

Advanced Sociological Methods: A Capstone and Writing Course in Sociology
SOCA 494 (CRN# 16548)

TR 10:00-11:15 am
240 Stansbury Hall
Spring 2008

Dr. Melissa Latimer
Room 315 Knapp Hall
Office Hours: MW 1:30-2:30
Phone: 293-5801 Ext. 3209
E-Mail: melissa.latimer@mail.wvu.edu

General Course Description

The **SOCA 494** course is a **three credit course** designed to teach students how to use empirical observations from our social world to evaluate the explanations that theories provide about the patterns found in human social life. This course utilizes a practical and hands-on introduction to the logic of survey data analysis to teach students how to use data and theory to explain, understand, and make sense of human social behavior and the larger social world. You will be taught the steps of quantitative data analysis using the 2004 General Social Survey (GSS) and one of the most widely used statistical software packages used by social scientists, Statistical Product and Service Solutions (SPSS).

This course serves as a capstone course for the Spring 2007 semester. **You need to enroll in the SOCA 488 The Capstone Experience course (CRN# 14805).** West Virginia University implemented a new “capstone” requirement for any Freshmen who entered West Virginia University in the Fall of 2002 or after. Transfer students who entered the University as Juniors in the Fall of 2002 or after are also required to fulfill the capstone requirement in their major before they graduate.

The Sociology and Anthropology capstone experience (SOCA 488) is currently designed as a one hour add on (pass/fail) to existing division courses. You must receive a passing grade in the SOCA 494 course in order to receive credit for the capstone. Regardless of the form it takes, every capstone experience must emphasize an undergraduate research experience for our majors.

Even though there is some flexibility in the focus and design of the capstone add-on, each capstone course must provide an academic experience with the following specific criteria: (1) a significant oral and written component, (2) review, synthesis, and evaluation of key theoretical and/or practical knowledge, (3) data collection, analysis, and reflection on what was learned from the process, and (4) reflections on ethical and social responsibility issues implied or confronted in their projects.

This course also serves as a writing course for Sociology and/or Anthropology majors. **You need to enroll in the SOCA 389 (CRN# 10684)** course. This is a one-credit "W" course accompanying SOCA 494 and SOCA 488. By taking the "W" credit, students will learn how to write an empirical research report (i.e., a research-based term paper that resembles sociology journal articles). This integration of researching, organizing, learning, thinking, and writing will provide useful skills for future endeavors.

Course Objectives

- 1) To provide a safe environment in which students from a diversity of experiences and backgrounds can openly discuss and analyze contemporary social issues.
- 2) To further develop critical thinking, writing, and research skills begun in other courses.
- 3) To undertake original sociological research (specifically, secondary data analysis of a national representative survey of American adults)—at a basic level of analysis. This includes defining a research problem, identifying, reviewing and summarizing appropriate literature, developing a research design, and analyzing data in a meaningful report.
- 4) To understand empirical research of human behavior, including limitations of this way of knowing about the world.
- 5) To understand issues of ethics regarding research on human subjects.
- 6) To learn how to write sociologically (i.e., proper formatting and citations) and to improve your overall writing abilities (i.e., elements of grammar, style, and punctuation).
- 7) To practice using oral and written communication as an avenue to express ideas, thoughts, and research findings.
- 8) To see the relevance of sociology in today’s world and for many of today’s problems.
- 9) To develop and/or refine a personally meaningful definition of sociology/anthropology as a discipline and the potential use of it for a range of life activities including a career.

To Achieve Course Objectives

You are expected to finish your readings prior to class time and to attend class. Consistent attendance and participation in class discussion will boost borderline grades. Lectures will be used frequently and they will cover outside readings. Cell phones need to be turned off during class.

Make-up exams will only be given in extraordinary circumstances, beyond the control of the student.

WVU and the Department of Sociology and Anthropology have official documents about your rights and responsibilities as students. Consult these documents concerning questions on any course. According to these documents, “West Virginia University expects that every member of its academic community shares the historic and traditional commitment to honesty, integrity, and the search for truth” (WVU undergraduate catalog, 1999:49). Plagiarism, regardless of intent, is academic dishonesty. Consult these documents for further discussions of plagiarism and its repercussions.

WVU is committed to social justice. I concur with this commitment and expect to maintain a positive learning environment based upon open communication, mutual respect, and non-discrimination. Our University does not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, age, disability, veteran status, religion, sexual orientation, color or national origin. If you are a person with a disability and anticipate needing any type of accommodation in order to participate in this class, please advise me and make appropriate arrangements with Disability Services (293-6700).

Required Texts

Adventures in Social Research: Data Analysis Using SPSS 14.0 and 15.0 for Windows. Sixth Edition. (SPSS) Earl Babbie, Fred Halley, and Jeanne Zaino. Pine Forge Press, 2007.

The Research Imagination. Paul Gray, John Williamson, David Karp, and John Dalphin. (IMAG). Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Course Evaluations

Exams--There will be three exams worth 100 points each for a total of 300 points for the SOCA 494/488 course. Exam can consist of matching, short answer, and/or essay questions and will cover only the material since the previous exam.

Writing exercises--There are three writing exercises and the dates they are due are listed on the syllabus. Each exercise represents one main section of your final research paper. For example, Section One is the Introduction/Purpose section and it contains a review of the literature, the rationale for your study, hypotheses, and the purpose of the study. Section Two is the Methods section and it contains a write up of the sample selection, study design, data collection procedures, and instruments of study. Section Three is the Results section and it includes a write up of the findings, discussion, limitations, and implications. Your SOCA 494 grade is based on how well you complete the assignment. In addition, I will make editorial suggestions and evaluate each essay in terms of the quality of writing. This writing evaluation will serve as a basis for your revision. I will also document improvement/lack of improvement in your writing on each consecutive section. You will rewrite each of these three sections and put them together in one final 15-20 page research paper. I will evaluate this final paper based on the content **and** writing as outlined in a handout.

The evaluation of your writing will not depend on whether your materials agree with the instructor or not. It will depend solely on how well you have followed the instructions given and that your work is turned in on time. For example, you need to have **8** references (within the past 6 years) from sociology journals listed in the handout from *The Sociology Student Writer's Manual*.

To receive an A on an essay, you must write an outstanding essay that follows the instructions given in terms of organization, providing very clear thoughts and evidence pertinent to the assigned topic. In addition, there must be no errors in writing mechanics. To receive a B on an essay, you must write a very good essay that follows the instructions given on clarity and evidence and has only minor errors in writing mechanics. To receive a C on an essay, you must write a satisfactory essay that follows the instructions on clarity and evidence and the writing must be adequate to communicate the basic assignment. If you receive a D on an essay, it is because you failed to write an essay that followed instructions and/or that did not communicate the assigned basics. If you receive an F on an essay, it is because you failed to write an essay that followed instructions and did not communicate the assigned basics.

Oral Participation/Presentation --There are three requirements for fulfilling the oral component of the SOCA 494/488 course. First, students are expected to regularly participate in

class discussions of the course readings and their project's progress. Second, students are required to do an oral presentation of their research findings at the end of the semester. Each student will have approximately 10 minutes for their presentation and this oral presentation is worth 45 points. We will use April 29, 2008 for these presentations. Third, you are expected to attend class and ask your classmates questions about their research during the oral presentations. Your presence and participation is worth 5 points for a total of 50 points.

Final project – You are required to write a final paper that includes a revised Introduction/Literature Review section, Methods section, and Results section. I have reserved time in a number of class periods for in class work on this project. The project must be typed and is worth a total of 100 points for both the SOCA 494 **and** SOCA 389 courses. It is due May 1, 2008 at 10:00 am. Ten points will be subtracted for each hour it is late. **PLEASE TURN IN A COPY OF THE ROUGH DRAFTS WITH YOUR FINAL DRAFT.** I will return them back to you when I return your paper.

Students with a final grade of A, B, C, or D in the SOCA 494 receive a “pass” for the SOCA 488 course. Students with an “F” will receive a “fail” in the SOCA 488 course. You may anticipate the following approximate point ranges for each letter grade for the SOCA 494/488 course:

- A 360-400
- B 320-359
- C 280-319
- D 240-279
- F 239 or below

You may anticipate the following approximate point ranges for each letter grade for the SOCA 389 course:

- A 90-100
- B 80-89
- C 70-79
- D 60-69
- F 59 or below

Tentative Class Schedule

January 15 Introduction to Course, Examine the Codebook, Appendix A (SPSS)
Identifying a viable research topic, Conducting a Literature Review

January 17 Review of Social Research, Read Chapter 1 (IMAG)

January 22 Read Chapter 2 (IMAG), Chapter 1 (SPSS)

- January 24 How to Use Theory (and Which Ones to Use), Writing Hypotheses
Read Chapter 3 (SPSS)
- January 29 Read Chapter 3 (IMAG), Proper Citation Style, Paraphrasing, and Using Direct
Quotes Appropriately
- January 31 How to Write an Intro and Literature Review, Read Chapter 4 (IMAG)
- February 5 Finish Chapter 4 (IMAG), Read Chapter 2 (SPSS)
- February 7 **Exam 1**
- February 12 Discuss Code of Ethics Guiding Research
Examine American Sociological Association website (www.asanet.org)
Read Chapter 5 (IMAG)
- February 14 **First Writing Exercise (Introduction, Literature Review) Due**
Read Chapters 4-5 (SPSS), Pp. 397-404 (SPSS)
- February 19 Read Chapter 6 ((IMAG), Read Chapters 6-7 (SPSS)
- February 21 Read Chapter 7 (IMAG), How to Write a Methods Section
- February 26 Read Chapter 10 (IMAG)
- February 28 **Exam 2**
- March 4 **Second Writing Exercise (Methods section) Due**
Read Chapters 8 (SPSS) and Chapter 17 (IMAG) Indexes and Scales
- March 6 Read Chapters 10-11 (SPSS), Pp. 404-418 (IMAG)
- March 11 Read Chapter 13 (SPSS)
- March 13 Read Chapter 14 (SPSS), Pp. 426-429 (IMAG)
- March 18 Read Chapters 16 and 17 (SPSS)
- March 20 **Exam 3**
- March 22-March 30 Spring Break!!!
- April 1 How to Write a Results and Discussion Section, Final data analysis

April 3 Final data analysis

April 8 Final data analysis

April 10 Final data analysis

April 15 Final data analysis

April 17 **Third Writing Exercise Due**, Resume Writing and Life After WVU

April 22 Final data analysis

April 24 Final data analysis, Preparing for an Oral Presentation

April 29 Oral Presentations

May 1 **Final Project due** at 10:00 am

May 5-May 10 Final Exam Week

