

Sociology 357: Methods of Sociological Inquiry

Spring 2015

TR 11 – 11:50am (BIRGE 145)

Professor Chaeyoon Lim

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Office Hours: R 2pm - 4pm

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Note: 'M' = Monday; 'T' = Tuesday; 'W' = Wednesday; 'R' = Thursday

Overview:

This is a basic course on social science research methods. The course has two major goals: 1) developing skills as a more informed and critical reader of social science research (the “consumption goal”); 2) learning basic skills to conduct your own social science research (the “production goal”). It requires no background in research methods or statistics. It provides a general overview of the ways sociologists (or social scientists in general) collect information about social phenomena with a special emphasis on what can be done to yield information that is trustworthy and useful for our theoretical understanding of social life. The course’s goals will be achieved primarily through ‘hands-on’ experiences in designing sociological research, collecting and analyzing empirical data, and writing research papers. In fact, you can consider this class as

a ‘lab’ in which you learn sociological research methods by carrying out mini sociological research projects of your own.

Required Textbook:

Babbie, Earl. *The Practice of Social Research* (12th edition). Wadsworth, Cengage Learning.

**Note about the textbook:* We will read a number of chapters (nine, to be precise) from this textbook. It is available from the university bookstore for purchase and several copies are reserved at the College Library. If you want to purchase a used copy, a number of copies seem to be available at \$50 or less at Amazon.com. This textbook has been used for this course for several years now, so you may be able to find a friend who is willing to lend you his/her copy.

Web Resources:

The course website is available through *learn@UW*. If you enrolled in the course, you can access the site by going to <http://learnuw.wisc.edu> and entering your NetID and password. Once there, click on the link to SOC357 under “My Madison Courses.” We will use *learn@UW* to distribute the readings, administer weekly quiz, and submission of your works. Please check the website regularly.

Format:

The course consists of my lectures and sections led by teaching assistants. I will come to each lecture with a prepared presentation on each week’s material. I expect that you read the assigned reading materials before you come to lecture. I encourage questions, commentary, and discussion at all times, and will invite such at the beginning of each session – as well in the course of my presentation.

The section is an essential part of this course and your attendance is required (i.e. it is NOT optional). The section consists of various activities that are designed to provide you with hands-on experiences in various aspects of sociological research and thus help you develop basic but important skills, including: critically reading published sociological research, asking sociologically relevant questions, collecting and analyzing high quality data, and communicating research findings to academic and general audiences.

Requirements:

Lecture attendance & participation (5%)

Section participation (20%)

- 1) Attendance & general participation in discussion (10%)
- 2) Presentation (10%)
 - a) Leading discussion on published research article
 - b) Project presentations
 - Each presentation will be evaluated on the five-point scale.

Weekly quiz (20%)

- At the beginning of each week students will complete quiz based on assigned readings of the week and lectures from the week before. Quiz will be administered through learn@uw. Quiz consists of mostly true/false questions. You have two chances to take each quiz and the only the higher score will be counted. At each attempt, the questions will be randomly drawn from the ‘question library’ and you will not get a same set of questions in your two attempts.

Reading responses & Homework (10%)

- For selected readings, you will write a short reading response. For each reading we will provide a set of questions you will address in your reading response.
- Reading responses will be graded on the five-point scale.
- In addition, there will be a STATA practice homework.
- Combined, these will account for 10% of your final grade.

Final products from three main projects (45%)

- You will do three research exercises throughout the semester: a research proposal and two data collection projects. You may do all three exercises about a same topic if you wish. We will provide more detailed instructions in class. You can do the two data collection projects individually or as a group (no more than three students per group). You may also do the data collection portion of these exercises as a group and then write the paper individually. When you write the paper as a group, each member is responsible for the paper in its entirety, not just the portion she/he writes.
- The three research exercises are:
 - 1) Research proposal exercise (15%)
 - 2) Randomized Field Experiment project paper (15%)
 - 3) Questionnaire Survey project paper (15%)
- In preparation of each project, you will submit a memo or proposal that sketches your plan. This will be discussed in the section and your TA will provide feedbacks. We may ask you to revise and re-submit your proposals. These memos and proposals will be counted toward your grade for each project.
- The final products of the projects will be letter-graded.

Submission of works:

- All works will be submitted through the course website at *learn@uw*. They must be submitted on time to receive the full credit.
- Reading responses will be submitted through the ‘discussion forum’ by replying to the posted discussion questions.
- Other written assignments will be submitted through the ‘dropbox’. We recommend that you submit these assignments in Microsoft Word format if you can.
- Your TA will provide more detailed instructions on how to submit your written works.
- All assignments must be turned in on time to get the full credit.

Special Needs Arrangements:

If you require special arrangements for testing, assignments, or other aspects of the course due to a disability or religious observances, please speak with me, or your TA, within the first two weeks of the semester. I rely on the McBurney Disability Resource Center (<http://www.mcburney.wisc.edu/>) to determine what reasonable academic accommodations a student may require.

Academic Honesty:

As with all courses at the University of Wisconsin, you are expected to follow the University's rules and regulations pertaining to academic honesty and integrity. Students are expected to know and follow the standards outlined by the Offices of the Dean of Students. See their website (<http://www.wisc.edu/students/conduct/uws14.htm>) for a complete description of behaviors that violate the University's standards as well the disciplinary penalties and procedures.

Department Notice:

The Department of Sociology regularly conducts student evaluations of all professors and teaching assistant near the end of the semester. Students have more immediate comments, complaints, or concerns about Sociology 357 should report them to me or to the Chair or Associate Chair of the Department of Sociology.

Feedback:

I am interested in hearing your reactions to the course, and your suggestions for improvement. Please feel free to e-mail me about comments or suggestions or make an appointment to see me.

Schedule of Topics and Readings

Note: *The schedule below is subject to change.* All announcements regarding schedule changes will be emailed to you or announced in lecture and/or section. You are responsible for keeping up to date on these changes.

Introduction and Overview

Week 1. Introduction (1/20, 1/22)

Lecture:

- Review the syllabus
- Introduce teaching staff
- Course overview

Section:

- **M/T** No meeting
- **W/R** Introduction & Organization

Readings:

- 1) Singleton Jr. & Straits. Pp. 1-5
- 2) Duncan Watts. “The Importance of Studying the Obvious.”
- 3) Yudhijit Bhattacharjee. “The Mind of a Conman”

Works to do:

- Read 1) - 3) before the class on 1/22

Week 2. Sociology as Science (1/27, 1/29)

Lecture:

- What is scientific approach and why do we need it?
- Varieties of sociological research

Section:

- **M/T** Objectivity and the role of values in social science research (Discussion of the Sprague article)
- **W/R** Ethical issues in studying human subjects (Discussion of the Goffman article)

Readings:

- 1) Abbott, *Methods of Discovery* (Ch 1)
- 2) Sprague, “The Field of Vision”
- 3) Goffman, “Methodological Appendix”

Works to do:

- Read 1) before the class on Tuesday
- Read 2) & 3) and submit a short reading response for each article by 8pm on 1/25
- Finish the weekly quiz before the class on Tuesday (1/27) [the quiz questions will be from the readings 1) – 3) in Week 1, the reading 1) in Week 2, and the lectures from Week 1]

- Choose a topic or issue that you think is a relevant topic for sociological research. You will develop this idea into a research proposal in the following weeks for your first written assignment project. [You do not need to submit anything about this for now; just think about it]

Nuts and Bolts of Sociological Research

Week 3. Basic Elements of Sociological Research (2/3 & 2/5)

Lecture:

- Goals of sociological research
- What is explanation?
- Units of analysis
- Variables
- Proposition and hypothesis
- Asking a ‘sociological’ research question
- Making it matter and making it count

Section:

- **M/T** Research article analysis (The Bryson article)
- **W/R** How to write a research proposal

Readings:

- 1) Babbie. Ch. 4
- 2) Bethany Bryson. “ “Anything But Heavy Metal”: Symbolic Exclusion and Musical Dislikes.”

Works to do:

- Read 1) before the class on Tuesday (2/3)
- Read 2) and submit a short reading response by 8pm on 2/1.
- Complete the weekly quiz before the class on Tuesday (2/3)
- Write a short memo that summarizes: a) topic/issue for your research proposal; b) research question you would like to address; 3) why your research question is important; 4) core concepts/variables that you need to answer the question; 5) proposition/hypothesis to be tested. Submit the memo by 8pm on 2/8

Week 4. Measurement in Sociological Research (2/10 & 2/12)

Lecture:

- Conceptualization and operationalization
- Levels of measurement
- Validity and reliability

Readings:

- 1) Babbie Ch. 5
- 2) Malcolm Gladwell, “The order of things”
- 3) Kevin Carey, “Building a Better College Ranking System. Wait, Babson Beats Harvard?”

Section:

- **M/T** Discussion of memo on the research proposal writing exercise.
- **W/R** Discussion of 2) & 3); Group exercise to develop an alternative measure of the quality of college/university

Works to do:

- Read 1) before the class on Tuesday
- Complete the weekly quiz before the class on Tuesday (2/10)
- Read 2) and 3) and submit a short reading response by 8pm on 2/10
- Submit the first draft of research proposal by 8pm on 2/15.

Week 5. Sampling: How to select subjects for your research? (2/17 & 2/19)

Lecture:

- Population, parameter, sample, statistic
- Probability sampling
- Examples of non-probability sampling
- Making inference from sample

Section:

- **M/T & W/R** Research proposal workshop: Students present the first draft of their research proposals and discuss them.

Readings:

- 1) Babbie Ch. 7

Works to do:

- Read 1) before the class on Tuesday (2/17)
- Complete the weekly quiz before the class on Tuesday (2/17)

Week 6. Communicating Research Findings (2/24 & 2/26)

Lecture:

- How to communicate research findings
- Tips for writing research article

Section:

- **M/T** Discussion of the White article; general tips for writing
- **W/R** Writing workshop: Read other student's draft of research proposal and provide feedback, focusing on writing.

Readings:

- 1) White, "Writes of Passage: Writing an Empirical Journal Article"
- 2) Handout: Tips for writing a research article

Works to do:

- Read 1) & 2) before your first section meeting of the week.

- Complete the weekly quiz before the class on Tuesday (2/24) [Quiz questions from the reading 1) and 2) as well as from the lectures in week 5.
- The final draft of research proposal is due at 11:59pm on 3/1.

Varieties of Sociological Method

Week 7. Causality in Sociological Research (3/3 & 3/5)

Lecture:

- Causality as the Holy Grail in social science?
- Causal inference with observational data
- Lurking variable (or unobserved heterogeneity) problem
- Randomization

Section:

- M/T: Discussion of research articles that use randomized field experiments (2 & 3)
- W/R: Discussion of research articles that use randomized field experiments (4 & 5)

Readings:

- 1) Babbie Ch. 8
- 2) Max Ernest-Jones et al. "Effects of eye images on everyday cooperative behavior: a field experiment"
- 3) Mark Levine et al. "Identity and emergency intervention: How social group membership and inclusiveness of group boundaries shape helping behavior"
- 4) Marianne Bertrand and Sendhil Mullainathan. "Are Emily and Greg more employable than Lakisha and Jamal? A field experiment on labor market discrimination."
- 5) Pager, "The Mark of a Criminal Record"

Works to do:

- Read 1) before the class on Tuesday (3/3)
- Complete the weekly quiz before the class on Tuesday (3/3)
- Read one of 2) or 3), **AND** one of 4) or 5). Write a short reading response for each article. Submit your response for 2) or 3) by 8pm on 3/1; submit your response for 4) or 5) by 8pm on 3/3.
- Submit the first draft of your proposal for randomized field experiment project by 8pm on 3/8.

Week 8. Designing Randomized Field Experiment (3/10 & 3/12)

Lecture:

- How to design randomized field experiment
- Validity and generalizability in experimental research
- Distribute randomized field experiment exercise

Section:

- M/T Randomized Field Experiment Proposal Workshop

- **W/R** Randomized Field Experiment Proposal Workshop

*Readings: **No reading***

Works to do:

- No quiz in Week 8. The lectures in week 7 & 8 will be covered in the quiz in week 9
- Revise the proposal based on the feedback you receive and submit the final version of the proposal (if necessary) by 8pm on 3/15.

Week 9. Analyzing quantitative data (3/17 & 3/19)

Lecture:

- Introduction to WINSTAT by SSCC staff
- Basic univariate & bivariate statistics
- Using statistical software packages for quantitative analysis
- Using existing survey data

Section:

- **M/T** WINSTAT/STATA instruction (led by SSCC staff)
- **W/R** STATA exercise using GSS data

Readings:

- 1) Babbie. Ch. 14

Works to do:

- Read 1) before the class on Tuesday (3/17)
- Complete the weekly quiz before the class on Tuesday (3/17)

Week 10. Qualitative Field Research (3/24, 3/26)

Lecture:

- Qualitative field research
- Ethnographic research
- Thursday: a guest lecture

Section:

- **MT & WR** Student presentation: Findings from the randomized field experiment exercise.

Readings:

- 1) Babbie, Ch. 10
- 2) TBA

Works to do:

- Read 1) & 2) before the class on Tuesday.
- Complete the weekly quiz before class on Tuesday (3/24)
- Submit the STATA exercise homework by 11:59pm on 3/25
- Submit the final draft of the randomized field experiment paper by 11:59pm on 3/29

Week 11 Spring Break (No Class)

Week 12 Survey Research Method I (4/7 & 4/9)

Lecture:

- Strengths and weaknesses of questionnaire survey method
- Questionnaire design
- Arts and science of asking questions
- Modes of survey

Section:

- **M/T** Research article analysis: Discussion of Rubin and Peterson et al.
- **W/R** Research article analysis: Discussion of Marsden et al. and Hamilton

Readings:

- 1) Babbie, Ch. 9
- 2) Rubin, "Measurement of Romantic Love"
- 3) Peterson et al. "Orientations to Happiness and Life Satisfaction: the Full Life versus the Empty Life."
- 4) Marsden et al. "Gender Differences and Organizational Commitment: Influences of Work Positions and Family Roles."
- 5) Hamilton. "Education, Politics and Opinion about Climate Change: Evidence for Interaction Effects."

Works to do:

- Read 1) before the class on Tuesday (4/7)
- Read 2) or 3) and submit a short reading response by 8pm on 4/5
- Read 4) or 5) and submit a short reading response by 8pm on 4/7
- Complete the weekly quiz before the class on Tuesday (4/7)
- Submit the first draft of proposal for the questionnaire survey research project by 8pm on 4/12

Week 13 Survey Research Method II (4/14 & 4/16)

Lecture:

- Issues in survey research
- Validity and reliability in survey research
- Index and scale
- Distribute the questionnaire survey exercise

Section:

- **M/T & W/R** Questionnaire Survey Research project proposal workshop

Readings:

- Schaeffer and Presser, "The Science of Asking Questions".

Works to do:

- No quiz in week 13. The lectures in week 12 & 13 will be covered in the quiz in week 14.
- Submit the revised version of your proposal with the first draft of your survey questions by 8pm on 4/19.

Week 14. Analyzing Survey Data (4/21 & 4/23)

Lecture:

- Checking validity & reliability in survey data
- Creating scale/index variable using survey data
- Correlation and regression
- Statistical inference

Section:

- **M/T & W/R** Polishing survey questionnaire & Qualtrics instruction

Readings:

- 1) Babbie, Pp. 173-177; 467-474

Works to do:

- Read 1) before the class on Tuesday (4/21)
- Complete the weekly quiz before the class on Tuesday (4/21)
- Conduct pretests using your questionnaire.
- Revise the questionnaire and import it into Qualtrics.
- Begin to distribute the survey.

Week 15. Sociological Research in the Age of Big Data (4/28 & 4/30)

Lecture:

- What is Big Data?
- How does Big Data change sociological research?
- Data science
- Ethical issues in Big Data research

Section:

- **M/T & W/R** Survey data analysis

Readings:

- 1) Cukier & Mayer-Schoenberger. "The Rise of Big Data: How It's Changing the Way We Think About the World."
- 2) Marcus and Davis. "Eight (No, Nine!) Problems with Big Data."

Works to do:

- Read 1) & 2) before the class on Tuesday.
- Complete the weekly quiz by 11:59pm on Sunday (5/3)

Week 16. Student Presentation (5/5 & 5/7)

Lecture:

- No lecture this week (The instructor will attend the presentations in sections)

Works to do:

- Prepare a presentation based on the findings of your questionnaire survey project.
- Submit the final draft of the questionnaire survey research paper by 11:59pm on 5/10.

Assignment Schedule

Due	Quiz	RR/HW	Memo/Prop	Paper
1/25 (8pm)		Sprague; Goffman		
1/27 (11am)	Quiz 1			
2/1 (8pm)		Bryson		
2/3 (11am)	Quiz 2			
2/8 (8pm)			Memo for RP	
2/10 (11am)	Quiz 3			
2/10 (8pm)		Gladwell&Carey		
2/15 (8pm)				RP (first draft)
2/17 (11am)	Quiz 4			
2/24 (11am)	Quiz 5			
3/1(11:59pm)				RP (final draft)
3/1(8pm)		Ernest-Jones/Levine		
3/3 (11am)	Quiz 6			
3/3 (8pm)		Bertrand/Pager		
3/8(8pm)			RFE proposal	
3/15 (8pm)			RFE proposal (revised)	
3/17 (11am)	Quiz 7			
3/24 (11am)	Quiz 8			
3/25 (11:59pm)		STATA HW		
3/29 (11:59pm)				RFE paper (final draft)
4/5 (8pm)		Rubin/Peterson		
4/7 (11am)	Quiz 9			
4/7 (8pm)		Marsden/Hamilton		
4/12 (8pm)			QSR proposal	
4/19 (8pm)			QSR proposal (revised w/Qs)	
4/21 (11am)	Quiz 10			
5/3 (11:59pm)	Quiz 11			
5/10 (11:59pm)				QSR paper (final draft)

Note: RP = Research Proposal; RFE = Randomized Field Experiment; QSR = Questionnaire Survey Research