

METHODS OF SOCIAL RESEARCH (SOC 1020)

Meetings: Fall 2009 MWF 1:00pm – 1:50pm – Wilson 101

Instructor: Professor Bridwell-Mitchell

Office Hours: Wednesday 2:30-5:30pm; by appointment

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Course Description

The course *Methods of Social Research* has one overarching aim: For students to gain the tools to critically observe and assess the social world in order to improve collective knowledge and help solve important problems. This aim is addressed by providing students with the skills and knowledge to (1) ask and answer interesting and important research questions and (2) evaluate the attributes, quality, and impact of reported research.

Conducting and assessing meaningful research depends on a variety of skills from rigorous training in statistics and methods of inference to the social savvy required to gain entry into research sites, collect data, and appropriately present findings. No one class can expose students to the full breadth and depth of required knowledge. This course is a survey course designed to introduce students to each of the important components of conducting social research, such as formulating a research question, theorizing, research design, data analysis and reporting. However, since quality research substantially depends on effective research design special emphasis is given to this topic.

Course Format

The course is organized around thirteen focal topics on which there are readings, lectures, in-class discussions and assignments. Since research, like many skills, is learned best by doing, the course places a strong emphasis on application and practice of new knowledge. Specifically, there are a number of in-class discussion activities which provide the opportunity to apply, synthesize and assess your new knowledge. There are also six formal assignments that are designed to build on one another to help you plan, conduct and present your own research study. The presentation of the research in a formal research paper is the final assessment for the course.

Some of the most strongly-held professional norms amongst researchers are collegiality, cooperation, and collaboration because these are how new knowledge becomes shared and how the most difficult problems are solved. Therefore, students are asked to plan, develop, and execute their research studies in 3-4 member teams, based on shared interest in a specific research topic. These research teams will work together on in-class activities as well as on formal assignments, on which you will be graded as a team.

Course Requirements and Assessment

The course has three required texts: (1) *The Basics of Social Research* (4th Edition) by Earl R. Babbie ; (2) *Experiencing Social Research: A Reader* by Kerry J. Strand and Gregory L. Weiss; and (3) *The Craft of Research* (Third Edition) by Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb and Joseph M. Williams. All the texts are available at the Brown University Bookstore. The text, *The Craft of Research* is available as an on-line book through the Brown Library. I will do my best to make the other texts available on-reserve at the library.

Students are expected to attend ALL class sessions and to be ON TIME. Frequent absence, lateness, or leaving class early (e.g. occurring more than 4 times – nearly 10% of the sessions) will be reflected in your final grade. Extenuating circumstances should be discussed in advance with the professor via e-mail. All students are expected to participate fully in cooperative class activities. All written assignments (not completed in class) must be typed on neat 8.5” x 11” paper, free of grammar and spelling errors and composed in 12-pt Times New Roman font with 1-inch margins and double-spacing. I do not accept late assignments. I do not offer extra-credit. I do not provide make-up assignments (again, extenuating circumstances should be discussed in advance). Your overall performance will be based on 100 possible points, as follows:

- I. **Course Assignments** [60pts - 10pts each]: Each course topic culminates with a formal assignment. For students working in research teams each assignment, except Assignments 1 and 3, should be completed as a team. Because the aim of team research is to build norms of collegiality and maximize learning students should work on each assignment collaboratively rather than dividing assignments amongst the team. I consider the latter an explicit effort to undermine the course goals.
- II. **Final Research Report** [25pts.]: The culminating product for the course is a research report. The research report is 15-page paper that includes an introduction, literature review & theorizing section, research methods, findings, and conclusion. Most of the components for the report will be developed throughout the semester. However, one semester is insufficient time to execute a full-blown, quality research project. Thus, my expectation is that the report and its preparation be an exercise, which allows you to apply and practice essential skills. It need not be a perfect, publication-ready research paper although papers closer to this standard will likely receive higher marks. Students working in research teams will also be asked to provide a 1-page memo explaining the division of labor for the final report. Each student will also be asked to complete a peer assessment of their teammates’ contributions using a feedback form provided by the instructor.
- III. **Class Participation** [15pts]: Your class participation grade is comprised primarily of your contribution and performance in 10 in-class meetings, which will be graded pass/fail for 1 point. However, partial points and bonus point will be awarded to individual students based on peer and instructor assessments. The remaining class participation points will be judged based on your steady attendance, punctuality in class, and the extent to which you are prepared for class as assessed by your ability to thoughtfully ask and answer questions posed by the instructor and other students.

For students taking the course for a grade, as a general rule I consider 90-100 points roughly equivalent to an A, 80-89 points, roughly equivalent to a B and 70-79 points roughly equivalent to a C. For student taking the course pass fail you must earn 75 points to earn a passing grade.

Academic Conduct

Please note that I take the academic code very seriously. The academic code is designed to protect and promote the cooperative enterprise of learning. Any suspected violations of the code will be reported to the undergraduate dean who will make the final determination of the severity of the infraction. Examples of code violations include “taking unfair advantage of policies or procedures” and “misrepresentation of facts, significant omissions and falsifications in any connection with the academic process (p.7).” You can view the academic code in full at: www.brown.edu/Administration/Dean_of_the_College/curriculum/documents/principles.pdf

SUMMARY OF INSTRUCTION

		Topic 1: Studying the Social World: An Introduction
Wed.	9-Sep-09	Overview: Examining the Social World <i>Reading:</i> Babbie Chpt. 1
Fri	11-Sep-09	Identifying Research Topics & Questions <i>Reading:</i> Booth, Colomb & Williams Chpts. 3 & 4
Mon.	14-Sep-09	Identifying Research Topics & Questions <i>Reading:</i> Booth, Colomb & Williams Chpts. 3 & 4
Wed.	16-Sep-09	IN-CLASS MEETING 1: Research Topics ASSIGNMENT 1 DUE
		Topic 2: Ontology, Epistemology & Theorizing
Fri	18-Sep-09	Understanding Research Paradigms <i>Readings:</i> Babbie Chpt. 2
Mon.	21-Sep-09	Theorizing answers to Research Questions <i>Reading:</i> Booth, Colomb & Williams Chpts. 5 & 6
Wed.	23-Sep-09	Theorizing answers to Research Questions <i>Readings:</i> Booth, Colomb & Williams Chpts. 7-11
Fri	25-Sep-09	IN-CLASS MEETING 2: Research Question & Answers <i>Readings:</i> Booth, Colomb & Williams Chpts. 7-11 ASSIGNMENT 2 DUE

- Topic 3: Research Design - Experimental Research**
- Mon. 28-Sep-09 Research Design - An Overview
Reading: Babbie Chpt. 3 & 4
- Wed. 30-Sep-09 Experimental Research
Reading: Babbie Chpt. 8
- Fri 2-Oct-09 IN-CLASS MEETING 3: Experimental Research
Reading: Strand & Weiss Chpt. 4
ASSIGNMENT 3 DUE
- Topic 4: Research Design - Survey Research**
- Mon. 5-Oct-09 Survey Research
Reading: Babbie Chpt. 9
- Wed. 7-Oct-09 Survey Research
Reading: Babbie Chpt. 9
- Fri 9-Oct-09 IN-CLASS MEETING 4: Survey Research
Reading: Weis & Strand Chpt. 5
ASSIGNMENT 4 DUE
- Topic 5: Research Design – Archival and Historical Research**
- Mon. 12-Oct-09 NO CLASS – COLUMBUS DAY
- Wed. 14-Oct-09 Archival and Historical Research
Readings: Babbie Chpt. 11
- Fri 16-Oct-09 IN-CLASS MEETING 5: Archival and Historical Research
Reading: Weiss & Strand Chpt. 8
- Topic 6: Research Design - Field Research**
- Mon. 19-Oct-09 Field Research
Reading: Babbie Chpt. 10
- Wed. 21-Oct-09 Field Research
Reading: Babbie Chpt. 10
- Fri 23-Oct-09 IN-CLASS MEETING 6: Field Research
Reading: Weiss & Strand Chpt. 7
- Topic 9: Research Design - Sampling & Data Collection**
- Mon. 26-Oct-09 Sampling from a population
Reading: Babbie Chpt. 7
- Wed. 28-Oct-09 Sampling from a population
Reading: Babbie Chpt. 7
- Fri 30-Oct-09 IN-CLASS MEETING 7: Sampling & Data Collection

ASSIGNMENT NOTE: BY THIS WEEK YOU SHOULD HAVE IDENTIFIED A POPULATION FROM WHICH YOU CAN SAMPLE AND DRAW DATA.

Mon. 2-Nov-09 **Topic 10: Research Design - Measurement & Inference**
Operationalizing Constructs
Reading: Babbie Chpts. 5 & 6
ASSIGNMENT 5 DUE

Wed. 4-Nov-09 Operationalizing Constructs
Reading: Babbie Chpts. 5 & 6

Fri 6-Nov-09 IN-CLASS MEETING 8: Data, Sampling & Measurement
Reading: Babbie Chpts. 5, 6 & 7

Mon. 9-Nov-09 **Topic 11: Quantitative Data Analysis**
Quantitative Analysis
Reading: Babbie Chpt. 14

Wed. 11-Nov-09 Quantitative Analysis
Reading: Babbie Chpt. 14

Fri 13-Nov-09 IN-CLASS MEETING 9 AT COMPUTER LAB
Reading: Intro to SPSS

Mon. 16-Nov-09 Quantitative Analysis
Reading: Babbie Chpt. 14

Wed. 18-Nov-09 **Topic 12: Qualitative Data Analysis**
Qualitative Analysis
Reading: Babbie Chpt. 13

Fri 20-Nov-09 Qualitative Analysis
Reading: Babbie Chpt. 13

Mon. 23-Nov-09 IN-CLASS MEETING 10 AT COMPUTER LAB
Reading: Intro to NVIVO
ASSIGNMENT 6 DUE

Wed. 25-Nov-09 No Class – Thanksgiving Recess

Fri 27-Nov-09 No Class – Thanksgiving Recess

Mon. 30-Nov-09 **Topic 13: Reporting Results & Presenting Research**
Explaining what you know in Writing
Reading: Booth Colomb & Williams Chpts. 1 & 2

- Wed. 2-Dec-09 Explaining what you know in Writing
Reading: Booth, Colomb & Williams Part IV Prologue & Chpts. 12-14
- Fri 4-Dec-09 FINAL CLASS MEETING
Reading: Booth, Colomb & Williams Chpts. 15-17
- READING WEEK**
- Mon. 7-Dec-09 NOTE: I will be available all this week by appointment to meet with
Wed. 9-Dec-09 research teams about their final research reports.
Fri 11-Dec-09
- Mon. 14-Dec-09 **FINAL RESEARCH REPORT DUE**

ASSIGNMENT SUMMARY

Due Date

In-Class Meeting Assignments

**9/16; 9/25;
10/2; 10/9;
10/16; 10/23;
10/30; 11/6;
11/13; 11/23**

In-Class Meeting Assignments: As part of in-class meetings research teams will be asked to complete a team assignment in class. The assignment is typically a discussion guide related to the week’s reading and the team’s research project. The in-class assignments are designed to be completed in the 50 minute class period and are due to the instructor at the end of the class session. Students will also be asked to submit a peer review and feedback form as part of each in-class assignment.

10 points total

Formal Assignments

Wed. 16-Sep

Assignment 1: Submit 3 artifacts/sources that illustrate topics of interest for a research project. Provide a 1-paragraph summary for each topic including citations to research related to the topic.

10 points

Fri. 25-Sep

Assignment 2: Develop a research question. Submit a 10-20 source annotated bibliography of references related to your research question. Select the most relevant article and provide a 1-page write-up explaining the research’s ontological and epistemological approach.

10 points

Fri. 2-Oct

Assignment 3: Complete and submit proof of certification of online CITI training: <http://www.citiprogram.org/>. Provide a 1-page reflection on what you learned from the training and your assessments about ethical standards in research.

10 points

Fri. 9-Oct

Assignment 4: Submit a 5-7 page write-up of the introduction, literature review and ‘theorizing’ that addresses your research question. This write up should draw heavily on lessons learned from Booth, Colomb & Williams (2008).

10 points

- Mon. 2-Nov** **Assignment 5:** Submit a 2-3 page write up proposing which research design you plan to use for your project and describing how you would sample the population and collect data for your study. **10 points**
- Mon. 23-Nov** **Assignment 6:** Identify sample data for your topic and provide an example of how you would approach the analysis. Include a 1-2 page description of the data source and sample, and what you think you have found (or might find). **10 points**
- Mon. 14-Dec** **FINAL RESEARCH REPORT:** See rubric provided by the instructor. **25 points**