

SOCIOLOGY 346

Advanced Research Methods
Spring 2008

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Text: Norusis, Marija J. SPSS 15.0: Guide To Data Analysis.
Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2006.

Course Content:

This course is a continuation of our inquiry into the practical aspects of research in social science that was begun in Sociology 246. Particular attention will be devoted to the processes of coding and recoding information as data and the analysis of such data by use of the microcomputer statistics program SPSS. Simultaneously, each student will be executing the empirical research project he/she designed in Sociology 246 or a substitute project agreed to by mutual consent of the student and instructor. While we will not use the Babbie text as one would typically use a textbook, you were encouraged to retain it because it contains helpful reference/background information that should be helpful to you as work on your projects.

Course Objectives:

(1) To give students some practical experience in analyzing information as empirical data, beginning with the process of designing coding frames and inputting data in machine readable form.

(2) To familiarize students with the use of microcomputers for statistical data analysis.

(3) More specifically, to acquaint students with the use of a standard statistical package (SPSS) and to demonstrate its similarities to and differences from spreadsheets like EXCEL.

(4) To provide students with an opportunity to apply some of the social science principles they have learned in earlier courses to the execution of an empirical research project.

Course Requirements:

1. **Computer Laboratory Work** - This course is designed as a laboratory/tutorial experience. Thus, the primary classroom performance will involve hands-on exercises designed mainly to familiarize students with the multi-faceted data analysis utilities provided by SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences), the program which is the *de facto* standard data analysis program used by most sociologists. Some of these activities will be executed in class and others will be done independently as homework.

The relatively small size of the class allows us considerable flexibility in optimizing the pace at which we can proceed; thus, specific assignments will be announced on an on-going basis in class. Our in-class work will be done in the computer-equipped social science data lab in PPHAC 331. It contains about 20 IBM compatible microcomputers, each networked to the campus computer intranet which gives limited access to SPSS. Each of you should also have a copy of the diskette that came as an accessory to your text; it contains a set of data bases, one of which is a subset of the 2000 General Social Survey on which we will focus much of our in-class activity. The files will also be available to you in a course folder named "Smolansky SOC346" in a sub-folder of the SOC folder named "Workshop" on the P drive of the campus net.

Collaboration between and among students in mastering the use of SPSS is explicitly encouraged. However, students will do themselves a disservice if they simply copy another student's computational homework. The latter is assigned not for formal evaluation by the instructor, but rather as the primary means of helping students master the challenging SPSS computer program and the statistical thinking embedded therein. Indeed, there will be two formal quizzes designed to test students' mastery of the computational processes assigned at appropriate times during the term. It is, thus vital that students keep up with their assigned work, for the material is organized mostly in hierarchical fashion so that mastery of one week's work is an essential foundation to understanding the following weeks' work.

The physical arrangements are such that you may work on your homework assignments either in our classroom/data lab, or in any of the campus's other classrooms/labs that have SPSS on their computers (when they are not in use for a scheduled class) using the software on the campus network. The requirements of our campus site license do not allow you to access the program from your individual personal computers even if they are connected to the campus network, and it could block you out if the maximum allowed number of users are already on line.

2. The **major term project** involves the execution of the research design written in Sociology 246 or a substitute to which you and the instructor have agreed. Each student (or small group of students doing a team project) should arrange an individual conference with the instructor early in the term to negotiate the final research design and to establish a timetable for data collection and analysis. The formal research report must be written using word processing and should be formatted in the standard style of empirical research journals in sociology.

Since these research reports will constitute the litmus test of what each student has learned in the course, they will be considered a de facto take-home final examination and, thus, will be due on the first day of the Final Examination period. The date this term is April 28.

Grades:

Each of the two lab quizzes and the major project will be counted as 30 percent of the final grade (a total of 90 percent). Participation in the work of the class will account for the remaining 10 percent.

Academic Honesty:

Recognized standards of honesty are part of the foundation on which the integrity of an academic community rests. Accordingly, the Moravian College Faculty in 1986 adopted a statement on Academic Honesty, the standards of which will be strictly applied in this course. You are encouraged to read carefully the description of this policy which is printed in your Student Handbook.

Any episode of academic dishonesty will be grounds for dismissal from this course and the assignment of a grade of F. The most basic principle to be kept in mind is that any work submitted to the instructor as the work of a specific student must be exactly that. Any use by a student of the specific ideas or phrasing of another person (whether that person be another student or a professional scholar) must be accompanied by overt attribution to the original source. Any student who is unsure about the propriety of a given procedure or approach for completing assigned work in this course should consult with the instructor before completing the assignment. Moreover, in order to avoid any misunderstandings or misinterpretations, each student should retain all notes and drafts (including computerized versions), as well as all source material until after the assignment has been graded and returned.