Sociology 357 – Methods of Sociological Inquiry
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“‘Method’ has to do, first of all, with how to ask and answer questions with some assurance that the answers are more or less durable. ‘Theory’ has to do, above all, with paying close attention to the words one is using, especially their degree of generality and their logical relations. The primary purpose of both is clarity of conception and economy of procedure, and most importantly just now, the release rather than the restriction of the sociological imagination.”
— C. Wright Mills, The Sociological Imagination, 1959

Overview

Sociology 357 is a required course for sociology majors; it teaches you the logic of research design and the basics of data collection. In this course you will both do sociological research (on a small scale), and evaluate the research of others. This is not a statistics course; I assume no background in methods. You will do a small amount of statistics in your projects, which will be easier if you have already had elementary statistics. However you can easily learn what you need to know for these projects in this course, and I will do what is necessary to help you with this. My goals in teaching you methods are:

• To spark your interest in sociology; to encourage you to see sociology as a research enterprise, as a process of learning about our social world
• To introduce you to the elements of research design, with a special emphasis on measurement (operationalization) and assessing relations between variables (causality and correlation)
• To teach you how to read a research report with a critical eye, so that you can tell how trustworthy its information is
• To learn first hand about the problems of research by trying out and evaluating several data collection methods on a small scale
• To show you that research is a personal, human activity involving both your brain and your emotions, combining brilliant insights with spectacular failures, and invoking both dramatic visions and inescapable practical limitations

This course is a broad overview. What that means is that you will not learn enough about any one methodology to actually do a serious research project using that method. However, what you lose in depth you gain in breadth; you will be introduced to a wide range of methods (experiment, survey, ethnography, comparative and historical) and taught the basic epistemological claims of each. The purpose of this overview is to allow you to evaluate the information provided in various studies that you are likely to encounter in your academic and nonacademic life, and to provide you with a beginning set of tools that will guide you in collecting meaningful information.
Course Requirements

There are four kinds of assignments in this course; in total you will be handing in nine pieces of work. They are: two quizzes, three projects, three article summaries, and one book evaluation. Below I provide a brief explanation of each one of these. In addition, I will provide very detailed assignment sheets for each assignment as it approaches. These are also available on-line. This course is a considerable amount of work. You will have about 6-8 hours of homework per week in this class. I am a teacher who rewards doing your work. Your projects, article summaries, book review and literature review do not have to be brilliant to receive a good grade. Rather, they need to be done on time and show that you’ve thoughtfully done your coursework. If you show up for class, do the reading, pay attention, are careful about your assignments and hand them in on time you should do very well in this course. Conversely, if you miss class, don’t do the reading, are distracted, hand in your work late, and are sloppy, you will not do well. My hope is that a course evaluation centered around steady work will both relieve stress and actually help you learn, remember, and use the concepts that are introduced to you in this class.

Article Summaries

Your final project in this class is to evaluate the methodology of a major sociological study. You may choose one of four books for this project. In addition, for each book I have chosen three to four academic articles that relate to that book. Over the course of the semester you must hand in a summary of three of these articles. These summaries should be one page, single-spaced. The due dates are:

- February 22
- March 15
- April 17

You may hand in article summaries at any time during the semester. If you’d like to work on them one weekend and get them all out of the way, I am happy to accept them all at once – or any time. Just know that you must hand in one article summary by February 22, two by March 15, and three by April 17. Late summaries will not be accepted. Each article summary is worth 3% of your grade.

Quizzes

There are two quizzes in this course. The first is on February 8; the second is on May 8. Both quizzes will cover the reading and lectures from one section of the course. The first quiz will be on the introductory concepts of the course (causality, variables, and sampling). The second quiz will be on comparative and historical methodology. Each quiz is worth 15% of your total grade. The first quiz will be multiple choice and short answer; the second quiz will be essay questions. The first quiz will take about 30 minutes; the second quiz will take the entire class period. Quizzes must be taken in class on the day designated in this syllabus. Note that in course sections when you are quizzed
you will have more reading than the course sections when you are not quizzed. This is because on non-quiz sections you have projects to do.

Projects

The projects in this class are not "real" research. As you will learn, real research is much too time consuming to fit into a course. You will be doing scaled-down projects that teach you important lessons about research without taking so much time.

You will be doing three research projects: one experiment, one survey, and one ethnography. For the first two projects you are very strongly encouraged to work in groups. Teams have two options: (1) write a joint report, or (2) each person write the whole report individually. Option 1 is appropriate when team members are truly working and learning together. It is unfair and unethical for one student to do most of the studying and writing while another "free rides" under the guise of option 1. Those doing the work must refuse to "give" partners papers they did not help write. If you choose option 2, you work together until the data are collected and, if you wish, put into a data summary, but you do not collaborate in writing your separate reports. Option 2 is a good choice if you have busy schedules that make it difficult to meet with others, but want the advantage of having a partner in thinking up the original idea and collecting data. If you find yourself in an ambiguous position about these options because of unforeseen problems, speak to me and I will help you to determine the fairest thing to do.

I give very explicit guidelines for how to write-up these research projects. These are available on-line, and I will provide hard copies in class. On average you have two weeks to complete these assignments. This is purposefully short. Your research projects should be simple and modest. They should demonstrate to me that you understand the very basic principles of each research method.

Book Evaluation

Your final project in this course is to take what you’ve learned about research methods and apply it to an actually study. This means reading and evaluating a book. Below are four books to choose from. For each book I have also selected three to four readings that you must summarize. In your book evaluation I expect you to make reference to at least two of the articles you have been asked to read in relationship to them. I would strongly suggest that you read this book twice: once early in the semester to get a sense of what it is about, and once in the final week to explore the methodology in greater depth. Your book evaluation must focus on the methodology of the book and explore the relationship between the method used and the claims made.

Interview:


**Ethnography:**

**Comparative Historical:**
Skocpol, Theda, 1979, *States and Social Revolutions*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

**Survey:**

The amount of work for each one of these books/readings is roughly the same; you can’t really select these on which one will be the easiest. I would suggest you selected based
upon which of these books/sections is likely to be of greatest interest to you. So you can make a somewhat educated choice, I will tell you what each book is about during the first week of class.

**Academic Integrity**

Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Section 14.03 of the University of Wisconsin System Administrative Code defines academic misconduct as “an act in which a student: (a) seeks to claim credit for the work or efforts of another without authorization or citation; (b) uses unauthorized materials or fabricated data in any academic exercise; (c) forges or falsifies academic documents or records; (d) intentionally impedes or damages the academic work of others; (e) engages in conduct aimed at making false representation of a student's academic performance; (f) assists other students in any of these acts.” If you have any questions about what constitutes academic misconduct generally, you must consult [http://www.wisc.edu/students/saja/misconduct/UWS14.html](http://www.wisc.edu/students/saja/misconduct/UWS14.html) before proceeding in this course. Lack of familiarity with these rules in no way constitutes an excuse for acts of misconduct. Any instance of cheating, plagiarism, or other misconduct will be dealt with strictly according to University policy, and the penalties recommended to the Dean of Students will be severe.

**Grading**

What each assignment is worth:

- 2 Quizzes @ 15% each: 30%
- 3 Article Summaries @ 3 % each: 9%
- Book Review: 10%
- 3 Projects @ 17% each: 51%

Total: 100%

Grade Distribution:
- 93-100: A
- 88-92: AB
- 82-87: B
- 78-81: BC
- 70-77: C
- 60-69: D
- <60: F

Refer to this syllabus throughout the semester. In the sections where you do not have a project due I have assigned considerably more reading. Plan accordingly, as you will be quizzed on this material. On several days we will have workshops. These are before your three projects are due. On these days I will not lecture and you will have no readings due. Instead, I’ll devote the day to going over questions you all may have about these assignments. These classes are optional. However, they will be extremely useful. So I strongly encourage you to attend.
What do you need to buy?

Readings will all be available on-line.

You will have to buy three books for this course. There are two everyone will have to buy. They are:


You will also have to buy one (and only one) of the four books listed above for your book evaluation. Again, they are:

- Skocpol, Theda, 1979, States and Social Revolutions, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Schedule of readings, homework, and written exercises
Readings should be completed for the day listed. Always bring your readings to class.

January 23-February 8: Introduction

January 23: Course Introduction

January 25: Concepts & Causality

January 30: Research Design
“Elements of Research Design”, Chapter 3, Singleton

February 1: Measurement
“Measurement” Chapter 4, Singleton

February 6: Sampling
“Sampling”, Chapter 5, Singleton

February 8: QUIZ

February 13-27: Experiment

February 13: Introducing the Experimental Method
“Experiment”, pp. 187-218, Singleton

February 15: Doing an Experiment in the Field

February 20: Doing an experiment in the Lab

February 22: Workshop
FIRST Literature Summary Due

February 27: Experiment DUE

March 1-20: Surveys

March 1: Survey
“Survey Research”, pp. 219-263, Singleton
March 6: Article/How to read a table

March 8: Problems with self-reporting

March 12: Survey data due, 12 Noon

March 13: Data Overview
SECOND Literature Summary due

March 15: Workshop/Questions

March 20: Survey Assignment DUE

March 22-April 19: Ethnography

March 22: Ethnography Reading

March 27: Writing Fieldnotes

March 29: Ethnography Example

March 31-April 8: Spring Break

April 10: Validity

April 12: Reading

April 17: Workshop
Third Literature Summary Due
April 19: ETHNOGRAPHY DUE

April 24-May 8: Comparative & Historical

April 24: Comparative Historical Reading

April 26: Comparative Historical Reading

May 1: Comparative Historical Reading
Beisel, Imperiled Innocents, Chapters 1-4 (pp. 2-103)

May 3: Historical Reading (single case)
Beisel, Imperiled Innocents, Chapters 4-8 (pp. 104-218)

May 8: Quiz on Comparative Historical/Macro-structural material

May 10-18: Book Review

May 10: Final Class, Final assignment overview

May 18: Final Assignment Due