

SocA 510: Principles of Research Design

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CRN #84614
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MW 4:30-5:45

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"One's mind, once stretched by a new idea, never regains its original dimensions."
---Oliver Wendell Holmes

REQUIRED TEXTS

1. Becker, Howard S. 1998. *Tricks of the Trade: How to Think about Your Research While You're Doing It*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
2. Seale, Clive. 2004. *Social Research Methods: A Reader*. London: Routledge
3. Individual readings available under "readings" in WVU eCampus (<https://ecampus.wvu.edu/>)

A WVU eCampus site is active for this course. All course handouts and information will be on this site. In addition, students will post reaction papers to the site for classmates to read. Students should use their MIX username and password. If students have problems logging into eCampus, they should email oithelp@mail.wvu.edu, call (304) 293-4444 ext.1, or visit the web site of the OIT Help Desk support team at <http://oit.wvu.edu/helpdesk/>.

INTRODUCTION

Research design is an essential and influential aspect of social science. In this course, we will learn about how to *do* research. Obviously, an M.A. in Applied Social Research implies that you should know how research is conducted. This required course will begin to build that crucial foundation. The primary goals are to: 1) introduce graduate students to conceptual and design issues that are central to the research process; 2) critically explore various methods in sociology; and 3) apply methods to real-life research situations so students can envision the costs and benefits of strategies in conducting their own research.

EXPECTED LEARNING OUTCOMES

Upon successful completion of this course:

1. Students will recognize and understand the major conceptual and methodological issues involved in research design and implementation.
2. Students will understand the ways in which theory and research practices are connected.
3. Students will understand the essential parts of high quality sociological research.
4. Students will develop a "toolbox" to become more intelligent consumers and critics of social research.
5. Students will become aware of the most important and commonly used methods.
6. Students will develop an ability to discuss and orally critique methodological aspects of research in a professional manner.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Readings:

We have limited time and much to cover, so we will focus on three types of research methods. Instead of providing detailed lectures on each method, I will help you to explore specific issues related to each method. This class does not require the typical methods textbook that is found in undergraduate courses. Students have already taken an

introductory methods class, so our class will focus on depth. Instead of just describing the methods, we will explore and analyze issues related to each method. Students should refer to their undergraduate texts or similar texts in the library as needed. Students should check citations from the course readings, read Seale's "further reading" sections, and see me for more references. Many recommended texts can be found in the WVU library.

The way that students read in college does not work in graduate school. Students must focus on understanding what they read rather than just memorizing. Students are expected to attend class and be prepared, having read and digested all of the readings. **I insist that students complete all readings before class.** All readings are available via the books or the web. Take the time to *really* understand the readings.

***The purpose of this graduate program is to enable you to function as an applied research professional. This will not happen if you do not take responsibility for learning the material. You may get through the class, but you will surely fail at a later stage (e.g., your thesis, your job). Commit to learning it now! ***

Three Reaction Papers: (15% of total grade)

The best classes have student participation. To encourage this, students will write three short reaction papers to the readings. Reaction papers ensure that students come to class prepared, ready to ask questions, and eager to engage in informed discussion. These should be no longer than two full double-spaced pages so that students learn how to write efficiently, but they must be two full pages. In them, students will present their informed thoughts on each reading. **Students may not summarize since I have already read the papers.** I grade these papers with a "check." To receive a check (100%), you must bring a hard copy to class. It must adhere to the assignments and meet the course's writing standards. This "check" is part of the participation grade. Papers that are too short, poorly written, or superficial will not receive any credit. In addition, you must post all reaction papers to eCampus under "Discussions" before class starts. Students should read each other's papers to learn about their comments and thoughts. Late papers are not accepted.

Take time to proofread, spell authors' names correctly, and follow the assignment and writing rules. The paper must answer two of the following questions (#1 and one other that you choose). You must use subheadings with the two questions in bold to make the topic of your paper clear. Focus on the intellectual content of the articles. Do not critique the use of jargon or complain about the articles (e.g., "language was confusing"). Also, avoid summarization and superficial comments like "it was great." There should be no more than one sentence of summary per paragraph.

- (1) **What did you like about what the researchers/authors did?**
- (2) What should they have done differently?
- (3) What are the advantages and limitations to their data/methods?
- (4) What aspects of their methods do you wish they discussed in more detail?
- (5) How should they extend their research?

On a third page, create two of your own questions based on readings for the week. These will be used to guide class discussion. Make sure these are thoughtful and integrate the work of all authors.

Practice Papers: (15% of the total grade)

These papers are intended to help students gain experience with three of the key methods of research. Students will practice these methods outside of class and prepare a paper on the experience (exactly four double-spaced pages). You must use the readings for the week in which the paper is due to inform your practice of the methods and the write up of the paper. Do the readings first, then do the methods practice. Post the papers on eCampus before class starts and turn in a hard copy in class. These papers are for in-class use and are graded.

Interviewing Practice Paper:

Students must conduct an in-depth interview with a classmate. The topic is “how people experience their residential neighborhoods.” Before the interview, choose a more specific topic within this broad topic and draft a short list of interview questions. Then, students will take turns being the interviewer and the respondent. The interview must be tape-recorded and students must take detailed notes during the interview. Students do not have to turn in the tape, but must record the session and listen to it. Each interview should last between 15 and 30 minutes and no longer. Students must turn in an appendix that contains an interview guide along with the paper. In the paper, answer the following questions and use these as your paper’s subheadings:

- 1) What is the specific topic and what were the main interview questions?
- 2) What was the setting of the interview like and who was your respondent?
- 3) How did the interview (that you conducted) go? What did you do that was successful? What did you do that was unsuccessful? What would you do differently next time?
- 4) How did the interview in which you were the respondent go? As the respondent, what did the interviewer do that helped you respond well? What did the interviewer do that was less helpful? What did you learn from being a respondent that will help you be a better interviewer?

Observation Practice Paper:

You must conduct a non-participant observation in a *public* place for one hour. Choose a site related to your thesis topic of interest. You will not interact in the setting, but only observe and take notes. Please attach a copy of your field notes (these should be more than two pages long). In the paper, answer the following questions:

- 1) What is the setting like and who are participants? Please provide details about the date and time.
- 2) What did you learn about the setting from observing?
- 3) What did you find? Interpret and speculate using information you observed in the setting. Analyze the participants’ behaviors and the scene.
- 4) What is a good descriptive title of this observation?

Survey Practice Paper:

Draft a few specific research questions and write a four-page self-administered questionnaire related to your research topic. Survey questions should capture the dimensions of the topic that students are interested in exploring. Keep open-ended questions to a minimum. In the accompanying four-page paper, please include the following:

- 1) a description of the research questions, sample, conceptual independent variables, conceptual dependent variable
- 2) a discussion of your methodological decisions in writing the questionnaire
- 3) cite at least one other survey-based study of a similar topic (with reference)
- 4) an appendix with your short questionnaire—make sure each question in the survey comes with appropriate response categories from which the respondent can choose an answer
- 5) print out and include an example of a questionnaire on a related topic for comparison

Methods Outline (20%) and Proposal (50%):

See handouts!

Attendance:

I expect graduate students to engage in professional behavior. This means regular attendance and informed participation. I will take attendance most days. **Each student is granted one day of forgiveness, but after that, I**

will subtract 1% from the total course grade for each day missed. If students leave class early and do not consult me, they will not get credit for attendance on that day. Students should take notes to verify their attendance in case of a dispute. If students need to miss a class for an unusual circumstance, they must email or phone me before the class to make up the work. Students may only make up one class during the semester by doing a one-page single space write up of the readings for the week.

Note that participation is based on attendance, listening, preparedness, asking questions, contributing to discussion, papers, and eCampus posts.

Grade Breakdown:

The breakdown for final grades is as follows:

(3) Reaction papers	5% each, 15% total
(3) Practice papers	5% each, 15% total
(1) Methods outline	20%
(1) Methods final draft	50%

Grading Scale:

- A: insightful and conscientious engagement with the paper
- B: solidly completed, but not exceptional
- C: not engaged with the methods at an acceptable level
- D: partial credit for a superficial reaction paper
- F: assignment not taken seriously

Final grades

A	90-100	D	60-69
B	80-89	F	Less than 60
C	70-79		

Academic Misconduct:

I will not tolerate cheating or plagiarism. It is your responsibility to educate yourself! This means you must not:

- quote directly without acknowledging the source
- paraphrase without acknowledging the source
- construct a paraphrase that resembles the original in language and syntax

Further, you must:

- avoid direct quotes (no more than one per paper)
- paraphrase in your language. Don't just change a few words here and there.
- show you really understand the work

All cases of academic misconduct will be referred to the dean of Arts and Sciences and the Office of Judicial Programs. Attendance and assignments contribute to actual grades and reflect an individual's ability to understand the course material; therefore, providing and/or seeking assistance from fellow students or using other aids for papers will constitute cheating. Students should be familiar with the WVU statement on Academic Integrity and Dishonesty published in the undergraduate catalog. See it here:

<http://www.ia.wvu.edu:8888/Undergraduate/2001thru03/pdf/files/frontpages.pdf>

According to the WVU Undergraduate Catalogue (2001-2003), under "Academic Information," Academic

Dishonesty Defined, WVU expects every member of its academic community share the historic and traditional commitment to honesty, integrity, and the search for truth. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to any of the following:

1. Plagiarism is defined in terms of proscribed acts. Students are expected to understand that such practices constitute academic dishonesty regardless of motive. Those who deny deceitful intent, claim not to have known that the act constituted plagiarism, or maintain that what they did was inadvertent are nevertheless subject to penalties when plagiarism has been confirmed. Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to: submitting, without appropriate acknowledgment, a report, notebook, speech, outline, theme, thesis, dissertation, or other written, visual, or oral material that has been copied in whole or in part from the work of others, whether such source is published or not, including (but not limited to) another individual's academic composition, compilation, or other product, or commercially prepared paper.
2. Cheating and dishonest practices in connection with examinations, papers, and projects, including but not limited to:
 - a. Obtaining help from another student during examinations.
 - b. Knowingly giving help to another student during examinations, taking an examination or doing academic work for another student, or providing one's own work for another student to copy and submit as his or her own.
 - c. The unauthorized use of notes, books, or other sources of information during examinations.
 - d. Obtaining without authorization an examination or any part thereof.
3. Forgery, misrepresentation, or fraud:
 - a. Forging or altering, or causing to be altered, the record of any grade in a grade book or other educational record.
 - b. Use of University documents or instruments of identification with intent to defraud.
 - c. Presenting false data or intentionally misrepresenting one's records for admission, registration, or withdrawal from the University or from a University course.
 - d. Knowingly presenting false data or intentionally misrepresenting one's records for personal gain.
 - e. Knowingly furnishing the results of research projects or experiments for the inclusion in another's work without proper citation.
 - f. Knowingly furnishing false statements in any University academic proceeding.

A common rule of thumb: when in doubt, cite! Citations and references are necessary for an acceptable paper. When writing, remember that I may be very familiar with the topic, writings on the topic, and she may check sources. Cheating and plagiarism are not the only forms of academic misconduct; therefore, students should go to the above link for a more detailed discussion of student responsibility.

Classroom Conduct: The Rules and the Reasons

The following behaviors are unacceptable and are examples of rudeness, distractions, and passivity: lateness, eating, chatting, reading newspapers, sleeping, audible beepers and cellular phones, leaving early, and missing class. I mention these verbal and physical incivilities because they are not harmless, but interfere with other students' learning and prevent the class from being all that it might be.

Student Services:

I do not require this, but I encourage students to schedule a time to meet with me. I am willing to discuss student concerns and progress during individual appointments. I make every effort to assist students who are experiencing difficulty in this course. In addition, WVU offers several other options for students who need extra assistance. Students are encouraged to take advantage of these services:

Carruth Center for Counseling
& Psychological Services
3rd Floor of Student Services Building
304-293-4431

Center for Writing Excellence
240 Stansbury Hall
304-293-3107
<http://www.as.wvu.edu/english/cwe>

<http://www.wvu.edu/~cocenter/>

WVU Student Support Services/TRIO
304-293-6629
sss_trio@mail.wvu.edu
<http://www.wvu.edu/~trio/>

Career Services Center
Student Organization Wing of the Mountainlair Building
(304) 293-2221
CareerServices@mail.wvu.edu

Social Justice Statement:

West Virginia University is committed to social justice. I concur with that commitment and expect to foster a nurturing 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. Any suggestions as to how to further such a positive and open environment in this class will be appreciated and given serious consideration.

Students with Disabilities:

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). Students with disabilities are responsible for making their needs known to the instructor and seeking available assistance in a timely manner.

Course Outline

Note: this is only a guide. There may be points over the semester when we move slightly faster or slower. I will inform students of large deviations from this outline. By the end of the semester, students should understand and be able to clearly communicate sociological perspectives, patterns, and findings on the following general issues:

Date	Topic/Readings/Papers
Week 1: 8/18 & 8/20	Introduction to Research Methods in Sociology
Week 2: 8/25 & 8/27	Research Design ***Reaction Paper 1 Due on Mon.*** Readings: Denscombe (2002), Brint (2001), Becker Ch.1 & 2 (1998), Seale Reader (Pp. 1-10; 19-25)
Week 3: 9/3	Ethical Issues in Social Research ***Reaction Paper 2 Due on Wed.. (includes IRB reading)*** Readings: WVU IRB Human Subjects Ethics Training and Quiz (Take the quiz and bring evidence of passing to class.) http://www.wvu.edu/~rc/irb/HPP_course.pdf Pp.381-383, 395-400, & 478-486 in the Seale Reader
Week 4: 9/8 & 9/10	Politics of Social Research ***Reaction Paper 3 Due on Mon.*** Readings: Hammersley (1995) Pp. 444-447, 453-455, 456-464, 465-472, 473-477 in Seale Reader
Week 5: 9/15 & 9/17	Sampling in Social Research ***Proposal Outline Due on Mon.*** Becker Ch. 3, Pp. 63-72, 226-231 in Seale Reader
Week 6: 9/22 & 9/24	Introduction to Interviewing ***Practice Interview Paper Due on Mon.*** Preparation list for ASR manuscripts (read about citing): http://www2.asanet.org/journals/asr/preplist.pdf , Galvan (2004), Pp. 257-260, 261-268 in Seale Reader, Banks (2000)
Week 7: 9/29 & 10/1	Discussion on Interviewing Eder and Fingerson (2002), Fingerson (1999), Pp. 269-172, 246-252 in Seale Reader
Week 8: 10/6 & 10/8	Introduction to Field Research and Participant Observation ***Practice Observation Paper Due on Mon.*** Duneier (1999), Pp. 221-225, 217-220, 232-235, 236-240 in Seale Reader
Week 9: 10/13 & 10/15	Discussion of Field Research and Participant Observation Adler, Kless, and Adler (1992), Pp. 241-245, 389-394, 405-408 in Seale Reader.

Week 10: 10/20 & 10/22

Introduction to Surveys

*****Practice Survey Paper Due on Mon.*****

Couper (2000), Pp. 73-87, 125-128, 105-110, 96-104 in Seale Reader

Week 11: 10/27 & 10/29

Discussion on Surveys

Freese, Powell, and Steelman (1999), Pp. 136-140, 133-135, 182-192 in Seale Reader

Week 12: 11/3 & 11/5

Introduction to Historical Methods and Unobtrusive Data

Pp. 277-281, 282-289, 341-344, 295-298 in Seale Reader.

Week 13: 11/10 & 11/12

Discussion on Historical Methods and Unobtrusive Data

*****Methods Proposal Due on Mon.*****

Carpenter (1998), Pp. 290-294, just the indented quote on P. 315 of the Kelle piece in Seale, 117-124, 303-306 in Seale Reader.

Note: There are a lot of readings on next week's topic of analysis, so some of these are assigned for this week (see above).

Week 14: 11/17 & 11/19

Qualitative Data Analysis and Multiple Methods

Giordano, Manning, and Longmore (2006), Pp. 357-265, 366-370, 371-376, 505-509 in Seale Reader.

Week 15: 12/1 & 12/3

Thinking about Methods and Sociology

Becker, Chapters 4, 5, and "Coda"