

Irene Browne
Sociology 513-01
Research Methods and Models: Design
Fall 2000

SYLLABUS

The aim of this course is to teach the fundamentals of research design and the techniques of data collection used in sociological research. Students should understand the assumptions underlying social science research and the debates within the philosophy of science regarding those assumptions. By the end of the course, students should be able to design their own research projects, as well as analyze and critique studies in the sociological literature.

The course will emphasize the iterative nature of the research process. In the first few class periods, students will be introduced to published studies and resources for data. We will draw upon these specific examples throughout the course. The second section of the course focuses on issues in epistemology and the philosophy of science, introducing students to the major paradigms in social science research. This section will also provide students with a range of critical lenses from which they can question the underlying assumptions of the dominant social science paradigms. In the third section, we turn to important practical issues in the construction of a research project, and cover debates in measurement theory and research design. Students will then learn the basic techniques necessary for designing, implementing, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research. Our quantitative section concentrates on experiments and survey methods. The qualitative section is primarily devoted to field research methods, particularly ethnography. Relevant ethical concerns will be considered throughout the course, and will be summarized in the final class period.

Required texts:

Kuhn, Thomas. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Lofland, John, and Lofland, Lyn. 1995. *Analyzing Social Settings, 3rd Edition*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Neuman, W. Lawrence. 1997. *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches, 4th Edition*. Allyn Bacon.

Articles (on electronic reserve through EUCLID).

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Sociology 501
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COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

Grading will be based on the following:

- participation (10 points)
Students are expected to attend classes regularly and contribute to class discussion.

- assignments (30 points)
Assignments, worth varying points each, are described more fully in a separate page. Points will be deducted for late assignments. Note that two of the “assignments” are short essays.

- midterm exam (20 points)

- final exam (15 points)

- research proposal (25 points)
Due December 18 at 5 p.m.
A research proposal, approximately 15 pages in length, is required for successful completion of the course. The proposal should contain a full literature review and an extensive discussion of the methodology, including: the research question, why the question is important, why the method used is appropriate to the research question, the population, the sample design, how the data will be collected, how the concepts will be operationalized. If you are submitting a proposal on the same or similar topic as a paper for another course, you must provide a summary of how your proposal will differ from the other paper, and receive permission from the instructor.

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COURSE SCHEDULE

- 9/5 (Tu) **Introduction to the Course**
- 9/7 (Th) **Research Questions and Resources**
READINGS: Bobo, Lawrence; Zubrinsky, Camille L. 1996. "Attitudes on Residential Integration: Perceived Status Differences, Mere In-Group Preference, or Racial Prejudice?" *Social Forces*, 74, 3: 883-909
Pescosolido, Bernice A; Grauerholz, Elizabeth; Milkie, Melissa A. 1997. "Culture and Conflict: The Portrayal of Blacks in U.S. Children's Picture Books through the Mid- and Late-Twentieth Century." *American Sociological Review*, 62, 3: 443-464
Neuman, Chap. 4
- 9/12 (Tu) READINGS: Durkheim, E. 1951. "Introduction" and "Egoistic Suicide" in *Suicide*. NY: The Free Press.
- 9/14 (Th) READINGS: LeBlanc, Lauraine. Preface, Chap. 2, and Chap. 5 in *The Flowers in Your Dustbin: Women in The North American Punk Subculture of the 1990s*.
Geertz, Clifford. "Thick Description: Towards an Interpretive Theory of Culture."
- 9/19 (Tu) **Philosophy of Science**
READINGS: Kuhn, S. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.
- 9/21 (Th) READINGS: Kuhn, S. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.
Nielson, Joyce McCarl. 1990. "Introduction." In *Feminist Research Methods*.
Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- 9/26 (Tu) Megill, Allan. 1994. "Introduction: Four Senses of Objectivity" in *Rethinking Objectivity*, edited by Allan Megill.
Weber, Max. 1968. "Objectivity in the Social Sciences."

- 9/28 (Th) **Overview of Research Designs: Logic of Causal Thinking**
 READINGS: Stinchcombe, A. Chap. 2, "The Logic of Scientific Inference" in *The Structure of Social Theories*.
 Cook and Campbell. "Causal Inference and the Language of Experimentation" (Chap. 1) in *Quasi-Experimentation: Design and Analysis Issues*. Houghton-Mifflin.
- 10/3 (Tu) **Conceptualization and Operationalization**
 READINGS: Neuman, Chap. 7
 Wright, Lawrence. 1994. "One Drop of Blood." *New Yorker* July 25.
 Udry, Richard. 2000. "Biological Limits of Gender Construction." *American Sociological Review* 65:443-457.
- 10/5 (Th) **Reliability**
 READINGS: Anderson et al. "Measurement: Theory and Techniques." In *Handbook of Survey Research*, edited by Rossi, Wright and Andersen. Orlando, FL: Academic Press.
 Simons, Ronald, Christine Johnson, and Rand Conger. 1994. "Harsh Corporal Punishment Versus Quality of Parental Involvement as an Explanation of Adult Maladjustment." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 56: 591-607.
 Heavy et al. 1996. "The Communication Patterns Questionnaire: The Reliability and Validity of a Constructive Communication Subscale." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 58: 796-800.
- 10/10-10/12 **Validity**
 READINGS: Cook, Thomas, and Donald Campbell. 1979. "Validity," (Chap. 2) in *Quasi-Experimentation: Design and Analysis Issues for Field Settings*. Houghton-Mifflin.
 Bradburn, Norman. 1983. "Response Effects." In *Handbook of Survey Research*, edited by Rossi, Wright and Andersen. Orlando, FL: Academic Press.
 Scully, Diana. 1990. "A Glimpse Inside" and "Nothing is Rape: Justifying Sexual Violence." In *Understanding Sexual Violence*. Boston: Unwin-Hyman.
- 10/17 *** FALL BREAK ***
- 10/19 (Th) **Experimental Design**
 READINGS: Cook, Thomas, and Donald Campbell. 1979. "Quasi-Experiments: Nonequivalent Control Group Design" (Chap. 3) in *Quasi-Experimentation: Design and Analysis Issues for Field Settings*. Houghton-Mifflin.
 Neuman, Chap. 9
- 10/24 (Tu) READINGS: Johnson, Cathryn. 1994. "Gender, Legitimate Authority, and Leader-Subordinate Conversations." *American Sociological Review* 59:122-135.
 Hegtvedt, Karen. 1987. "When rewards Are Scarce: Equal or Equitable Distributions?" *Social Forces* 66(1):183-207.
- 10/26 (Th) **Sampling Theory and Statistical Thinking**

READINGS: Neuman, Chap. 8

Sudman, Seymour. 1983. "Applied Sampling." Pp. 145-194 in *Handbook of Survey Research*, edited by Rossi, Wright and Anderson. Academic Press.

Frankel, Martin. 1983. "Sampling Theory." Pp. 21-67 in *Handbook of Survey Research*.

10/31 (Tu) READINGS: Bobo et al. 1995. "The Los Angeles Survey of Urban Inequality Sample Report on the Household Survey. UCLA: Center for the Study of Urban Poverty.

Frankel, Martin. 1983. "Sampling Theory." Pp. 21-67 in *Handbook of Survey Research*.

11/2 (Th) READINGS: Dobbins, Frank, and Tim Dowd. Forthcoming. "The Market that Anti-Trust Built: Public Policy, Private Coercion, and Railroad Acquisitions, 1825-1922." *American Sociological Review*.

11/7 (Tu) *** MIDTERM REVIEW ***

11/9 (Th) *** MIDTERM EXAM *** (9 a.m. - 11:15 a.m.)

11/14 (Tu) **Survey Research**

READINGS: Sheatsley, Paul. 1983. "Questionnaire Construction and Item Writing" (Chap. 6) in *Handbook of Survey Research*, edited by Peter Rossi, James Wright, and Andy Anderson. Orlando, FL: Academic Press.

Laumann, Edward O., John H. Gagnon, Robert T. Michael, and Stuart Michaels. 1994. "The Study Design." (Chap. 2) in *The Social Organization of Sexuality: Sexual Practices in the United States*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Neuman, Chap. 10

11/16 (Th) READINGS: Laumann, Edward O., John H. Gagnon, Robert T. Michael, and Stuart Michaels. 1994. "Homosexuality." (Chap. 8) in *The Social Organization of Sexuality: Sexual Practices in the United States*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Dykema, Jennifer, and Nora Cate Schaeffer. 2000. "Events, Instruments, and Reporting Errors." *American Sociological Review* 65:619-625.

11/21 (Tu) READINGS: Browne, Irene, and Ivy Kennelly. 1999. "Stereotypes and Realities." In *Latinas and African American Women at Work*, edited by Irene Browne. NY: The Russell Sage Foundation.

Agnew, Robert, and Helene Raskin White. 1992. "An Empirical Test of General Strain Theory." *Criminology* 30(4):475-99.

11/23 (Th) *** THANKSGIVING ***

11/28 (Tu) **Qualitative Research Design**

READINGS: Lofland and Lofland. 1995. *Analyzing Social Settings, 3rd Edition*. Wadsworth.

11/30 (Th) TBA

12/5 (Tu) READINGS: Sterk, Claire. 1996. "Just for Fun? Cocaine Use among Middle-Class Women." *Journal of Drug Issues* 26(1): 063-076.
Lempert, Richard, and Karl Monsma. 1994. "Cultural Differences and Discrimination: Samoans Before a Public Housing Eviction Board" *American Sociological Review* 59:890-910.

12/7 (Th) **Ethical Issues**

READINGS: Maher, Lisa. 1997. "Appendix: On Reflexivity, Reciprocity, and Ethnographic Research." In *Sexed Work: Gender, Race and Resistance in a Brooklyn Drug Market*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
Rollins, Judith. 1985. "Introduction" and "Deference and Maternalism." In *Between Women: Domesticity and Their Employers*. Philadelphia: Temple Press.
Wolf, Diane. 1996. "Situating Feminist Dilemmas in Fieldwork." PP. 1-55 in *Feminist Dilemmas in Fieldwork*, edited by Diane Wolf. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
Neuman, Chap. 5

12/12 (Tu) FINAL EXAM (9 a.m. - 11:15 a.m.)

ASSIGNMENTS

Date Due: *Assignment:*

- 9/12 Find an article (1 pt)
Select an article published since 1995 in one of the major sociological journals and containing quantitative empirical research of some sort. (You can find an article from the three main journals, *American Sociological Review*, *American Journal of Sociology*, or *Social Forces*, or select from the major journal in your area of specialization. For instance, if you are interested in social psychology, you could choose an article from *Social Psychological Quarterly*. If you are pursuing the field of crime and deviance, you could find an article in *Criminology*. Ask the instructor or one of the faculty to assist you in identifying a specialty journal).
- 9/14 Describe a research question (2 pts)
Describe the research question of your chosen article, and explain why it is an interesting and important question. In the same fashion, describe a related research question that you are interested in pursuing. Assume that you are writing to a granting agency to convince them to fund your project based on its merits as a research topic.
- 9/14 Find a data set (2 pts)
(If possible, locate the dataset and documentation used in the article. If this dataset is not publicly available, find a dataset that covers similar topics. Write a description of the data set. What types of information are available? (That is, are there questions about attitudes? Demographic information? Longitudinal measures?) What topics or research questions could be investigated with these data? What is the unit of analysis, sample size, and who is included in the data set?
- 9/21 Essay on Kuhn (8 page max) (7 pts)
Answer the following questions, referring to Kuhn:
a) What is normal science? What is a scientific revolution? Why does normal science *necessarily* lead to revolutions?
b) Why are observations *always* theory-laden? (Or influenced by paradigms?)
c) Why does Kuhn argue (p. 94) "When paradigms enter, as they must, in a debate about paradigm choice, their role is necessarily circular. Each group uses its own paradigm to argue in that paradigm's defense." What does this mean? How does a new paradigm necessitate the redefinition of the corresponding science?
d) According to Kuhn, is knowledge cumulative? Support your answer from the text.
- 9/26 Short paper on Weber and objectivity (5 pages max) (5 pts)
Describe the three most important points regarding objectivity in the social sciences in the Weber reading ("Objectivity in the Social Sciences"). Compare and contrast Nielsen's description of feminist epistemology with Weber's perspective. Would Nielsen agree or disagree with Weber? Why?

- 10/5 Describe the methodological features of your selected article (3 pts)
Referring to the article that you selected for your first assignment, write a description of how the authors use the data to operationalize their concepts and test their hypotheses. What is the unit of analysis? What are the hypotheses? What are the main concepts? How does the author operationalize these concepts? What is the dependent variable? How is it measured? What are the independent variables? How are they measured? What do the authors find?
Describe how the concepts causally related, drawing a path diagram. In identifying the causal relationships, state the argument in terms of types of variables (dependent, independent, etc.), types of relationships (spurious, direct, etc.), and direction of relationships among important variables. If the article contains multiple arguments or large sets of variables, choose one sub-argument or one part of the causal structure to describe.
- 10/31 Describe the sampling procedure in the data set (3 pts)
Write a detailed description of the sampling procedure used to collect the data in your data set. Begin with a description of the target population and explain how the sampling design was constructed to represent that population. Include a discussion of the limitations of the design. Do not quote directly from the documentation -- describe the sample design in your own words, and demonstrate that you understand how the sample was constructed. Describe the weights that are available in the data, and explain the purpose of the weights in reference to the sampling design.
- 11/14 Write a one-page description of your proposal topic (1 pt)
The description should include: the question that your research project will address, the type of measures that you will use, and how you will collect your data. You also must include a brief description of the major theoretical debates that are pertinent to your research topic.
- 11/21 Apply survey research methods to your research question (4 pages max) (3 pts)
Write a discussion of whether survey methods would be appropriate to answering the research question that you are posing for your final proposal (ideally, this is the same question that you describe in the first assignment.) If the answer is “yes,” describe how you would construct the survey and *why this would allow you to address your research question* (for instance, would you ask closed-ended or open-ended questions? Would you administer the survey via telephone, face-to-face interviews, or by mail?). If you plan to use secondary data, explain why the survey you chose is relevant to your research question, and why it is preferable to gathering your own data. Discuss the drawbacks of using a survey to address your research question.
If the answer is “no,” and a survey is not appropriate to answering your research question, explain your reasoning, discussing the relation between the main concepts relevant to your question, their inter-relationships, and why these concepts and relations cannot be observed using a survey.
- 12/5 Apply field research methods to your research question (3 pts)

Using the same general approach as outlined in the previous assignment, write a discussion of whether field research methods would be appropriate to answering the research question that you are posing for your final proposal.