of the research in the Humphreys and Haney et al. articles. Also pay attention to what was learned from observation in each of these articles. NOTE: 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.</p>

<p>Thurs June 20</p>	<p>Part I: Finishing the Observation Assignment PREPARE: 1) Read Singleton 18 (writing a report) and pp. 465-485 on elementary statistics. 2) Data collection. Bring your observation data to class and have your reliability calculations done. This class will answer final questions on doing the observation exercise. Part II. Examples of Experiments 1) Read experiment exercise so you know where this is going. I will give some examples to get you thinking. 2) Read Darley and Batson, "From Jerusalem to Jericho" and the personal journal in Golden reader 191. Ignore the material on measures of religiosity (pp. 200-202). AND Goldberg, "Misogyny and the College Girl," in the Golden reader p. 147 and the personal journal. NOTE: You can assume these two are randomized experiments, which we will talk about. AND Read Goldstein and Arms, "Effects of Observing Athletic Contests on Hostility," and the personal journal in Golden reader p. 241. DO HW # 6 For each article 1) Identify the independent and dependent variables and tell how each was measured; 2) Summarize the key findings. Focus on finding the relevant numbers, not just the words. 3) What factors seem to make this research trustworthy or generalizable, or less so? 4) What similarities and differences do you see in the design of these three projects?</p>
<p>Mon June 24</p>	<p>Part I. OBSERVATION EXERCISE REPORT DUE. Each group should be prepared to give a 30-60 second summary of your group's findings. Part II. PREPARE Read Experiment Assignment in Workbook and Singleton 7 and 8 on experiments (FYI: your assignment will use Design 5.) Recommended: Stern 3, especially pages 88-105. We will also continue discussing the articles from last class. This class will introduce the experiment exercise and provide a lecture on the logic of randomized experiments.</p>
<p>Tues June 25</p>	<p>Part I. Answer questions about experiment. Review what is expected in the "logic of experiments" section of the report. PREPARE: Experiment pretest should be done so you know what questions or problems you have. Plan data collection that can be done by tomorrow. Before collecting data, you should have a draft of the written report for "body of paper" Part B "methods" for all parts except how this actually worked out in practice. Part II. Begin learning about survey research. PREPARE: 1) Read Singleton Chapters 9 (logic and design of surveys) and chapter 5, pp. 113- 128 (on reliability and validity); also especially pages 288-291 and 397-400 which focus on ordinal variables and creating indexes. 2) Read Ransford, "Isolation, Powerlessness, and Violence," G 292 and the personal journal, Do: HW #7-a a) List the major variables and tell how at least one was measured, b) and list some of the results and try to find them in the tables. b) Note other concerns or questions you have from the other reading. 3) Read: Rubin "Measurement of Romantic Love" and journal, G 495. Do: HW #7-b : (1) Try to explain in your own words the relation between what Rubin is doing and the ideas of validity explained in your text. (They are related, but these may be difficult ideas.) (2) List three facts which 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.</p>

Wed June 26	<p>Part I: Answer questions about experiment exercise Experiment data should be collected by now. You have time to check with me if problems have come up.</p> <p>Part II. Writing good questions. PREPARE:</p> <p>1) Read Singleton Chapter 10 on writing questions plus review the material on scales and indices pp 397-400. Read the over the questionnaire exercise in the workbook so you know what you are working toward.</p> <p>2) Read the Newman questionnaire (see workbook packet) as a NEGATIVE example: how NOT to write questions. This fake questionnaire was devised as a teaching tool to illustrate common mistakes made in writing questions. Pick out your two favorite lousy questions; I will discuss what makes a bad question. I will also give hints on writing good questions.</p> <p>3) Read Schuman, "Two sources of antiwar sentiment in America", in Golden p. 267 and the personal journal.</p> <p>4) DO HW #8: What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of open-ended questions? When would they be better than structured questions? Would there be some groups of people you wouldn't want to use them with? Identify the major variables; summarize the sampling procedures. 3) Questionnaire assignment explained.</p>
Thurs June 27	<p>This is a workshop class.</p> <p>Part I: Answers to questions about experiment exercise.</p> <p>Part II: Get questionnaire questions developed and approved. Make copies of questionnaire and collect data over the weekend. Collecting the data should go quickly, just do a convenience sample.</p>
Mon July 1	<p>Part I. EXPERIMENT EXERCISE REPORT DUE Be prepared to give a one minute summary of your experiment and its findings in class.</p> <p>Part II. How to code survey data PREPARE:</p> <p>1) Read 1) Singleton pp 456-465 (data processing) and 2) the detailed example of coding and data analysis in the Workbook packet. Look at the sample questionnaire and the code sheet to see their relation. Look at the tables to see the relation between the questions on the sample survey and the numbers in the report. We will discuss in class different ways to do this depending on the computer facilities you have available.</p>
Tues July 2	<p>Workshop class Questionnaire data must be coded up and submitted by the end of today's class</p>
Wed July 3	<p>Sampling theory and practice PREPARE:</p> <p>1) Read Singleton Chapter 6 (sampling) plus sample descriptions from Gallup, NYTimes (links posted on my web page). Review your notes on the sampling in articles we have read.</p> <p>2) DO HW #10. Write short summaries of the sampling procedures in three of the articles we have read this term.</p>
Thurs July 4	<p>Discussion of how to interpret data and write report PREPARE:</p> <p>1) Re-Read workbook packet on questionnaire assignment. Questionnaire tables given to students. Opportunity to request revised tables</p>

Mon July 8	<p>QUESTIONNAIRE EXERCISE REPORT DUE</p> <p>Identifying causal relationships in survey research. Discussion of the elaboration model, third-variable analysis, and internal-external validity issues.</p> <p>1) Read Singleton Chapter 16 (multivariate analysis) and Kasarda, "The Impact of Suburban Population Growth on Central City Functions" and the personal journal in Golden reader, p. 412 .</p> <p>AND</p> <p>Read Oliver "If You Don't Do It, Nobody Else Will" included in the workbook packet.</p> <p>2) DO HW #11 for each article: What is the main point of this article? What is being controlled by the use of multiple regression? How are the theoretical concepts related to the variables? Do not worry that you have not learned about regression in statistics. You do NOT need to know how to compute these statistics to be able to understand what they mean in tables.</p>
Tues July 9	<p>Evaluating Qualitative Research. See also "historical analysis," pp. 376-383 in Singleton.</p> <p>PREPARE</p> <p>Read the short handout on evaluating qualitative research in the workbook, and review Singleton 11 (Field Research).</p> <p>Read Browne, "The Used Car Game" and "Fieldwork for Fun and Profit" Golden 60</p> <p>AND Gans, "The West End" and "On the Methods" G 40</p> <p>AND Selections from Duneier's Sidewalk in workbook and on line reserves.</p> <p>DO HW #12: (1) Based on their discussions in their journal or appendix, compare the roles played and methods employed by Duneier, Browne and Gans. (2) Which of each author's "findings" do you think are most trustworthy? Why? Least trustworthy? Why?</p>
Wed July 10	<p>Review for exam.</p>
Thurs July 11	<p>Final exam: sampling, internal validity, measurement concepts etc. I will give out study questions as the term progresses. Exam format will be objective (so it can be graded quickly).</p>