SOCIOLOGY 1020

METHODS OF SOCIAL RESEARCH

SPRING 2014

Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays 9:00 – 9:50 a.m.

Location: Metcalf Auditorium

**Instructor:** Carrie E. Spearin, Ph.D.

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**Office Hours:** Fridays 2:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m. or by appointment

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| **TA:** | Meredith Pustell | Mujun Zhou |
| **Office:** | Maxcy Hall, Room 403 | Maxcy Hall, Room 106 |
| **Office Hours:** | Mondays 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. | Wednesdays, 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. |
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**I. Course Description.**

Sociology 1020 is a required course primarily for sociology concentrators (as well as BEO organizational studies track concentrators) and introduces students to the logic of research design and the basic techniques of data collection employed by social scientists conducting empirical research. When we think of research, we often think of a research report or article where researchers present their major findings. However, such research reports are only the final outcome of a research process. Conducting social science research involves making difficult decisions at critical junctures, as well as a fair amount of creativity. Researchers must delimit their topics, pose relevant questions, formulate testable hypotheses, develop means of measuring variables, design samples, and decide how to collect information. While there are certain rules, tools, and techniques social scientists use to conduct research, there is no one right way to study social phenomena. A good social researcher must be knowledgeable about methods and must tap into their sociological imagination and creativity. Upon completion of this course, students should be able to design research projects that can answer questions of interest and critically evaluate the research conducted by others.

**II. Course Objectives.**

The major objectives for this course are: (1) to learn the basic principles associated with all types of social research, (2) to become familiar with a variety of methods for conducting social research, (3) to critically evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of research from a methodological standpoint, and (4) to be able to conceptualize and design your own research project.

**III. Course Prerequisites.**

Although basic statistics will be introduced and discussed, a background in statistics is not required.

**IV. Course Expectations.**

There will be many new terms and definitions that must be learned through study, discussion, and assignments. Class attendance is important for discussion, to answer your questions, and to obtain my perspective on the material. I will use the lectures to emphasize why certain issues are important and to illustrate how what is learned in a textbook comes to life when it is applied to actual research projects. Please note, the material must be read on schedule and learning is cumulative. Each new idea you encounter will continue to be used in subsequent chapters and assignments.

**V. Required Texts.**

Earl Babbie. 2010. *The Practice of Social Research, 13th Edition*. (**Babbie**)

Mark Edwards. 2012. *Writing in Sociology.* (**Edwards**)

Both the Babbie and Edwards texts are available at the Brown Bookstore, but you may be able to find less expensive copies of them on your own (available at Amazon, Barnes & Nobel, etc.).

Additional readings are also assigned. All additional readings will be placed on Canvas.

The Babbie book comes with free access to a book companion website (www.wadsworth.com). This website contains assisted instruction on the major topics of the course, such as variables and hypotheses, units of analysis, levels of measurement, experimental design, etc. I strongly urge you to visit this website to review each of these topics as we study them in the course. Many of my past students have found it very useful in studying and preparing for exams. It is entirely your responsibility to link the website topics up to the textbook and class lectures.

**VI. Course Requirements.**

There are four components to the course that make up your final grade: class participation, article analyses, exams, and a research proposal.

Class Participation. There will be several opportunities for in-class individual and group assignments over the course of the semester. These exercises are intended to give you an opportunity to apply the concepts presented in the readings, as well as the lectures. If an assignment is given in class, you should have ample class time to complete it. These assignments count towards your final grade, but will not be formally graded. These assignments **can not** be made up under any circumstance. Therefore, it is in your best interest to attend class and participate in these in-class assignments.

Article Analyses. Students are expected to complete three critical analyses of sociological research articles published in peer-reviewed journals. Each article analysis will have a particular focus: (1) research question, hypotheses, and measurement, (2) sampling technique and ethical concerns, and (3) research design/internal validity. These article analyses require you to apply the course material by explaining how and why researchers made the decisions they did in conducting their research and presenting a critical review of their decision making process (e.g. how could it have been done differently?). These papers (approximately 5 pages in length, double-spaced) will be formally graded.

All papers must be submitted in-person at the start of class on the day they are due. If you will not be in class on that day, please make arrangements with me for submission. **I will not accept late papers.** The only exception to this rule is illness or other circumstances beyond your control (e.g. religious holiday). Any late paper due to illness will require a note from Health Services. All other late papers will require a note from the Dean’s Office.

Exams. There will be a total of three exams over the course of the semester. Exams are based on the semester’s readings, lectures, and in-class assignments. These exams ask you to identify concepts, provide definitions, and apply the course material. **These exams are mandatory and must be taken on the dates scheduled (see part IX of syllabus)**. Because you are allowed to drop your lowest exam grade, no make-up exams will be given. Extreme cases of personal illness, emergency, or family crisis will be handled on a case-by-case basis; notify me

as soon as possible and expect to submit a Dean’s note. You should double-check the exam schedule prior to registering for this class; travel plans are not a reasonable excuse for missing an exam.

Research Proposal. Students are also expected to prepare a complete research proposal. This is an opportunity for you to put the information you have acquired in this course to practical use. As your text points out, when you design a research project, it is usually necessary to lay out the details of your research plan for someone else’s approval or review, and this is what you will be doing for this course.

A proposal is your plan for your research. You are not required, nor do I want you, to collect data. The act of sitting down to write about a research project will help you synthesize and organize the material you have learned in the course. This paper is one of the major methods used in this course to help me evaluate your understanding of the research process, so take advantage of two important resources, the texts and your instructor.

You will complete this assignment in two parts. The first half of the research proposal is due *Wednesday, March 12th*. At this stage, the proposal will be reviewed for content and consistency and comments will be provided. It is your responsibility to review these comments and incorporate them into your proposal. The complete research proposal is due during the reading period, *Monday, May 5th*. At this time you will pass in both the complete proposal, as well as the original first half of the proposal with comments. These proposals will be formally graded.

**VII. Grading.**

No curve is involved in this course. You will receive the grade that you earn. I do not offer extra-credit either during the course or after receiving your final grade. Your final course grade will be based on the following components and according to the following distribution:

Class Participation 10%

Article Analyses (10 pts each) 30%

Exam (15 pts each) 30%

Research Proposal 30%

**Total 100%**

**VIII. Course Policies and Etiquette.**

Please come to class and be in class on time. Tardiness, in addition to absences, will affect your grade and are strongly discouraged. Unless you become ill or speak to me about leaving early for a specific purpose, expect to stay for the entire class.

**Plagiarism** can occur by accident, in working together, or when work is borrowed. Working together in small groups can be fun and helpful. But, if you write your assignments together, it may appear to me that the work is too identical. It is safest to work together at the reviewing stage, but not in the writing stage of your work. Take steps to ensure that plagiarism does not occur.

Incomplete grades will not be awarded. Extensions will be considered only under extreme circumstances pertaining to family or medical emergencies (must be accompanied by a Dean’s note). The use of cell phones and SMS will not be tolerated in class.

I will be unavailable to interact via email in the evening and most times during the weekends. However, I will do my best to reply to your inquiries as soon as possible.

**IX. Readings and Assignments**

You are responsible for the assignments on the dates listed. You should read ahead as some assignments will require planning and extra time. Please note: I reserve the right to make changes to the syllabus during the course of the semester and I will notify you if/when I do so.

**General Theme I:** *The Goals and Process of Research*

**Week 1 (January 22nd & 24th)**

*Course Introduction and Scientific Inquiry*

**Reading:** Babbie, Ch. 1

**Week 2 (January 27th, 29th, & 31st)**

*The Process of Social Research*

**Reading:** Babbie, Ch. 2

Sherman, L. and Berk, R. 1984. “The Specific Deterrent Effects of Arrest for Domestic Assault.” *American Sociological Review*, 49: 261-272.

**Week 3 (February 3rd, 5th, & 7th)**

*Asking Good Questions and Finding Good Sources*

**Reading:** Babbie, Ch. 17, Appendix A

Edwards, Chs. 1-8, 11-12, & 14

**Assignments:** Final Research Proposal Summary discussed

**General Theme II:** *Elements of Research Design*

**Week 4 (February 10th, 12th, & 14th)**

*Conceptualization and Operationalization*

**Reading:** Babbie, Ch. 5

Gibbs, J. 1989. “Conceptualization of Terrorism.” *American Sociological Review*, 54: 329-334.

**Assignment:** Research Proposal Summary due (**2/10**)

Distribute Article Analysis I

**Week 5 (February 19th & 21st) – NO CLASS 2/17**

*Sampling*

**Reading:** Babbie, Ch. 7

Watters and Biernacki. 1989. “Targeted Sampling: Options for the Study of Hidden Populations,” *Social Problems*, 36 (4): 416- 430.

**Assignment:** Article Analysis I due (**2/21**)

Research Proposal Part I distributed

Article Analysis II distributed

**Week 6 (February 24th, 26th, & 28th)**

*Research Designs and the Issue of Causality*

**Reading:** Babbie, Ch. 4

**Assignments:** EXAM I (**2/24**)

**General Theme III:** *Major Methodological Techniques for Gathering Data*

**Week 7 (March 3rd, 5th, & 7th)**

*Survey Research*

**Reading:** Babbie, Chs. 9 & 6

**Assignments:** Article Analysis II due (**3/3**)

**Week 8 (March 10th, 12th, & 14th)**

*Experimental Designs*

**Reading:** Babbie, Ch. 8

Sonnenfeld, Jeffrey A. 1985. "Shedding Light on the Hawthorne Studies," Journal of Occupational Behavior, vol 6.

**Assignments:** Research Proposal Part I due (**3/12**)

**Week 9 (March 17th, 19th, & 21st)**

*Social Research Ethics*

**Reading:** Babbie, Ch. 3

Humphreys, L. 1970. *Tearoom Trade*, Chs. 1 &2

**Assignments:** EXAM II (**3/19)**

**Week 10 (March 24th, 26th, & 28th)**

**NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK**

**Week 11 (March 31st, April 2nd, & 4th)**

*Qualitative Field Research*

**Reading:** Babbie, Ch. 10

Cannon, J. et al. 1998. “Amateur stripping and gaming encounters: Fun in games or gaming as fun?” *Deviant Behavior: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 19: 317-337.

**Assignments:** Research Proposal Part II distributed

Article Analysis III distributed

**Week 12 (April 7th, 9th, & 11th)**

*Unobtrusive Methods*

**Reading:** Babbie, Ch. 11

**Week 13 (April 14th, 16th, & 18th)**

*Evaluation Research*

**Reading:** Babbie, Ch. 12

**Assignments:** Article Analysis III due (**4/16**)

**General Theme IV:** *Data Analysis*

**Week 14 (April 21st, 23rd, & 25th)**

*Quantitative and Qualitative Data Analysis*

**Reading:** Babbie, Chs. 13 & 14

**Week 15 (April 28th)**

*Course Wrap-Up*

**Assignments**: Exam III (**4/28**)

**Week 16 (May 5th)**

*Final Research Proposal due – Monday, May 5th at 10:00am*

Please submit a hard copy in Prof. Spearin’s mailbox

Maxcy Hall, Room 101

Electronic versions will NOT be accepted!