

Sociology 301 – Sociological Research Methods
Course Syllabus, Fall 2008
Chafee Social Science Center, 501
M & W, 2:00 – 3:15 p.m.

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Office: 505 Chafee
Hours: MW 9:30-10:30, 3:30-4:30
or by appointment

Course Description

Other classes you have taken, both in Sociology and other disciplines, had the goal of teaching you *what we know*. In this class, you will learn *how we know* what we know. By the end of the semester you will (1) be familiar with research methods utilized by social scientists to examine and explain the complexities of the social world; (2) have the necessary skills to understand and critically evaluate both the methods and results of published research, as well as the world around you; and (3) be able to design, implement, and analyze your own social research.

This semester, you'll learn about the research process through your readings and our class meetings, and by designing your own social research project for your major writing assignment for the semester.

Academic Honesty

The Community Standards of Behavior section in your student handbook outlines the University Policies and Regulations regarding honesty in all interactions and academic work. I take academic honesty VERY seriously. Students who violate this policy will be severely penalized. Please see the student handbook for a detailed description of the standards of behavior.

URI Student Handbook: <http://www.uri.edu/judicial/studenthandbook.pdf>

Students with Disabilities

Any student with a certified disability that is likely to affect their performance on any or all of the assignments should see me to arrange for accommodations, as should students whose primary language is not English.

Required Text

Babbie, Earl. (2008). *The Basics of Social Research*, Fourth Edition. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Recommended Text

Best, Joel. (2001). *Damned Lies and Statistics: Untangling Numbers from the Media, Politicians, and Activists*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

The Babbie book is an abridged version of a standard research methods textbook, designed to present and explain the basic concepts in sociological research. The Best book provides an illustration of why it's important for people, not just sociologists, to understand the process and products of social research.

Course Requirements

Reading and Class Participation

You are expected to read the assigned reading before you come to class. Occasionally there will be a pop quiz or a minute paper on the reading to make sure you are keeping up. Reading, attendance, participation in class discussion through questions and comments, participation in group discussion and in-class projects, pop quizzes and minute papers will contribute to your class participation grade. Reading and class participation is worth 5 % of your final grade for the course.

Keep in mind that although I will not take attendance during class, this course is a requirement for the major and as such, is very important to your education. In addition, attendance is necessary to participate in class, which is part of your grade (as well as providing you with information needed for the tests). You need to be in class to participate in discussions and ask questions. Periodically, you will be discussing issues in groups in class. From time to time, I will ask you to take a minute (hence, the minute paper) at the end of class to write what you learned in class that day. This will help you to pay attention during class and to think about and reflect on what we have discussed, as well as to help me determine whether you understand the main points and whether there is any confusion or points of clarification that I need to address during the next class session. If you miss class, you need to get the notes from a classmate, please do not ask me what you missed. I do not give out my notes.

Homework

There will be 4 homework assignments. You will typically have at least a week to complete the assignment. The nature of these homework assignments will vary depending on the topic we are studying. Your assignments should be typed* unless otherwise specified. Be sure to include the homework number on the copy you give to me. Assignments are due at the beginning of class. Homework is worth 15 % (3.75 % for a piece) of your final grade for the course.

Examinations

There will be one exam during the semester and a comprehensive final exam. In addition to testing your general knowledge of important terms and concepts in sociological research methods, the exams will require you to apply what you are learning in class. For example, I may ask you to select the most appropriate sample technique for a specific research question and population that we have not previously discussed in class, or I may ask you to critique a research project described in the exam. Thus, while you should know general definitions of terms, you must also be able to know how to *use* the research techniques we cover in class. The exams are collectively worth 40 % of your final grade for the course. *Failure to take an exam will result in a zero! I do not give make-up exams unless there is an extreme circumstance and official documentation is provided. I must be notified in advance if a situation presents itself.*

*Field Observation Group Exercise**

The goal of this exercise is to introduce you to structured field observation. Working in teams of 2-3 people, you will develop a hypothesis about differences in human behavior, collect data to test your hypothesis, and write a report documenting your methods, findings, and conclusions. You will have 5 weeks to complete this project. Each group will give a presentation the day the project is due. More detailed instructions will be handed out at a later date. We will discuss it more at that time. The field observation group project is worth 20 % of your final grade for the course.

*Research Proposal Assignment**

Your major writing assignment for the course is to write a proposal to conduct a sociological research project of interest to you. The proposal will be completed in stages over the course of the semester, with sections of the paper corresponding to sections of the course. At each stage of your paper, you will get a grade and some feedback from me, so that any problems in earlier stages of the paper will be resolved by the time the final version is completed. I will distribute detailed guidelines for the paper separately. The proposal assignment is worth 20 % of your final grade for the course.

*For the writing assignments, I will only accept hard copies; NO email attachments will be accepted. All papers are to be typed in Times New Roman, 12-point font, double-spaced, with one-inch margins, printed double-sided and stapled. You must have page numbers. Grammar, spelling, and punctuation count; points will be deducted for more than a few errors.

Calculation of Grades

Reading & Class Participation	5 %
Homework	15 %
Midterm Exam	20 %
Final Exam	20 %
Field Research Project	20 %
Research Project	20 %

Grading Scale

A	90-100
B	80-89
C	70-79
D	60-69
F	0-59

Late Policy

One part of being a responsible student is being able to meet deadlines; therefore, all assignments are expected to be turned in on time. However, if for any reason you have to turn in an assignment late, you will be docked a half letter grade for every **day** that it is late (this includes weekend days). No assignments will be accepted after seven days. If there is a problem or a situation presents itself, please let me know before the assignment is due. This policy does not apply to the Field Observation Group Exercise as no late projects will be accepted.

Miscellaneous Information

I encourage you to utilize the resources offered by the Academic Enhancement Center, located on the fourth floor of Roosevelt Hall (www.uri.edu/acc). The center can provide tutoring, help with writing assignments, and a variety of other services that may help you succeed in this and your other courses.

Out of consideration for me and for your classmates, please only leave class if you really need to – leaving in the middle of class and coming back a few minutes later is distracting to others and it sends the message that being there isn't important to you.

Also out of consideration, please make sure to turn off all cell phones, pagers, and other electronic devices that you may have brought with you to class. **Take Note:** If I hear or see a device during a quiz or test I will assume that you are cheating and will take your quiz or test from you and you will receive a zero.

Make sure you save all exams, and written assignments that are returned to you in case there is an error in your grade, and so you know where you stand in the course. Keep a copy of all written

assignments you hand in, and back up computer files regularly. “My computer crashed” will not be accepted as a valid excuse for late papers. I do not accept emailed papers or assignments.

Finally, do not hesitate to see me if you are not doing as well as you would like to in the course, or if you have questions about anything. I am available outside of regularly scheduled office hours – you can make an appointment to see me, or you can just stop by anytime. I’m also very good about answering email.

A note about emails: Please send proper emails. Make sure to put SOC 301 in the subject line and to include your full name in the text. Also, use proper capitalization and punctuation. Emails should come from your URI account (this is for my protection in case of viruses – emails from other accounts will not be opened).

Schedule of Classes

The following schedule of classes is only a tentative outline, and may be revised throughout the semester. Any changes to reading assignments or other assignments, exams, etc. will be announced in class, and you are responsible for knowing the schedule even if you have missed class (get in touch with a classmate or with me to be sure you know what to prepare for our next meeting).

Week 1

Wednesday, September 3rd

Introduction to the course
First Day Activity
Assignment Handout: Research Proposal Assignment

Week 2

Monday, September 8th

Babbie, Chapter 1: Human Inquiry and Science (p. 4-31)

Wednesday, September 10th

Babbie, Chapter 2: Paradigms, Theory, and Research (p. 33-63)
Assignment Handout: Homework 1

Week 3

Monday, September 15th

Theoretical Foundations Assignment Due
Class Discussion of Assignment
Mock IRB – Ethics in Sociology (Chapter 3 – Babbie)

Wednesday, September 17th

Babbie, Chapter 4: Research Design (p. 95-129)
Assignment Due: Homework 1
Assignment Handout: Homework 2

Week 4

Monday, September 22nd

Babbie, Chapter 5: Conceptualization (p. 130-147)

Wednesday, September 24th

Babbie, Chapter 5: Operationalization (p. 147-156)

Assignment Due: Homework 2

Week 5

Monday, September 29th

Revised Theoretical Foundations and Research Questions/Hypotheses

Assignments Due

Class Discussion of Assignments

Wednesday, October 1st

Babbie, Chapter 5: Validity and Reliability (p. 156-167)

Week 6

Monday, October 6th

Babbie, Chapter 6: Indexes, Scales, and Typologies (p. 169-197)

Wednesday, October 8th

Babbie, Chapter 14: Quantitative Data Analysis (p. 442-458)

Week 7

Monday, October 13th

COLUMBUS DAY – NO CLASS!!!

Wednesday, October 15th

Revised Research Question/Hypotheses and Conceptualization and Measurement

Assignments Due

Class Discussion of Assignments and Q & A for Midterm Exam

Week 8

Monday, October 20th

Midterm Examination!!!

Wednesday, October 22nd

Babbie, Chapter 7: Nonprobability Sampling (p. 198-207)

Babbie, Chapter 7: Theory and Logic of Probability Sampling (p. 207-212)

Babbie, Chapter 7: Populations and Sampling Frames, and Probability

Sampling Designs (p. 221-241)

Week 9

Monday, October 27th

Assignment Handout: Homework 3

Assignment Handout: Field Research Group Exercise

Wednesday, October 29th

Revised Conceptualization and Measurement, and Sampling Assignments Due

Class Discussion of Assignments

Meet with Field Research Group

Week 10

Monday, November 3rd

Babbie, Chapter 4: False Criteria for Nomothetic Causality (p. 102 – review)

Handout, “Determining Correlation Between Variables,” p. 1-6

Assignment Due: Homework 3

Wednesday, November 5th

Babbie, Chapter 14: Bivariate Analysis (p. 459-463)

Handout, “Determining Correlation,” p. 6-10

Week 11

Monday, November 10th

Babbie, Chapter 4: Criteria for Nomothetic Causality (p. 100-102 – review)

Babbie, Chapter 14: Multivariate Analysis (p. 463-469)

Handout, “Correlation and Causation,” p. 1-5

Wednesday, November 12th

CRIMINOLOGY MEETING – NO CLASS!!!

Please take this time to meet with your field research groups (if you have not done so already) and work on your projects.

Friday, November 14th

CRIMINOLOGY MEETING – OUT OF TOWN

Assignment Due: Research Proposal Assignment

Needs to be signed by Dept. Secretary (507) and placed in my mailbox by 12 (noon)

Week 12

Monday, November 17th

Babbie, Chapter 8: Experiments (p. 245-253)

Assignment Handout: Homework 4

Wednesday, November 19th

Babbie, Chapter 8: Variations on Experimental Design (p. 253-267)

Week 13

Monday, November 24th

Babbie, Chapter 9: Survey Research (p. 269-286)

Assignment Due: Homework 4

Wednesday, November 26th

Babbie, Chapter 9: Self-Administered Questionnaires (p. 286-311)

Week 14

Monday, December 1st

Field Research Group Work Time

(I will be available in my office if you need help with anything)

Wednesday, December 3rd

Field Research Project Presentations

Assignment Due: Field Research Project

Week 15

Monday, December 8th – Last Day of Class

Field Research Project Presentations

Question & Answer for Final Exam

Final Exam

Wednesday, December 17th, 8:00-11:00 a.m.

Tips for Reading and Taking Notes Effectively

The work you do in preparation for out class meetings is crucial. In addition to the reading quizzes, many of your in-class assignments will also be based on your reading, and will cover topics that have not yet been discussed in class. Below I provide some suggestions that should help you get the most out of your assigned reading and any additional reading that you complete for your research projects.

1) **Put it in context and get the big picture**

Before you start reading, you need to be sure about what you need to get out of the reading and why. Toward that end, be sure you can answer the following questions: What part of our research projects are we focusing on right now? What's the title of the chapter I'm going to read? What are the headings and subheadings in this section of reading? What parts of the reading are most important to my research project?

2) **Think about and understand the examples used in your readings**

I will almost never ask you to give me a definition of a term on an exam, and you won't need to include definitions of methodological terms in your papers. This doesn't mean you don't need to know what important terms mean, it actually means you need to know them *better* than you would if I only wanted definitions. Examples are included in textbooks because they help you understand the concepts being discussed and why they are important. If you really understand a term or concept, you will be able to give an example of it, and you will be able to develop your own original examples of it as well.

3) **When taking notes from readings, start with the “big picture”**

It's a good idea to note the chapter title and the headings/subheadings in your reading notes. These will serve as an outline and keep you focused on the overall purpose of the reading and the purpose of each section of reading.

- 4) **Take notes from your readings in your own words, except for important terms**
If you cannot put definitions, examples, and explanations in your own words, you don't really understand them. For this reason it is important that you are taking notes in your own words, except for headings/subheadings and key terms. You'll also need to incorporate this material into your papers in your own words, which makes it more important that your notes are in your own words. (Failure to paraphrase is also plagiarism).

- 5) **Keep your notes brief**
Your notes should be a brief summary of key points to be most useful to you. Taking notes in your own words is one way to keep your notes to a reasonable length. It is also a very good idea to not take any notes until you've finished the entire reading assignment (except the headings and subheadings, which can serve as an outline for your notes). If you start taking notes as you read a chapter for the first time, you'll certainly end up taking too many notes and not focusing on the big picture.

- 6) **Assess the quality of your notes**
If you are reading carefully, taking notes, and not feeling like you are understanding the material, be sure to see me right away – you must be missing important points in your reading. It also might be a good idea to compare your reading notes to those of your classmates, which can also serve as an indicator that you are missing things, or perhaps that you are taking more notes than you need to.