

Sociology 355: Social Research I
Fall 1998, Tuesday and Thursday, 2:30 to 3:45

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COURSE DESCRIPTION AND GOALS

Social research is the collection of information to learn about the social world. We conduct research to (1) understand ourselves and our world better and (2) to control our world -- to prevent problems (for example, riots) and to promote life (for example, to find cures for diseases like AIDS). Yet, science is peculiar in that data are collected to test "guesses" to investigate theories. How can we learn anything about the world when all we do is make educated guesses?

Moreover, social research is concerned with the manner in which one collects and analyzes data. Like an attorney arguing a case, scientists must collect and analyze data in such a way so as to remove "reasonable doubt" about one's findings so that they can say they have a credible theory. Thus, in this course, we will learn how to gather facts to make a good case for theories that help us to explain ourselves and our social world.

In short, whether you become a social scientist, the skills you can learn in this course will assist you in literally any career. You will learn how to critique others' claims and arguments. Just as important, you will be able to produce a credible argument or plan to persuade others that they should adopt your idea, buy your product, or follow your lead.

This course and semester will be divided into three main sections.

I. The Nature of Social Research

- A. How people understand life everyday, and how science protects us from errors in judgment and perception.
- B. Why we conduct research, and the need for theory and the collection of facts.
- C. How to conduct a research project, translating an idea (and theory) into action.

II. Methods for Collecting "Facts"

- A. How to select samples, and how to estimate the sampling error in probability samples.
- B. How people like Emory faculty apply research designs in the "real world."
- C. How to conduct surveys, experiments, field research, and unobtrusive research.

III. Analyzing the "Facts" to make some Claims

- A. Basic methods for analyzing data, including an introduction to elementary statistics.
- B. An elementary knowledge of SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). This is a major computer program used in the social sciences for analyzing data.
- C. How to apply the above materials to answer research questions that are of interest to you and to evaluate the answers produced by others.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

<u>Grading Scale</u>		
93 > %	A	80-82% B- 60-69% D
90-92%	A-	78-79% C+ 0-59% F
88-89%	B+	73-77% C
83-87%	B	70-72% C-

1. **Assignments = 60% of final grade.** You will complete assignments almost every week. The assignment require you to apply reading and lecture materials, and the assignments are progressive, building toward the completion of your own research project. You will work alone as well as with classmates who share your “research topic” interests.

Assignment grading policy: Assignments will be turned in at the beginning of day of class they are due. One point will be deducted for handing in the assignment after class and an additional point will be deducted each day that an assignment is late (unless evidence of a medical problem or other emergency is provided).

2. **Three Exams = 40% of final grade.** The course is divided into 3 sections, and each exam covers material from its respective section. Exams consist of multiple choice, true/false, and a question or two that involves the application of knowledge to a real world problem.

Examination and Make-Up Policy: First, the *Emory College Honor Code* is activated during all examinations. Science is governed by ethics and trust, and this is especially the case when you enter the classroom on the day of an exam. Second, if you are unable to take an exam at the scheduled time, you must arrange to take a make-up exam prior to the day of the exam. Make-up exams are allowed only when a student provides documented evidence of an illness or family emergency (by “documentation” I mean that you must arrange to have the doctor call me or to have a letter delivered to me before the exam).

Required Textbook: Neuman, W. Lawrence. *Social Research Methods*. (3rd edition) Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1997.

I may occasionally assign an article or outside reading, which I will announce in class and place on reserve so that you can make a copy (usually reserved in Sociology Department Office).

Course Outline and Tentative Schedule (Test Dates are Firm)

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| Aug. 27 | Introduction to the each other and the course. |
| Sep. 1 | What is social research, why do we do it, and what do we accomplish?
<u>Reading:</u> Neuman, Ch.1
<u>Assignment:</u> Photocopy Student ID |
| Sep. 3 | Collecting data about people and their lives: What are the major methods and where do we draw the line of privacy and scientific interest?
<u>Reading:</u> Neuman, Ch.2 |

Film: The Stanford Prison Experiment

Assignment: Analysis of a Position Statement

Optional: Introductory session on using Windows and Netscape (Room and time to be announced).

- Sep. 8 Theory: What is it, why do we need it, how do scientists build it?
Reading: Neuman, Ch. 3
Assignment: Making a “Case”
- Sep. 10 Theory: Major theoretical perspectives, and how theory guides action (research) through Hypotheses, Constructs, and Statements of cause-effect and association.
In-class: Finish last part of Assignment (Making a “Case”)
In-class: Creating different hypotheses from the theoretical perspectives.
Reading: Neuman, Ch. 6 (pp. 106-123)
- Sep. 15 Searching, reviewing and synthesizing a “literature”: An example from Dr. Keyes’ research on Subjective Change.
Reading: Neuman, Ch. 5.
Assignment: A Brief Literature Review
- Sep. 17 Conceptualization and Operationalization
Reading: Neuman, Ch. 7 (pp. 131-150)
- Sep. 22 Measurement
Assignment: Operationalizing a Theoretical Notion.
- Sep. 24 Finish measurement and illustrate validity through problems called “response effects.”
- Sep. 29 **EXAMINATION 1**
- Oct. 1 Sampling: Who and what do we want to describe? How can we insure representativeness, and why do scientists seem to “gamble“ (relying on chance)?
Reading: Neuman, Ch. 9
- Oct. 6 Sampling (Continued)
Assignment: Select a Sample
- Oct. 8 Qualitative research (Field and Case Studies): What is it, why use it, how, and strengths and weaknesses?
Readings: Neuman, Ch. 13 (pp. 331-335)
Readings: Neuman, Ch. 14
- Oct. 13 **Fall Break**
- Oct. 15 Possible Guest Presentations on Qualitative Research (To be announced)

Assignment: Operationalize and Measure Your Research Idea in the Field

- Oct. 20 Survey research: What is it, why use it, how, and strengths and weaknesses?
Readings: Neuman, Ch. 10
- Oct. 22 Possible Guest Presentations on Survey-type research (To be announced).
- Oct. 27 Experiments: What is it, why use it, how, and strengths and weaknesses?
Readings: Neuman, Ch. 8.
- Oct. 29 Possible Guest Presentations on Experimental Research (To be announced)
- Nov. 3 **EXAMINATION 2**
- Nov. 5 Statistical “inference”: How statistics is a tool that, like a group of jurors in a legal case, decides whether the facts weigh in favor “for” or “against” the hypothesis. Begin one variable analysis.
Outside Reading: from Abelson’s *Statistics as Principled Argument* (Make your own copies from reserve copies in Sociology Office, Room 225, Tarbutton Hall).
- Nov. 10 **Lab Session** on Univariate Analysis. The first part of the session will (a) teach you how to login to the computer and get into the sociology network; (b) introduce you to WINDOWS -- a PC program for interacting with the computer; and (c) introduce you to SPSS -- a major program used in the social sciences for analyzing data. In the second part of the session, you will compute the frequency distribution, mean, median mode, and standard deviation for each of the GSS 1996 variables that you have selected to operationalize your theory.
Readings: Neuman, Ch. 12 (pp. 294-300)
Assignment: Frequency Distributions and Univariate Statistics
- Nov. 12 Dr. Keyes’ Birthday! So, we will learn about Bivariate Analysis!
Readings: Neuman, Ch. 12 (pp. 304-312)
- Nov. 17 **Lab Session** on Bivariate Analysis. You will compute at least 2 two-variable tables, each table illustrating the relationship between your dependent variable and one of your independent variables. If necessary, you will recode your dependent and/or independent variables into a smaller number of categories before computing the tables.
Assignment: Describe and Interpret Bivariate Results
- Nov. 19 Measures of the Association
Readings: Neuman, Ch. 12 (top paragraph p.312 to p. 315)
- Nov. 24 **Lab Session** on Measures of Association. You will explore your theoretical model and decide the appropriate measures of association for specific variables (depending on how they are measured). **You will be allowed to complete the Assignment on Measures of Association I in this lab session, which I strongly**

encourage, because you don't want to have to work on this over Thanksgiving Break.

Nov. 26-29 **Thanksgiving Break**

Dec. 1 Multiple Regression

Readings: Neuman, Ch. 12 (from "Elaboration Model" on p.315 to top of p. 320).

Dec 3. **Lab Session** on Multiple Regression. **Work on final Assignment on Measures of Association II**. We will investigate whether our measure of association changes (if at all), when we "control" for the possible effect of a third variable on our independent and dependent variables.

Dec. 8 Statistical inference: How statistics brings us full-circle to deciding whether we have made a credible case for a theory. If so, then . . .

how much more do we know?

Readings: Neuman, Ch. 12 (pp. 320-324)

Dec. 10 **FINAL EXAMINATION** is 12:30 to 3:00pm in LIBC 226.