

SOCIOLOGY 498

INDEPENDENT RESEARCH

COURSE SYLLABUS

Course objectives:

Independent Research has the following objectives:

1. To allow students to pursue research topics of their choosing with a depth and sophistication not allowed by the constraints of standard courses.
2. To develop student skills in expository writing (a paper of c25 pages is anticipated).
3. To develop student skills with regard to formulating a theory or research project, selecting the methods appropriate to test or conduct it, and to analyze the results.
4. When substituting for SOC497, to give students the opportunity to produce a research paper (based on library, original, or secondary sources) evidencing a level of sophistication that demonstrates mastery of the discipline appropriate to the undergraduate level.

Course content:

Course content will vary according to the research project.

Topical Outline:

While a topical outline would be inappropriate, the following distributions of time are recommended:

Prior to the semester:

Preliminary literature review	3%
Sketch of project	2%
Consultation with mentor(s)	2%

During the semester:

Literature review	15%
Research design	15%
HSC approvals	4%
Research	20%
Data analysis	15%
First draft	10%
Final daft	14%

Total	100%
-------	------

Required texts:

While the notion of a required text is inappropriate to the course, the following text would serve as resources for it:

- W. Lawrence Neuman, *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*, 5/E (Allyn & Bacon, 2003)
Singleton and Straits, *Approaches to Social Research*, Third Edition (Oxford: Oxford University

Press, 1999)
Johnson, Rettig, Scott and Garrison, *The Sociology Student Writer's Manual* (Upper Saddle River NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1998)
Becker with Richards, *Writing for Social Scientists: How to Start and Finish your Thesis, Book, or Article* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1986)
Williams, *Style: Toward Clarity and Grace* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990)

WAC requirement:

In order to assure that the goals of *Writing across the Curriculum* (WAC) are met, both Instructor and student will review the document *Integrating Written, Oral, Visual and Electronic Communication Across the Curriculum: A Guide for Faculty and Graduate Teaching Assistants* available at

<http://www.siu.edu/departments/cac/guide/index.html>

Course Schedule:

Prior to the semester in which the course is taken, the student should outline the research project in the form of a 150 word abstract to which is appended a preliminary bibliography of relevant materials and a schedule for completing the proposed research. The following can serve as a model, though of course any model can only be appropriate for one mode of independent research.

- | | |
|----------|--|
| Week 1: | Work on literature review, preliminary design of instruments, HSC approval if necessary. Meet with instructor. |
| Week 2: | Continue with literature review. Construct statement of problem. Continue with design of instruments. Meet with instructor. |
| Week 3: | Submit literature review in draft along with statement of problem (c10 pages), complete instrument design and arrange for pretesting (pending HSC approval). Meet with instructor. |
| Week 4: | Instructor returns draft with comments. Work on revision of draft. Plan data analysis methods and sampling procedure. Meet with instructor. |
| Week 5: | Submit revision of draft lit review and statement of problem. Pretest instruments (pending HSC approval). Meet with instructor. |
| Week 6: | Revise instruments and prepare sample. Submit draft of methods section(c5 pages). Meet with instructor. |
| Week 7: | Collect data. Instructor returns draft of methods section with comments. |
| Week 8: | Collect data and revise methods section. |
| Week 9: | Begin data analysis. Meet with instructor. |
| Week 10: | Conclude data analysis. Submit revised methods section. |

Week 11	Submit draft of findings (c10 pages). Meet with instructor.
Week 12	Instructor returns draft of findings with comments. Begin draft of conclusions.
Week 13	Submit draft of entire paper (c25 pages).
Week 14	Receive comments on draft and revise. Submit final version.

The following structural and formatting requirements apply to Honors theses in the Department, but should be approximated for Independent Study:

Overall structure

The beginning third of your research project document usually consists of an *introduction*, a *statement of the problem* and a *review of the literature*. You go on from there to report on the research process, state your findings and analyze them, come to some conclusions, and recommend avenues for further research. Thus the structure of the research project, particularly for empirical work, would be as follows:

1. Statement of your problem
2. Review of literature
3. Elaboration of problem and indication of your particular orientation to it. (Normally this and the previous step are intermingled.)
4. Statement and discussion of method.
5. Research history: what went wrong, blew up, or otherwise caused you to change your plans? How much hair did you tear out? Personal reflections, emotional highs and lows, etc. are appropriately reported upon here.
6. Statement of findings and discussion of them.
7. Conclusion: what have you learned and what directions do you suggest for future research?

Naturally, exploratory or theoretical projects will follow somewhat different paths, but the above outline is more or less universally applicable, suitably modified.

The dynamics of writing

Good thinking and good writing are never distinguishable in practice. Happily, good writing is within your grasp: it's a craft that can be learned like any other, the only real problem being the amount of one-on-one attention necessary. What stops some students from doing so is the degree to which they find their writing and their self-esteem intertwined. It just seems terribly threatening to expose to public view any document that isn't polished; but the catch is that you can't learn to polish a document unless you're willing to give it to someone who's a good polisher and see what he or she does with it. So there's an understandable, but absolutely counterproductive, tendency to clam up until forced to produce.

We'll try to create a climate to overcome this bashfulness. On your part, the best approach will be to consider writing a bit like dancing--something you can never become graceful at without occasionally revealing your awkwardness. A "What the hell; let's have at it; who cares if I stumble once in a while?"

attitude is helpful, as is the realization that only final drafts count. You may not be accustomed to working a piece through many drafts, but it's what almost all scholars have to do--because nobody gets it right the first time. A research project is different from a term paper. It involves considerably more work, and each part of it may go through several revisions. These revisions are not something you come up with on your own: they respond to comments and criticisms you get after showing your work to others. It is essential to become accustomed to exposing your ideas in this way--especially to people who are not your close friends--so as to get honest comment on them. Your faculty mentor will serve as a sounding board for your ideas and can help get your prose into shape.

If you need help on grammar and usage, try the University's standard: *The Little, Brown Compact Handbook*. If you want guidance about writing clear and effective prose, read Joseph M. Williams, *Style: Toward Clarity and Grace*. For practical help with writing a research paper, see Becker, Howard S. 1986. *Writing for Social Scientists: How to Start and Finish Your Thesis, Book, or Article*. But above all, remember that the University has a Writing Center in Faner 2281 (453-6863) that's prepared to help at every stage. So don't expect your mentor to edit your manuscript with any degree of thoroughness: make sure it is in as good shape as possible when you first turn it in for review.

We make several technical points here. As a general rule, the research project should be written with care to tense. Don't switch back and forth between tenses haphazardly. Instead choose the appropriate tense for each section or topic and stick to it. Though in the past students were forbidden to use personal pronouns, this resulted in awkward phrasing and frequent passive constructions (e.g., "It was decided that..."). In keeping with current conventions, we would encourage you to use personal pronouns (e.g., "I decided that..."). Furthermore, it's perfectly appropriate to make personal statements; that is, you may discuss frustrations, problems, epiphanies and other experiences that affected the outcome.

The following guidelines are not "regulations" even though they're phrased like it: they simply aim at producing a text that is readable, clear, and consistently laid out. If you can devise a better format, or if you have a good reason to innovate on a specific point, by all means do so... as long as you are consistent throughout.

Footnotes and source acknowledgment

You should use the source acknowledgment form now standard in scientific writing, a version of which is reproduced in Appendix A.

Footnotes or endnotes are to be used for the development of subsidiary and minor themes, for the discussion of points that would interrupt the flow of the argument in the text, for matters tangential to the main flow of the argument, or for identification of views differing from your own, but not for the citation of works drawn upon for quotations or ideas. If you are uncertain whether a given item is correctly incorporated as part of the text, a reference in the text or a footnote, consult your faculty mentor or the Undergraduate Director for advice. Recent issues of the *American Sociological Review* will provide examples of the ways in which footnotes are used in sociology.

A bibliography (titled REFERENCES) gives readers full information about your sources. A format for your References section is available in Appendix B.

Tables, charts, and figures

All tables, charts, graphs, figures, illustrations, or photos should be inserted directly into the text and should be introduced in the text discussion before (or at the same point as) they appear. Consult a recent issue of the *American Sociological Review* for examples of formats. In general, tables, charts, and graphs are titled at the top; illustrations, figures, and photos are titled as well as identified by numeric designation. Footnotes pertinent to any these items should be contained within the body of the table, figure, etc., itself.

Manuscript requirements

Margins: One inch on the top, bottom, and right hand side; one and one-half inches on the left hand side. The choice of style is yours, but please don't use a font larger than 12 point. There's no reason to make your research project look longer by having fewer words per page.

Pagination: The first page of the text does not receive a page number; all subsequent pages are numbered sequentially (starting with 2) in the upper right hand corner. The pages which precede the first page of the text are numbered with lower case Roman numerals centered at the bottom of the page.

Headings: Major headings should be capitalized and centered in the middle of the line. Subheadings should not be capitalized but should be underlined and set at the left hand margin on a line by themselves. Sub-sub-headings should be underlined, indented one tab from the left hand margin, and should be followed by text. Check out how we're doing it here. (Hopefully, sub-sub-sub-headings will not be necessary).

Pre-text Pages: Include the following items, *should they apply*, in the order listed and prior to page 1:

1. Title Page. See Appendix C for an example.
2. Abstract: a 200 word or less, single-spaced summary of your project.
3. Acknowledgments. People who have been particularly helpful should be recognized here along with sources of outside funding. Acknowledgments may also be made in a footnote on page 1 of the text (in which case an asterisk is used to designate the footnote).
4. Table of Contents.
5. List of Tables.
6. List of Charts.
7. List of Graphs.
8. List of Figures.
9. List of Illustrations.
10. List of photographs.

Appendices: Appendices should be used to include materials that would be disruptive to the flow of the test if included in it, but that are none the less important in fully appreciating or understanding your work. Quite often you will include measurement instruments, data sets, sample lists, maps, etc., in appendices, which are listed alphabetically rather than numerically and precede the References.