

Advanced Sociological Research Methods

Course Information

Advanced Sociological Research (SOC4306)

Fall 2016

Monday & Wednesday: 2:30pm-3:45pm

Class Location: [SLC 3.102](#)

Professor Contact Information

Zachary R. Simoni, PhD

Office location: GR 2.232

Office hours: Tuesday/Thursday 12:00 PM – 2:00 pm and by apt.

Telephone: 618-514-0924

E-mail: zrs160030@utdallas.edu

Course Description

This course is designed as an advanced course in sociological research methods. Advanced topics in research methods and data analysis are examined with an emphasis on project based learning. Smaller assignments will culminate into a complete research paper that incorporates theory, review of literature, data analysis and research findings. Both quantitative and qualitative projects will be accepted. Projects will focus on a range of topics including, but not limited to, education, race and ethnic relations, culture, the family, health care, and workplace diversity.

Student Learning Objectives/Outcomes

This course will introduce you to advanced sociological research methods used by the scientific community, and teach you to develop sociologically relevant research questions. You will learn to use theoretical perspectives in sociology and develop your own research project throughout the course of the semester. The methods you will learn are used by sociologists, social scientists in general, as well as medical researchers and other scientists.

Specific objectives include the following:

- design a research project
 - develop academic writing skills within the discipline of sociology
 - use theory to create a logical research project
 - garner an advanced understanding of quantitative and qualitative research methods
 - understand ethical issues when collecting sociological data
 - understand how research can lead to fascinating and impactful careers
-

Required Textbooks and Materials

1. Babbie, Earl. (2015) The practice of social research, 14th edition. Wadsworth Cengage Press.
 2. Additional materials will be provided on the Blackboard Learn Coursesite
-

Course Requirements

Your final grade will be based on:

2 Exams (50 pts. each)	100 points	Grade Scheme
5 Assignments	100 points	100-90% A
Project Presentation	25 points	89-80% B
Final Paper	100 points	79-70% C
		69-60% D
Total	325 points	59 and below F

Assignments

This class relies on project based learning to better understand advanced sociological research methods. Thus, students will develop their own research project based upon a topic of their choosing. There are five assignments due throughout the course in order to better develop these skills. Class time on each Wednesday will be allotted to help students make substantial progress towards these goals. Directions for each assignment are listed below:

Assignment 1: Introduction (10 points)

Quality research begins with a clear, concise and relevant research question. Hence, this assignment is intended to help you learn how to choose and develop a research topic. Therefore, this assignment is the first step in beginning your final paper. FOLLOW THE INSTRUCTIONS CAREFULLY. The assignment should be typed double spaced. Grammar and Spelling do count.

1. Choose a general topic of interest to you within the sociological discipline. Examples of broad topics of interest include marriage and family issues, health, gender discrimination, voting behavior, academic success, race/ethnic relations, etc. Once you have chosen a general topic, what do you want to explain? Your topic might be how SES promotes health, or why some people are more racially prejudiced. Briefly explain why this topic is important and worthy of study.
2. Generate three research questions related to the general topic specified in question 1. The following example should be helpful. Perhaps you had chosen health as your topic, with interest in explaining why some people have better health. How does socioeconomic status relate to health? How does socioeconomic status relate to mental health? All people? Women only? People in the United States? High school students? Only Whites, Blacks or both?
3. Lastly, describe what you expect to find. For quantitative papers, what do you think the direction of the relationship between your variables will be, why? For qualitative papers, what do you expect to hear or see from your participants?

Assignment 2: Theoretical Framework and Review of Literature (20 points)

Now that you decided upon a research question, it is time to investigate the sociological literature and describe what other scholars have found about your research question.

1. Begin by providing a theoretical framework that helps to explain or provides an explanation about your particular research question. Feel free to utilize classical sociological theory (Marx, Weber and Durkheim) or more modern theoretical perspectives, based upon your research question.
2. Next, give a thorough overview of the main research findings concerning your research question. In other words, what have other researchers found when researching your research question? Try to focus on recent articles from high impact journals (American Sociological Review, Journal of Health and Social Behavior, Journal of Sociology).
3. If you are doing a quantitative analysis try to stay as close to your hypotheses as possible. If you are conducting a qualitative paper, you are free to investigate literature more broadly considering an inductive approach.

Assignment 3: Methodology (30 points)

This is perhaps the most important part of any research paper so make sure to think carefully about this section. Provide as much detail as possible.

Quantitative Papers

1. Give a thorough description of each of your hypotheses clearly delineating independent and dependent variables. See below...
 - a. Hypothesis 1: Higher levels of perceived everyday discrimination is related to higher BMI among African Americans.
2. Describe your sample population. What kind of sampling procedure will you use? Will you use a convenience sample? How will you gather/recruit your participants? Provide as much information as possible here. *Most importantly*, explain why you think it is best to use this particular method!
3. Describe your variables and questionnaire used to operationalize your variables. Provide a clear description of how each question was worded and your questionnaire. See below. If you used scales, provide Cronbach's alpha as well as other findings from past research that has used that particular scale.
 - a. "Weight status will be assessed in two ways: (1) using a continuous measure of BMI defined as weight (kg)/height (m)² and (2) using a dichotomous measure of obesity defined as a BMI ≥ 30 ."
4. Next, describe your statistical analysis or analytic strategy. You will need to provide univariate, bivariate and multivariate statistics to properly answer your hypotheses so describe which techniques you will use and *most importantly*, why.

Qualitative Papers

1. Provide a thorough explanation of each of your research questions.
2. Describe your sample in as much depth as possible. See below. If you are using interviews, describe what techniques you will use to gather your sample. Will you be using structured or semi structured interview guides? If so, provide it here including a rationale for each interview question. What do you perceive to be some potential limitations gathering your sample? How long do you anticipate the data gathering process will take? Here is an example below.
 - a. "I contacted interviewees through snowball sampling from my diverse personal contacts; internet postings (e.g. craigslist); various clubs and events I attended (e.g. book clubs and social networking groups); and select community-based organizations and events. I tried to find individuals who were in a similar stage of the life cycle where they were coming to grips with issues of marriage, family, and career but used maximum

variation sampling (Lofland et al. 2006) to include wide-ranging perspectives of individuals from diverse backgrounds. In other words, I deliberately aimed to recruit a diverse sample of participants based on: 1) individual characteristics (e.g. gender, ethnicity, current income, birth order); 2) social background characteristics (e.g. family income and structure while growing up, racial/ethnic composition of friends, schooling, and organizational involvement); 3) and current relationship status (e.g. marital status, race of partner, sexual orientation, and with or without children).” –excerpt from (Chung 2013).

Assignment 4: Results (20)

Now that you have completed data collection, report your results in the most efficient way possible.

Quantitative Papers:

1. Provide tables in either word or excel that clearly articulate what you found. Display the most applicable statistical technique in order to show what you found. Include, univariate, bivariate and multivariate analysis. Use asterisks to highlight significant findings.
2. Make sure to describe your findings in the text of this section as well.

Qualitative Papers:

1. Describe themes that emerged through your data. Make sure to provide both depth, breadth and accuracy. Also, provide quotes to help lend support to your themes. How did you code your data?
2. Be as thorough as possible in this section. Remember, the power of qualitative research is the rich detail and study of data.

Assignment 5: Discussion and Conclusion (20 points)

Summarize your findings.

1. Reiterate your main hypotheses and describe what you found. Were the main hypotheses supported or rejected?
2. Next, tie in the literature from your lit review. Do your findings lend support to the literature or contradict key findings from past research?
3. Discuss limitations of your project. How was your study limited and what are some ways that future research can address your limitations.
4. Discuss potential implications of your findings. That is, what do your findings say about the importance of particular policy initiatives? Although you probably don't have a representable sample, extrapolate your findings to suggest key trends going forward. What do your findings mean in the big picture?

Exams

There are two exams for this course meant to assess grasp of important concepts and ideas related to research methods. They will be taken in class. Exam questions are based off of both the text and in class lectures. Scantrons will be provided to students for each exam. Make-up exams will not be given without documentation of a serious illness, death in the family, or required university-sponsored event. **IT IS YOUR RESPONSIBILITY** to make arrangements with me to schedule your make-up; don't wait for me to come to you. Do not be late for an exam. If you show up after the first person has already finished and left the room you will not be permitted to take the exam, and you will receive a 0. Please be on time so you have the entire class period to take the exam.

Project Presentation

Good researchers know how to convey their findings to both the lay public as well as an academic audience. Thus, students will be required to give a 15 minute presentation on their projects at the end of course. Directions are located below:

Final Paper

Because this course relies on project based learning, the primary assessment will focus on a well-developed research project testing or evaluating a research question of your choosing. Both qualitative and quantitative projects will be allowed. Each research project must have the following sections: Introduction, Review of Literature, Methods, Results and Discussion. Assignments due throughout the course will help students organize each section. The final paper should incorporate all sections into a cohesive paper. For instance, the introduction will discuss aspects of the literature review as well as the methods sections.

Course & Instructor Policies

Participation and Attendance

Students are expected to attend class lectures, participate in class discussions and exercises and read required material. It is important that you actively engage in the class. You need to do more than just show up. Arriving late and leaving early is not acceptable. If a student is consistently late, I reserve the right to ask that student to leave. Attendance will be recorded.

Late Assignments

A one grade deduction will be made for each day an assignment is late. In the cases of a prolonged illness or emergencies, other arrangements will be made. It is important to communicate with me in this case.

Accommodation of Religious Beliefs:

Religious beliefs shall be reasonably accommodated with respect to all examinations and other academic requirements. Please notify me in advance if there is a conflict.

Reasonable Accommodations:

It is the policy and practice of The University of Texas at Dallas to make reasonable accommodations for students with properly documented disabilities. However, written notification from the Office of Student AccessAbility (OSA) is required. If you are eligible to receive an accommodation and would like to request it for this course, please discuss it with me and allow one week advance notice. Students who have questions about receiving accommodations, or those who have, or think they may have, a disability (mobility, sensory, health, psychological, learning, etc.) are invited to contact OSA for a confidential discussion. OSA is located in the Student Services Building, SSB 3.200. They can be reached by phone at 972-883-2098, or by email at studentaccess@utdallas.edu.

Make-up Policy:

Because of the online nature of this course, only in extreme cases will make-ups be provided. REMEMBER, not all quizzes and discussions are used to calculate final grades.

Academic Honest Policy:

Faculty expect all members of its academic community to function according to the highest ethical and professional standards. Academic dishonesty and misconduct includes, but is not limited to, acts of abetting, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication, and misrepresentation. Candidates are expected to honor the Academic Code of Conduct as detailed UT Dallas Student Catalog 2015-2016. Please consult this resource for additional information regarding the specific procedures to be undertaken when a student violates the UT Student Code of Conduct - UTDSP5003.

<https://policy.utdallas.edu/utdsp5003>

Let me make it clear: if you cheat or plagiarize you will fail the course and your name will be forwarded to the University Compliance Office. Please don't do it.

Etiquette:

Respect fellow students and myself. Topics in this class may become sensitive and someone (including myself) may say something with which you disagree. Critical discussion is encouraged, but respect differences of theoretical perspective.

Reservation:

I reserve the right to make changes in this syllabus to better serve the class's needs. Any changes will be announced in advance.

Classroom Etiquette

I expect a level of dignity and respect for your fellow classmates and myself. While I will allow the use of computers for note-taking, I will not tolerate distractions from technology in class. Please do not make incoming or outgoing phone calls, text messaging, surf the web, gaming, or instant messaging during class. If you are expecting an important phone call (e.g., from a child care provider or a job interview), you must inform me of this before class, set your phone to vibrate, and sit near a door so that you can leave immediately if you receive a call. I have the right to deny the use of cell phones, pagers, and any other communication devices during class. Moreover, as a result of advances in technology such as text messaging, any use of cell phones during exams or minor/group assignments will be considered academic misconduct and may result in an "F" for the quiz/exam or an "F" in the course.

The descriptions and timelines contained in this syllabus are subject to change at the discretion of the Professor.

Course Calendar

*syllabus is subject to change at professor's discretion

Week 1

Topics: Course Introduction, The nature and process of social research, Qualitative vs. Quantitative Research

Readings: Babbie Chapter 1

Week 2

Topics: Planning a research project and formulating research questions; Reviewing the literature

Readings: Babbie Chapter 2

Week 3

Topics: Research Design; Reviewing the literature cont.

Readings: Babbie Chapter 4

Week 4

Topics: Conceptualization, Operationalization and Measurement

Readings: Babbie 5

Due: Assignment 1: Research Question due Wednesday

Week 5

Topics: Indexes and Scales

Readings: Babbie Chapter 6

Week 6

Topics: Sampling in Quantitative and Qualitative Research

Readings: Babbie 7, Coyne reading (see BBL course site)

Due: Assignment 2 Due: Review of Literature due Wednesday

Week 7

Topics: Self-administered Questionnaires; Using existing data; Online Questionnaires

Readings: Babbie Chapter 9

Due: Exam 1 in class on Wednesday

Week 8

Topics: Interviewing in Qualitative Research

Readings: Babbie Chapter 10, Corbin and Strauss reading (see BBL course site)

Week 9

Topics: Qualitative Data Analysis, Coding, Constant Comparison, Emerging Themes, Individual Project Help

Readings: Babbie Chapter 13

Week 10

Topics: Quantitative Data Analysis, Descriptive and Bivariate analysis

Readings: Babbie Chapter 14

Due: Assignment 3 Due: Analytic Strategy due Wednesday

Week 11

Topics: The Logic of Multivariate Analysis, Mediation and Moderation, Individual Project Help

Readings: Babbie Chapter 15

Week 12

Topics: Review of Stata and NVivo Individual Project Help (In lab)

Readings: Additional readings for stata and NVIVO (see BBL course site)

Week 13

Topics: Individual Project Help (in Lab)

Readings: Additional readings for stata and NVIVO (see BBL course site)

Due: Assignment 4 due: Data analysis

Week 14

No Class

Week 15

Final Presentations

Week 16

Final Exam, Papers due