

Sociology 357
Methods of Sociological Research
Fall 2003
University of Wisconsin, Madison
John Levi Martin

Note: this is a **provisional** syllabus: changes are pending.

Contact Information

Email: jlmartin@ssc.wisc.edu
Office: 2452 Social Sciences Building
Office Number: 265-2368
Office Hours: Thursdays 10-11

Course Description

This is a survey of methods of sociological research—how people go about spending their days so that at the end, sociology comes out. This is a required class, which means that you have to take it and I have to teach it. This is actually a great way to start; since we know we'll be together, let's see if we can figure something out.

Course Goals

This course has a number of goals. The first and most important is simply to avoid some embarrassing disaster, in either organizational or intellectual terms. After that, there are some things worth learning. The second goal is to give you a sense of how sociologists go about doing what they do—the diversity and unity of their methods. The third goal is to give you an ability to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of research.

Course Requirements and Evaluation

The course requirements—and their contribution to your final grade—are as follows:

- 1) *Exercises*. The most important part of your grade will be the research exercises that you will carry out. You will have three exercises; for each you will have around two weeks. Each involves using some of the research methods we are learning, and writing up a brief (around 5-7 pages) report. Each one of these contributes 20% of your grade.
- 2) *Final*. The final is an in-class essay. You will be given a work to read and will write an evaluation of its methodological strengths and weaknesses. This is an open-book and open-everything kind of hopefully low-pressure final, so you don't need to memorize terms like "ecological fallacy" or whatever. This also contributes 20% of your grade. The Final is (unfortunately) scheduled for 7:45 AM Friday, December 19th. Since it won't actually take two hours, it will really begin 8:15 AM on that date.
- 3) *Participation*. The remainder of your grade comes from your participation. 10% is given for attendance (body-presence). If you come to half the classes, you get half the points, etc. The other 10% is for mental participation, which means coming to class prepared to answer questions and contribute to collective problem solving. This is a **requirement**. If you find it hard to speak in class, see me before the class starts. You are not expected to

show off in class, but we will be trying to work together towards some understanding of what is going on, and that will require you repeatedly verbalizing your thoughts, even if you are not confident about them. That (in addition to the obvious) is what college is all about.

Academic Integrity

This class involves the submission of research exercises, as opposed to tests, so “cheating” in the conventional sense is not an issue. But academic integrity is. It is not uncommon for undergraduates to be honestly unclear as to some aspects of the standards of academic integrity which they are expected to uphold. If at any point you are unclear as to whether some course of action is consistent with these standards, please see me or an administrator in charge of such affairs. Basically, the rule of thumb that guides all issues of academic integrity is the following: If someone evaluating something you hand in as yours may, for better or worse, evaluate as your contribution something which is really someone else’s contribution, you have breached standards of academic integrity. It does not matter whether or not you have *permission* from that someone else to use or incorporate their work. It does not matter whether or not you have *cited* that person elsewhere.

The two most frequent ways in which students, often inadvertently, breach standards of academic integrity are relying on the *words* of someone else without proper attribution, or relying on the *argument* of someone else without proper attribution. Regarding the first, if you were to incorporate someone else’s words in your submission, without putting them in quotation marks and indicating the source, that would be plagiarism. Knowing this, it is tempting to change the words sufficiently to avoid a direct quotation. Believe it or not, this is considered **worse** than direct quotation, because it *appears* that you have tried to *disguise* your appropriation of someone else’s words. It is still a breach of academic conduct if the author of the words you have taken, upon reading your paper, would recognize it as really hers or his.

Similarly, it may be that if you rely on others’ overall organization of a paper—their argument, their use of support, their organization—some other person, reading your paper, would think, “Hey! This is really **my** paper!” That is also a breach of academic integrity **even if you cite that person repeatedly**. So what do you do when there is one main source you are using, and you completely agree with this source, and this source has written things in the best possible way? Good question—this raises the main problem that leads to this form of misconduct. If you have your **own** argument to make, you won’t end up relying too much on others. If you **don’t** have your own argument, don’t start writing. See your teacher and work on getting something that is truly your own.

So really the most important thing about academic integrity is to understand what it is; very few people set out to breach these standards. But just to put it in writing, those who do will receive a 0 for the assignment with no chance for a make-up.

Course Readings

There are three required books—the rest of the readings will be in a packet or on electronic reserve. The required books are:

Thomas Schutt, *Investigating the Social World*
Mitchell Duneier, *Sidewalk*
Barrie Thorne, *Gender Play*.

All are available at the University Bookstore. Note that the first is quite expensive, but can be gotten used quite easily (we don't need the CD that originally came with it). Don't let them know I told you this at the bookstore, but you can get them for \$2.50 from Amazon. So use the money to buy the other books and pay for printouts.

The rest of the readings are on electronic reserve. Depending on what you guys say the first day, we may decide to make up a packet. Because I just go here myself, I didn't have time to get the copyright permissions necessary to have a packet ready.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Additional readings will be assigned throughout the year, as we will be pursuing topics that come up in discussion.

Course Organization

In general, our discussions will come in two-week sections, the first devoted to me helping lay out the method (the “talking” week) and the second devoted to a discussion of the readings (the “reading” week). But it's not that cut and dried, and discussions of method will involve discussions of the works involved. It is expected that you will come to the first class for any week (i.e. the Tuesday class) having read that week's reading. To make that easy, the first week there's not really any reading, so that by next Tuesday we can all be together.

WEEK 1: WHAT IS A SOCIOLOGICAL QUESTION?

(September 2, September 4)

Readings: Newspaper, TV, whatever

- A. What is a question?
- B. What is a specifically sociological question?

WEEK 2: WHAT IS A SOCIOLOGICAL ANSWER?

(September 9, September 11)

Readings: Stuart Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness*, 31-39, 81-84, Joel Best, *Damned Lies and Statistics*, 30-58; 98-104, 109-113; Schutts, Chapter 4

- A. Sociology as a pseudo-science: systematicity and good faith
- B. Sampling as a key concept in sociology

WEEK 3: ASKING #1: IN DEPTH TALKING

(September 16, September 18)

Readings: Weiss, *Learning from Strangers*, 1-14, 29-33, 39-42, 45-51, 61-119, Chapter 5 recommended; Hochschild, *The Second Shift*, 1-10, 33-55, 59-74.

- A. The in-depth interview outlined
- B. Structured vs. semi-structured interviews; vignettes

WEEK 4: ASKING #2: IN DEPTH READING

(September 23, September 25)

Readings: Helen Rose Ebaugh, *Becoming an Ex*, 1-3, 25-40, 62-65, 87-89, 97-103, 124-129, 139-143, 213-224(?); France Winddance Twine, *Racism in a Racial Democracy*, selections*

- A. Discussion of Ebaugh
- B. Discussion of Twine; discussion of next project

***** BEGIN IN DEPTH INTERVIEWING PROJECT *****
***** DUE OCTOBER 14th IN CLASS *****

WEEK 5: ASKING #3: SURVEY TALKING (Start In Depth Doing)

(September 30, October 2)

Readings: Stanley L. Payne, *The Art of Writing Questions*, 16-31, 55-74, 114-119; Edward O. Laumann et al, *Sex in America*, selections*, and *The Social Organization of Sexuality*, selections*, 35-71, 96-118, 124-133, 606-608, 622-649, 670-677; Schutts Chapter 7 optional.

- A. Back to sampling—the idea of population inference
- B. Question writing—the difficulty of thinking straight.

WEEK 6: ASKING #4: SURVEY READING

(October 7, October 9)

Readings: Sniderman and Carmines; *Reaching Beyond Race*, selections*, 11-14, 37-53

- A. Discussion of Laumann et al.
- B. Discussion of Sniderman and Carmines

WEEK 7: LOOKING #1: NONPARTICIPANT OBSERVATION TALKING

(October 14, October 16)

Readings: W. C. McGrew, *An Ethological Study of Children's Behavior*, 25, 27-35, 42-43, 114-115, 210-211; Schutt, Chapter 8 (optional)

- A. Hand in Interviewing Projects—discussion of Projects
- B. Discussion of McGrew, Lofland

WEEK 8 : LOOKING #2: NONPARTICIPANT OBSERVATION READING

(October 21, October 23)

Readings: Barrie Thorne, *Gender Play*, required pages to be announced. (But this is not a very long book, and it is well written, so you are encouraged just to read the whole thing.)

- A. Discussion of Substance
- B. On Duneier's method; discussion of next project

***** BEGIN SURVEY WRITING PROJECT *****

***** DUE NOVEMBER 6th IN CLASS *****

WEEK 9: LOOKING #3: PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION TALKING

(October 28, October 30)

Readings: William H. Whyte, *Streetcorner Society*, xv-xx, 3-52, 255-268, 279-337, 346-354.

- A. The differences between participation and nonparticipation
- B. Discussion of Whyte

WEEK 10: LOOKING #4: PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION READING

(November 4, November 6)

Readings: Mitchell Duneier, *Sidewalk*, required pages 3-14, 43-80, 157-172, 333-357. (But this is a very well written work with different facets, so you are strongly encouraged to read the whole thing.)

- A. Discussion of Duneier
- B. Hand in Survey writing project; discussion of survey project; my comments on interviewing projects; discussion of upcoming project

***** BEGIN NON-PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION PROJECT *****

***** DUE DECEMBER 2nd IN CLASS *****

WEEK 11: HISTORICAL TALKING & READING

(November 11, November 13)

Readings: Claude Fischer, *America Calling*, 1-6, 21-31, 78-100, 182-200, 222-247, 261-272; Schutt Chapter 9 optional.

- A. Answering Historical Questions
- B. Causality and History

WEEK 12: THE LOGIC OF CAUSAL AND PSEUDO-CAUSAL ANALYSIS

(November 18, November 20)

Readings: You can use Schutt, Chapters 1, 3 (skim) and 5; chapter 6 optional but useful.

- A. Variables and Causality
- B. The Experimental Model

WEEK 13: MAKING #1: EXPERIMENTS

(November 25)

Readings: Haney, Banks and Zimbardo, "Interpersonal Dynamics in a Simulated Prison," in Goldberg; Haney's Personal Journal too (pp. 157-190); Doob and Gross, "Horn Honking" and personal reflections in Goldberg, 481-494.

- A. Treatment and Control
- B. Fishbowls

WEEK 14: BORROWING #1: STATISTICS

(December 2, December 4)

Readings: Dalton Conley *Being Black, Living in the Red*, 1-24, 42-79.

- A. Hand in Nonparticipant Observation Project; Discussion of nonparticipant observation project
- B. Marshalling statistics to make an argument; discussion of Conley and Durkheim's *Suicide* (no, you don't have to read it).

WEEK 15: THINKING: HOW DOES ONE SUPPORT AN ANSWER?

(December 9, December 11)

Readings: Weiss, *Learning from Strangers* Chapter 7.

- A. My discussion of nonparticipant observation project
- B. Discussion of support

FINAL:

(December 19th; 8:15 AM)

Bring anything you want to the final—it is open book and notes. You will have a few questions to answer.

Whew! Are we done yet?...

'course!

Acknowledgements: This syllabus is loosely based on a syllabus by King-To Yeung, in turn loosely based on a syllabus by me, in turn loosely based on one by Claude Fischer, with additional influence from a syllabus used by Pamela Oliver and Jane Pillavian.