

SOCIOLOGY 4200: METHODS OF SOCIAL RESEARCH

Fall 2017

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2:30-4:10pm

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**This is the Sociology main office, not a personal line. You may leave a message for me, but I may not receive it in a timely manner.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

From the Catalog: “An elementary research methods that covers the process of doing social research, including research design, data collection techniques, processing and analysis of data, as well as the interpretation of data.”

This course provides students with an overview of both quantitative and qualitative methods for conducting sociological research. We will review various types of research designs, and the benefits and costs of each. We will also read about and discuss ethical considerations in research. Students will learn how to conduct research by engaging with quantitative and qualitative techniques. The content and assignments are designed to prepare students for the Capstone course (SOC 4996), a course all sociology majors must successfully complete prior to graduation. Students are responsible for completing a number of written assignments in this course; each assignment is designed to increase understanding of the diversity and complexity of sociological research. We will go through topics quickly, and assignments tend to build on each other. Therefore, **students must enter this course willing to keep up with readings and assignments as they are given - otherwise, it can be very easy to quickly fall behind.**

Full Disclosure:

This is a broad survey class intended to introduce undergraduate-level students to the most common approaches to social research. With new paradigms and perspectives emerging all the time, there are so many methods and so little time, so this course is not designed to explore all nuances of each methodological approach—otherwise, you would never get out of here! That said, this is an advanced-level undergraduate sociology course. I expect that most of you are here because you are pursuing a sociology major/minor (or another social science field). I understand that at the undergraduate level, it may be very difficult to get excited about a course on methods, especially if you do not use some of these specific skills in your future career. I also understand that many, if not all, of you have not yet had exposure to the language of science and social research, and so you may struggle with the concepts and material in this course. You may become frustrated as you attempt to engage with the methods. You may run into unforeseen problems or take unexpected detours—but you may also have light bulb or “ah ha!” moments as everything starts to connect. This is the nature of scholarly scientific inquiry. Unlike the cleaned up accounts of methodology that you will read in peer-reviewed scholarly articles, research is a messy but rewarding process. I advise you to keep in mind that lots of students before you have survived a methods class—and that methodology (the actual “doing” of research) *can* be fun!

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Upon successful completion of this course, you will be able to:

- Identify basic methodological approaches and describe the general role of methods in building sociological knowledge
- Compare and contrast basic methodological approaches
- Consider various ethical dilemmas that may occur in the research process
- Critically assess mainstream media coverage of scientific research studies with a working knowledge of research methods
- Formulate research hypotheses and conceptualize/operationalize variables on a basic level

- Collect and/or analyze data using various methods on a basic level

REQUIRED READING

Principles of Sociological Inquiry: Qualitative and Quantitative Methods, Saylor Academy. **(Open Source textbook)**

PDF/HTML/DOCX is available at <http://www.saylor.org/books>.

Recommended Readings (NOT required, but good sources on doing research)

- Howard S. Becker, *Tricks of the Trade: How To Think About Your Research While You're Doing It*
- Joey Sprague, *Feminist Methodologies for Critical Researchers: Bridging Differences*
- Tukufu Zuberi and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *White Logic, White Methods: Racism and Methodology*

If you are interested in more reading material on a particular method/methodology, I will be happy to give you recommendations.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Points breakdown for your grade is as follows:

Participation (Homework/In-Class Assignments): 50 points

CITI Training = 25 points

Quantitative Research Project = 50 points

Qualitative Research Project = 50 points

Midterm Exam: 25 points

Final Exam: 50 points

TOTAL: 250 points

Participation. I will not take attendance and it will not count toward your grade, but keep in mind that missing too many class sessions is at your own peril. For most weeks, there will be an in-class activity and/or a homework assignment that will be graded on a complete/incomplete basis. These will be due by the end of class (in-class activities) or before the next class meeting (homework). Homework assignments are to be submitted via Blackboard. Handouts for in-class assignments will be made available on Blackboard following the class period; if you are absent from class but complete the handout by the next class meeting, you may receive half-credit for the activity.

Lecture slide handouts will be available on Blackboard. These will not be the full versions of the slides - you will need to come to class to fill out the missing information. Barring any technological catastrophe, full versions will only be posted right before exams for study purposes (for example, all slides leading up to midterm will be posted before the exam; the same goes for the final).

CITI Training for Human Subjects Research. Specific instructions will be posted to Blackboard. **Please print your completed certificate and submit to me via Blackboard on the due date.** If you have already completed the social/behavioral research training for a prior course/research project and it has not yet expired, you do not have to complete the modules again.

Research Projects. I believe that in order to truly understand research methodology, you must get your hands dirty and actually “do” methods! In lieu of a traditional methods proposal, these projects combined will serve as the “application” of course material following the relevant readings. **For each project, more detailed instructions will be provided prior to the due dates.**

Quantitative Project: The purpose of this project is to practice conceptualization and operationalization of a survey. This project is broken into two phases.

Phase 1 (Research Foundations): You will be asked to develop a research question and testable hypotheses that are appropriate for survey research. You will also be required to read and summarize three empirical, peer-reviewed journal articles that are directly related to your topic.

Phase 2 (Survey Methods): You will create several items that you would write for a survey and describe a sampling procedure that you would use to obtain a sample for this survey.

NOTE: You will not actually be writing and distributing a survey to people! The purpose of this project is to get you thinking about how you would design a quantitative study to answer a research question that is informed by the current literature on your selected topic.

Qualitative Research Project

Participation Observation: You will be required to conduct **2 observations in a public place (20 minutes each)**. You should observe in the same place for both observations unless you have a compelling interest in comparisons across locations (check with me). However you decide to split up the observation dates/times is up to you and your schedule. You may choose to observe at the same time/date during different weeks, or you may observe on different dates/times (this may give you different results). You will need to record field notes while keeping in mind what we have discussed in class regarding fieldwork by that point. The greater goal is for you to practice being a systematic observer, not just a “people watcher.” In addition to turning in your raw field notes and a transcribed version, you will also write a brief memo of what you observed, methodological details (dates/times, places), any patterns/themes you may have come across, and any difficulties/insights you may have had.

In-Depth Interview Guide: You will also be responsible for creating a guide suited for qualitative interviewing. It will be based on the same topic you worked with in your Quantitative Project, though it may be slightly altered to be suitable for qualitative work. **You will not be doing an interview with the questions you create - we will be practicing interviewing skills in class.**

NOTE: The data collection assignments are for pedagogical/course use only. They **CANNOT** be used as data for any current or future research reports! Use of these data are limited strictly to this classroom. If you are interested enough in your topic that you want to create a full research project from it, you will need to seek human subjects approval from WSU’s Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Exams. Exams will be on Blackboard. You will be able to go back to the test once you have started it. With each exam, you will have a 2-hour window to complete the exam.

Midterm Exam: The midterm exam will be **posted at 2:30pm (usual start of class) on the scheduled midterm exam date, available through 4:30pm**. The exam content will cover foundational concepts from the first half of the semester, using multiple-choice items.

Final Exam: The final exam will be **posted at 2:45pm on the final exam date, available through 4:45pm**. The multiple-choice component will only cover the methods learned in the second half of the course, but the short-answer questions will ask you to synthesize both general foundation and specific method knowledge, which means you may need to review information from the first half of the course.

For both exams, I will provide you with a study guide beforehand—I **STRONGLY RECOMMEND** that you complete the study guide before you take the exams.

GRADES

Grades are earned, not given. I will attempt to return feedback on assignments in a timely manner (if it will take longer than anticipated, I will inform you—remember that I am also a student, like you!). **For the bigger course assignments, I will give you the opportunity to revise your initial attempt for a higher grade.** These revisions must address my feedback and be re-submitted within two weeks’ time. If revisions are not submitted within this window, they will not be accepted and the original grade will stand. **Submitting an assignment for revision does not guarantee you a higher grade.** You must show me that you have tried to address my feedback and/or improve the quality of your work to gain any extra points.

Incompletes will only be given in the cases of medical or other **VERIFIABLE** emergencies. If students are not doing well in this course, they have the responsibility of formally withdrawing from this course. Please note

that the withdrawal system at Wayne State is **student-initiated**, in that students who desire to withdraw from the course do so themselves via Pipeline. When students withdraw, they may receive a “withdraw passing” (WP), “withdraw failing” (WF), or “withdraw not enough information” (WN) on their transcript, depending on how much of the course is completed. According to the university’s grading policies, students who do not formally withdraw from the course but stop attending class and do not complete scheduled assignments will receive a failing grade (F) in the course. *Before withdrawing from the course, you should talk to the instructor about why you are withdrawing.*

If you have any concerns about the course (grade-related or otherwise), you should speak to me immediately and directly about your concerns. However, class time will NOT be used to discuss your course concerns. The concerns you have about the course should be discussed PRIVATELY with the instructor, as they are *your* concerns and not your classmates’.

Final grades will be determined by the following scale:

90-100% (225 points)= A

80-89% (200 points)= B

70-79% (175 points) = C

60-69% (150 points) = D

Below 60% (<150 points) = F

COURSE POLICIES/EXPECTATIONS

Extra Credit. Opportunities for extra credit may be added to certain assignments and exams at my discretion, but it is not guaranteed.

Late Assignments. I accept late assignments. However, be advised that for the larger Projects, I may grade them harder if they are late than if they were submitted on time.

In Case of Emergency... If an emergency or otherwise significant life event arises that prevents you from regularly attending class or submitting assignments, **please do not wait until the last minute to inform me.** The sooner I know about your circumstances, the better the opportunity I will have to work with you and your needs. If you wait until the end of the semester to come to me, I will be less sympathetic. If you stop coming to class and turning in assignments with no communication, I will have no idea what is happening in your life and I will assume you are dropping the course.

Communication and Etiquette. I use Blackboard for all course information (assignment revisions, class cancellations, updates, etc.). Please make sure that you check these sources on a regular basis. I will communicate with you primarily through your Wayne email. If you decide to use a different email account, you need to ensure that your WSU email is forwarded to the alternative account, or otherwise ensure that my emails are forwarded. Please indicate your name in the email and the course in the subject line (“SOC 4200...”) so I know who is sending the email and for which course. **Do not email as if you are sending a text message.** I will attempt to answer emails within 48 hours of receipt.

Changes to the Syllabus. Information in this syllabus is always subject to change. Please pay attention to course announcements each week so that you are informed of any changes. Please also make sure that you have access to your WSU email account so that you will receive emails that I may send via the course’s Blackboard site.

Classroom Ground Rules.

- All rules of courtesy and respect are in effect during class time. Please respect your fellow students and your instructor by coming to class on time, staying until class is over, being patient and courteous while others are talking, etc. Treat others as you yourself would like to be treated. All electronic devices should be turned off (or turned to a silent ringer option) before class begins. Students should also refrain from texting, Facebooking, tweeting, or surfing the web during class

time. If you are using a laptop during class, please use it for note-taking purposes only. Please respect your classmates who are trying to learn course material.

- Part of the course is based in class or small group discussion. As sociology is always culturally relevant, we may talk about current hot topics and/or controversial issues as they are related to sociology and social research methods. Progression in science requires healthy, constructive debate. That said, class discussions should be respectful (i.e. no trolling).
- Students are responsible for all material covered and announcements made during class. Therefore, if students must be absent at some point during the course, it is their responsibility to find a classmate who is willing to share their notes with them.
- Class time is valuable! If you have a question regarding course policies or assignments, check the syllabus first, then Blackboard—most of the time, the information should be in one of those places. If you have questions about grades or have in-depth questions regarding course material, please see me during office hours.

Problems with Writing? Grades for written assignments depend partially on students' ability to write a coherent, well-organized, and grammatically sound product. If students have concerns about their writing abilities, they should visit Wayne State University's Writing Center in the Undergraduate Library: <http://clas.wayne.edu/writing/> (you can schedule an appointment at the Writing Center on line as well). The Writing Center also has an online tutoring option through Google Hangout: <http://clas.wayne.edu/writing/Online-Writing-Center>. There is a page of writing resources posted on the sociology department's website that might help you: <http://clasweb.clas.wayne.edu/Sociology/WritingResources>. If you have difficulty with written assignments, you should make the effort to access these resources and talk to the instructors of all of your courses that involve writing.

Plagiarism: All university rules about plagiarism and cheating are in effect during this course. I expect students to abide by the academic honor code. Any quoted material must be placed in quotation marks with proper references to the author. You may use statistical data or paraphrase other published works in the text, but ONLY if you provide the complete citation (author's last name and year). This means, even if you use your own words, but the ideas are from something you read you must give credit to that author. If you think you might be plagiarizing, then you probably ARE! Copying entire paragraphs from sources is not appropriate even if citations are provided. Evidence of cheating or plagiarizing result in automatic failure of the test/assignment and possibly the course. Please see the student code of conduct for more information on WSU's policies regarding academic integrity: <http://doso.wayne.edu/assets/codeofconduct.pdf> and http://doso.wayne.edu/assets/scoc_section_10.1_a-b.pdf.

Student Disability Services: If you have a documented disability requiring accommodations, you must register with Student Disability Services (SDS), located at 1600 David Adamany Undergraduate Library in the Student Academic Success Services department; telephone is [313-577-1851](tel:313-577-1851) or [313-577-3365](tel:313-577-3365) (TTY phone is for hearing impaired students only). Once accommodations are in place, I will be glad to meet with you privately during office hours to discuss your special needs. Student Disability Services' mission is to assist the university in creating an accessible community where students with disabilities have an equal opportunity to fully participate in their educational experience at WSU.

University statement on religious holidays. Because of the extraordinary variety of religious affiliations of the University student body and staff, the Academic Calendar makes no provisions for religious holidays. However, it is University policy to respect the faith and religious obligations of the individual. Students with classes or examinations that conflict with their religious observances are expected to notify their instructors well in advance so that mutually agreeable alternatives may be worked out.

Important University Dates

- Classes begin: August 30
- University closed: September 4 (Labor Day)
- Last day to drop with tuition cancellation: September 13
- Last day to withdraw: November 12

- University closed: November 22-25 (U.S. Thanksgiving)
- Classes end: December 11
- Study day: December 12
- Finals: December 13-19

COURSE SCHEDULE

Here is the TENTATIVE schedule of readings and assignments. It may change due to cancellations, class interest, etc. I reserve the right to make changes to this schedule throughout the semester. I will announce any changes via email/Blackboard.

Date	Topic	Readings	Assignments
August 31	Syllabus/Course Intro		
September 5	Intro to Methods	Principles Ch 1 & 2	
September 7	NO CLASS		
September 12 & 14	Research Ethics	Principles Ch 3	<i>CITI Training Due Sun Sep 17 by 11:59pm</i>
September 19 & 21	Reading and Understanding Social Research Research Design	Principles Ch 4, 5, 14	
September 26 & 28	Defining and Measuring Concepts	Principles Ch 6 BB - Button et al.	
October 3 & 5	Sampling	Principles Ch 7 BB - Henderson et al.	
October 10	Catch Up/Review Day		
October 12	MIDTERM EXAM		
October 17 & 19	Qualitative Field Research	Principles Ch 10 BB – TBD	<i>Quantitative Project Phase 1 Due Sun Oct 22 by 11:59pm</i>
October 24 & 26	Interviews	Principles Ch 9 BB - TBD	
October 31 & November 2	Survey Research	Principles Ch 8 BB - Brewster & Lynn	
November 7 & 9	Unobtrusive Research	Principles Ch 11 BB - Schmittel & Sanderson	
November 14 & 16	Experiments Program Evaluation	Principles Ch 12 BB - Pager BB - Gidycz et al.	<i>Qualitative Project Due Sun Nov 19 by 11:59pm</i>
November 21	Catch Up Day		
November 23	NO CLASS - THANKSGIVING		
November 28 & 30	Mixed Methods Focus Groups	Principles Ch 12 BB - Pager BB - Hershov et al.	
December 5 & 7	Research as Art and Narrative Final Wrap-Up	BB - Ellis BB - TBD	
December 12	NO CLASS - STUDY DAY		
December 14	FINAL EXAM 2:45-4:45 PM		<i>Quantitative Project Phase 2 Due Fri Dec 15 by 5pm</i>