

SOCIOLOGY 312: ELEMENTS OF SOCIOLOGICAL RESEARCH

Fall 2010: Section 1

Lecture:	Tuesday & Thursday; 9:00 a.m. – 10:40 a.m.
Lecture location:	Applied Science & Arts; Room 118
Professor:	Dr. Derek Christopher Martin
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Office Hours:	Monday/Wednesday: 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. Tuesday/Thursday: 10:45 a.m. – 11:45 a.m., and by appointment

Course Content and Requirements:

“The student is introduced to a variety of research methods in the social sciences including use of the library, techniques of observation and elementary steps in quantitative measurements and analysis. Satisfies the CoLA Writing-Across-the-Curriculum requirement.”

Above is the course description as it reads in the SIU catalog. However, for summarizing my intentions for this semester, it is woefully inadequate. Late at night, in my most ambitious moments, I envision this class as a complete and thorough examination of the very foundation of epistemology (“*n*: a branch of philosophy that investigates the origin, nature, methods, and limits of human knowledge,” *Webster’s New Universal Unabridged Dictionary*, p. 480). At the break of day though, I have scaled back my lofty expectations to encompass a content area that is a bit more manageable for a fifteen-week semester. Up until now, in the majority of your classes, you have been expected to learn *what we know* (with regard to various subject areas). Alternatively, in this course we will explore *how we know what we know* (with regard to all subject areas). We will also discuss the myriad pitfalls commonly experienced during efforts to obtain sociological knowledge, as well as the techniques to avoid, or at least minimize, those threats to scientific integrity. So yes, although not down to the foundational level, we will study epistemology.

However, as this is a skills-based course, in addition to learning about the various research methods available to social scientists; you will also have to demonstrate your proficiency in using them. Think of this like a class in musical appreciation, where you learn about the various instruments in the orchestra (the strings, the woodwinds, the horns, the percussion, etc.). Instead of simply learning to identify them, though, you will be expected to learn, and exhibit, how to play them. Upon completion of this course, you should 1) be familiar with the methods utilized by sociologists to examine, explain, and understand the complexities of the social world; 2) have the necessary skills to comprehend and analytically evaluate the methods and the results of published research, as well as the world around you; and 3) be able to design, implement, and analyze your own sociological research.

Grading Criteria:

Your final course grade will be determined based on the following criteria:

Written Assignments (2)	12%
Group Projects (2)	12%

Examination 1	10%
Examination 2	13%
Final Exam	18%
Research Proposal	25%
Attendance/Participation	10%

Students who earn 90% or more of the points will earn an “A.”

Students who earn 80% to 89% of the points will earn a “B.”

Students who earn 70% to 79% of the points will earn a “C.”

Students who earn 62% to 69% of the points will earn a “D.”

Students who fail to earn at least 62% of the points will earn an “F.”

I do not believe in giving extra credit, so do not even bother to ask.

Written Exercises:

During the semester, students will be expected to complete two (2), short written assignments. These assignments will allow you to practice applying the knowledge and skills you will learn in this course. They will be graded primarily on their content, although your ideas must be communicated clearly and you should follow the rules of formal essay writing. Egregious grammatical errors will result in a deduction of points, no matter how strong your content. I will discuss the actual assignments more in the coming weeks.

Group Projects:

Much of social scientific research, in academia and in the business world, is done in collaboration with others. With that in mind then, during the semester you will also participate in two group (2) projects. As with the above written assignments, these projects will allow you take the information out of the text book and apply it. Each member of the group will be responsible for individual contributions that ideally, when combined with the work of the others, will exceed the sum of the parts. I will discuss the actual assignments more in the coming weeks.

Examinations:

The examinations will consist of multiple choice, true/false, short answer, and essay questions. The first two exams will **NOT** be cumulative, although the continued understanding of certain key concepts will be necessary throughout the semester. The final exam will be cumulative, encompassing key concepts from the entire semester. Exams **MUST** be taken on the scheduled day; there will be **NO** make-up exams (except for those students with an **authorized** absence).

Research Proposal:

In addition to the smaller written assignments, all students must submit a research proposal. This is a semester long, individual project that will allow you to display your understanding of all the aspects involved in the research process. You will not actually carry out the project you propose, but one of the standards I will use to evaluate your proposal will be its feasibility. Much of the proposal will be done in stages, with the preliminary steps being submitted as homework at various times throughout the semester. The final proposal, between twelve (12) and fifteen (15) pages, will be turned in during the last week (December 11th).

Attendance / Participation:

In-Class discussions are an important part of this course. Therefore, beyond simply attending, you are also expected to participate in discussions. Class participation includes reading the course materials (**before class begins!**) and asking questions or making comments. When relevant, students are encouraged to enrich class discussions by bringing in current events, accounts from personal experiences, or other appropriate material from outside the class.

Acknowledging Differences:

During the semester students will have the opportunity to share thoughts, opinions, and beliefs about their life experiences. The differences in these perspectives that each student brings to the discussion will add to the richness of this course. Students should communicate in ways that acknowledge and respect such differences. While it is natural and expected that many of us will have differing opinions, we must always respect our fellow students in the class and the opinions they hold. I expect and **encourage** students to be critical of each other's ideas, but it is **UNACCEPTABLE** to be dismissive of and/or combative with other students in the class.

Classroom Decorum:

I have an obligation to maintain a classroom environment that allows each student to learn to the best of his or her capabilities. While I encourage students to ask questions and make comments in class, I will not tolerate or permit behavior that is disruptive, distracting, or demeaning. Actions that violate these norms will be treated seriously— after one warning you will be asked to leave. Also, if your cell phone must be on for medical, child care, or other reasons, please set it to silent or vibrate.

Emergency Procedures:

Southern Illinois University Carbondale is committed to providing a safe and healthy environment for study and work. Because some health and safety circumstances are beyond our control, we ask that you become familiar with the SIUC Emergency Response Plan and Building Emergency Response Team (BERT) program. Emergency response information is available on posters in buildings on campus and is available on the BERT website at www.siu.edu/emergency/bert.html, Department of Public Safety's website www.dps.siu.edu/ (disaster drop down) and in the Emergency Response Guidelines pamphlet. Know how to respond to each type of emergency.

Instructors will provide guidance and direction to students in the classroom in the event of an emergency affecting your location. It is important that you follow these instructions and stay with your instructor during an evacuation or sheltering emergency. The Building Emergency Response Team will provide assistance to your instructor in evacuating the building or sheltering within the facility.

Americans with Disabilities (ADA) Statement:

Persons with disabilities requiring special accommodations to meet the expectations of this course are encouraged to bring this to the attention of your TA as soon as possible. Written documentation of the disability should be submitted during the first week of the semester along with a request for special accommodations. Contact the SIU Disability Support Services (DSS) to facilitate requests:

Woody Hall B-150, Carbondale, IL 62901, Mail Code: 4705

DSSsiu@siu.edu

Ph: (618) 453-5738 Fax: (618) 453-5700 TTY: (618) 453-2293

Ethical Conduct:

Southern Illinois University at Carbondale is dedicated not only to learning, research, and the advancement of knowledge, but also to the development of ethically sensitive and responsible persons. The university seeks to achieve these goals through sound educational programs and policies governing individual conduct that encourage independence and maturity. By accepting membership in this university, an individual joins a community characterized by free expression, free inquiry, honesty, respect for others, and participation in constructive change. All rights and responsibilities exercised within this academic environment shall be compatible with these principles. An act of ***academic dishonesty*** is a breach of the student conduct code. Dishonesty includes: 1. Plagiarism, representing the work of another as one's own work; 2. Preparing work for another that is to be used as that person's own work; 3. Cheating by any method or means; 4. Knowingly and willfully falsifying or manufacturing scientific or educational data and representing the same to be the result of scientific or scholarly experiment or research; 5. Knowingly furnishing false information to a university official relative to academic matters; 6. Soliciting, aiding, abetting, concealing, or attempting conduct in violation of this code. If you are in doubt or have questions regarding behavior that may constitute academic dishonesty, please consult with me or refer to the SIU Handbook. <http://www.siu.edu/~policies/policies/conduct.html>

Course Materials:

[SCHUTT] = Schutt, Russell K. 2006. *Investigating the Social World: The Process and Practice of Research* (6th Ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press.
[Student resources: <http://www.pineforge.com/isw6/>]

[RES] = Articles available through the library's on-line reserve system

TOPICS, READINGS & ASSIGNMENTS

WEEK 1: Introduction

8/24 What is Science? What is Social Science? How Do We Know what We know?

Reading:

Chapter 1: "Science, Society, and Social Research" [SCHUTT]

8/26 Motives and Types of Social Science Research

Homework: *Developing a Research Proposal*, p. 26 [due, September 2nd]

WEEK 2: Process and Problems of Social Research

8/31 Social Research Questions

Reading:

Chapter 2: "The Process and Problems of Social Research" [SCHUTT]

Homework: "Group Assignment I - Observation and Categorization" [due September 9th]

9/2 Research Strategies and Goals

Homework: *Developing a Research Proposal*, p. 65 [due, September 9th]

WEEK 3: Research Ethics and Philosophies

9/7 Ethical Principals

Reading:

Chapter 3: “Research Ethics and Philosophies” [SCHUTT]

9/9 Philosophical Issues

Homework: *Developing a Research Proposal*, pp. 98-99 [due, September 16th]

WEEK 4: Conceptualization and Measurement

9/14 Concepts and Measurement Operations

Reading:

Chapter 4: “Conceptualization and Measurement” [SCHUTT]

Homework

“Conceptualization: Media Exercise” [due September 28th]

9/16 Levels of Measurement and Evaluating Measures

Homework: *Developing a Research Proposal*, p. 147 [due, September 23rd]

WEEK 5: Sampling

9/21 Sample Planning and Methods

Reading:

Chapter 5: “Sampling” [SCHUTT]

9/23 **EXAM 1** [about here]

WEEK 6: Research Design and Causation

9/28 Research Design Alternatives

Reading:

Chapter 6: “Research Design and Causation” [SCHUTT]

9/30 Criteria for Causal Explanations

Reading:

Chapter 6: “Research Design and Causation” [SCHUTT]

Homework: *Developing a Research Proposal*, p. 220 [due, October 7th]

WEEK 7: Experiments

10/5 Types of Experiments

Reading:

Chapter 7: “Experiments” [SCHUTT]

10/7 Validity in Experiments

WEEK 8: Survey Research

10/12 Surveys and Writing Questions

Reading:

Chapter 8: “Survey Research” [SCHUTT]

Homework: “Group Assignment II – Designing a Survey” [due October 14th]

10/14 Designing and Organizing Surveys

Homework: *Developing a Research Proposal*, p. 312 [due, October 21st]

WEEK 9: Qualitative Methods

10/19 Fundamentals of Qualitative Research

Reading:

Chapter 9: “Qualitative Methods” [SCHUTT]

10/21 Types of Qualitative Research

WEEK 10: Qualitative Data Analysis

10/26 Features and Techniques of Qualitative Research

Reading:

Chapter 10: “Qualitative Data Analysis” [SCHUTT]

10/28 Alternatives to Qualitative Data Analysis

WEEK 11: Historical and Comparative Research

11/2 **EXAM 2 [about here]**

11/4 Unobtrusive Methods

Reading:

Chapter 12: “Historical and Comparative Research” [SCHUTT]

WEEK 12: Historical and Comparative Research

11/9 Comparative Social Science Methods

11/11 **VETERAN’S DAY HOLIDAY (NO CLASS!)**

WEEK 13: Secondary Data Analysis and Content Analysis

11/16 Secondary Data Sources

Reading:

Chapter 13: “Secondary Data Analysis and Content Analysis” [SCHUTT]

11/18 Content Analysis

11/22 – 11/26 THANKSGIVING BREAK! [NO CLASS]

WEEK 14: Quantitative Data Analysis

12/2 Introducing Statistics

Reading:

Chapter 14: “Quantitative Data Analysis” [SCHUTT]

12/4 Using Statistics

WEEK 15: Summarizing and Report Writing

12/9 Comparing Research Designs

Reading:

Chapter 15: “Summarizing and Report Writing” [SCHUTT]

12/11 Ethics, Politics, and Research Reports

FINAL EXAM – Thursday, December 16th, 7:50 a.m. – 9:50 a.m.