

SYA 4300- Methods of Social Research

Sociology SYA4300 Section 1
Methods of Social Research
HCB 214 (9:30-10:45 TR)
Spring (Second Semester) 2009

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from 1:00-2:00, or by appointment

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Social Research is both an art and a science. It is an art because social research requires creative interaction with the social world. It is a science because of its method. In this course, I will show you where the ACTION is within sociology—in research. I will do so by teaching you the methods of social research, but even more importantly, I will require you to begin actively engaging in the activity of social research. We will examine topics ranging from conceptualization and operationalization of variables, to issues of social desirability bias and acquiescence bias, as well as discussing the logic of social research. We will explore the potential pitfalls and minefields that experienced researchers seek to avoid, and discuss what it means to “prove” something. In the end, social research is a mechanism for judging theoretical or factual claims. Here’s my claim: If you give this class a chance, you will enjoy it. Are you ready to test my claim?

Overall, I have four goals for this course:

1. To expose students to a host of different methodological techniques in order for them to both critically consume and carefully conduct research using these techniques.
2. To develop students writing and communication skills and further their professionalization as sociologists.
3. To help students understand the theoretical bases of choosing amongst various methodological approaches and the strengths and weaknesses of these approaches.
4. This course will prepare Sociology majors for professional or graduate school and for careers (e.g. business, politics, social services and many other fields) practicing and utilizing social science.

Readings for the Course:

A set of readings will be available electronically through the Blackboard system (and can also be accessed via the library and online journals). The readings will all be listed by their first author. The readings include journal articles, chapters from books, and a few popular commentaries on social science. I hope the readings are both stimulating and valuable. Students should read the assigned material prior to class and should bring the readings to class. Students who are unwilling to do the readings will not perform well in the class.

OFFICE HOURS:

My office is on the Fifth Floor of Bellamy in room 513. My office hours are Monday, Tuesday or Thursday from 1:00-2:00. If the listed hours are inconvenient, we can set up another time to meet. I am most easily reached by e-mail at bstarks@fsu.edu. My office phone is (850) 644-1839.

ACADEMIC HONOR CODE:

Students are expected to uphold the Academic Honor Code published in The Florida State University Bulletin and the Student Handbook. The Academic Honor System of The Florida State University is based on the premise that each student has the responsibility (1) to uphold the highest standards of academic integrity in the student's own work, (2) to refuse to tolerate violations of academic integrity in the university community, and (3) to foster a high sense of integrity and social responsibility on the part of the university community. Please see the following web site for a complete explanation of the Academic Honor Code. <http://www.fsu.edu/Books/Student-Handbook/>
<http://www.fsu.edu/Books/Student-Handbook/codes/honor.html>

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY:

Students must abide by the highest standards of academic integrity. Any form of academic dishonesty will result in a "zero" for that particular assignment or an "F" for the course, at the instructor's discretion. Any student who plagiarizes, cheats on exams, or otherwise behaves in a dishonest way may be reported to the University Judicial Office for official adjudication.

CLASSROOM COURTESY

Classroom courtesy is necessary to ensure that all students have the opportunity to learn without distractions. This means no cell phones, talking during lectures (unless recognized by the professor or discussion leader), reading newspapers, etc. during class. If you must have a cell phone to receive emergency calls about kids or other family members, keep it on vibrate. Because entering and leaving is distracting to the instructor and other students, you need to be on time for class and stay until the end. If you must enter late or leave early, please inform me before class begins and take the seat nearest an exit and enter or leave as quietly as possible. Repeated disruption of class may lead to penalties that reduce your final grade (see below). Class discussions can sometimes stimulate strong feelings and heated debate. Because this is a college classroom, all discussions must be scholarly. **Failure to abide by these principles can result in academic penalties ranging from a lowered grade, to dismissal, to failing the course.**

Scholarly comments are:

Respectful of diverse opinions and open to follow up questions and/or disagreement; related to the class and course material; advance the discussion about issues related to the course and/or course material rather than personal beliefs; are delivered in normal tones and a non-aggressive manner.

Unacceptable behaviors are:

- (a) Personal attacks. This includes attacks on a person's appearance, demeanor, or political beliefs.
- (b) Interrupting your instructor or other students. Raise your hand and wait to be called on to prevent this problem.
- (c) Using the discussion to argue for political positions and/or beliefs. If political discussions arise, they must be discussed as scholarly endeavors (see above).
- (d) Using raised tones, yelling, engaging in arguments with other students, and being physically aggressive.
- (e) Ignoring your instructor's authority to protect the integrity of the classroom. Anyone who violates these guidelines will be asked to cease and desist and may be asked to leave the classroom and/or drop the course.

CLASS ATTENDANCE

Class attendance is required. If you miss more than three classes, I begin to deduct points from your final grade. Also, I take attendance into account when calculating borderline grades. The following and only the following absences are eligible to be excused: Religious holidays, as specified in FSU policy (see

elsewhere in syllabus); absences due to representing FSU at official functions, including intercollegiate debating or varsity sports events; verified emergencies and/or medical illness. Medical illnesses are serious in nature and require continued treatment by medical professionals and/or surgical or other treatments. Colds, the flu, fatigue, and stress do not qualify as medical illnesses. If you have a chronic illness that could affect your attendance, it is imperative that you alert me to this at the beginning of class. Documentation for an absence to be excused is required. You must provide a copy of any documentation to your professor (but maintain a copy for your records). While one is not penalized for excused absences, he or she remains responsible for all content missed, including assignments, knowledge, or skills covered in missed class(es).

COURSE EXPECTATIONS:

Because each person in a class contributes to its ultimate success or failure, I expect everyone to attend our class meetings, read and think about the day's readings, work on the in-class projects, and participate in the give and take of class discussion. Not meeting this expectation is grounds for a lowered grade. Over the course of the semester, there will be three exams covering the substantive topics and readings in that section of the course. These exams will include a combination of multiple choice, short answer and essay. The exams will be graded for an integration and deep understanding of course material, coherent and well-reasoned arguments, and professional writing skills. The first two exams will be non-cumulative, while the final exam will be partially cumulative. The final exam will obviously not request the minutest details about information early in the semester, but students will be expected to cumulatively retain the core concepts throughout the semester. Also, students will complete six research projects (for a total of 280 points). The composition of final grades are expected to be as follows:

Six Research Projects 28%
Exam #1 22%
Exam #2 23%
Final Exam 27%

Failure to be present for an exam will result in a grade of zero for that exam and this grade will be included in determining final grades. If you are unable to take an exam, you must call me with a valid excuse prior to the time of the exam.

The research projects will be due at the beginning of class on the due date. Late assignments will be penalized one letter grade for each day late. That is, after the first day late, the maximum grade attainable will be an B+, after the second day late, the maximum grade will be a C+, after three days late, the maximum will be a D+, and after four days late, the maximum will be a D-. Students who turn in assignments after the beginning of class, but on the due date will be penalized one-half of a letter grade – such that the maximum grade will be an A/A-.

USE OF GRADED MATERIALS AS CLASS EXAMPLES

In this course, all material turned in for a grade is eligible to be used as an example for current and future students of this course. I try to remove names from such examples when I use them, but I cannot promise that all identifying information will be removed in all cases. If you have any concerns about your materials being used in this way for the purpose of future instruction, please let me know ahead of time.

NO SELLING OF LECTURE NOTES

The lecture material in this course is copyrighted and any reproduction of course notes for profit is strictly prohibited.

RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS

Students will be allowed to miss class due to observance of religious holidays but they are still responsible for all materials assigned outside and covered in class on the day(s) missed. You must talk with your instructor in advance of missing a class for religious holiday observance reasons.

ELECTRONIC DEVICES

Use of cell phones, ipods, etc. is not allowed during class. Please put these electronic devices away and out of sight during the class. No text messaging please! If you need a cell phone because you are on-call or in case of emergency, please set the ringer to silent and leave the classroom unobtrusively if you must answer it.

AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT: Students with disabilities needing academic accommodation should: (1) register with and provide documentation to the Student Disability Resource Center; (2) bring a letter to me indicating the need for accommodation and what type. This should be done during the first week of class. For more information about services available to FSU students with disabilities, contact:

Student Disability Resource Center, Dean of Students, 08 Kellum Hall
Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL 32306-4400, (850) 644-9566 (voice), (850) 644-8504 (TDD), SDRC@admin.fsu.edu, <http://www.fsu.edu/~staffair/dean/StudentDisability/>

Grading Scale:

A	93-100	D+	67-69
A-	90-92	D	63-66
B+	87-89	D-	60-62
B	83-86	F	59 OR BELOW
B-	80-82		
C+	77-79		
C	73-76		
C-	70-72		

COURSE OUTLINE:

This outline will give you an idea of how the course will unfold. I suggest that you complete the readings the week that they are listed in the syllabus. This will make information presented in class clearer and will give us as a class the chance to talk about and react to the readings in a more thoughtful way. (This is only a tentative outline and is subject to revision at any time during the semester)

Date Topic, Readings, and Assignments

Jan 6 Introduction- Avoiding Common Errors: The Promise of Social Science
 Read the Syllabus

- Jan 8 Social Science and the Research Process
Davis, Nancy and Robert V. Robinson. 2006. "The Egalitarian Face of Islamic Orthodoxy: Support for Islamic Law and Economic Justice in Seven Muslim-Majority Nations." *American Sociological Review* 71: 167-190 (read the abridged version and reading guide)
- Jan 13 Theory and Research
Freese, Jeremy, Brian Powell, and Lala Carr Steelman. 1999. "Rebel Without a Cause or Effect: Birth Order and Social Attitudes." *American Sociological Review* 64: 207-231.
- Lareau, Annette. 2002. "Invisible Inequality: Social Class and Childrearing in Black Families and White Families." *American Sociological Review* 67: 747-776.
- Jan 15 Research Design and Causality I
Downey, Douglas B. 1995. "When Bigger is Not Better: Family Size, Parental Resources, and Children's Educational Performance." *American Sociological Review* 60: 746-761.
- Jan 20 Research Design and Causality II
Bradshaw, York et al. 1993. "Borrowing Against the Future: Children and Third World Indebtedness." *Social Forces* 71: 629-656.
- Jan 22 Measurement I: Conceptualization
Steensland, Brian et al. 2000. "The Measure of American Religion." *Social Forces* 79: 291-318.
- Jan 27 Measurement II: Operationalization
Hadaway, C. Kirk, Penny Long Marler, and Mark Chaves. 1993. "What the Polls Don't Show: A Closer Look at U.S. Church Attendance." *American Sociological Review* 58: 741-752.
- Ferraro, Kenneth F. and Melissa M. Farmer. 1999. "Utility of Health Data from Social Surveys." *American Sociological Review* 64: 303-315.
- Project #1: Variables, Sampling and Basic Statistics (due 2/5 – 40 points)**
- Jan 29 Sampling I: Probability Sampling
Chapter 2: "The Sex Survey" in Michael, Robert T., John H. Gagnon, Edward O. Lauman, and Gina Kolata. 1994. *Sex in America: A Definitive Survey* Boston, MA: Warner Books.
- Feb 3 Sampling II: Non-Probability Sampling
Snow, David A. et al. 1986. "The Myth of Pervasive Mental Illness Among the Homeless." *Social Problems* 33: 407-423.

Wright, James D. 1988. "The Mentally Ill Homeless: What is Myth and What is Fact?" *Social Problems* 35: 182-191.

Feb 5 Wrap-up and Review
Project #1 DUE

Feb 10 **EXAM #1**

Quantitative Research Methods

Feb 12 Surveys I

Chapter 7: "Practices and Preferences" in Michael, Robert T., John H. Gagnon, Edward O. Lauman, and Gina Kolata. 1994. *Sex in America: A Definitive Survey* Boston, MA: Warner Books.

Feb 17 Surveys II

Krysan, Maria and Reynolds Farley. 2002. "The Residential Preferences of Blacks: Do They Explain Persistent Segregation?" *Social Forces* 80: 937-980.

Project #2: Constructing and Conducting Surveys (due 2/24 – 42 points)

Feb 19 Surveys III

Pager, Devah and Lincoln Quillian. 2005. "Walking the Talk? What Employers Say Versus What They Do." *American Sociological Review* 70: 355-380.

Feb 24 Content Analysis

Project #2 DUE at beginning of class

Gilens, Martin. 2003. "How the Poor Became Black: The Racialization of American Poverty in the Mass Media." Pp. 101-130 in *Race and the Politics of Welfare Reform*, edited by S.F. Schram, J. Soss, and R.C. Fording. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.

Project #3 Content Analysis of Media (due 3/3 – 40 points)

Feb 26 Experiments I

Lovaglia, Michael J., Jeffrey W. Lucas, Jeffrey A. Houser, Shane R. Thye, and Barry Markovsky. 1998. "Status Processes and Mental Ability Test Scores." *American Journal of Sociology* 104: 195-228.

Lovaglia, Michael J. 2003. "From Summer Camps to Glass Ceilings: The Power of Experiments." *Contexts* 2(4): 42-49.

Mar 3 Experiments II

Project #3 DUE at beginning of class

Sherman, Lawrence W. et al. 1992. "Crime, Punishment, and Stake in Conformity: Legal and Informal Control of Domestic Violence." *American Sociological Review* 57: 680-690.

Qualitative Research Methods

Mar 5 Ethnography I

Chapter 2: "Learning from Kids" in Thorne, Barrie. 1993. *Gender Play: Girls and Boys in School* New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Adler, Patricia A. and Peter Adler. 2003. "The Promise and Pitfalls of Going Into the Field." *Contexts* 2(2): 41-47.

Project #4: Ethnographic Fieldwork (fieldnotes due 3/17, paper due 3/19 –56 points)

Mar 10 & 12 Spring Break- No Class

Mar 17 Ethnography II

Project #4 Fieldnotes DUE at beginning of class

Chapter 3: "The Impact of Drugs" in Anderson, Elijah. 1990. *Streetwise: Race, Class and Change in an Urban Community* Chicago: The University Chicago Press.

Leidner, Robin. 1991. "Serving Hamburgers and Selling Insurance: Gender, Work, and Identity in Interactive Service Jobs." *Gender and Society* 5: 154-177.

Mar 19 Intensive Interviewing and Other Qualitative Methods

Project #4 Paper DUE at beginning of class

Weiss, Robert S. 2004. "In Their Own Words: Making the Most of Qualitative Interviews." *Contexts* 3(4): 44-51. **AND**

Selections from Pierce, Jennifer L. 1995. *Gender Trials: Emotional Lives in Contemporary Law Firms* Berkeley: University of California Press.

OR

Lee, Jennifer. 2000. "The Salience of Race in Everyday Life." *Work and Occupations* 27: 353-376.

Project #5: Intensive Interviewing (due 3/31 – 40 points)

Mar 24 Wrap-up and Review

Mar 26 **EXAM #2**

Politics, Values and Critiques of Social Research

Mar 31 Comparative-Historical I

Project #5 DUE at beginning of class

Beisel, Nicola. 1993. "Morals Versus Art: Censorship, the Politics of Interpretation, and the Victorian Nude." *American Sociological Review* 58: 145-162.

Evans, Peter, and James E. Rauch. 1999. "Bureaucracy and Growth: A Cross-National

Analysis of the Effects of ‘Weberian’ State Structures on Economic Growth.” *American Sociological Review* 64: 748-765.

Apr 2 Comparative-Historical II

ONE OF FOLLOWING:

Andrews, Kenneth T. 2001. “Social Movements and Policy Implementation.” *American Sociological Review* 66: 71-95.

Roscigno, Vincent J. and William F. Danaher. 2001. “Media and Mobilization: The Case of Radio and Southern Textile Worker Insurgency, 1929 to 1934.” *American Sociological Review* 66: 21-48.

Zhao, Dingxin. 1998. “Ecologies of Social Movements: Student Mobilization During the 1989 Prodemocracy Movement in Beijing.” *American Journal of Sociology* 103: 1493-1529.

Apr 7 Evaluation Research

“Lynam et al. 1999. “Project DARE: No Effects at 10-Year Follow-Up.” *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 67(4): 590-593.
www.apa.org/journals/ccp/ccp674590.html

Project #6: Literature Critique (due 4/21 – 62 points)

Apr 9 Critiques of Research

Editor and Various Authors. 1998. “A Symposium on Church Attendance in the United States.” *American Sociological Review* 63: 111-145.

Stacey, Judith and Timothy J. Biblarz. 2001. “(How) Does the Sexual Orientation of Parents Matter?” *American Sociological Review* 66: 159-183.

Apr 14 Research Ethics

Allen, Charlotte. 1997. “Spies Like Us: When Sociologists Deceive Their Subjects.” *Lingua Franca* November: 31-39.

“Code of Ethics” American Sociological Association
“Ethics Cases for Discussion”

Apr 16 Feminism, Identity and Politics in Social Research

Collins, Patricia Hill. 1991. “Toward An Afrocentric Feminist Epistemology.” Pp. 201-220 in *Black Feminist Thought* New York: Routledge.

Apr 21 The Role of Sociology and Social Research in Society

Project #6 DUE at beginning of class

Burawoy, Michael. 2005. “For Public Sociology.” *American Sociological Review* 70: 4-28.

Apr 23 Wrap-up and Review

Apr 28 Final Exam (Tuesday 10:00 AM-12:00 Noon)

SYLLABUS CHANGE POLICY: This syllabus is a tentative guide for the course and is subject to change with advance notice. This syllabus and other class materials are available in alternative format upon request.

In this class, students will submit papers through the Blackboard website to the instructor. Student papers will then be submitted to Turnitin.com for an "originality report." Papers with low originality scores will receive further investigation according to departmental procedures.

INCOMPLETE GRADES

Missing work is insufficient reason for a grade of Incomplete (I). An **I** will not be given except under extenuating circumstances at the instructor's discretion. Note that College of Social Science guidelines require that students seeking an "I" must be passing the course.