

Sociology 246: Basic Research Methods

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Tuesdays and Thursdays, PPHAC 331, 10:20 – 11:30

Abstract: This class is designed to expose students to the basics of social research for social scientists, with a particular focus on the methods used by sociologists. By the end of the course, students will have a foundation in generating social science research questions, drafting a research proposal, and choosing appropriate methodologies.

Main Text: **The Basics of Social Research: Fourth Edition, Earl Babbie**, (Thomson, 2008). In addition to this text, supplementary readings and handouts will be distributed in class and posted on Blackboard.

Assignments: Assignments are due at the *beginning of class on Thursday*. So the assignment listed on the syllabus under Week 2 is actually due on Thursday of Week 2.

Since this is a writing course, writing is a central component of your assignment(s), but the particular project you undertake for this course will provide multiple opportunities for feedback (from the professor and from your peers) and revision. The central assignment for this course will be the creation of a sociology research proposal. The research proposal will basically have four main components:

- 1) In the first section of the proposal, you will state your main research question with accompanying hypotheses. In this section, you will have to argue why it is important for sociologists to study this particular topic—addressing a core question of the field—“So what?” In this section, you will learn the writing tools to make a concise but strong argument to motivate the study.
- 2) In the second session, you will provide information on what is already known about the topic you have chosen and provide a concise literature review. How will your research add to the body of knowledge already in existence? Again, concise and clear writing will be stressed.
- 3) In section 3, you will discuss the form your research will take. What is the time period expected? How many people will you study (what is your sample and how will you choose/access the sample)? What methodologies will you use? What are the benefits of using these particular methods?
- 4) In the final section, you will critique your own proposal—what are the strengths and weaknesses. There are always trade-offs no matter what methods you choose. Can you recognize what can be gained from your endeavors and what you simply will be unable to know at the end of the project?

Each section will be handed in at different points of the semester and you will have many opportunities to revise your submissions. You will also be encouraged to read and edit each other's submissions. As such, you will learn how to include an acknowledgment section in your proposal.

Each assignment will be graded on the following 0.0-4.0 scale:

4.0: A	2.0: C
3.7: A-	1.7: C-
3.3: B+	1.3: D+
3.0: B	1.0: D
2.7: B-	0.7: D-
2.3: C+	

Grade Distribution:

60% for the research proposal (roughly 15% for each section)

20% for short assignments

20% class participation

Attendance rules: attendance is mandatory. If you will not be able to attend class, I expect you to send me an email or leave a phone message prior to the start of class. Part of the grade will be based on class participation.

Outline of Weekly Readings and Assignments:

Week 1: An introduction and review of the course as well as introduction to some basic research frameworks.

Assignment: Dice rolling exercise! I want you to begin to understand that the probabilities we talk about in the social science are similar to the probabilities we associate with other human activities—in particular, game playing and gambling! Although we will allot a block of time towards the end of the semester on data analysis, we will do various activities throughout the semester to acquaint ourselves with probability theory and statistical analysis. The first activity will be to roll dice 100 times and record the distribution!

Week 2: Part One: An Introduction to Inquiry

Chapter 1: Human Inquiry and Science

Chapter 2: Paradigms, Theory and Research

Assignment: First draft of research proposal statement.

Week 3: Chapter 3: The Ethics and Politics of Social Research

This week we will review the Nuremberg Code and the beginning of the concept of informed consent.

Assignment: Start reviewing/collecting the literature on your research topic, and work on expanding section I of the proposal.

Week 4: Part Two: The Structure of Inquiry: Quantitative and Qualitative

Chapter 4: Research Design

Assignment: Path analysis

Week 5: Chapter 5: Conceptualization, Operationalization, and Measurement

Assignment: Interpreting Data

Week 6: Chapter 6: Indexes, Scales and Typologies

Assignment: Start working on Section 3 of your proposal—what kind(s) of methodology(ies) is best suited for your research project?

Week 7: Chapter 7: The Logic of Sampling

Assignment: Continue working on Section 3 of your proposal, this time focusing on the question of your sample.

Week 8: Part Three: Modes of Observation: Quantitative and Qualitative

Chapter 8: Experiments

True experimental design is the gold standard of scientific research. Social scientists should have a firm understanding of this design, because every way that their research deviates from a true experimental design impacts the kinds of conclusions we can draw from the research.

Week 9: Chapter 9: Survey Research

Assignment: This week you will be asked to generate a number of survey questions, based either on your own study, or on a common theme chosen by the class. You will have to focus on the clarity and format of the question.

Week 10: Chapter 10: Qualitative Field Research

Assignment: Over the course of the next couple of weeks, you will be given a variety of short data analysis exercises, as well as a review of basic statistics. You will also be expected to continue to revise your proposals.

Week 11: Chapter 11: Unobtrusive Research

Week 12: Chapter 12: Evaluation Research

Assignment: Work on the final section of your proposal—the critique of your research design.

Week 13: Analysis of Data: Quantitative and Qualitative

Chapter 13: Qualitative Data Analysis

Chapter 14: Quantitative Data Analysis

Week 14: Chapter 14: Reading and Writing Social Research

This week, we will primarily be spending time putting the final touches on our research proposals.