

SOCIOLOGY 4200: METHODS OF SOCIAL RESEARCH

Spring 2016

Mondays, 5:30-9:20pm

328 State Hall

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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. Attendance is mandatory for this course. Students should complete all assigned readings before coming to class and be prepared to discuss the key ideas found in the readings. Students are also 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 in this course and, therefore, **students must enter this course willing to keep up with readings and assignments as they are assigned.**

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
- Identify and search for peer reviewed/academic sources using electronic library databases
- 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

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

Assignment breakdown for your grade is as follows:

Attendance/Participation = 25 points

CITI Training = 25 points

Quantitative Research Project = 50 points

Qualitative Research Project = 50 points

Final Exam: 100 points

Attendance/Participation: Attendance will count as part of your grade. I will pass around a sign-in sheet at some point during each class session. It is your responsibility to sign in to receive credit for the day. You may miss up to **two** classes, no questions asked, without affecting your grade. (That means if you are ill, stay home and get well!) After these two absences, every subsequent absence will affect the final course grade. There are NO exceptions to this policy, unless you have a VERIFIABLE emergency and we work something out. For participation (and to encourage critical thinking/creativity) points, you will have writing prompts or in-class activities to complete.

CITI Training for Human Subjects Research: Specific instructions will be posted to Blackboard. **Please print your completed certificate and submit to me in class 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 and rubrics will be provided prior to the due dates.**

Quantitative Research Project: For this project, you will be practicing conceptualization and operationalization of a survey. The project will be completed in two stages. First, 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. Second, you will be asked to create several items that you would write for a survey and to 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 form a research question and design a quantitative study to answer it.

Qualitative Research Project: In order to practice using qualitative methods, you will be required to conduct **2 observations in a public place (20 minutes each)**. 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 (typed or handwritten—if handwritten, be sure they are LEGIBLE!) 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 full typed version, you will also write a brief summary 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. I may use some sets of raw fieldnotes for a class exercise on qualitative data analysis (I will ask your permission first!).

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).

Final Exam: The final exam will be in-class, using multiple-choice and short answer items. For the final, I will provide you with a study guide beforehand—I **STRONGLY RECOMMEND** that you complete the study guide before you take the exam (material on the exam may come straight from the study guide...). Depending on class interest, we may go over the study guide in class the week before the final.

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!). 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% = A 80-89% = B 70-79% = C 60-69% = D Below 60% = F

COURSE POLICIES/EXPECTATIONS

Assignment Submission Format. Make sure that your name, the course name, an assignment description/title (“latest study paper”), and due date are on the first page. Use ASA citation style when directed. For more specific instructions on how to cite sources using ASA style, please see the Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL) at this link: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/583/1>

Late Assignments. I will subtract 1 point from your points total for each day that an assignment is late.

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, extra credit opportunities, 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. *I reserve the right to lower students’ participation grade if students are online or on their devices during class time.*
- 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

- Last day to drop with tuition cancellation: May 15
- Last day to withdraw: June 12
- Study day: June 25
- Final exams: June 27-28

COURSE SCHEDULE (TENTATIVE)

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	Assignment Due
May 9	Introduction to Methods Linking Methods with Theory	Principles Ch 1 & 2	Catch up on these readings when you can!
May 16	Research Ethics Reading and Understanding Social Research	Principles Ch 3 & 14 Blackboard 1	CITI Training due by class time
May 23	Beginning a Research Project Research Design Defining & Measuring Concepts	Principles Ch 4-6	Quantitative Project Phase 1 due Fri May 27 by 11:59pm
May 30	NO CLASS - MEMORIAL DAY		
June 3 **scheduled as a Monday**	Sampling Survey Research	Principles Ch 7 & 8	
June 6	Interviews Qualitative Field Research	Principles Ch 9 & 10 Blackboard 3	Quantitative Project Phase 2 due Fri Jul 8 by 11:59pm
June 13	Unobtrusive Research	Principles Ch 11 Blackboard 7 & 8	
June 20	Other Methods Methods in the Real World **Study Session for Final Exam	Principles Ch 12 & 15	Qualitative Project due Fri Jun 25 by midnight
June 27	**Final Exam During Regular Class Time**		