This is a general course on the design and practice of social research. The course has three aims. 1) to equip students to formulate interesting research questions and to design theoretically grounded approaches to collecting and analyzing evidence to answer those questions, and 2) to gain literacy in the variety of sociological methods, regardless of whether s/he intends to use them, so as to be able to evaluate arguments and evidence across the discipline, and 3) to write a specific and realistic proposal for the MA thesis (or a subsequent research project if the student already has an MA degree).

The course begins with a brief overview of epistemological positions in social science: that is, what kinds of questions are worth answering, and how can they be answered? Next, we will survey the most common research methods applied in sociology: experiments, surveys, ethnography, interviewing, and comparative research approaches. In reading exemplars for each class of method, we will consider researchers’ epistemological stances, and their approaches to theory, measurement, analysis, and argument.

Readings
Students are expected to come to class meetings having completed the reading and prepared reactions to them to share with the class. The following books are required reading and should be purchased or borrowed. All other readings will be posted online through the D2L system or handed out in class.

Note: The Bradburn book will be needed the third week of class, so please order asap. Others will be the sixth week or later.


ASSIGNMENTS AND ASSESSMENT

There are three basic requirements: reading and active participation in class; completion of several research and writing assignments, and completion of a semester-end research proposal.

Class attendance and participation comprise 10% of the grade. I expect students to come to class having prepared comments and questions on the readings. You cannot receive higher than a B in the course if you do not actively and regularly participate in class discussions. You should also complete human subjects certification early in the semester (details to be given in class).

Research and Writing Assignments: There will be several assignments due throughout the semester, worth 60% of final grade. Detailed guidelines will be handed out at the appropriate time.

Research proposal: A final research proposal will be worth 20% of the grade. The proposal should emphasize research design. Students are strongly encouraged to make appointments with the professor at least twice during the semester to discuss their proposals.

Please turn your work in on time. Incompletes and extensions will only be given in case of serious family or medical emergency. Writing assignments should be turned in to D2L dropboxes as .pdf documents.

Due Dates: assignments are due by 6pm on the date they are assigned.

- January 23 (Monday): Human subjects certification due (5% of final grade)
- January 30 (Monday): Research question exercise due (5% of final grade)
- February 27 (Monday): Pilot survey project due (20% of final grade)
- March 30 (Friday): Pilot ethnography project due (20% of final grade)
- April 23 (Monday): Pilot in-depth project due (20% of final grade)
- May 7 (Monday): Research proposal due (20% of final grade)
WEEK 1: INTRODUCTION

January 17: Logic of Social Inquiry

January 19: Causal Reasoning
Durkheim, Emile. Suicide. Book I Ch 1; Book 2 Ch 2.

WEEK 2: EXPERIMENTS & CAUSAL VALIDITY

January 24: Laboratory experiments

January 26: Non-laboratory experiments
WEEKS 3-5: SURVEY RESEARCH

January 31. Total survey design paradigm

February 2. Surveys, cognition, and interaction

February 7. Measuring events/behavior

February 9. Measuring attitudes/subjective states


February 16. Questionnaire workshop (in-class).
WEEKS 6-8. ETHNOGRAPHY

February 21. Ethnography Example
Whyte, William. Street Corner Society. Ch 1-3, conclusion.

February 23. Ethnographic paradigm

February 28. Field entry and role

March 1. Taking fieldnotes

March 8. Ethnography proposal workshop

March 10. Data Analysis

WEEKS 9-10. QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWING

March 20: Qualitative validity/epistemology
March 22. Introduction to Interviewing  
Weiss. Learning from Strangers. Chapters 1-3.

March 27 NO CLASS (Instructor out of town)

March 29 NO CLASS (Instructor out of town)

April 3. Conducting In-Depth Interviews  
Mishler, Elliot G. Research Interviewing: Context and Narrative. Cambridge, MA:  
Harvard University Press, pp 1-7, 67-116  
Weiss. Learning from Strangers Chapters 4-6.

April 5. Example of in-depth interview study  
Lamont. Money, Morals, and Manners. Entire

April 10. Analyzing interview data (with software demo)  
Weiss. Learning from Strangers Chapters 6-7, appendices C & E.

WEEKS 11-12: COMPARATIVE METHODS

April 12. Comparative Logic  
Charles Ragin. TBA.  

April 17. Comparing Cases  
Biesel, Nicola. Class, Culture, and Campaigns against Vice in Three American Cities, 1872-1892.

April 19. Comparing over time: Process-tracing  
WEEKS 14-15: PRESENTING RESEARCH

April 24. Scientific Writing
Becker. 1989. Writing for Social Scientists. Chapters 1-5, 7-8

April 26. Style

May 1. Visual Rhetoric
Selections from Edward Tufte: The Visual Display of Quantitative Information and “Powerpoint is Evil” (to be distributed in class).