

SOC 512: Sociological research methods and design.
Fall 2011

Course Information

Professor: Dr. Rachel Bridges Whaley
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Office Hours: M 12-2, W 1-3, Th 11-1 and by appointment

Class time: Tuesdays 1:00 pm - 4:20 pm Classroom: Faner 3410

Course Description and Objective

Catalog description: Focus on issues related to the research process from identification of the role of theory, formulation of research questions, to research design and quantitative, qualitative, and mixed method data collection techniques. The connections between theory, research design and measurement decisions, and interpretation (answering research questions) are emphasized throughout. Practical and ethical issues are discussed including sampling and informed consent. Assignments vary and may include a series of small or one large research project/paper, as well as other assessment tools.

Additional description: This course is intended to provide experience with research design and matching research questions with appropriate research methods. A wide range of methods and techniques for collecting data will be covered including experiments, survey research, interviews, focus groups, use of available data, field research and ethnography, action research, content analysis, and evaluation research. Logistical and ethical issues associated with the various techniques will be discussed. This course is intentionally a survey course providing an overview of the range of methods available to sociologists. The goals of this course are for you to learn 1) the major paradigms of social research, 2) the breadth of available methods, 3) research design, and 4) some of the major issues involved in conducting social research. These goals will be accomplished through the discussion and critical analysis of published studies, reading material, writing assignments, as well as your own development of a research proposal. By the end of the semester you should be able to critique scholarly work, recognize connections between research questions, theory, research design, and results, and be able to imagine research questions and possible research designs to answer such questions.

Materials

1. Brief text: *Constructing social research*. Charles Ragin. 1994. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press.
2. Many readings are available via the library's subscription to on-line journals.
3. Readings marked "PDF" will be emailed to you.

Assignments/Requirements

I. Short assignments. All short writing assignments involve the reading by Rosenfeld and Kim (see below). There are 4 in total. You should work independently on these papers. We will

discuss the article and assignments in class – usually after a short paper is due. See the attached grading rubric that will be used to evaluate these papers. (all 4 = 30% of grade)

Rosenfeld, M., and Kim, B. 2005. The Independence of Young Adults and the Rise of Interracial and Same-Sex Unions. *American Sociological Review*, 70(4):541-562.

1. Identify, describe and evaluate Rosenfeld and Kim's research problem/topic and research question. [identify/describe: use your own words, paraphrase, do not quote the authors; figure out what they are saying and say it in a different way; evaluate or critique: discuss strengths/weaknesses, positives/negatives, praise/criticize with focus on their question(s).] How do they describe the significance of their research and/or its potential contribution to the literature? Finally, what is the role of theory (do they have a theoretical perspective, are they testing a theory, etc.) [2-3 pages, 5% of grade]

2. Discuss the authors' research design (as many elements as relevant). What decisions/choices did they make and why? How is the design itself (and their decisions) connected to their theory and research question? Offer a critique. [3-5 pages, 10% of grade]

3. Describe the study's major findings (don't worry about the details of the analyses, instead focus on the research question and how the authors' answer it. Evaluate how the research design affected the authors' ability to answer their question (be specific). [3-5 pages, 5% of grade]

4. Offer an alternative research project to address the same topic. Offer a discussion of the contrast between the authors' research and your alternative project. [5 pages, 10% of grade]

II. Discussion prompts. On all nights (except Week 3 and Week 10) you will bring a discussion question, knowledge/clarification question, or critical comment about the readings for the night. You will use these in class as relevant and will turn them in at the end of class. Late discussion prompts will not be accepted. If discussion prompts are not used in class, time allowing, I will call on students to present their question or comment (summarize, provide background, etc). I will make sure that every student participates in this manner at least once during the semester. I expect others to try to answer/respond to/or further discuss the prompt. I will keep track of how many weeks you bring a prompt (at least 8) and how often you use it in discussion (or I call on you to do so) (at least a few times). I will not grade these prompts but as necessary, I will provide feedback and evaluation. It is expected that you will consider this information as you continue to write prompts.

III. Class Participation. Attend class and participate in class discussions. More than one absence not due to an excused absence will result in a lower grade. (discussion prompts and participation (including preparation for discussions) combined = 30%)

IV. Research Proposal. You will write a mini-proposal for a social science research project. You should write sections of the proposal throughout the semester. My feedback to your short papers should help as you work on this task. Detailed instructions are attached at the end of the syllabus. You are strongly encouraged to visit me during office hours to discuss your topic and

design ideas. You will present your “in-progress” research proposal in class (twice). Everyone is expected to attend the presentations and offer critical feedback (praise and criticism, strengths and weaknesses, concerns, etc.). You will revise your proposal based on these discussions and turn in a final, polished, proofread, properly cited, and well-organized final version on Monday December 12 by noon. (40% of grade)

Course Schedule 8/23 to 12/12

Week 1 (8/23) Introduction to Course

Week 2 (8/30) Diverse views on social research

Ragin. Preface, Ch. 1-3 and the Afterward by Driscoll.

Ferrell, J. 1998. Criminological Verstehen: Inside the immediacy of crime. In J. Ferrell and M. S. Hamm, eds., *Ethnography at the Edge: Crime, Deviance, and Field Research*, 20-42. Boston: Northeastern University Press.

Sprague, J. and Zimmerman, M. 2004. Overcoming dualism: A feminist agenda for sociological methodology. Pp. 39-61 in Hesse-Biber and Leavy (eds.) *Approaches to qualitative research: A reader on theory and practice*. Oxford.

Week 3 (9/6) Reading Published Research and Introduction to Research Process/design

Ragin. Ch. 2 and 3

Class preparation: Read through these articles. Pay attention to the organization and content of each section. Be prepared to compare and contrast where and how the authors reveal their research question/problem, and where and how justify their research. Is one more convincing than the other? What paradigms were adopted by each (how do you know)? We'll discuss their research designs and other issues in later weeks so don't worry about that now.

Soule, S. 2004. Going to the chapel? Same-sex marriage bans in the United States, 1973-2000. *Social Problems*, 51(4):453-477.

Kelly, Moen, & Tranby. 2011. Changing workplaces to reduce work-family conflict: Schedule control in a white-collar organization. *American Sociological Review*, 76(2): 265-290)

Week 4 (9/13) Research Design **Short Paper 1 due**

Ragin. Ch. 4 and 5 (read these now but you'll likely refer back to them when we discuss specific methods)

Class preparation: Be prepared to discuss and evaluate the authors' design decisions. Discuss impact of such decisions.

Review with focus on design: Soule, S. 2004. Going to the chapel? Same-sex marriage bans in the United States, 1973-2000. *Social Problems*, 51(4):453-477.

Review with focus on design: Kelly, Moen, & Tranby. 2011. Changing workplaces to reduce work-family conflict: Schedule control in a white-collar organization. *American Sociological Review*, 76(2): 265-290)

Week 5 (9/20) Measurement

Reading: to be announced (a chapter on the traditional text book explanation of measurement)

Class preparation: Evaluate a few measurement decisions. Discuss impact of decisions.

Review with focus on measurement: Soule, S. 2004. Going to the chapel? Same-sex marriage bans in the United States, 1973-2000. *Social Problems*, 51(4):453-477.

SEE THE ON-LINE SUPPLEMENT referred to on p 272 and review their measurement decisions: Kelly, Moen, & Tranby. 2011. Changing workplaces to reduce work-family conflict: Schedule control in a white-collar organization. *American Sociological Review*, 76(2): 265-290)

Read with focus on measurement: Guest, A. M. & McRee. 2009. A School-Level Analysis of Adolescent Extracurricular Activity, Delinquency, and Depression: The Importance of Situational Context. *J Youth Adolescence* 38:51–62

Smith, Smith & Earp. 1999. Beyond the measurement trap: A reconstructed conceptualization and measurement of woman battering. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 23: 177-193

Week 6 (9/27) Sampling and Causality

Curtis, S., Gesler, W., Smith, G., & Washburn, S. (2000). Approaches to sampling and case selection in qualitative research: Examples in the geography of health. *Social Science and Medicine*, 50(7–8), 1001–1014.

Wright, Decker, Redfern and Smith. 1992. “A snowball’s chance in hell: Doing field research with residential burglars.” *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 29 (2): 148-161.

McClendon, M. J. 1994. Chapter 1. Causality and social science. *Multiple regression and causal analysis*. IL: Waveland Press, Inc.

Babbie, E. 2004 The logic of nomothetic explanation. p. 90-94 **and** Chapter 15. The elaboration model. In *The practice of social research, 10th edition*. Thompson Wadsworth

Review with focus on mediation: Kelly, Moen, & Tranby. 2011. Changing workplaces to reduce work-family conflict: Schedule control in a white-collar organization. *American Sociological Review*, 76(2): 265-290)

Week 7 (10/4) Ethics **Short paper #2 due**

Humphreys, L. 1970. Methods: Sociologist as voyeur. In M. P. Golden, *The Research Experience*, p. 100-114. Boston: Northeastern University Press.

Miller, J. 2000. "The protection of 'human subjects' in street ethnography." *Focaal*, 36: 53-68.

Rupp, L. J. & Taylor, V. 2011. Going Back and Giving Back: The Ethics of Staying in the Field *Qualitative Sociology*, 34:483-496

Visit SIU's Office of Research and Development webpage to learn about our procedures. Start here <http://www.orda.siuc.edu/> and be sure to read the following:

Human Subjects Guide: <http://www.orda.siuc.edu/human/HSguide.html>

Human Subjects Compliance: <http://www.orda.siuc.edu/human/>

Responsible Conduct of Research: <http://www.orda.siuc.edu/general/rcr.html>

Be sure to read the Human Subjects Research Applications and a Sample Consent Form

ASA ethics statement (see website: <http://www.asanet.org/members/ecoderev.html>)

Week 8 (10/11) No class (Fall break)

Week 9 (10/18) Method: Experiments

Class preparation: Come prepared to discuss method/design decisions of following studies (appropriateness, consequences, etc).

Feder, Jolin, and Feyerherm. 2000. "Lessons from two randomized experiments in criminal justice settings." *Crime & Delinquency*, 46 (3): 380-400.

Pager, Devah. 2003. "The Mark of a Criminal Record." *American Journal of Sociology* 108:937-975.

Review with focus on implications of experimental design: Kelly, Moen, & Tranby. 2011. Changing workplaces to reduce work-family conflict: Schedule control in a white-collar organization. *American Sociological Review*, 76(2): 265-290)

Week 10 (10/25) Presentations **Short paper #3 due**

Week 11 (11/1) Method: Asking Questions

Claude S. Fischer. 2009. The 2004 GSS Finding of Shrunk Social Networks: An Artifact? *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 74 (August: 657-669)

Class preparation: Come prepared to discuss how each used this method (asking people questions), their design decisions that relate to asking questions, the appropriateness of their choices, consequences.

Gaarder, E. and J. Belknap. 2002. "Tenuous borders: Girls transferred to adult court." *Criminology*, 40(3):481-517.

Yarwood, G. A. 2011. The pick and mix of fathering identities. *Fathering*, Vol. 9, No. 2, Spring 2011, 150-168.

Another reading will be assigned (to be announced)

Week 12 (11/8) Method: Field Observation and Ethnography

Herbert J. Gans. 2010. Public Ethnography; Ethnography as Public Sociology. *Qualitative Sociology*, 33:97-104

Maher, L. 1997. "Appendix. On reflexivity, reciprocity, and ethnographic research. In *Sexed work: Gender, race, and resistance in a Brooklyn drug market*, 207-232. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Class preparation: Come prepared to discuss how each used this method, their design decisions that relate to field observation or ethnography, the appropriateness of their choices, consequences. To what extent does each author attend to the concerns outlined in Maher?

Flores, G. M. 2011. Racialized Tokens: Latina teachers negotiating, surviving and thriving in a white woman's profession. *Qualitative Sociology*, 34: 313-335.

Mattley, C. 1998. (Dis)Courtesy stigma: Fieldwork among phone fantasy workers. p. 146-158 In J. Ferrell and M. S. Hamm, eds., *Ethnography at the Edge: Crime, Deviance, and Field Research*. Boston: Northeastern University Press.

Week 13 (11/15) No class. Work on proposal.

Week 14 (11/22) Method: Unobtrusive Research **Short paper #4 due**

Class preparation: Come prepared to discuss these articles as we have been discussing others.

Lee, Juliet P.; Moore, Roland S.; Martin, Scott E.. 2003. Unobtrusive observations of smoking in urban California bars. *Journal of Drug Issues*, Vol. 33 Issue 4, p983-999, 17p

Bridges, J. S. 1993. Pink or Blue: Gender-stereotypic perceptions of infants as conveyed by birth congratulations cards. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 17:193-205.

Knudson, L. 2009. Cindy Sheehan and the Rhetoric of Motherhood: A Textual Analysis *Peace & Change*, Vol. 34, No. 2: 164-183

Cherlin, A. J., L. M. Burton, T. R. Hurt, and D. M. Purvin. 2004. "The influence of physical and sexual abuse on marriage and cohabitation." *American Sociological Review*, 69: 768-789.

Week 15 (11/29) Other options: Mixed Methods, Action Research, Applied Research, Evaluation Research

Class preparation: Come prepared to discuss these articles as we have been discussing others.

Rank, M. R. 1992. "The blending of qualitative and quantitative methods in understanding childbearing among welfare recipients." In J. F. Gilgun, K. Daly, G. Handel, eds., *Qualitative methods in family research*. Newbury Park: Sage Publications.

Northcote, J. 2011. Young adults' decision making surrounding heavy drinking: A multi-staged model of planned behavior. *Social Science & Medicine* 72: 2020-2025.

McAllister, C. L., P. C. Wilson, B. L. Green and J. L. Baldwin. 2005. "'Come and take a walk': Listening to early head start parents on school-readiness as a matter of child, family, and community health." *American Journal of Public Health*, 95(4):617-625.

Week 16 (12/6) Wrap up course with Discussion (Final Presentations)

Final draft research proposal due Monday, 12/12 by noon.

Soc 512, Whaley Grading Rubric

Here is a grading rubric that I will use for your short assignments and research proposal. These are general evaluation criteria and should be conceived as a continuum with +/- grades in between the letter grades. Although final grades do not include +/-, I feel students benefit to recognize where their work falls in the more detailed continuum (a grade of an 80 (or B-) is not the same as an 89 (or B+)). Specific characteristics listed below may be more or less relevant depending on the particular assignment. I provide this so you have a sense of what I will look for - not to scare you. There are many weeks in the term and thus time to improve if you are not comfortable with your initial performance(s).

"A" Excellent; fully responds to assignment; written discussion is very focused, clear (easily identifiable), well-organized, sophisticated (complicated/developed), insightful, and relevant; reflects serious thinking on the topic; reflects high level of engagement with and understanding of material; accurately and appropriately invokes knowledge gained from other course related material when relevant; reflects critical thinking; provides arguments with reasons, evidence, or examples as relevant; is largely free of errors in grammar, punctuation, word choice, spelling, and citations.

"B" Good; mostly responds to assignment; written discussion is fairly focused, clear, and organized; simple or elementary (less sophisticated than "A"), reflects cursory thinking on the topic (less insightful than "A"); reflects reasonable level of understanding of material; somewhat connected to other knowledge; provides arguments but without sufficient reasons, evidence or examples; minimal errors in grammar, punctuation, word choice, spelling, and citations.

"C" Needs work; minimally responds to assignment; written discussion lacks focus, clarity, and organization; reflects lack of engagement with material/topic; reflects a weak understanding of the material; not connected to other course related knowledge; lacks arguments or inappropriate arguments; errors in grammar, punctuation, word choice, spelling, and citations. Below expectations for graduate level work.

SOC 512 (Whaley)

Fall 2011

Research Proposal Guidelines

Overview: A major research proposal describes the design of your study and includes a developed review of the relevant theoretical, empirical, and methodological literature. For our purposes you will write a mini-proposal that will not have a fully developed literature review. Instead you will just review about 5 scholarly articles to give you practice with this task and because its really impossible to write a proposal for research when you have no idea what has been done before. Even if your project is totally inductive, some knowledge of the general field, theoretical concepts, etc. will be necessary. For the most part, a research proposal includes the same sections in the same order as a quantitative (and many qualitative) journal articles. However, there are various formats for proposals and they depend on the nature of your study. Use the following as a rough guide for the key sections to include in your proposal.

- * Audience: your paper should be written with formal language (not personal or familiar language) for a sociological audience.
- * Papers must be prepared using computer word processing (double-spaced, 10 or 12 point font, 1 inch margins, no borders).
- * While length should vary with the method, the expectation is that you will write 12-15 pages.

Due Week 3: Research Topic/Interest Statement

Selecting a research topic and writing a research question are difficult steps in the research process. Think about this early and seriously. The topic you select should be the one that you will discuss in the research proposal. What do you want to research and why? What is your primary research question(s) or hypothesis (at this point in time, it may evolve). Can and should this topic be studied? Finally, in just a sentence or so, include a brief statement containing your preliminary ideas about research design (again this need not be developed and may change).

Week 10 (10/25): Informal presentations

Paper is due 12/12

Organization of the final paper (mini-proposal)

Introduction: What is your topic or research question (*statement of problem*)? What is it that you wish to know or explain? Why should a sociologist be interested in this topic/question? That is, explain why the project is sociologically interesting. Discuss the importance of the research). Briefly state the primary goal or purpose of the study. (2-3 paragraphs)

Literature Review: Normally (depending on your approach, topic, and design) this would include theoretical, empirical, and perhaps methodological reviews. For our purposes, review about 5 research articles on your topic (or related topic) to set up your study. What do we already know and what do we still need to know (hence your research project)?

Research Questions or Hypotheses: State your research question(s) and/or hypotheses. If you have abstract concepts (particularly in the case of deductive, quantitative research), you should define the concepts here. That is, provide the nominal definitions not the full operationalization as that will come in the methods section.

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For a qualitative proposal:

Methods

Research Design: Justify your choice of method, grounding your explanation within relevant methodological literature.

Position Yourself as a Researcher: Provide an explanation for what drives your interest in your topic/research questions and your choice of method. Describe strategies for accounting for yourself and your role/influence in data collection. This will probably necessitate a disclosure of your personal biases/opinions on the topic.

Research Process: Discuss logistical issues for collecting your data according to the method you have chosen. Describe how you will gain access to a particular setting and/or particular group of subjects. How will you talk about your project and invite participation in it? Explain and justify your choice of a sample and its size. How will you decide who/what to observe/interview? How long will you observe, how many interviews will you conduct?

Data Analysis Procedures: skip

Issues of Validation, Reliability and Generalization: Given the qualitative nature of your study, discuss how you will address the typical means of examining the utility of your findings.

Anticipated Ethical Issues: Discuss the ethical concerns that may arise in the course of the study you propose. How might these concerns be aggravated by the qualitative nature of your project and what would you propose for addressing them?

Strengths and Weakness/Limitations of Design: Describe the benefits and drawbacks of your choice in method. Is your choice of method beneficial or unique for what it will yield as far as data/findings? Likewise, would your data be hindered in some way due to your choice of method?

For a quantitative proposal:

Methods

Research Design: Justify your choice of method, grounding your explanation within relevant methodological literature.

Sample: Describe the data you will collect or use. What is the unit of analysis? What is the target population? How will you sample the population? Consider the implications of your proposed sampling procedure. How might it affect the generalizability of the results? How will subjects be recruited for participation? If using publicly available data or secondary data (data collected by another researcher), describe the source(s), discuss how the data were originally collected (sampling technique, sample size), the target population, and implications of the sampling procedure for your study.

Measurement: In a prior section you defined your abstract concepts. Now explain how you propose to operationalize them. Here is where you want to fully explain or describe your variables as relevant. If relevant, describe the levels of measurement of your variables. Include some details in this section (example of a survey question or complete description of Census data) but also refer the reader to an appendix that contains the actual instrument or more details, as relevant). You might want to include a table that includes columns titled concept, definition, and operationalization. In this section you may need to justify your measurement decisions (e.g., cite precedent in the literature or explain need for new indicators).

Reliability and Validity: Discuss issues of validity and reliability as they pertain to your study – particularly in terms of measurement.

Data Analysis Procedures: skip

Anticipated Ethical Issues: Discuss the ethical concerns that may arise in the course of the study you propose. How might these concerns be aggravated by the quantitative nature of your project and what would you propose for addressing them?

Strengths and Weakness/Limitations of Design: Describe the benefits and drawbacks of your choice in method. Is your choice of method beneficial or unique for what it will yield as far as data/findings? Likewise, would your data be hindered in some way due to your choice of method?

For a mixed methods proposal:

If you propose a mixed methods project, include the relevant sections/topics in your proposal. See me for further assistance.

References: you need in-text citations and a reference page. Bear in mind that all of your sources should be intellectually sound and academically grounded; see me if you have any questions on the legitimacy of a source. You must use an appropriate citation format (APA style guide), take care when paraphrasing, and avoid plagiarism. If you have any questions about how to paraphrase appropriately see me for tips.

Final word: It is possible that this proposal will function as a preliminary draft of a thesis or dissertation proposal, particularly if you are an advanced student and have already given your project considerable thought. However, this will not be the case for many of you and it need not be. Instead, consider this a necessary exercise that will help you as you continue your education. The experience will enhance your understanding of “doing sociology.”

See me for help along the way. I have lots of resources that you may borrow about writing research proposals.