

Spring 2014: SOC 346: Advanced Research Methods

This syllabus is subject to change over the course of the semester. Any updated or revised versions of the syllabus will be posted on Blackboard and students will be notified.

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Classroom and time: PPHAC 331, M 8:55 AM-11:30 AM

Office hours: To be announced

This course is a continuation of SOC 246. In this class, we will learn how to take the foundation from SOC 246 and advance our understanding of how social science research is executed. While we learned the basic frameworks in SOC 246, during the course of this semester, we will actually collect and analyze data. Students who took time (one or two semesters) between SOC 246 and SOC 346 should befriend someone who took the class last semester since you may be rusty on some of the concepts from basic methods—we cannot lose too much class time reviewing basic concepts, so it is imperative you review the material early in the semester.

Goals of the course:

By the end of the semester, you should have a foundation in:

- collecting and inputting data into either a spreadsheet program or into a statistical program, specifically Excel and SPSS
- running and interpreting basic summary statistics (descriptive statistics)
- interpretation of raw data
- recognition of appropriate statistical tests to employ based on the type of variable under study
- bivariate and multivariate analysis
- the generation and testing of null and alternative hypotheses
- how to communicate your findings to policy makers, the general public, i.e. a variety of non social-scientists, and to also understand the potential impact of your research (i.e. including ethical considerations)
- to practice presenting your findings both in written form (extending on the writing skills developed in 246) and through oral communication
- identifying the shortcomings of ANY research project (why sociologists value supplementing their work with various methodologies and building on a base of knowledge)!

Books: There are no texts required for this class, but there will be a number of handouts and students will have to take notes on how to navigate the SPSS commands as we review them in class, so a notebook/binder and careful attention to note-taking are very important. For some of the class activities, you will be required to independently run statistical tests without the help of fellow students or help from me, but you will be able to refer to your notes. This is why good note-taking will be of great importance.

Class attendance/participation is mandatory. If you are going to miss a class, I expect that you will contact me prior to class to let me know, either by phone or email. Although I understand that people might occasionally miss class due to illness or personal emergencies, patterned absences will result in a lowering of your class attendance/participation grade and I will contact your advisor/the dean's office. Regular attendance and minimal participation will yield a class attendance grade of a 3.0 (B). Regular and engaged participation will increase that grade upwards, and patterned absences will decrease that grade. Basically, everyone will start out with a B. What you do with that B is your responsibility. Unexcused absences will result in a lowering of the B. Active participation will be assessed on the basis of volunteering thoughtful answers on a regular basis, and passive participation as merely being there, taking notes, and looking attentive.

Students who miss an in-class activity due to an excused absence will not get credit for the assignment but will not be penalized. Often, the in-class activities cannot be "made up" outside of class time, but you will be responsible for knowing how to execute the activity for future class activities. You will lose the designated points for the assignment which means that your other remaining assignments will count more towards your final grade. For example, if the total of all in-class activities ends up counting for a total of 200 points, but you missed an activity due to an excused absence that was worth 20 points, and your total points earned was 160 points, your final grade for class activities will be scored as 160/180 instead of 160/200. If you, however, miss an in-class activity due to an unexcused absence, you will earn a zero for that class activity and as noted above, you will not be able to "make up" the lost points.

Students who miss a class are responsible for getting notes and copies of handouts from a fellow student. I advise that every student find a partner(s) in the class that will share notes and collect handouts for them when they have an anticipated or unanticipated absence. I will not be responsible for collecting or keeping track of handouts for students who miss class, nor will every handout be scanned and posted on Blackboard. You must also collect the notes and review the material covered in class before you ask me "what did I miss the other day when I was not here." I am not responsible for repeating one of my lectures in a private session with students who miss class. While I am happy to review material that students do not understand during office hours, you must review the material before you schedule a meeting. Do not wait until a couple of weeks have passed before you realize that you are missing certain key handouts necessary to complete an assignment—trying to track down handouts a few weeks down the road can be a nightmare.

In addition to expecting regular class attendance, I also expect students to arrive to class "on time." Patterned late arrivals will also be penalized. Being a commuter, I understand the

challenges associated with traffic, accidents and other unanticipated delays, but it is your obligation to arrive to class on time. If you are commuting from South Campus, I understand that the shuttle system may be a nightmare, but you need to catch the earlier bus if there is a chance that the shuttle might be a few minutes late getting up to North Campus. Again, I understand that “stuff happens” and you may “every now and then” arrive late, but it cannot be a regular pattern. You would not regularly arrive late for a job (it would not be tolerated by your employer and you would eventually be fired). Think of your college career as one of your current jobs. If you are late, however, come into the classroom as soon as you do get to PPHAC 331. Do not wait outside the class for some optimum time to enter as all this will do is make you miss more of the class instruction. Quietly and unobtrusively enter the classroom and take a seat.

More details on classroom behavior:

Recording Devices:

Students have my permission to use audio recording devices in class. I know some students like to use these devices in order to review lecture notes, so this statement serves as my “informed consent” to be taped.

Cell phone, texting, email, web surfing: I expect that students will NOT be using their cell phones, texting, sending emails or web surfing during class time. Students who are caught engaged in any of these activities will immediately lose **one full grade** of their class participation grade (i.e. a B will drop to a C). If you engage in this behavior multiple times, then getting caught a mere three times in the course of a semester will earn you an F for class participation. Since our classroom is a computer lab, and we will often have the computers on during class time, I know the temptation to check your Facebook page, or answer a few emails during what you might think is a less interesting part of my lecture may be overwhelmingly tempting, but please resist the urge. You may think you are pretty good at hiding this activity from me, but it is actually fairly easy to tell when a student is engaged in other activities (although I hear that students are getting very adept at texting when the phone is in your pocket!). Sometimes your neighbor actually gives you away, so why you are making sure to keep looking up at me, your neighbor might get very interested in looking at your newly posted profile picture. So best just not to do it, so matter how good you think you are at it. And even if you think you might be so good, I will not necessarily confront you in class if I catch you. I will merely dock your class participation grade and you will not be aware of the penalty until the end of the semester.

There are some circumstances under which I will allow students to take a phone call or surf the web during class.

Phone calls: I know some students occasionally have family, work and/or personal obligations that may need their immediate attention. For example, there may be students who have a sick child at home and need to be reachable during class time in case there is an emergency. If you find yourself in this kind of situation, please contact me before class via email or approach me

at the beginning of class. I will expect your phone to be on vibrate, but I will allow you to leave the room to take the call. And again, you can just get up and quietly leave the room to take your phone call. You do not need to apologize or draw attention to yourself.

Web surfing: Sometimes a class activity might actually involve searching the web for resource materials. I will expect that students will be searching for the task assigned and not looking up newly posted videos. It often amazes me how students will try to take a moment to “sneak a peek” at something while the rest of the class is searching for a piece of data.

“Facilities” Break: I have had the experience of students regularly leaving class for what I can only assume is a “bathroom” break, leaving class for a few minutes during basically every class period. Unless there is an underlying medical issue, I do think it is necessary for students to regularly leave the class for what is only a one-hour ten-minute class period. If you need to use the facilities after lunch, please make sure you make your visit before the beginning of class. If you do have some underlying medical condition that requires you to regularly leave class, then please make sure I get a note from disabilities support (see contact information below). If I do not get official notification from disabilities support, then the regular bathroom break will be considered a series of “unexcused” absences and will result in a lowering of your class attendance grade. I have absolutely no problem with an occasional bathroom visit, but please limit your visits.

Cheating/plagiarizing: If any student is caught plagiarizing, you will automatically fail the class. If there are any questions about what constitutes plagiarism, please review drafts of your assignments with me. Please also see Moravian College’s Academic Honesty policy (on the college website and in the handbook) to review the institution’s definitions of cheating and plagiarism.

Assignments:

I expect ***assignments to be handed in on time***, on the day that they are due and by the beginning of class unless otherwise specified. Do not rely on the time posted on Blackboard for the time due since we have been experiencing trouble with the Blackboard system and I have had the Blackboard calendar repeatedly list an incorrect time due. Late assignments will be docked one full grade for each day that they are late. So an “A-quality” assignment that was due on Tuesday that is handed in on Wednesday will drop to a “B.” If handed in on Thursday, the grade will drop to a “C.” A “D-quality” assignment that is submitted a day late will receive an “F.” I know students occasionally run into computer/printer problems, and if you are in this situation, email me as soon as possible. If you are having a printer problem, you can send me your assignment as an attachment so that you can still get full credit for handing the assignment in on time. I do not have much sympathy for students who wait until a few minutes before class begins to print up their assignment and then discover that they are having trouble. So try to make it part of your schedule that you will finish and print up your assignments at least the night before the assignment is due. This way, you will have time to either solve your problem or contact me.

I also expect assignments to follow whatever **formatting and page instructions** given when the assignment is assigned. For example, if I assign a question that I suspect will take at least two pages to answer, I expect a full two pages of writing will constitute your response. This is two pages, word processed, double-space, one inch margins, Calibri, 12-point font, without additional spaces between your name and date at the top of the page, and between the title of your essay. Assignments that fall short of the page requirement will automatically lose points.

We will often have **in-class activities/quizzes** throughout the semester—this is another reason why regular class attendance is so important. These activities will help to solidify the concepts of the course. There will also be **sporadic short out-of-class activities**. These two kinds of assignments will constitute the short assignment/quizzes grade. I expect people to keep up with any readings and activities for the class, otherwise you will not be able to successfully complete the in-class activities. Everyone should expect that they will be investing a significantly amount of in-class time to the activities and you will almost always have some out of class work to complete for the following week. You should be prepared to reproduce the concepts and calculations that we conducted during the prior week's class. **This is key—you should be able to complete activities/assignments the following week based on what we covered the previous week.**

Mid-term: If I feel that students are not working consistently on the course material, there will be an in-class mid-term exam which will consist of short answers/essays. This exam will help me enforce that everyone is up-to-speed on the concepts of the class before we move ahead with the material in the second half of the semester. If students demonstrate mastery of the material in the context of class activities, I will cancel the mid-term exam and the 20% of the grade that would have constituted the mid-term exam will instead be distributed among the class participation/activity grade and the short assignment/quizzes grade.

Group Project: The class will collectively work on a research project. Work on the project will entail going out into the field to conduct interviews, conduct observations, and administer a survey. Based on everything you learned in SOC 246, you will work together to create the instruments for this project. Once the data is collected, you will have time to use SPSS to analyze some of the data. We will also use a variety of data from other sources to learn about the common statistical tests used by sociologists.

Final Project: For your final project, you will put together a portfolio of your work for the semester, a collection of your analyses/assignments. There will be no final exam. A detailed outline about the format and structure of the final portfolio will be distributed around the mid-term as I see how the semester project unfolds. You will complete a review of the various statistical tests, and run examples of these tests with accompanying analyses.

Breakdown of grade:

My grading system is dynamic—the number and type of assignments can vary from class to class depending on a group's average skill set and speed of mastery of the material. Because

flexibility is inherently required by a “methods class,” there is not a fixed set of activities defined at the beginning of the semester. But the weight of the different grades will remain as defined below with the possible exception of the change in the mid-term assignment.

Class attendance and participation: 20%

Short assignments/quizzes: 20%

Mid-term exam: 20%

Group project/presentation: 20%

Final portfolio: 20%

I try to weight the various assignments based on their level of importance, so an assignment worth 100 points is weighted significantly more than a short assignment worth 10 points. I also give significant overall weight to class attendance and participation since I value your participation, again, especially since this is a methods class and learning comes by doing. But since you will be receiving many grades over the course of the semester, no one assignment will tend to “break” you, and you will have multiple opportunities to salvage your grade, so if you mess up on one assignment, you can redeem your performance on another.

Letter Grade Four Point Scale Percentage

| | | |
|----|------|---------|
| A | 4.00 | ≥93.3% |
| A- | 3.67 | ≥90.0% |
| B+ | 3.33 | ≥86.6% |
| B | 3.00 | ≥83.3% |
| B- | 2.67 | ≥80.0% |
| C+ | 2.33 | ≥76.6% |
| C | 2.00 | ≥73.3% |
| C- | 1.67 | ≥70.0% |
| D+ | 1.33 | ≥66.6% |
| D | 1.00 | ≥63.3% |
| D- | 0.67 | ≥ 60.0% |

Anyone who earns below a 60% will fail the course.

And please be aware, it is within the instructor’s purview to apply both a quantitative and qualitative judgment in determining grades for an assignment and/or for the course.

Professor/Student dialogue: I highly value good communication between us, and I therefore encourage you to contact me at any time in the semester to talk about the class in general or your individual performance. Few things are as frustrating for me than to get to the end of the semester to find out someone struggled with some aspect of the course (for example, understanding the assignments!). If you do not understand some aspect of the course material, or my assignment instructions, then please send me an email, call, or stop by my office hours. Students who had me for SOC 246 will hopefully tell you that I am more than willing to read and respond to drafts of your work, so please take me up on my offer to read work before final due dates. I typically ask for at least one week to turn work around. Not surprisingly, the students who took me up on my offer to review work earned significantly higher grades than students who did not. I also tend to allot in class time to review work, and this opportunity is often underutilized. I try to structure the class so that every student can succeed (earn at least a C or better) through the way that I weight the grades (giving a significant weight to activities such as class participation), through my offer to review drafts of materials, and through the numerous opportunities I give to revise work. Therefore, to use a common cliché, the “ball is in your court.” Students who invest an adequate amount of time in this class will succeed. Students who procrastinate tend to earn low grades. Consistent investment pays off in a class like this where an accumulation of skills and concepts is important. In SOC 246, you built a research proposal through a series of logical steps:

- 1) defining the research question
- 2) revising that question until it was clear and concise
- 3) defining the null and alternative hypotheses that corresponded to that question
- 4) defining the theoretical framework/background literature review that set the context for your project
- 5) addressing the broad sociological question that your research was going to try to help answer—basically addressing the all important “so what” question associated with social science research
- 6) operationalizing the research—creating your instruments, whether developing a survey, an interview protocol, or defining a system for observation
- 7) defining the sample population
- 8) preparing an informed consent form and addressing a host of issues associated with meeting the ethical obligations of social science research

In SOC 346, you will develop the skills to analyze the data you collect through a series of steps. Failure to keep up with the accumulation of skills will impede your ability to master the next step. For example, if you fail to master the concepts of mean, median, mode, spread, standard deviation, etc., in the very beginning of the semester, you will have an extremely difficult time with the more advanced multivariate statistical tests later in the semester.

Students with Disabilities:

Students who wish to request accommodations in this class for a disability should contact Elaine Mara, assistant director of learning services for academic and disability support at 1307 Main Street, or by calling 610-861-1510. Accommodations cannot be provided until authorization is received from the Academic Support Center.

Very rough outline of week by week readings/assignments: we must remain flexible since flexibility is required by the nature of the methods, but this gives a rough road map for what we will accomplish over the course of the semester.

Week 1:

A review of some of the basic concepts of SOC 246, including but not limited to a description of variable types. We will also discuss the topic of the group project.

Review of mean, median, mode, and standard deviation.

Week 2:

Getting Started with SPSS. We will start to play with SPSS and review many basic commands. You will need to take careful notes since you will also be required to do some independent data manipulations as a short assignment outside of class time.

Week 3:

Creating and working with data files and more work with basic descriptive statistics.

Week 4:

Working with data, more basic statistics and gathering data/SPSS graphing.

Week 5:

Creating variables and computing descriptive statistics.

Week 6

Chi-square tests and review of statistical significance.

Week 7:

Mid-term exam. There will be an in-class exam this week to make sure that everyone is on board with all of the concepts and computations so far. The exam will be a mixture of data analysis as well as some short answer/essays.

Week 8:

T-tests

Week 9:

ANOVA

Week 10:

Continuing univariate and multivariate analyses, correlation and regression.

Week 11:

Work on class project, portfolios and student presentations.

Week 12:

Work on class project, portfolios and student presentations.

Week 13: April 22nd

Work on class project, portfolios and student presentations.

Week 14: April 29th

Work on class project, portfolios and student presentations.