

RESEARCH METHODS
SOCIOLOGY 207
Summer 2008
(Monday-Friday 2:20-3:35pm)
219 Thomas Building

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Course Description and Objective:

Sociologists ask a broad range of questions concerning societal processes. For instance, as sociologists we might ask “why is Japan’s suicide rate higher than that of other industrial nations?” Or, “How does body weight influence adolescent mental health?” In this class, we will learn *how* sociologists go about asking and answering these questions and gain knowledge about the world. We will explore a variety of issues that sociologists face when they conduct research and some of the methods that they use to collect and analyze data. By the end of this session, you will...

1. Be familiar with all major aspects of the survey research and will know how social scientists design research questions, construct questionnaires, and analyze data.
2. Be familiar with different sampling techniques and will know their strengths and weaknesses.
3. Know how to write a professional research paper including a literature review, methods section, findings, discussion, conclusion, references, tables and appendices.
4. Be familiar with major research techniques used in the social sciences including experiments, unobtrusive measures, field research, and evaluation research.
5. Be able to locate, read, and understand empirical journal articles in the social sciences
6. Be familiar with a variety of sources of sociology information and be able to access them through library and computer data bases.
7. Become familiar with the ethics of social science research.

With some hard work and a sincere interest in research methods, everyone can succeed in this course and will hopefully develop a further interest in the social sciences.

Required Readings

Babbie, Earl. 2008. *The Basics of Social Research*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth (4th ed.)
ISBN: 0495094684

The Babbie book will be our primary text for the duration of the course, and is available for purchase at the student bookstore. However, given the rising costs of textbooks, I highly recommend checking out online retailers for less expensive copies (i.e. www.addall.com). In addition to the Babbie text, I will also have additional readings and exercises available on ANGEL. *If you cannot afford the book for financial reasons, please see me immediately.*

Grading

Your final grade will be based on class participation, two exams, workbook assignments, and the final research project. *The components for the course are assigned the following values (% of overall grade):*

Class Participation (15%)

Class Discussion	5%
In-Class Projects	10%

Exams (30%)

Mid-term Exam	15%
Final (non-cumulative)	15%

Homework Assignments (20%)

Homework/Workbook Assignments (5 x 4%)

Final Project (35%)

Assignment 1	2%	Assignment 3	4%
Assignment 2	3%	Assignment 4	4%
Final Paper	15%	Presentation	7%

I will use the following scale in assigning grades:

93%-100%:	A	83%-86%:	B	73%-76%:	C	Below 60%:	F
90%-92%:	A-	80%-82%:	B-	70%-72%:	C-		
87%-89%:	B+	77%-79%:	C+	60%-69%:	D		

Exams & Exam Policies

There will be 2 exams this semester (1 midterm and a final exam). The exams will cover material from the readings and from lecture. Some of the material from lecture will overlap with the readings. You will be tested on information that is covered in the readings but not in lecture and vice versa. Therefore, it is extremely important to do all assigned readings and attend lectures regularly.

Format: The exams will be multiple choice with a few short answers. Be prepared to apply concepts from lectures and reading and use critical thinking skills on the exams. Each exam will cover only new material. However, expect to see a few comprehensive questions on the final exam.

Make-up exams: There will be no make-up examinations except in extremely rare cases in which some unforeseen crisis/circumstance arises. If you miss an exam, see me as soon as possible to discuss the missed exam. If you know ahead of time that you have a conflict with the exam schedule, discuss this with me as soon as possible to make arrangements for the exam. However, exams will typically only be given on designated test days. Do not expect to arrange different exam schedules simply because it is more convenient.

Late Policy

On any assignment, your grade will be reduced by one unit for each day late (e.g., 1 day, from A to A-; 2 days, B+; 3 days, B, and so on).

Final Paper

The goal of this assignment is to write a professional style research paper similar to studies that appear in the major sociological journals. To do this, you must develop a research question and analyze it with data from your choice of *one* the the following datasets:

1. General Social Survey (1972-2002)
2. Health Behavior in School-Aged Children (1995-1996)
3. Monitoring the Future, 12th grade, 2005
4. American National Election Survey, 2004 (pre & post election)

These datasets cover a broad range of topics, which will hopefully allow you to work on a research question that is of interest to you. As part of this assignment, you must develop testable hypotheses and write an abstract (brief summary) of your study, as well as an introduction that introduces readers to the topic and explains why it is important. Additionally, you must find previous sociological literature on your topic and write a literature review that explains what other scholars have found. You must explain the methods and data you used in your analysis by writing a methods section for your paper. Then you will discuss the findings of your research by writing a results section and providing tables to summarize your findings. Lastly, you will discuss the meaning and implications of your findings in the discussion and conclusion sections. You will be given more information on the research paper in a separate handout. Additionally, this assignment will be completed in stages. You will write one section at a time and will hand in each section for feedback. **IMPORTANT:** You will be required to revise your paper sections after I provide this feedback. Revisions are one of the most important parts of writing. Finally, on the last day of class you will give a *brief* (5-10 minutes) presentation of your research topic, results, and conclusions. Presenting research to an audience is an important part of the research process, and this will provide you with an opportunity to share your research with your classmates. This is not at all meant to be a daunting or formal affair. *Please do not stress out about the presentations.* These can be as informal or formal as you'd like to make them.

Extra Credit

There will be a variety of extra credit options available throughout the semester. The first option is to attend the Population Research Institute's Summer Methodology Workshop, on Monday June 16th at the Nittany Lion Inn from 8am-1pm. This year's topic is on Age-Period-Cohort analysis, and features presentations by several well-respected methodologists, including Dr. Glenn Firebaugh (Penn State), Dr. Chris Winship (Harvard), and Dr. Ken Land (Duke). This workshop gives you the opportunity to be introduced to a professional academic conference and get a feel for issues in research methods that today's top scholars are working on today. To qualify for extra credit I ask that you stay for at least *one* of the major speakers, and write up a one-half to one page double-spaced report, indicating 1. A brief summary; and 2. Your reflections and what you learned from the presentation. **Note: if you are interested in this option, it's important that you register for the workshop as soon as possible at:**

<http://help.pop.psu.edu/workshops/2008-summer/2008-summer-methodology-workshop/view>

IF YOU DO NOT REGISTER FOR THE WORKSHOP, YOU WILL NOT BE ABLE TO ATTEND. Additionally, throughout the semester, there will be several extra credit opportunities. The details of these assignments will be announced on random class days. If you want or need extra credit, I suggest attending class regularly. Stay tuned...

Homework and Readings

Homework: Throughout the semester there will be 5 short homework assignments. Each assignment is worth 4% of your grade. These are meant to be relatively easy assignments in which you can critically apply the information provided in the readings and lectures. Homework assignments are due at the beginning of the class period on the date shown on the course schedule

Reading: In addition to the Babbie text, we will also be reading several articles and book excerpts that relate to our discussion topics for that day. These readings will be available on ANGEL in PDF format. If you are not able to print the readings, please let me know and I will provide you with a hard copy. It is important that you complete readings on time so you can better understand the lectures and contribute to class discussion.

IMPORTANT NOTE: READINGS SHOULD BE COMPLETED BY THE DATE LISTED ON THE SYLLABUS. For instance, you should read Babbie Chapter 1 and the Levitt Introduction BEFORE we meet for our second class period.

A Note on Summer Classes

It's summer. And it's nice out. The odds are pretty good none of us want to be here. But, we have to make sure we get our work done. I'm going to do my best to keep the material fun and interesting, but in return I expect all of you to help out on that front by staying attentive, contributing to class discussion, and asking plenty of questions as we go along. We're in this together, and it will be a lot less painful and more enjoyable for all of us if we make the best of it.

In addition to the distractions of nice weather, we have to worry about the break-neck pace of summer courses. Quite literally, we're cramming about 16 weeks' worth of material into 6 weeks. This makes it all the more important that you keep up with reading, stay on track with your assignments, and come to class. If you fall behind in any of these areas, it will be very difficult to catch up. Thus, it's even more important that you make me hold up my end of the bargain. I will be covering a lot of material rather quickly, and if something isn't quite clicking, or you don't think I've explained something well enough, it's up to you to let me know. **NOTE:** It's especially important that you are present for the "Nuts and Bolts" class sessions. These classes will function as workshops in which we go over in-depth the "nuts and bolts" (hence the title) of the research paper assignments.

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is the pursuit of scholarly activity in an open, honest and responsible manner and all members of the University community are expected to act in accordance with this principle. The University's Code of Conduct states that all students should act with personal integrity, respect other students' dignity, rights and property, and help create and maintain an environment in which all can succeed through the fruits of their efforts. Academic integrity includes a commitment not to engage in or tolerate acts of falsification, misrepresentation or deception. Such acts of dishonesty violate the fundamental ethical principles of the University community and compromise the worth of work completed by others. As such, dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated and students found in violation of the University's Code of Conduct will be notified and reported to the appropriate authorities. Cheating and other forms of dishonesty (such as plagiarizing) often result when students feel too much pressure to perform and that they do not have the tools to achieve their goals. If you are falling behind or feeling overwhelmed, **please** come sit down and chat with me BEFORE you decide to cheat.

Disability Needs

Penn State welcomes students with disabilities into the University's educational programs. If you have a disability-related need for modifications or reasonable accommodations in this course, please let me know as soon as possible and contact the Office for Disability Services, ODS, located at 116 Boucke Building at 814-863-1807(V/TTY). For further information regarding ODS please visit their web site at www.equity.psu.edu/ods.

VERY IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT OUR CLASS AND YOUR INSTRUCTOR

A few tips on how you can help keep our class rewarding and focused on the material:

1. Please don't blow off this class (and if you do, at least find a way to pretend that you're not doing so). If you must miss class, **you do not need to provide me with an explanation**. More importantly, do not ask whether you missed anything important (if the material you missed wasn't important, it wouldn't have been covered in class). I will assume that you are serious about your commitment to this class. As such, I presume that if you miss class you have a good reason (e.g., you are very sick, you are caring for someone who is very sick, or you are trapped under something very heavy). **ONE EXCEPTION:** If your absences become chronic, or if you anticipate chronic absences, then it's time to consult with me.
2. Feel free to call me Jason. If you prefer to address me more formally, Mr. Houle works, but it tends to make me feel old.
3. A general note about etiquette: Please be respectful in your interactions with me and with your peers (I will do the same). In particular, keep in mind that **correspondence via e-mail makes an impression just as correspondence in person does**. Before making a request by e-mail, please consider whether you would be willing to make the same request in person. In a nutshell, I'm pretty laid back and informal, but that doesn't mean I enjoy being manipulated or disrespected – electronically or otherwise.
4. Finally, if you have any questions or comments about the class or material, or just feel like chatting about sociology in general, please feel free to stop by my office at any time. Generally you can count on me being around during my office hours, but my door is always open for students whenever I'm around.

Keeping the above points in mind will enhance everyone's experience in the class and allow us reserve all brain activity for learning the material and having FUN while we do so.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Disclaimer: course schedule is subject to change at any time at my discretion. Readings should be completed by the date on which they are listed on the syllabus.

<u>DATE</u>	<u>TOPIC</u>	<u>READINGS</u>
WEEK 1: Introduction to Research Methods		
Mon. 5/19:	Intro/ Go over syllabus and policies	
Tues. 5/20:	An Introduction to Research Methods	<i>Babbie Ch. 1; Syllabus Levitt, Introduction</i>
Wed. 5/21:	Paradigms, Theory, and Research Homework 1 Due: Exercise 1.3	<i>Babbie Chi. 2</i>
Thurs. 5/22:	Research Ethics	<i>Babbie Ch. 3</i>
Fri. 5/23:	Research Ethics Continued Homework 2 Due: IRB Assignment <i>Handout Research Paper Assignment 1</i>	<i>Humphreys, Tearoom Trade</i>
WEEK 2: Research Design		
Mon. 5/26:	NO CLASS! MEMORIAL DAY	
Tues. 5/27:	Research Design	<i>Babbie Ch. 4</i>
Wed. 5/28:	Research Design (Continued)	<i>Best, "Confusing Numbers"</i>
Thurs. 5/29:	Nuts and Bolts: Hypotheses/Intro to Data Tentative: May meet in CPU Lab, 006 Sparks	<i>Bem "Writing the Research Report"</i>
Friday 5/30:	MEET IN LIBRARY FOR WORKSHOP <i>104 Pattee (Gateway)</i> Homework 3 Due: Exercise 4.1	

WEEK 3: Measurement & Sampling

- Mon. 6/2: Measurement *Babbie, Ch 5.*
RA #1: Research Paper Topic and Hypotheses Due
- Tues. 6/3: Measurement and Sampling *Babbie, Ch. 7*
- Wed. 6/4: Nuts and Bolts: Writing A Lit. Review *Babbie, Ch. 15*
Handout Research Assignment 2
Homework 4 Due: Review Questions, p. 196
- Thurs. 6/5: Exam Review
- Fri. 6/6: **EXAM 1 TODAY**

WEEK 4: Survey Research

Mid Semester Reviews

- Mon. 6/9: Advanced Measurement:
Indexes, Scales, Typologies *Babbie Ch. 6*
- Tues. 6/10: Nuts and Bolts: Writing a Methods Section
Hand out Research Assignment 3
- Wed. 6/11: Survey Research *Babbie Ch. 9*
- Thurs. 6/12: Nuts and Bolts: Analyzing Quantitative Data *Babbie Ch. 13*
Hand Out Research Assignment 4
- Fri. 6/13: Analyzing Data Continued
Homework 5 Due: Survey Research Assignment

WEEK 5: Experiments and Qualitative Research

Mon. 6/16: **NO CLASS – FOR EXTRA CREDIT, ATTEND METHODS WORKSHOP**

Tues. 6/17: **ANALYZING YOUR DATA: MEET IN CPU LAB, 006 Sparks**
RA #3: First Draft of Methods Section Due
Hand out Research Assignment #4

Wed. 6/18: Elaboration and Control, Experiments *Babbie Ch. 8*

Thurs. 6/19: Experiments and Participant Observation *Pager: Mark of a Criminal Record*

Fri. 6/20: **VIDEO**

Research Assignment #4 Due

WEEK 6: Qualitative Research, Content Analysis, and Evaluation Research

Mon. 6/23: Qualitative Research

Babbie Ch. 10

Tues. 6/24: Qualitative Research and Content Analysis

Babbie Ch. 11

Schaller: Self-Consciousness & Fame

Wed. 6/25: Evaluation Research

Babbie Ch. 12

Thurs. 6/26: **NO CLASS-USE THIS DAY TO WORK ON YOUR PAPERS AND PRESENTATIONS.**

I will be available in my office all day to answer questions. Please stop by anytime.

Fri. 6/27: Final Presentations

FINAL RESEARCH PAPERS DUE TODAY!!

WEEK 7:

Mon. 6/30: **Final Exam: Time/Room TBA:**

GOOD LUCK, AND ENJOY THE REST OF THE SUMMER!