

Research Methods for Sociology

Season, Year

Day, Time

Classroom

Dr. Lefeng Lin

Email

Office:

Office hours: Day Time, or by appointment

Overview

This is a basic course in how to do social science research and how to evaluate research of others. It provides an 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.

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 the methods of statistical computing and will use these tools to analyze the data that you collect.

Learning Objectives

Beyond the specific substantive and methodological content that I will cover in this course, I have designed this course to achieve the following instructional objectives:

- *Conduct Research and Analyze Data (quantitative or qualitative).*
- *Critically Evaluate Published Research.*
- *Communicate Skillfully.*
- *Work effectively in groups.*
- *Improve project management skills.*

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 research is a relatively straightforward, systematic set of procedures by which you can get answers to questions you have, (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.

Required Readings

The required textbook:

In addition to these books, there are additional assigned readings. Electronic copies of these articles will be posted on (Canvas). Hard copies of the articles in the reader will be available on reserve in (Library). I expect you to bring the assigned readings with you to class in order to facilitate discussion.

Course Requirements:

Homework (15%)

- Two types of homework will be assigned in section: reading responses (5%) and assignments (10%).
- *Reading responses:* For selected readings, you will be asked to write a short reading response that addresses a specific set of questions. Reading responses will be submitted via (Canvas) and will be graded on a five-point scale.
- *Assignments:* There will also be three small assignments that will be distributed in section. Two of the three assignments will be begun in class and finished at home. These assignments include:
 - Homework #1: Ethics certification
 - Homework #2: Sampling exercise
 - Homework #3: Stata exercise

Group Projects (54%)

- 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 2-3 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 she/he writes.
- The three research projects are:
 - Project #1: Field Observation (18%)
 - Project #2: Randomization (18%)
 - Project #3: Survey (18%)
- In preparation for each project, your group will submit a memo or proposal that sketches your plan. We will discuss your proposal in my office hours or by appointment. You may be asked to revise and resubmit your proposals. These proposals will count toward your grade for the project.

Quizzes (20%)

- At the end of each week, students will complete a quiz based on assigned readings and lectures from the week before. Some quiz questions will cover material included in the readings but not in the lecture, while others can only be answered by attending and paying attention in lecture. The quiz will be administered through (Canvas). The quizzes will consist of true/false questions. You will have two chances to take each quiz and only the higher score will be counted. At each attempt, the questions will be drawn randomly from the “question library” and you will not get the same set of questions in your two attempts.

- **It is your responsibility to complete the quiz during the open window.** You will be given 60 hours to complete the quiz (e.g. W 9 am – F 9 pm), which is sufficient time for most students to find time in their schedule. If you forget to complete the quiz, it **will not be re-opened** for you after the quiz deadline. We can, however, negotiate the deadline for submitting your quiz **if you contact me before the quiz deadline.** Things happen; in the event that you have scheduled university-related travel, religious observations, severe illness, computer problems, or rescheduled work shifts, email me and I can extend your quiz submission deadline **if you contact me before the quiz deadline.**
- Your lowest quiz score will be dropped from the final quiz grade.

Participation (11%)

- Lecture Participation (8%)
 - **You are expected to attend and participate in lecture.**
 - Participation scores will be adjusted for **excused** absences. You must contact be **before** lecture in order for your participation to be adjusted.
- Presentation (3%)
 - Groups will present their results from Project #3 in the final meetings of section.
 - The presentation will be evaluated on a five-point scale.

Honors Credit:

If you are eligible to receive honors credit for (class number), it is your responsibility to make the appropriate course registration and to contact Professor Lin. In order to receive honors credit, you must write a brief research proposal, following the guidelines for (university specific or instructor-made). For grading purposes, your grade on the proposal will be averaged with that of your group projects.

Submission of work:

- All assignments must be submitted via (Canvas).
- All submissions to (Canvas) are time-stamped and must be submitted on time in order to receive the full credit. Points will be subtracted for each day late.
- Homework and group project reports must be submitted via Dropbox on (Canvas). We recommend that you submit these assignments in Microsoft Word format, if possible.
- I will provide more detailed instructions on how to submit your written work, such as project appendices.

Accommodations: Please send the instructor an email by the end of the second week of the course if you are eligible for special arrangements or accommodations for testing, assignments, or other aspects of the course. This may be the case if English is your second language, you have a travel schedule from student athletics, or you experience a physical or psychological condition that makes it difficult for you to complete assignments without some modification of those tasks. Accommodations are provided for students who qualify for disability services through the (a university institution). Their website has detailed instructions about how to qualify: <http://www/> Provide a copy of your accommodations request to the instructor.

If you wish to request a scheduling accommodation for religious observances, send an email by the end of the second week of the course 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: <http://www/>

Academic Integrity: As with all courses at the (university), you are expected to follow the University's rules and regulations pertaining to academic honesty and integrity. The standards are outlined by (Office of) at (Website). According to (rule number), academic misconduct is defined as:

For a complete description of behaviors that violate the University's standards as well the disciplinary penalties and procedures, please see (website). If you have questions about the rules for any of the assignments, please ask the instructor.

Departmental notice of grievance and appeal rights (if there is one)

Deadlines

Note: all quizzes, homework, and projects must be submitted **before 12 a.m.** to receive full credit.

Deadline	Assignment	Comment
M/D	Quiz #1	Lectures week 1-2
M/D	Quiz #2	Lectures week 3
M/D	Homework #1	Research ethics certification
M/D	Quiz #3	Lectures week 4
M/D	Quiz #4	Lectures week 5
M/D	Quiz #5	Lectures week 6
M/D	Homework #2	Sampling exercise
M/D	Quiz #6	Lectures week 7
M/D	Project #1	Observation project
M/D	Quiz #7	Lectures week 8
M/D	Quiz #8	Lectures week 9
M/D	Project #2	Randomization project
M/D	Quiz #9	Lectures week 10
M/D	Quiz #10	Lectures week 11
M/D	Homework #3	Stata exercise
M/D	Quiz #11	Lectures week 12
M/D	Quiz #12	Lectures week 13
M/D	Quiz #13	Lectures week 14
M/D	Project #3	Survey project

Schedule of Classes (Two lectures for each week)

- Week 1 **Introduction**
Reading: The syllabus
Lecture: Introductions
Assignments: None
- Week2 **Sociology as Science**
Reading: Textbook Chapter
 Whyte, “Appendix A,” *Street Corner Society*
 Article TBD
Lecture: Objectivity and the role of values in social science research
 How to read a research article (Article TBD)
Assignments: Quiz #1 must be completed by **day, time.**
 Note: Quiz #1 covers week 1-2 and associated lecture readings
- Week 3 **Elements of Social Research**
Reading: Textbook Chapter
 Sudhir Venkatesh, “The Hustler and the Hustled,” *Gang Leader for a*
 Day, pp. 185-218
Lecture: Elements of Research
 Ethical issues in studying human subjects
 Homework #1 distributed
 In class exercise: hypotheses
Assignments: Quiz #2 must be completed by **day, time.**
 Homework #1 must be submitted by **day, time.**
- Week 4 **Measurement in Social Research**
Reading: Textbook Chapter
 Li Zhou, 2015, “Obama’s New College Scorecard Flips the
 Focus of Rankings,” *The Atlantic*
Lecture: Measurement
 In class exercise: measurement
 In class group exercise: measure college ranking
Assignments: Quiz #3 must be completed by **day, time.**
- Week 5 **Qualitative Research**
Reading: Textbook Chapter
 Hoang. “Chapter 6: Constructing Desirable Bodies.” *Dealing in Desire*,
 pp. 126-53
Lecture: Field Observation
 Interview
 Introduction Project #1
Assignments: Quiz #4 must be completed by **day, time.**
 Project #1 due **day, time.**
- Week 6 **Sampling**

Reading: Textbook Chapter
Lecture: Sample and Sampling
Sampling Methods
Homework #2 (Sampling exercise) distributed and begun in Class
Project #1 Proposal
Assignments: Quiz #5 must be completed by **day, time.**
Homework #2 must be submitted by **day, time.**

Week 7

Causality and Experiments

Reading: Textbook Chapter
Ernest-Jones et al. "Effects of Eye Images on Everyday Cooperative Behavior: A Field Experiment"
Levine et al. "Identity and Emergency Intervention: How Social Group Membership and Inclusiveness of Group Boundaries Shape Helping Behavior"
Massey and Lundy. "Use of Black English and Racial Discrimination in Urban Housing Markets: New Methods and Findings"
Ludwig et al. "Neighborhood Effects on the Long-Term Well-Being of Low-Income Adults"
Lecture: Causality
Experiment
Assignments: Quiz #6 must be completed by **day, time.**

Week 8

Designing Field Experiments and Mid-Term Review

Reading: No assigned reading
Lecture: Plan randomization project
Project #2 Proposal
Mid-term review
Assignments: Quiz #7 must be completed by **day, time.**
Project #2 due **day, time.**

Week 9

Multiple Methods

Reading: Textbook Chapter
Evans and Moulder. "Reflecting on a Decade of Women's Publications in Four Top Political Science Journals."
Sommers. "Citizenship and the Place of the Public Sphere"
Lecture: Content Analysis
Historical-Comparative Method
Assignments: Quiz #8 must be completed by **day, time.**

Week 10

Survey Methods

Reading: Textbook Chapter
Rubin, "Measurement of Romantic Love"
Peterson et al., "Orientations to Happiness and Life Satisfaction: the Full Life versus the Empty Life"

Desmond and Shollenberger. “Forced Displacement from Rental Housing: Prevalence and Neighborhood Consequences”
O’Brien. “Depleting Capital? Race, Wealth, and Informal Financial Assistance”

Lecture: Survey
Questionnaire
Index and Scale
Online Survey Training (Qualtrics)
Assignments: Quiz #9 must be completed by **day, time.**

Week 11 **Analyzing Quantitative Data**

Reading: Textbook Chapter
Lecture: Stata Basics
Stata exercise (Homework #3)
Assignments: Quiz #10 must be completed by **day, time.**
Homework #3 due **day, time.**
Project #3 due **day, time.**

Week 12 **Qualitative Data Analysis**

Reading: Textbook Chapter
Ferree. “Resonance and Radicalism: Feminist Framing in the Abortion Debates of the United States and Germany.”
Lecture: Software for Processing Qualitative Data (NVivo) + coding exercise
Critique Questionnaires in Class (Project #3 Proposal)
Assignments: Quiz #11 must be completed by **day, time.**

Week 13 **Unobtrusive Research (and Big Data)**

Reading: Textbook Chapter
Cukier and Mayer-Schoenberger, “The Rise of Big Data: How It’s Changing the Way We Think About the World”
danah boyd and Kate Crawford, “Critical Questions for Big Data: Provocations for a cultural, technological, and scholarly phenomenon”
Lecture: *Big Data*
Download Project #3 data from Qualtrics
Create the project dataset
Assignments: Quiz #12 must be completed by **day, time.**

Week 14 **No lecture**

Reading: No reading
Lecture: Project #3 presentations
Assignments: Quiz #13 must be completed by **day, time.**