

SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH METHODS

SOCIOLOGY 2301-02: Fall 2014

Kennesaw State University

Friday 5:00 – 7:45 pm

Social Sciences Classroom Bldg., Room 3025

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Office hours: F 4-5 pm or by appointment

Required readings:

Neuman, Lawrence: *Understanding Research*. 2009. Allyn & Bacon

Course Objectives:

SOCI 2301 Sociological Research Methods is the first of two social research methods courses required for sociology majors. SOCI 2301 sets the stage for SOCI 4499: Senior Seminar. SOCI 2301 focuses on decisions that must be made by researchers preparing to collect the data, while SOCI 4499 covers the analysis and the interpretation of data.

This course should help you understand the nature of sociological investigation, the relationship between theory and research, the advantages and disadvantages of various methods of investigation, their benefits and limitations, as well as their ethical, theoretical and practical implications. The course will also assist you in developing theoretical and practical skills required for preparing successful research proposals. At the end of the course, you will turn in a complete research proposal for a research study you would like to conduct in Senior Seminar.

Course requirements:

Reading. Reading represents the major assignment for this class. I expect each of you to come to class prepared to discuss, question and clarify the day's reading assignment. While I do not expect you to have mastered all of the readings before coming to class, I do expect you to have read the texts, and to be prepared to discuss them.

Human Subjects Research Certification. This assignment includes learning modules and quizzes on issues related to research with human subjects. The Institutional Review Board wants to make sure that people involved in research are treated ethically. This is a 2-3 hours on-line assignment available at www.kennesaw.edu/irb.

Survey. The students will learn how to create a survey to be used in their own research study. The survey must contain 10 close-ended questions, one open-ended question, and 5-6 demographic questions (16-17 items total). Be creative! Try to use different scales and indexes. The survey should also include a contingency, a skip and a matrix question. The questionnaire has to be pretested on at least two subjects. **This assignment includes four parts:** 1) cover letter for the survey, 2) the initial version of their questionnaire (prior to pretesting), 3) the final version (after pretesting), and 4) a half page explanation of the changes resulted from pretesting and why did they feel compelled to make these changes.

Interview. Students will learn how to build an interview guide, how to record and transcribe an actual interview. The interview guide should be on the same topic of interest, and eventually be used for their research study. **This assignment includes three parts:** 1) cover letter for the interview, 2) interview guide, and 3) transcription of a 30-40 minutes interview.

Lab reports. The lab reports are data analysis assignments in SPSS to be completed in the computer lab during class time. The lab reports will be checked in class for grading. (**No make-up work allowed! Do not miss this class!**) The first lab report includes the development of codebook and data entry of the two surveys completed by students. Second lab report consists in an application of chi-square test and correlation of data from GSS SPSS file.

Class participation. The students will be able to collect points for their participation in several class assignments.

Research Proposal. Students will develop a research proposal for their final. The professor reserves the right to deny a proposed research topic based on feasibility of conducting the research. Students are encouraged to work in teams of two members in order to write stronger proposals (with more in-depth literature review and larger samples) that can eventually be submitted as writing samples to graduate school or presented at student symposiums and conferences. You are welcome to submit multiple drafts of your research proposal for revisions, as well as to ask for additional guidance on relevant topics during my office hours. Students are strongly encouraged to visit the Writing Center if they previously experienced problems with their writing. No late proposals are accepted. See attached guidelines on research proposal.

Grading:

| | |
|---------------------------------------|-----------|
| Human Subjects Research Certification | 10 points |
| Survey | 10 points |
| Interview | 10 points |
| Lab reports (2*5 points) | 10 points |
| Participation | 10 points |
| Midterm exam | 30 points |
| Research proposal | 20 points |

Total

100 points

Final grades will be appointed as follows:

| | |
|---------------------|---|
| 90 -100 points | A |
| 80 -89 points | B |
| 70-79 points | C |
| 60-69 points | D |
| less than 60 points | E |

Attendance:

Attendance is required and will be taken every class. Keep in mind also that grades are almost always positively related to class attendance. All the assignments are deeply connected to the material covered in class and in readings, so you might not want to miss a class. Acceptable reasons for excused absences are: serious illness, illness or death of a family member, university related trips, major religious holidays or other reasons approved in advance by instructor. If you have been sick for a long time and did not show up in class, please let me know somehow (e.g. e-mail me), so I do not drop you off from class.

Academic Honesty Policy

Cheating or plagiarism will be sanctioned according to University policies. Please check The *Handbook of Student Rights and Responsibilities*.

Tentative Schedule of Classes

| Date | Chapter |
|----------------|--|
| Aug 22 | Introduction |
| Aug 29 | Ch. 1: Why Do Research? Ch. 2: Planning a Study |
| Sep 5 | Ch. 3: Becoming an Ethical Researcher <i>Human Subjects Research Certification (take-home on-line test)</i> |
| Sep 12 | Ch. 4: Sampling |
| Sep 19 | Ch. 5: Measuring Social Life |
| Sep 26 | Ch. 6: Survey |
| Oct 3 | Survey due Ch. 8: Research with Nonreactive Measures <i>Content Analysis Exercise</i> |
| Oct 10 | Codebook construction & Data entry Ch. 9: Making Sense of the Numbers I Univariate Analysis, Descriptive Statistics, Mean & Mode Graphs, pies and charts |
| Oct 17 | EXAM |
| Oct 24 | Ch. 9: Making Sense of the Numbers II Significance level, cross-tabs, correlation Ch. 9: Making Sense of the Numbers III t-test, chi square test Lab exercises Intro and Literature Review of the Research proposal due (4 pages) |
| Oct 31 | Ch. 10-1: Observing People in Natural Settings Field research Interview Observing People in Natural Settings Focus Group, Case Study |
| Nov 7 | <i>Field Research Day: Interview</i> Methods section of the Research proposal due (2 pages) |
| Nov 14 | Qualitative Data Analysis Presentation of NVIVO Interview due |
| Nov 21 | Research Proposals Presentations |
| Nov. 28 | Thanksgiving Break: No Class! |
| Dec. 5 | Research Proposals Presentations |
| Dec. 12 | Research Proposals Due |

Research Proposal

You can choose a topic for your own paper, or you can consult with the instructor for a proper research topic. In case that you select your own topic, the topic must be known to and approved by the instructor.

Format (5 points) Regarding the format, the paper must:

- be typed, double-spaced with the Times font size 12.
- have one-inch margin on all sides.
- conform to the ASA or APA style (be consistent)
- be error-free regarding grammar and spelling.
- be between 5-6 pages in length, excluding the title page. There must be at least five refereed articles cited.

The paper must include the following sections in that order. For reference, see our textbook (Neuman):

1. The title page (title of the paper, your name, course number and semester)

2. Introduction (no more than 1 page) (to convince readers that the topic is worth studying).

- Brief history/discussion of the issue. This is the part where you should include official statistics on your topic, and later trends of the social phenomenon.
- The purpose and benefits/significance of the study and the importance of the study (the last paragraph of the introduction). It must also include 2-3 **research questions** that your study attempts to answer.

3. Literature review (3 pages) (to see what related studies have been conducted up to date). Discuss and analyze the main important concepts. Also include:

- **Empirical studies** (within the past ten years) that were conducted and that are related to the paper topic should be summarized and written in this section. *Your main source of information should be academic books and academic (refereed, peer-reviewed) articles (a minimum of six cited articles).* Students must avoid using non-refereed publications (such as newspapers, magazines, information from the Internet, etc.) as their references.
- **Theory** (half page): How a particular theory will help you to answer your research question?
- At the end of this section (i.e., the last paragraph), you should mention how your study can fill a **gap** in the literature and contribute to future studies in the field. In other words, what your study will examine that has not been studied previously.

4. Methodology (2 pages) should answer the following questions:

- What are your independent and dependent variables? How did you operationalize (or measure) these independent and dependent variables? What type of variable you use (nominal, ordinal or interval).
- How do you measure these variables? What type of indexes (if applicable) and scales are you going to use? For example, you may say that “the Likert-type scale is used to measure the variables, with 1 representing strongly disagree, 2 disagree.....and 5 representing strongly agree. Or you might measure the variables using yes/no/don’t know answers. Just mention that.
- What is the location/ site for your study and why did you choose it? What month/ year, day and time do you plan to collect the data and why?
- What is your population and sample? (Why did you choose them as your sample? What was your sampling technique (such as random, convenient, snow ball, or selective?) Why did you use that sampling technique? → You should start with the originally intended samples first before you talked about your selected samples. Give descriptive statistics about your sample and explain if they fit all the eligibility criteria.
- Did you have any contact person to collect your data? Did you have a cover letter/ informed consent form that explains about your study? Describe them.
- Explain why did you chose either qualitative or quantitative data for your study.
- What are your main instruments? For instance:
 - a. For **quantitative studies**- survey (Internet, mail or telephone survey) or secondary data, if available. Quantitative data also include official data you can find. For survey research design, include a minimum of 75 subjects. (**Remember: you will be required to actually conduct ONLY two questionnaires, but you need to include in your research design the appropriate number of questionnaires!**) For the research paper, each student is encouraged to use an existing survey questionnaire. The survey must contain 10 Likert-type scale questions, one open-ended question, and 5-6 demographic questions (16-17 items total). The questionnaire has to be pretested on at least two subjects. Include the initial version of your questionnaire (prior to pretesting) and the final version (after pretesting) with a half page explanation of the changes resulted from pretesting and why did you feel compelled to make these changes.
 - b. For **qualitative studies**- interview, focus group, ethnography, and content analysis, design to include a minimum of 8-10 subjects in your sample. Plan for the interviews/ focus groups to be one hour long. (**Remember: you will be required to actually conduct and transcribe only ONE interview, but the design has to include the whole number of interviews/focus groups that your research requires!**) The interview guide must include at least 11 questions and 5-6 demographic questions. The interview guide has to be pretested on at least two subjects. Include the initial version of your

interview guide (prior to pretesting) and the final version (after pretesting) with a half page explanation of the changes resulted from pretesting and why did you feel compelled to make these changes.

- c. The pretesting explanation should be in the methods section, but the instruments should be in the Appendix.
- Discuss ethical concerns and protection of human subjects.
 - Discuss the weaknesses and possible limitations of your study. This can be mentioned in the area of sampling used, design of the survey, statistical techniques used, and the (independent and/or dependent) variables examined in the study.