

SOC 357/C&E SOC 357

Methods of Sociological Inquiry

Fall 2018

lecture TR 9:55-10:45 a.m.

Sewell Social Sciences #6104

+ two discussion sections per week with TA

Dr. Pamela Oliver

identity is she/her/hers but gender-neutral pronouns they/them/theirs are fine, too

pamela.oliver@wisc.edu

Office: 8143 Sewell Social Sciences Building

Office hours: 11-1 TR and by appointment. I prefer appointments and email inquiries when possible. I can also answer questions after lecture. You may address emails to “Professor Oliver”

Sections: 301 MW 9:55 302 MW 11 Miriam Barcus
 303 MW 12:05 304 MW 1:20 Jungmyung Kim
 305 TR 1:20 306 TR 2:25 Youbin Kang

Each TA will tell their sections their office hours

NOTE: Please do not come to class if you are ill, there are accommodations for illness. Please see the section below for information about accommodations and help if you have personal issues, including disabilities, financial problems, homelessness, food insecurity, family responsibilities, crime victimization.

This is a basic course in how to do social science research and how to evaluate the research of others. It provides a general overview of the ways sociologists 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. You will have the opportunity to practice a range of sociological methods, and will learn how to identify and evaluate how these methods are used in future sociological readings.

My goals in this course are: (1) to introduce you to the elements of research design so that you will have a good foundation for future learning, (2) to teach you how to read a research report or journal article with a critical eye, so that you can know how trustworthy its information is, (3) to expose you to a variety of research methods that you may encounter in the future, (4) to convince you that well-done research is a way of getting good answers to important questions, (5) to let you experience some of the limitations and problems of doing research into human behavior, and (6) to show you that doing research can be fun.

This course assumes no background in research methods or statistics. Over the course of the semester, you will be introduced to basic statistical concepts and basic methods of statistical computing and will use these tools to analyze the data that you collect.

This is a four-credit class that meets for a total of 4 class period hours, two 50-minute lectures and two 50-minute discussion sections during the spring semester. The accreditation expectation is that students will work on course learning activities including assigned reading, homework, exercises, and data collection projects for about eight additional hours each week, as explained in this syllabus and the additional information given on assignment sheets delivered in later class sessions and via Canvas.

Learning Objectives

Beyond the specific substantive and methodological content covered in this course, it is also designed to achieve the following instructional objectives designated as priorities by the Department of Sociology:

- *Conduct Research and Analyze Data (quantitative or qualitative)* – you will have the opportunity to design your own research projects, collect your own data, and learn how to analyze and present your findings.
- *Critically Evaluate Published Research* – in discussion section, you will read journal articles that use the methods that we study in class. Together, we will think about why social scientists use different methods to answer different questions, and how different research projects are structured.
- *Communicate Skillfully* – you will gain a research vocabulary that will help you think, write, and speak more critically about social science research and you will have the opportunity to practice writing and oral presentation

of your research.

- *Work effectively in groups* – all assignments are designed to develop your group work skills.
- *Improve project management skills* – the projects are complex and require planning and management.

Required Readings and Materials

Elizabeth Heger Boyle et al., *The Art and Science of Social Research*. This book is available in several paper bindings, which have been ordered through the bookstore, and an ebook which can be rented or purchased at <https://digital.wwnorton.com/socialresearch> .

In addition to the textbook, there are additional assigned readings. Electronic copies of these articles will be posted on Canvas.

A supplemental book *Give Methods a Chance* is packaged free with paper copies of the text. These essays are also available on the publisher's web site as podcasts: <https://thesocietypages.org/methods/>

I will also be using Top Hat as a mechanism for in-class exercises and lecture comments. See below for details

This class will use Stata, a statistical software package available for free to UW Madison students via software.wisc.edu for download to your personal computer, or loaded onto the computer in campus computer labs, and Qualtrics, a platform for online surveys, which all UW Madison students can use. Create an account by logging on to survey.wisc.edu with your @wisc.edu netid.

Course Requirements

NOTE: Although you submit work and take quizzes on Canvas, Canvas cannot correctly display your grade because Canvas is incapable of calculating your grade correctly. You will receive separate email reports on your grades several times a semester. I reserve the right to make minor modifications in the grading plan if we find mistakes or find a problem with this plan. If this is necessary, I will make announcements in class and on Canvas, and will be sure to verify that students are not hurt by needed changes. The overall grading scheme and weight for the different elements of the course will not change significantly. Note that this class is not “curved.” It is mathematically possible for all students to get As or all students to get Cs or anywhere between. We will hold you to rigorous standards of performance and help you meet them if you are willing to do the work.

To avoid confusion and because deadlines sometimes shift, the specific schedule of assignment and lectures is posted on Canvas.

3 Major Group Projects 51%

The primary goal of this class is to introduce you to the methods of social research. You will have the opportunity to try a range of data collection methods. This will require you to spend time outside of class working in groups of 2-4 students to collect and analyze your data. You may write the reports summarizing these exercises either individually or as a group. When you write the paper as a group, each member is responsible for the paper in its entirety, not just the portion they write. You will submit confidential evaluations of group process that may raise or lower individual grades relative to the group. In preparation for each project, your group will submit a memo or proposal that sketches your plan. This will be discussed in the section and your TA will provide feedback. You may be asked to revise and resubmit your proposals. These proposals will count toward your grade for the project.

The three major research projects are:

Project #1: Field Observation or content analysis (17%) key methods concepts are methods basics (units of analysis, variables, samples, hypothesis testing), operationalizing a complex variable and assessing inter-coder reliability.

Project #2: Survey (17%) key methods concepts are methods basics plus asking multiple questions about a concept and analyzing data.

Project #3: Randomized Experiment (17%) key methods concepts are methods basics plus logic of controlled experiments (randomization, holding constant)

Project grading scales. Grades are recorded on a A-F 4.0 scale. The baseline is a B (3.0), the assignment was completely done and with no major errors but in a way that does not clearly demonstrate mastery of the methods concepts. To move into the A (4.0) the project has content that demonstrates active mastery of all key concepts by using more complex examples and explaining them correctly, clearly and fully without including irrelevant material. An AB (3.5) paper demonstrates mastery in most areas but has small weaknesses. A C (2.0) is given when an assignment is completely done but contains significant errors; a BC (2.5) is given when an assignment is completely done but contains a few errors. A D (1.0) is given when an assignment is largely done but with poor understanding or is missing a major element but is acceptable in the parts that are done. An F (0) is given when an assignment is only partially done and shows weak understanding. A -1 is given for an assignment that is not done at all. That is, there is a greater penalty for not doing the assignment at all than for doing it badly.

Graded Exams (18%)

There will be two graded quizzes delivered via Canvas, each worth 9%. Each will be set up as an open-book take home exam. The exams are primarily objective questions and are designed so a student who knows the material can answer in an hour, but all students will be allowed at least two hours so that simple speed in answering will be reduced as a factor. You will have at several days of flexibility about when you take it. I will pretest the exam to verify that you are allowed sufficient time to have time to think and check details while taking the exam, but you will not have time to do all your reading during the test period. Each exam will focus on assessing your understanding of key methodological concepts (propositions, variables, and measurement; sampling; reading and interpreting results) but will also include some questions drawn from the textbook, assigned readings, and lectures. Flexibility for taking the test and can be negotiated if you need an accommodation and ask for it in advance. Exam questions will be drawn randomly from a test bank. You will see your scores but not the correct answers during the exam period. Your grade for these quizzes will be calculated by computing the percentage correct and then scaling this percentage to a letter-grade scale where 100% is 4.2 (A+), 60% is 1.0 (D), and the formula $\text{grade} = 8 * \text{proportion} - 3.8$ gives the numerical grade on the GPA scale. This is the LOWEST grade you may receive on an exam. If the average scores on the quizzes are low, I reserve the right to change the scale to raise grades. I will also inspect question responses and drop questions that prove to contain errors or generate too many wrong answers and recalculate grades accordingly. Each quiz will include an open-ended item that you can use for reporting any problems you believe there are with the questions. The grade formula gives a negative number if you get less than half right but the lowest grade you will earn on quizzes is 0 unless you don't do it at all, in which case your grade will be -1, so that skipping the test hurts your grade more than doing poorly on it.

I will also offer a third exam that replicates material from the first two exams and may be used to raise your exam grade. If you do better on the third exam than you average on the first two, your exam grade will be an average of the third exam grade and the grade from the first two exams.

Ungraded Homework (16%)

You will be assigned an average of one ungraded homework a week, some due before section and some due before lecture, with some weeks having more homework and others having none. Some homework assignments will be ungraded quizzes delivered on Canvas designed to assess whether you have done the reading, others will be out-of-class activities such as taking the Human Subjects training or doing some basic activities with Stata or bringing in notes on an article for class discussion. You will get full credit for these if they are done completely and seriously before they are due. You will get partial credit for doing them incompletely or superficially or after they are due. Your grade for these assignments will be calculated by computing the percentage done and then scaling this percentage to a letter-grade scale where 100% is 4.2 (A+), 60% is 1.0 (D), and the formula $\text{grade} = 8 * \text{proportion} - 3.8$ gives the letter grade. This formula gives a negative number if you do less than half of the assignments.

Section Participation (10%)

Your participation grade is heavily weighted toward showing up as it is impossible to participate if you are not present. Your basic section participation grade is based on attendance using the formula $\text{grade} = 7.5 * \text{proportion} - 4$. This formula gives an AB for perfect attendance and a .5 (border between D and F) for 60% attendance. This grade is raised by half a grade (.05) if your participation is almost always fully engaged and productive and is lowered by half a grade (.05) if your participation is generally poor, either because you are generally disengaged (seem not to be paying attention) or because you are disruptive.

Lecture participation (5%)

Lecture attendance and participation is assessed by daily comments on lecture using the Top Hat interface supplemented with Top Hat exercises during some of the lectures. For each class, I will set up a discussion item. You should use this to make a summative comment (what happened today), to ask questions you'd like to have answered in the next class, and to give feedback on lecture process (too fast, too slow, confusing, etc.). This response needs to reference something that actually happened in the lecture for you to get credit. I will read all these comments but will not generally respond to you individually unless you ask a question. If there is a technical problem with Top Hat or you forgot your device you may submit your comment to a google doc; the link will be sent to you via email and posted in Canvas. You may also use the google doc if you are requesting that an absence be excused. This will be graded entirely on a percentage basis using the formula $\text{grade} = 8 * \text{proportion} - 3.8$ which gives a grade of 4.2 (A+) for perfect attendance and a grade of 1.0 (D) for 60% attendance. On days in which I used Top Hat as an interactive activity, the lecture response will count 90% and the other activities 10%. Excused absences will be accommodated by dropping the class from the denominator of the attendance percentage.

Top Hat is an app that can be accessed through your smartphone, tablet, or laptop computer. If you do not have access to any of these items, prefer not to bring them to class, forget to bring one, or have battery issues, write your responses on a sheet of paper and hand it in at the end of class. A semester subscription to Top Hat is \$16, a year is \$20. You can set up your Top Hat account at <https://tophat.com/> click on "signup", then Student. If you are in Top Hat it is good for all classes so DO NOT PAY TWICE. Check with Top Hat if you are not sure whether you have an account already.

Calculation of Total Course Grade

Your course grade is calculated on a four-point A-F scale like your GPA where 4=A, 3.5=AB, 3=B etc. First, each type of work is transformed into this scale as described above. Then a weighted average is calculated using the percentages shown. This average is translated into letter grades: 3.75+=A, 3.25-3.75=AB, 2.75-3.25=B, 2.25-2.75=BC, 1.5-2.25=C, .5-1.5=D, below .5=F. All grades that compute to +/- .05 of a cutting point are inspected and a human being decides whether it is more just to move the grade up or down based on the total pattern of work, evidence of improvement, and overall effort.

Honors Credit

If you are eligible to receive honors credit for SOC 357, it is your responsibility to make the appropriate course registration and to contact Professor Oliver. To receive honors credit, you must earn a B average in the regular course work and in addition do an honors project which will involve either a methodologically-sensitive review of the literature about some sociological topic of interest to you or a research proposal. One model for a proposal is to do a first draft of a proposal for the Hilldale Undergraduate Research Competition (<http://awards.advising.wisc.edu/hilldale-undergraduatefaculty-research-fellowship/>), which has a February deadline. You and Professor Oliver will negotiate the expectations for your honors project depending on your class standing and interests. The honors project will be graded on a satisfactory/unsatisfactory basis. If possible, we will also schedule a few group meetings for students taking honors to provide other enrichment experiences.

Submission of work

Except for specific assignments that require paper (which will be stated in class), all assignments must be submitted via Canvas. Use Microsoft Word format (doc or docx) if possible, or plain text (.txt), as these are easier to grade online. **Do NOT submit work in the .pages format!** If you have an Apple Mac computer, you must export the file to a Word (.doc or .docx) format; you can do this from the File menu. If you submit a corrupted or incorrect or unreadable file, you will be allowed to replace it but will receive a late penalty. All submissions to Canvas are time-stamped and must be submitted on time to receive the full credit. Except where an accommodation is warranted, grades will be reduced for late work. Your TA will provide more detailed instructions on how to submit handwritten work, such as project appendices. All questions about assignments and grading should first be directed toward your TA.

Accommodations and Other Difficulties

We know students have many issues in their lives that may affect classroom performance, including hunger, homelessness, money problems, family responsibilities or crises, death of a family member or close friend, crime victimization, illness, or disability. If you are having difficulty securing food or housing or are facing financial, family, crime victimization, or life stresses, you can get support from the Dean of Students <https://doso.students.wisc.edu/student-assistance/> and are invited, at your option, to inform your professor or TA of your circumstances. As appropriate, we may be able to offer accommodations for challenging life circumstances.

You have the right to accommodation for religious observances, disability, and life events beyond your control and we honor reasonable requests for accommodation due to athletic schedules or official campus events or challenging life circumstances. We cannot offer accommodation for classes missed due to the need to study for another class or attend an ad hoc review session for another class or do volunteer work or other optional activities.

Accommodation adjusts deadlines or the details of assignments to give you a chance to do the required work and demonstrate your knowledge. Requests for accommodation for disability, religious observance, or chronic problems beyond your control should be requested during the first two weeks of class. Requests for unexpected or emergent problems should be requested as soon as they arise. If you have a problem and are not sure whether it can be accommodated, you are invited to discuss the issue with your TA or with me. Requests for accommodation need to be made before an assignment is due. You cannot in general get retrospective (after the fact) accommodation unless there is a good reason you were unable to make a timely request.

Accommodation for students with disabilities. You have the right to accommodation for physical, mental, or psychological disability. Please send the instructor and your TA an email **by the end of the third week of the course** if you are eligible for special arrangements or accommodations for testing, assignments, or other aspects of the course. Accommodations are provided for students who qualify for disability services through the McBurney Center <http://www.mcburney.wisc.edu/>. Their website has detailed instructions about how to qualify. The McBurney Center sends official accommodation requests to instructors via email. If a disability arises during the term, communicate with Prof. Oliver and your TA as soon as possible.

If you wish to request a scheduling accommodation for exams or assignment due dates for religious observances or athletic or other campus obligations, send an email by the end of the third week of the course, or within a week of learning of a due date if it is not announced on the syllabus, stating the specific date(s) for which you request accommodation. Campus policy requires that religious observances be accommodated if you make a timely request early in the term. See the university's web page for details: <https://kb.wisc.edu/page.php?id=21698>

I will also offer accommodation in the form of extra time on the timed exams for students whose first language is not English and believe they need extra time to read and write in English. You should communicate with me if you wish to make this request.

Accommodations for excused absences from classes will be made by changing the denominator in calculating your participation grades. Other accommodations will involve adjusting deadlines or other elements of assignments, as appropriate.

TWO NOTES: (1) Accommodations for "the computer ate my homework" in all its variants will NOT be authorized. You have grown up in the computer age. Back up your work often. If you truly don't know how, ask for help. One technique is to email a copy of your document to yourself every hour or so. (2) If an unexpected event arises within 24 hours of the due date of a major assignment you should have been working on for several weeks, you should submit whatever you have in the way of partial work as a sign of good faith in asking for a last-minute extension.

Diversity and Inclusion, Complaints and Concerns

It is university policy and my personal goal that you feel safe, respected and fairly treated in this class and everywhere on campus, regardless of your race or ethnicity, economic or educational class background, gender or gender expression or sexual orientation, religion, political beliefs, personal appearance, or any other characteristic. It is my goal to help every student in this class learn the material and do well. I expect to treat you with respect, and I expect you to treat me, your TAs, and your fellow students. In a diverse society, people have different backgrounds and experiences and we sometimes offend or hurt others unintentionally. If I do this, I hope you will tell me so that I can improve. If you are concerned about disrespect, bias or any other element of process in this class, I invite you to email or speak to me (Prof. Oliver) whether your concern is about me, a TA, or a fellow student. If you feel you have experienced a campus bias incident, this page lists your options and resources and you are invited to report it at https://cm.maxient.com/reportingform.php?UnivofWisconsinMadison&layout_id=1

The Department of Sociology regularly conducts student evaluations of all professors and teaching assistants near the end of the semester. Students who have more immediate concerns about this course should report them to the instructor or to the chair, 8128 Social Science jraymo@ssc.wisc.edu or the undergraduate advisor Ellen Jacobson ejacobso@ssc.wisc.edu

Sexual harassment is unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute sexual harassment when: submission to such conduct is a condition of employment, academic progress, or participation in a university program; or submission to or rejection of such conduct influences employment, academic or university program decisions; or the conduct interferes with an employee's work or a student's academic career, or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive work, learning, or program environment. If you believe that you may have been subject to sexual harassment, you have a variety of options ranging from confidential advice to official complaints. See <https://compliance.wisc.edu/titleix/campus-procedures/reporting/complainant/> for more information.

Academic Integrity

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. The standards are outlined by the Office of the Dean of Students at <http://www.students.wisc.edu/doso/academic-integrity/> According to UWS 14, academic misconduct is defined as:

- seeks to claim credit for the work or efforts of another without authorization or citation;
- uses unauthorized materials or fabricated data in any academic exercise;
- forges or falsifies academic documents or records;
- intentionally impedes or damages the academic work of others;
- engages in conduct aimed at making false representation of a student's academic performance;
- assists other students in any of these acts.

For a complete description of behaviors that violate the University's standards as well the disciplinary penalties and procedures, please see the Dean of Students website. If you have questions about the rules for any of the assignments or exams, please ask your instructor or one of the TAs. The penalty for any intentional act of academic dishonesty in this class is (a) an academic penalty equal to three times the academic harm caused by the dishonesty AND (b) a letter to the Dean of Students explaining what you did, and the penalty imposed; this letter is forwarded to your academic dean. Specific acts that are academic dishonesty in this class include (but are not limited to) falsifying attendance records, falsifying reports on how you did your research projects or what your data were, or receiving unauthorized assistance on quizzes and exams.

To avoid confusion and because deadlines sometimes shift, the schedule of assignment and lectures is posted on Canvas.