

**Social Research Methods**  
**Sociology 920:501<sup>1</sup>**  
**Fall 2012**  
**T 1:10-3:50**  
(Draft: August 27, 2012)

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This course aims to impart a critical perspective of, and an empirical familiarity with, the range of methods available to sociological researchers. We will examine three, broadly defined, methodological approaches to doing sociology: survey and experimental designs; ethnography and qualitative interviews; and historical and comparative studies. These three broad methodological approaches correspond to three distinct conceptualizations of social life and of the science dedicated to studying it. Yet even as you get your hands dirty trying to figure out the specifics of each method, you should keep in mind that no single approach can adequately account for the richness and complexity of human interaction and social structures. To overcome the reductionism inherent in one method, it is always advisable to reach out for a novel take on the issue at hand. The ultimate goal of this course is to instill in you the desire, as a matter of principle and conviction, to push past the conventional boundaries among the main sociological methods. We will encourage you to appreciate the potential and limits of each method through required readings and exercises and by having you design and execute your own mixed methods research project as your final paper.

***Learning Goals:***

By the end of this course, students will be able to: (1) demonstrate hands-on familiarity with a variety of social research methods; (2) communicate effectively, both orally and in writing, about the advantages and limitations of the major approaches to sociological research; (3) draw upon multiple methods to independently design and execute a research project; and (4) critically assess the empirical rigor of research claims in a wide spectrum of sociological subfields and peer-reviewed publications.

**COURSE LOGISTICS**

***Attendance and Participation:***

To put it bluntly, the norm for graduate courses is: thou shalt not miss class! You must have an excellent reason to miss a session and, unless not humanly possible, you are expected to let us know well ahead of time if you cannot make it. Moreover, you are

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<sup>1</sup> This syllabus builds on the Fall 2011 syllabus by Joanna Kempner and Patricia Roos as well as our syllabus of Fall 2010. We thank Joanna Kempner for her input.

expected to come to class fully prepared to analyze, discuss, and debate the issues raised in the assigned readings. We intend to conduct much of this class as a seminar, and its success depends on active engagement and exchange.

***Course Readings:***

We will upload many of the readings on Sakai, but you should buy hard copies of the following texts, available at the Douglass bookstore and via the usual online book vendors:

- Abbott, Andrew. 2004. *Methods of Discovery: Heuristics for the Social Sciences*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Charmaz, Kathy. 2006. *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis*. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Duneier, Mitchell. 1999. *Sidewalk*. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux.
- Miller, Jane E. 2005. *Writing About Multivariate Analysis*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

If you want a “methods textbook” that provides an overview of various sociological methods, we particularly recommend Russell Schutt’s. You’re not required to buy it, but you can get this or earlier editions fairly easily:

Schutt, Russell K. 2009. *Investigating the Social World: The Process and Practice of Research*. 6<sup>th</sup> edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press.

The syllabus will specify additional required readings each week (available through Sakai, see “Weekly Readings,” or “Articles” by author’s last name). We provide two other types of supplementary readings, also available on Sakai: (1) articles/chapters that illustrate the method under discussion (see the syllabus weekly for “Sample Articles”), and (2) other articles written by our very own faculty that further illustrate the variable, dynamic, and creative ways in which methods are actually used in sociological inquiry (see “Sociology Faculty Articles” on Sakai).

***Course Requirements:***

- Each student is required to facilitate discussion of at least one article over the course of the semester. We will distribute a sign-up sheet on the first day of class. On the day you facilitate, come prepared with several questions to facilitate conversation for about 20-30 minutes of class. We encourage you to talk with us about your questions. Your questions should engage with at least some of the bulleted topics for that week. Articles to be facilitated are denoted by an asterisk (\*) in weekly readings. (10 percent of final grade)

- One in-class analytic review and five assignments meant to conceptually and empirically deepen your comprehension of the course material and develop your analytic writing abilities. *If you think ahead, you can use several of these assignments to explore topics and conduct analyses for your final paper.* The five assignments should be circulated to the entire class on Sakai no later than 12 noon *the day before the class in which they are due* (to submit, use the “Discussion-Assignment Submission” section of Sakai). (40 percent).
- Final Paper. We expect a 15-20 page final paper on a mixed methods research project. For your final paper, you must use at least two of the three broad social science research methods we discuss in the course (survey/experimental; ethnographic/interview; comparative/historical). The paper is due December 17<sup>th</sup>. (50 percent)

As part of the Final Paper requirement, you must submit *two drafts of your final paper proposal*. The first draft is due November 13<sup>th</sup>, the second December 4<sup>th</sup>. Both proposals should be submitted to Sakai no later than 12 noon the day before class. The first proposal should be approximately 2 pages long, and describe your thesis, research questions, and the methods you will use (include 3-5 references). The second proposal should build on the first, be 3-5 pages long, and outline your thesis, research questions, data, methods, literature, and 5-7 references.

Note: Please talk with us about your proposed final project prior to the proposal due dates. We will hold extra office hours as needed. You are required to make an appointment with each of us to formally talk about your final paper (with a draft of your proposal in hand).

In-class presentation of your final paper, on December 11<sup>th</sup>. Plan for a 7-10 minute PowerPoint presentation, followed by a 5-minute Q&A session.

### ***Summary of Due Dates***

*(note these are class due dates; except for the 9/18 IRB certification and the 12/17 final papers, all class assignments must be uploaded to Sakai by 12 noon the previous day):*

September 11<sup>th</sup> (week 2): In-class Analytic Review  
 September 18<sup>th</sup> (week 3): Deadline for getting IRB certified  
 September 25<sup>th</sup> (week 4): Assignment 1  
 October 2<sup>nd</sup> (week 5): Assignment 2  
 October 23<sup>rd</sup> (week 8): Assignment 3  
 October 30<sup>th</sup> (week 9): Assignment 4  
 November 13<sup>th</sup> (week 11): 1<sup>st</sup> draft of proposal  
 November 27<sup>th</sup> (week 12): Assignment 5  
 December 4<sup>th</sup> (week 13): 2<sup>nd</sup> draft of proposal  
 December 11<sup>th</sup> (week 14): In-class Power-point presentations  
 December 17<sup>th</sup>: Final paper

## COURSE SCHEDULE\*

\*This schedule is subject to change. We will announce any necessary changes well in advance during class and on the Sakai course website.

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### Week 1 (September 4<sup>th</sup>)

#### Introduction to Social Science Inquiry

- Explanation in social science research
- Basic theoretical debates and methodological practices
- Methodological Rock-Paper-Scissors game
- IRB certification

#### READING:

- Abbott, *Methods of Discovery*, Ch. 1 and 2

#### ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT CLASS:

- In-class Analytic Review

### Week 2 (September 11<sup>th</sup>)

#### The Basics of Social Research

- Discussion of In-class Analytic Review
- Selecting and formulating a research problem
- Main steps for conducting research
- Attributes and variables
- Units of analysis
- Levels of measurement
- Association vs. causality
- Ecological fallacy
- Conceptualization and operationalization

#### READINGS:

- \*Miller, Alan, S., and Rodney Stark. 2002. "Gender and Religiousness: Can Socialization Explanations Be Saved?" *American Journal of Sociology* 107: 1399-1423.
- Miller, Chs. 1-2

#### Recommended Background Reading (skim as needed):

- Schutt, Chs. 2, 4
- Schutt, Ch. 6 (pp. 190-202)

#### ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT CLASS:

- IRB Certification
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**Week 3  
(September 18<sup>th</sup>)**

**The Logic of Causation**

- Cause and effect
- Elaboration Paradigm
- Bivariate and trivariate tables
- Statistical interaction and 3D tables
- Descriptive analysis: Crosstabulation
- Chi square analysis

READINGS:

- Babbie, Earl. "The Elaboration Model." Ch. 15 in the *Practice of Social Research*. 10<sup>th</sup> edition.
- Babbie, Earl, "Notes on Percentaging Tables"
- Miller, Chs. 3-4

Recommended Background Reading (skim as needed):

- Schutt, Ch. 6 (pp. 202-20); Ch. 14 (pp. 514-534)

ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT CLASS:

- Ass. #1: Bivariate tables (hypothesizing relationships)

**Week 4  
(September 25<sup>th</sup>)**

**Experimental and Quasi-Experimental Designs**

- Classic experimental design
- Control groups
- Internal and external validity
- Solomon 4-group design
- Quasi-experimental designs

READING:

- \*Pager, Devah. 2003. "The Mark of a Criminal Record." *American Journal of Sociology* 108:937-75.

Recommended Background Reading (skim as needed):

- Schutt, Ch. 7

SAMPLE ARTICLES:

- Correll, Shelley J., Stephen Benard, and In Paik. 2007. "Getting a Job: Is There a Motherhood Penalty." *American Journal of Sociology* 112:1297-1338.
  - Pager, Devah, Bruce Western, and Bart Bonikowski. 2009. "Discrimination in a Low-Wage Labor Market: A Field Experiment." *American Sociological Review* 74:777-99.
  - Rudman, Laurie A., Richard D. Ashmore, and Melvin L. Gary. 2001. "'Unlearning' Automatic Biases: The Malleability of Implicit Prejudice and Stereotypes."
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ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT CLASS:

- Ass. #2: Trivariate tables (testing hypotheses using elaboration paradigm)

**Week 5**  
(October 2<sup>nd</sup>)

**Sampling and Survey Design**

- Descriptive vs. inferential statistics
- Sampling theory/standard error
- Sampling designs
- Survey and questionnaire design
- Reliability/validity

READINGS:

- \*Carr, Deborah. 2004. "My Daughter Has a Career; I Just Raised Babies": The Psychological Consequences of Women's Intergenerational Social Comparisons." *Social Psychology Quarterly* 67:132-54.

Recommended Background Reading (skim as needed):

- Schutt, Ch. 5; Ch. 8
- Schutt, Ch. 13

**Week 6**  
(October 9<sup>th</sup>)

**Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches to Research**

- Reading, Appreciating, and Critiquing Quantitative Research
- Distinctions between Qualitative and Quantitative Research
- The Relationship Between Theory and Research
- Establishing Credibility

READINGS:

- \*Gorman, Elizabeth H. 2009. "Hierarchical Rank and Women's Organizational Mobility: Glass Ceilings in Corporate Law Firms." *American Journal of Sociology* 114:1428-74.
  - \*Schneider, Daniel. 2011. "Wealth and the Marital Divide." *American Journal of Sociology* 117:726-67.
  - \*Small, Mario Luis. 2009. "How Many Cases Do I Need?: On Science and the Logic of Case Selection in Field Based Research." *Ethnography*. 10: 5-38.
  - \*National Science Foundation. 2004. *Workshop on Scientific Foundations of Qualitative Research*. Report
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prepared by: Charles C. Ragin, Joane Nagel, Patricia White, for the National Science Foundation: Sociology Program; Methodology, Measurement & Statistics Program; Directorate for Social, Behavioral & Economic Sciences.

Read:

- General Guidance for Conducting Qualitative Research
- The Distinctive Contributions of Qualitative Research, by James Mahoney
- A Note on Science and Qualitative Research, by Sudhir Venkatesh

**Week 7  
(October 16<sup>th</sup>)**

**Ethnography**

\*\*\*NOTE TIME CHANGE: 9:50-12:30\*\*\*

- Why Ethnography?
- Mechanics of Fieldwork: Observing and Writing
- Ethics and IRB

READING:

- Duneier, Mitchell. 1999. *Sidewalk*. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux.

ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT CLASS

- Ass. #3: Fieldnotes (Report and fieldnotes from ethnographic observation)

**Week 8  
(October 23<sup>rd</sup>)**

**Qualitative Interviews**

**Guest speaker: Janet Lorenzen**

- Creating an Interview Protocol
- Interviewing techniques and etiquette
- Theoretical Sampling

READINGS:

- Charmaz, Chs. 1 and 2.
  - Weiss, Robert, S. 1994. *Learning from Strangers: The Art and Method Of Qualitative Interview Studies*. Free Press: chapter 4 (and skim chapters 1 and 2).
  - \*Roos, Patricia A., Mary K. Trigg, and Mary S. Hartman. 2006. "Changing Families/Changing Communities: Work, Family and Community in Transition." *Community, Work and Family* 9:197-24. (Go over interview protocol and paper.)
  - \*Daipha, Phaedra. "Whose Weather Is It Anyway?" (Go
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over interview protocol and paper.)

**SAMPLE ARTICLES:**

- Edin, Kathryn, Laura Lein. 1997. Work, Welfare and Single Mother's Survival Strategies. *American Sociological Review*. 62: 253-266.
- Kempner, Joanna, Jon F. Merz, and Charles L. Bosk. 2011. "Forbidden Knowledge: Controversy as a Form of Social Control in the Production of Nonknowledge." *Sociological Forum* .26: 475-500

**ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT CLASS:**

- Ass. #4: Interview (Report and partial transcript from qualitative interview)

**Week 9  
(October 30<sup>th</sup>)**

**Coding and Analyzing Qualitative Data**

- Manually? Qualitative data analysis software?
- Open coding, selecting themes, focused coding
- Practice with your fieldnotes/interview transcripts

**READING:**

- Charmaz, Chs. 3 and 4 (skim 5 and 6).

Recommended Background Reading (skim as needed):

- Emerson, Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes, chapter 6

**Week 10  
(November 6<sup>th</sup>)**

**Comparative/Historical Methods**

**Guest speakers: Catherine Lee and Paul McLean**

- Doing archival research
- Tracing social change over time
- Theorizing past events
- Denaturalizing categories
- Comparing across time and place
- Small N- and large N-analysis
- The negative case and counterfactual analysis

**READINGS:**

- Lee, Catherine. 2010. "Where the Danger Lies: Race, Gender, and Chinese and Japanese Exclusion in the United States, 1870-1924." *Sociological Forum* 25: 248-71.
  - McLean, Paul. 2005. "Patronage, Citizenship, and the Stalled Emergence of the Modern State in Renaissance Florence." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 47:
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638-64.

Recommended Background Reading (skim as needed):

- Hill, *Archival Strategies and Techniques*, chapters 1-6
- Scott, John. 1990. *A Matter of Record: Documentary Sources in Social Research*.
- Craig Calhoun. 1998. "Explanation in Historical Sociology: Narrative, General Theory, and Historically Specific Theory." *American Journal of Sociology* 104: 846-71.
- Clemens, Elisabeth S. 2007. "Toward a Historicized Sociology: Theorizing Events, Processes, and Emergence." *Annual Review of Sociology* 33:527-49.
- Charles Ragin. 1987. *The Comparative Method: Moving Beyond Qualitative and Quantitative Strategies*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, Chapters 1-4.

ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT CLASS;

- 1<sup>st</sup> draft of proposal due

**Week 11  
(November 13<sup>th</sup>)**

**Putting It All Together**

- Proposal discussion
- Defining mixed methods

READINGS:

- Abbott, *Methods of Discovery*, chapters 6 and 7 (skim chapters 3-5)
- \*Small, Mario. 2011. "How to Conduct a Mixed Methods Study: Recent Trends in a Rapidly Growing Literature." *Annual Review of Sociology* 37:57-86.

SAMPLE ARTICLES:

- Roth, Wendy and Jal D. Mehta. 2002. "The Rashomon Effect: Combining Positivist and Interpretivist Approaches of Contested Events." *Sociological Methods and Research* 31: 131-73.
  - Quinlan, Elizabeth, and Andrea Quinlan. 2010. "Representations of Rape: Transcending Methodological Divides." *Journal of Mixed Methods Research* 4:127-43.
  - Alise, Mark, A., and Charles Teddlie. 2010. "A Continuation of the Paradigm Wars? Prevalence Rates of Methodological Approaches Across the Social/Behavioral Sciences." *Journal of Mixed Methods Research* 4: 103-26.
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ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT CLASS:

- Ass. #5: Archival Research

—HAPPY THANKSGIVING!—

**NO CLASS**  
(November 20<sup>th</sup>)

**Week 12**  
(November 27<sup>th</sup>)

**Formal Methods: Social Network Analysis**  
**Guest speaker: Neha Gondal**

- Overview of formal methods in sociology
- Pattern analysis
- Relational sociology
- Social Networks: theory and methods

READINGS:

- \*Mische, Ann. 2011. "Relational Sociology, Culture, and Agency." Sage Handbook of Social Network Analysis.
- \*Bearman, Peter S., James Moody, and Katherine Stovel. 2004. "Chains of Affection: The Structure of Adolescent Romantic and Sexual Networks." *American Journal of Sociology* 110: 44-91

ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT CLASS:

- 2<sup>nd</sup> draft of proposal due

**Week 13**  
(December 4<sup>th</sup>)

**Writing Up**

- Presenting and writing up results
- Questions regarding final papers

READINGS:

- Miller, Chs. 2, 5 (pp. 81-97), 11, and 12 (and skim chapter 6).
- Charmaz, Ch. 7.
- Emerson, *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*, chapter 7

ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT CLASS;

- In-class power point presentations

**Week 14**  
(December 11<sup>th</sup>)

**Paper Presentations**

**December 17<sup>th</sup>**

—FINAL PAPERS DUE—

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## MISCELLANEOUS

### *IRB certification:*

Each of you is required to complete the IRB certification no later than week 3. We will go over the logistics prior to this. For further details on how to complete the certification see:

<http://orsp.rutgers.edu/Humans/default.php#general> (General description of Rutgers rule on IRB compliance)

<http://orsp.rutgers.edu/index.php?q=content/human-subjects-certification-program> (Human subjects certification; you will link to and complete the online exam).

### *Choosing data sets:*

#### ➤ SURVEY DATA

- [General Social Survey \(GSS\)](#). You will use the GSS to do various assignments for this course, and (if you so choose) for your final paper. The [GSS data and codebook](#) are available online. These are cross-sectional samples of the U.S. population from 1972 to 2010 (the data are available yearly in the early years, every other year later on). You'll probably want to focus on one year (e.g., 2010), but feel free to use multiple years as you move into your final project. Talk with us if you have a dataset you'd prefer to use other than the GSS. For example, there are other online datasets you can choose, such as the ones listed immediately below, or you may have access to your own data.
- [World Values Survey](#). This online database focuses on political and sociocultural change across countries. It has four waves, 1990, 1995, 2000, and 2005 (a 2010 survey is forthcoming). Excellent for those interested in comparative analysis.
- <http://sda.berkeley.edu/archive.htm>. This site includes several surveys, in the same easy-to-use format as the GSS: American National Election Study, IPUMS (Integrated Public Use Microdata Series), American Community Survey 2006-08 (Census Microdata for US), as well as a few others

#### ➤ HISTORICAL DATA:

- Rutgers Special Collections and University Archives  
<http://www.libraries.rutgers.edu/rul/libs/scua/scua.shtml>
- National Library of Congress online manuscripts <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/>
- Penn's online archives  
<http://dewey.library.upenn.edu/sceti/flash.cfm?CFID=2022796&CFTOKEN=14695275>
- New York Public Library online images:  
<http://digitalgallery.nypl.org/nypldigital/>
- Jack Lynch's (RU English professor) page on 18<sup>th</sup> century history  
<http://andromeda.rutgers.edu/~jlynch/18th/history.html>

- Resources listed by ASA comparative-historical section  
<http://www2.asanet.org/sectionchs/research.html#databases>

***Research, Thinking, and Writing: [articles available on Sakai]***

- Alford, Robert T. 1998. *The Craft of Inquiry: Theories, Methods, Evidence*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- American Sociological Association, "Writing an Informative Abstract"
- American Sociological Association, "Publishing Option: An Author's Guide to Journals, May 20, 2009.
- Becker, Howard S. 1998. *Tricks of the Trade: How to Think About Your Research While You're Doing It*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Becker, Howard S. 1986. *Writing for Social Scientists: How to Start and Finish Your Thesis, Book, or Article*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Clarke, Lee. "Notes on Proposing" and "On Writing and Criticism"
- Germano, William. 2005. "Passive is Spoken Here." *Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 22, 2005.
- Jasper, James. "Why So Many Academics are Lousy Writers"
- Miller, Jane E. 2005. *The Chicago Guide to Writing About Multivariate Analysis*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Peters, Mark. "Like a Bowl in a China Shop." *Chronicle of Higher Education*, August 9, 2006.
- Rockquemore, Kerry Ann. 2010. "Writing IS Thinking." *Inside Higher Education*, July 19. [ <http://www.insidehighered.com/advice/summer/summer6>, retrieved July 21, 2010]
- Rosenfield, Sarah. "Some Things to Think About While Reading Papers"
- Stein, Arlene. 2009. "Discipline and Publish: Public Sociology in an Age of Professionalization." Pp. 156-71 in *Bureaucratic Culture and Escalating Problems: Advancing the Sociological Imagination* (edited by David Knottnerus and Bernard Phillips). Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers.
- Strunk, William Jr., and E.B. White. 2000. *The Elements of Style*. Fourth Edition. New York: Allyn & Bacon.
- And, for some humor: "How to Write Good"

More examples of good methods, from Scatterplot:

<http://scatter.wordpress.com/2011/08/28/a-beautiful-method/>