

SOCIOLOGY 4200: METHODS OF SOCIAL RESEARCH

Fall 2015

Mondays, 5:30-9:10pm

025 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 the following techniques: surveys, in-depth interviews, and observations. 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 and students are required to participate when I open topics for discussion. Students should complete all assigned readings before coming to class and be prepared to discuss with the larger group 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
- Collect and analyze data using various methods on a basic level
- Successfully write reports detailing data collection/analysis

REQUIRED READING

Earl Babbie, *The Basics of Social Research*.

The 6th edition is the most recent, but you may use an older edition if preferred.

Available to purchase/rent at the Wayne State Bookstore or through online sources.

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 = 5%

CITI Training = 5%

Methods Journals = 20%

Latest Study Assignment = 10%

Hands-on Research Project = 40%

1. Research Topic & Annotated Bibliography
2. Survey & Write-Up
3. Observation & Write-Up
4. In-Depth Interview & Write-Up
5. Methods Reflection Paper

Final Exam = 20%

Attendance: 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 **three** classes, no questions asked, without affecting your grade. (That means if you are ill, stay home and get well!) After these three 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.

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.

Methods Journal: Nearly every week, you will be required to complete a journal entry on the week's assigned readings. **These are due at the beginning of class on the specified due date (5:30pm) and should cover the assigned readings for the week (for example, the journal due on the day we cover sampling in class should cover the readings on sampling).** I will not accept late journals past this time. I recommend bringing a copy with you to class so you may reference it during discussion and ask any questions you may have on the material covered. 11 are assigned for the semester, but only 10 count—I will drop the lowest grade at the end. (This means that if you do the first 10 and you're satisfied with your grades on all of them, you do not have to do the last one!) Formal citations are not required in journal entries, but please clearly identify the reading material you are summarizing.

Weekly journals must include the following parts:

1. *Reading Summary.* Summarize the assigned readings for that week (from the textbook and any assigned Blackboard readings). This section should be approximately 3-4 paragraphs in length. This is partially an exercise in the ability to summarize the main ideas of scholarly material, so you must select which details are important enough to include. For example, for readings regarding research findings, you do not need to include detailed statistics or theoretical background. Simply stick to the overall conclusions drawn from the data and the methods employed. Be sure that your summaries of assigned blackboard readings/articles focus on the METHODS used, not the topic of the reading. All assigned Blackboard readings are examples of methods and correspond with the assigned chapter for that particular week. You should be able to draw clear comparisons between the content you have read in the textbook and the application of those techniques in the journal article.
2. *Application.* In the second part of your journal entry discuss how the readings are relevant to your research interest. Include examples of how you would employ the techniques described in the textbook in order to successfully conduct a research study on your topic. If a chapter describes multiple techniques either a) choose which technique would be the most appropriate and explain why or b) describe how each of the techniques could be used relative to your area of interest. Be sure to provide concrete examples. Do NOT skip this part of the journal entry—being able to apply knowledge is just as important as the initial readings. This section should also be approximately 2-3 paragraphs long.
3. A brief discussion of any concerns, criticisms or other opinions you have regarding the readings. This should be the shortest section of your journal, 1-2 paragraphs maximum.

“The Latest Study” Assignment: There is a strong possibility that many of you will never be in a position wherein you are required to design and conduct a large-scale scientific research study. Likewise, after leaving college, many of you will no longer have the time (or desire) to locate and read scholarly articles delineating the most recent research findings. All of you, on the other hand, are (and will continue to be) consumers of scientific knowledge via mainstream media outlets (e.g., research reports). However, most of you are currently passive consumers of media’s reports of the latest scientific studies. In other words, most of you uncritically accept the media’s representations research projects. The purpose of this assignment is to encourage you to use your working knowledge of research methods to become active, critical consumers of such information. For this assignment, I will provide you with two articles: 1) a story from a mainstream media outlet summarizing findings from a recently published study, and 2) the original peer-reviewed study from an academic journal. You will read the two articles and then answer a series of questions that will ask you to identify and evaluate the methodology used in the original article, and to identify discrepancies between the two stories (especially what the mainstream media story leaves out). **The articles and questions will be provided prior to the assignment due date.**

Hands-on Research Project (in 5 parts): 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 mini-assignments combined will serve as the “application” of course material following the relevant readings. **For each portion of the assignment, more detailed instructions and rubrics will be provided prior to the due dates.**

1) Research Topic and Annotated Bibliography. This initial assignment will ideally serve as the foundation and give you practice setting up a research inquiry. Two of the first steps in initiating a research project is 1) specifying a research topic (what do I want to know?) and 2) evaluating the existing literature to see what has already been studied on your topic of interest (what do I already know?).

Send me a sentence or two explaining your proposed research topic of interest by September 28. We will be meeting in the library on September 28 for a presentation on how to use the library website to find scholarly sources. The rest of class will be devoted to completing this assignment, so to make the time worthwhile, you should already have a viable topic from which you can search for existing articles when you come to class! (Most of you should be able to find existing scholarly research on your topics. However, if it so happens that you are unable to find articles relating to your specific topic, don’t panic—you just may need to modify your topic for the sake of the assignment.) You will be asked to find **three peer-reviewed journal articles related to your topic and to write an annotated bibliography that will summarize the research questions, methods, main findings, and how the article links to your topic.**

2) Survey Instrument Assignment. As you will already have a course exclusively devoted to statistics and learning the statistical software (e.g. SPSS), you will not actually be distributing a survey and analyzing results. The purpose of this assignment is to give you practice in thinking about how to transform concepts into operational variables that can be measured, in addition to thinking about correlation and causation in quantitative research. You will create a brief survey instrument relating to your area of interest/research topic that you might give as a researcher. You will need to specify the unit of analysis, sample (size, characteristics), sampling frame, and limitations. Finally, you will be asked to briefly describe how your survey would answer your research question for this particular assignment.

3) Observation Assignment. In order to practice using qualitative methods, you will be required to conduct **2 observations in a public place (20 minutes each)** within a 2-week period. 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 the two 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.

NOTE: Based on your specific research interest, it may be difficult to transfer to a pure observation, so I do not expect all of you to make a direct link from your research interest to this assignment. However, if you broaden your reach, you may be able to make it work. (For example, if you are interested in gender or race, you may be able to examine more general trends such as gender presentation, racial composition of public places, etc.) Regardless of focus, 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, you will also write a brief summary of what you observed, methodological details (dates/times, places), any patterns/themes you may have come across, any difficulties/insights you may have had, and connections to your topic (if possible) or the readings for class. I may use some sets of raw fieldnotes for a class exercise on qualitative data analysis (I will ask your permission first!).

4) In-Depth Interview Assignment. In-depth interviewing is a large portion of qualitative research, and it takes a different set of skills and more concentration than is required in “casual conversation.” To practice this method, you will construct an in-depth interview guide (preferably related to your area of interest, even in a general sense, but I recognize that it may need to be tweaked) and conduct ONE in-depth interview with a person of your choice. You will submit your interview guide to me in advance so that I may revise and approve it before you can conduct your interview. As you are just practicing interview skills, your interviewee can be a friend, family member, significant other, etc. However, try to avoid interviewing those who would be classified by IRB as part of a “vulnerable population.” The interview does not need to be extensive (30 minutes-1 hour will be sufficient). You are not required to record or transcribe this interview, though you will need to take notes. In addition to turning in your raw notes, you will also write a brief summary of what you learned from your interviewee, methodological details (date/time/place of interview, types of questions asked), any patterns/themes you may have come across, any difficulties/insights you may have had, and connections to your topic (if possible) or the readings for 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).

5) Methods Reflection Paper. After you have completed each of the hands-on activities (surveys, observations, interviewing), you will write a final reflection paper (about 3-5 pgs) on your experiences engaging with these methods. Questions to address in this final paper may include, but are not limited to: What did you learn about your topic from doing each method? Did you prefer one method over the others? What were the strengths and weaknesses of each method? How does the nature of your initial research question/topic impact which method will be the most useful in your inquiry?

Final Exam. The final exam will be a combination of multiple-choice and short-answer items (using both quantitative and qualitative measures!). It will be cumulative, covering aspects from course material throughout the semester. 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...). We will go over the study guide and review for the exam in class the week before the final exam period. That is your time to ask any questions on any material we have covered.

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 certain 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, or even that your grade will change. You must show me that you have tried to 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% = A 80-89% = B 70-79% = C 60-69% = D Below 60% = F

COURSE POLICIES/EXPECTATIONS

Assignment Submission Format. Assignments should be typed in Times New Roman, 12 pt font, with 1” margins all around. 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>

Extra Credit. At my discretion, there may be extra credit activities available throughout the semester (attending Brown Bag talks, conferences, other assignments). These will be announced in class and posted on Blackboard. However, I strongly advise against waiting until the end of the course to scramble for extra credit opportunities.

Late Assignments. I will not accept late journals. **For all other assignments, unless otherwise noted, they are due via email to me (ay8209@wayne.edu) by 11:59pm on the due date.** I will subtract 1 point from your points total for each day that it 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.

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. **Except when noted, course assignments should be submitted to me via email (ay8209@wayne.edu).** 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 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).
- I will not provide lecture notes for students, nor will I reiterate lectures in class or during office hours. 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: September 16
- Last day to withdraw: November 15
- Thanksgiving break: November 25-29
- Study day: December 15
- Final exams: December 16-22

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
September 14	Human Inquiry & Science Paradigms, Theory & Research	Babbie, Ch. 1 & 2	Catch up on these readings when you can!
September 21	Research Design Reading & Writing Social Research	Babbie, Ch. 4 & 15	Journal #1
September 28	Research/library day	CITI material (online)	CITI Training 1-2 sentences on your topic/research interest
October 5	Conceptualization, Operationalization, and Measurement Indexes, Scales, and Typologies	Babbie, Ch. 5 & 6 Blackboard 1	Journal #2 Annotated Bibliography
October 12	Sampling	Babbie, Ch. 7 Blackboard 2 & 3	Journal #3
October 19	Surveys	Babbie, Ch. 9 Blackboard 4	Journal #4 Latest Study Assignment
October 26	Experiments	Babbie, Ch. 8 Blackboard 5	Journal #5
November 2	Qualitative Field Research	Babbie, Ch. 10 Blackboard 6	Survey Assignment Journal #6
November 9	Unobtrusive Research	Babbie, Ch. 11 Blackboard 7 & 8	Journal #7
November 16	Mixed Methods and Autoethnography	Blackboard 9 & 10	Observation Assignment Journal #8
November 23	Quantitative Data Analysis	Babbie, Ch. 13	Journal #9
November 30	Qualitative Data Analysis	Babbie, Ch. 14	In-Depth Interview Journal #10
December 7	Ethics & Politics of Social Research	Babbie, Ch. 3 Blackboard 11 & 12	Journal #11
December 14	Study Session in Class for Final Exam		Methods Reflection Paper
December 21	**Final Exam During Regular Class Time**		