

RESEARCH METHODS
Anthropology/Sociology 261
Fall 2002, MWF 11:30-12:30, Clough 100

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COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course is an introduction to research methods in the social sciences. It is divided into three sections. In the first part of the course, we go over basic concepts and issues related to conducting research, such as the pursuit of objectivity, interpretation and explanation, as well as ethics and relevance. Second, we experiment with various types of research techniques, from ethnography to statistics. Third, we design a research project selected by the student in a step-by-step manner. While the goal of the course is not to produce a finished and conclusive research analysis, it provides the necessary foundation for doing so in future semesters.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING:

Punctuality, Attendance and Participation - A good portion of the work we do is in the classroom during lectures and discussions. This means that regular punctuality, attendance and participation are required. Make sure to arrive for class on time so as not to disturb others by coming in late. Attendance is taken at the beginning of class. It is your responsibility to alert me of your presence (at the end of class) if you do arrive late, otherwise you will be marked absent. Active participation takes many forms including asking and answering questions, commenting on readings and lectures, contributing to a discussion. Make sure to complete the reading assignments by the date indicated, which will help you to actively join the discussion. Written assignments often involve the exchange of work with each other, collective evaluation, and constructive criticism in the form of oral and written comments. Your punctuality, attendance, and engaged presence are **essential** for the course and count for 20% of your final grade.

Oral/Written Exercises – There are weekly assignments to be completed throughout the semester. They are based on the topics treated in a particular week(s) and should reflect your understanding of the important issues discussed. Make sure to complete them by the due date indicated. Late assignments defeat the purpose of the exercise and will be penalized. Feel free to consult with me both before and after you do the assignment in order to get feedback on your ideas and progress. They count for 20% of your final grade.

Essays/Exams - At the end of Parts I and II, we will have assessments to make sure you comprehend the themes introduced thus far. They will take the form of an exam with short answer questions based on the readings, lectures, and discussion. These count for 30% of your grade.

Final paper - By the end of the course, you should be able to design your own research project. In Part III, we go through each of the necessary steps and give you the chance to explore on your own and together how to do that. For the final project, hand in a polished 10-15 page research proposal which counts for the remaining 30% of your grade. (See attached Writing Guidelines)

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Earl Babbie. The Practice of Social Research, 9th edition. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
Additional articles will be handed out or made available to copy.

WEEKLY SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS:

Week 1 (Aug 28, 30) – Introduction to the Course

Arthur Conan Doyle, “A Scandal in Bohemia”

Discussion of “science” and scientific method

I. CONCEPTS AND ISSUES

Week 2 (Sept 4, 6) – The foundations of inquiry

Babbie, Chpt. 1: Human Inquiry and Science

Michael Specter, “Rethinking the Brain: How the songs of canaries upset a fundamental principle of science”, New Yorker, July 23, 2001.

Discussion of the social sources of knowledge production

Week 3 (Sept 9, 11, 13) – Theories and Paradigms

Babbie Chpt. 2

Discussion of types of paradigms/theories and how paradigmatic perspectives shape all steps in the research process

Week 4 (Sept 16, 18, 20) – Description, Interpretation, and Explanation

Babbie, Chpt. 3: The Idea of Causation in Social Research

Robert Darnton, “The Great Cat Massacre”

Charles Tilly, “Contentious Repertoires in Great Britain, 1758-1834”, Repertoires and Cycles of Collective Action, ed. By Mark Traugott

Discussion of nomothetic and idiographic approaches to research – who do you believe and why?

Week 5 (Sept 23, 25, 27) – Ethics and Relevance

Babbie, Chpt 18: The Ethics and Politics of Social Research

Essay/exam #1

II. DATA SOURCES AND COLLECTION TECHNIQUES

Week 6 (Sept 30, Oct 2, 4) – Conceptualization, Operationalization, Measurement

Babbie Chpt. 2

Discussion of these terms, definitions, and how to apply them in research

Week 7 (Oct 7, 9, 11) - Surveys, Questionnaires, and Polls

Babbie Chpt. 9: Survey Research

Exercise

Week 8 (Oct 14, 16, 18) – Quantitative Data and Statistics

Healy Chpt. 1, glossary

Babbie, Chpt. 11: 315-321

Emile Durkheim, excerpts from Suicide

James Bennet, “Year of Intifada Sees Hardening on Each Side”, New York Times

Exercise

Week 9 (Oct 23, 25) – Case Selection, Unit of Analysis, and Unit of Observation

Babbie Chpt.

Babbie Chpt. 11: case selection and sampling 322-327

Week 10 (Oct 28, 30, Nov 1) – Qualitative Data and Methods: Ethnography, Participant Observation, Historical Comparison

Babbie Chpt. 10: Qualitative Field Research

Babbie Chpt. 13: Qualitative Data Analysis

Mid-term assessment

III. RESEARCH DESIGN

Week 11 (Nov 4, 6, 8) – Setting up a Research Project and Refining the Question

Babbie, Chpt. 4: Research Design

Handouts on proposal design

Question paper due, exchange, discussion/commentary

Week 12 (Nov 11, 13, 15) – Surveying the Field, Theories, and Constructing Hypotheses

Discuss literature survey, theories and hypotheses

Barry Bluestone, “The Inequality Express”

Library Tour

Lit Survey/hypotheses paper due, exchange, discussion/commentary

Week 13 (Nov 18, 20, 22) – Selecting methods and data

Discussion of methodology (data, technique, mode of analysis)

Method paper due, exchange, discussion/commentary

Week 14 – (Nov 25) - Conclusions and Relevance

Discuss relevance/implications/conclusion section

Conclusion due, exchange, discussion/commentary

Week 15 – (Dec 2, 4, 6) - Putting it all together

Discussion of steps and integration (see handouts again)

Individual Meetings

First full draft due/exchange

Week 16 – (Dec 9, 11) - Putting it all together cont’d

Discussion/comments on Draft 1

Week 17 – (Monday December 16) - Final Exam Period

Final draft of proposal due