

Sociology 304: Sociological Research Methods
Tuesday & Thursday, 01:30pm-02:55pm
Swan 111

Instructor: John T. Lang

Office Hours: Tuesday & Thursday, 1:00pm – 1:30pm and 3:00pm – 4:00pm

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Course Website: <http://moodle.oxy.edu>

“‘Method’ has to do, first of all, with how to ask and answer questions with some assurance that the answers are more or less durable. ‘Theory’ has to do, above all, with paying close attention to the words one is using, especially their degree of generality and their logical relations. The primary purpose of both is clarity of conception and economy of procedure, and most importantly just now, the release rather than the restriction of the sociological imagination.”

-C. Wright Mills (1959: 121), *The Sociological Imagination*

INTRODUCTION

This course looks at 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. It assumes no background in research methods or statistics. We will talk about the scientific method, the complexities of applying methods to social research, ethics and bias, and research design. You will also learn about major “quantitative” and “qualitative” methodologies, including surveys, interviews, ethnography, experiments, participant observation, and content analysis – and have opportunities to try out these methods.

Other classes you have taken, both in Sociology and other disciplines, had the goal of teaching you *what we know*. In this class, you will learn *how we know* what we know. By the end of the semester you will:

- (1) be familiar with research methods used by social scientists to examine and explain the complexities of the social world;
- (2) have the necessary skills to understand and critically evaluate both the methods and results of published research, as well as the world around you; and
- (3) be able to design, implement, and analyze your own social research.

Please Note

Prerequisite: Sociology 101.

First year students or graduate students may not enroll in this class.

REQUIRED MATERIALS

The required textbook is available at the Occidental College Bookstore. You can also find it online at your favorite book seller.

Chambliss, Daniel F. and Russell K. Schutt. 2012. *Making Sense of the Social World: Methods of Investigation, 4th Edition*. New York: Sage Publications, Inc.

ISBN-13: 978-1452217710

GRADING

I do not give extra-credit assignments. I will base your final grade on the following:

80% = Homework

20% = Quizzes

Attendance, Reading & Class Participation

Our time together is brief and we have a wealth of ideas to exchange and explore in that limited period. I expect you to come to class on time and remain here until class is over. You may miss 2 class sessions without penalty. After that, for each missed class your final course grade will drop one fraction of a letter grade. For example, if your work is above average and earns you a B, that absence will cause your final grade to drop to a B-. For every additional absence, the grade will continue to fall by the same fraction of a letter grade.

Arriving late or departing early twice equals one absence. I have this policy to encourage students to attend class and to do well in the course. I do not distinguish between "excused" and "unexcused" absences. You are, therefore, strongly encouraged not to miss class carelessly because of the possibility of unexpected or unavoidable absences during the semester. No matter the reason, it is always your responsibility to contact other students to learn what you've missed and to get notes.

Homework – 80%

You will typically have about two weeks to complete each of the four assignments. The nature of these homework assignments will vary depending on the topic. Assignments are due at the beginning of class and should be typed unless otherwise specified.

Quizzes – 20%

There will be 5 short quizzes throughout the semester. They will NOT be announced; you can NOT make up a quiz if you miss class. I will automatically drop your lowest quiz grade; this means that your four highest scores are each worth 5 percent of your final grade.

COURSE GRADES

Do NOT count on a curve. I will assign letter grades for the entire course as follows:

93.0 and higher = A

73.0 to 76.99 = C

90.0 to 92.99 = A-

70.0 to 72.99 = C-

87.0 to 89.99 = B+

67.0 to 69.99 = D+

83.0 to 86.99 = B

60.0 to 66.99 = D

80.0 to 82.99 = B-

59.99 and lower = F.

77.0 to 79.99 = C+

Letter grades in this class have the following meaning:

- A *Outstanding performance.* You have demonstrated very thorough knowledge and understanding of all the material, truly superior critical thinking, and expressed insightful and original thoughts clearly. You have completed all required assignments and they have been among the best in the class.
- B *Good performance.* You have demonstrated solid knowledge and understanding of the material and good critical thinking. You have also shown the ability to express your ideas clearly. You have completed all required assignments and they have been of good quality.
- C *Satisfactory performance.* You have demonstrated basic knowledge and understanding of the major concepts taught in the class and some critical thinking. You have completed all or most of the required assignments and they have routinely been free of significant problems.

- D *Deficient performance.* You have only acquired a limited understanding of the class material. You have failed to complete all the required assignments and they have routinely had serious problems.
- F *Failure.* You have failed to learn a sufficient proportion of the basic concepts and ideas taught in the class. You have failed to complete many required assignments and they have routinely had serious problems.

COURSE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

I will hold you responsible for the information in this syllabus, so I expect you to read it, understand it, and ask questions about anything you don't understand.

Office Hours: I hold three official office hours each week. I also encourage you to make an appointment outside of office hours or come by my office anytime to see if I'm available. I am happy to discuss class concepts, college more generally, musings about majors, future planning, or graduate school.

Feedback: I love getting feedback on my teaching and how the class is going. I value your input and I am willing to make changes to the class according to your preferences. Please share with me any comments, suggestions, and ideas you may have, and help me make this a great class. If you would like to do so anonymously, you can type and print out a note and drop it in my mailbox in the administrative offices in Swan Hall.

Class Demeanor: While we may find ourselves disagreeing, we must do so with respect, a commitment to hearing what others have to say, and a willingness to think and rethink our own positions. Personal insults have no place in the college classroom.

Technology in Class: Please turn off your cell phones when you come to class. Similarly, text messaging will not be tolerated in class. You are welcome to bring your laptop to class and use it to take notes, access readings we're discussing, and the like. You are not welcome to surf the web, check email, or otherwise perform non-class-related activities during class. Here's my best advice: If you aren't using it to perform a task specifically related to what we are doing in class at that very moment, put it away.

Special Accommodations/Learning Differences: Students with documented disabilities who are registered with Disability Services are required to present their accommodation letter to the instructor at the beginning of each semester or as soon as possible thereafter. Any student who experiences significant physical or mental impairments may contact Disability Services at (323) 259-2969 to learn about available services and support. More information is available at <http://www.oxy.edu/disability-services>

Assignments: A hard copy of all papers/assignments must be handed in at the start of class on the scheduled date. I do not accept assignments via email. Late assignments are docked 1 grade per day. Computer and printing problems are not a good excuse for missing a deadline. Make sure to print your papers early enough to be able to address any problems before class. Keep a paper and electronic copy of everything you hand in until you receive your course grade.

Academic Integrity: As is always the case, you are responsible for your own work. If you find yourself questioning whether you have documented or cited your sources properly, it is your responsibility to come see me about these issues prior to submitting an assignment. If you are thinking about submitting work that is not your own due to pressure, frustration, perfectionism, or any other reason, please talk to me. I am here to help you resolve these issues before they become a problem for your academic career. Academic integrity violations, including plagiarism, will be taken very seriously. A description of Occidental's academic ethics policies is available in the Student Handbook and on the following webpage:

<http://www.oxy.edu/student-handbook/academic-ethics/academic-ethics>

CLASS SCHEDULE

Although I will do my best to keep us on schedule, it is possible that we will make some adjustments during the semester. I will give as much notice - both in class and on the course website - when changes are necessary.

AUGUST

30 Welcome to the class

SEPTEMBER

4 Human Inquiry and Science

Berger, "An Invitation to Sociology"

Ruane and Cerulo, "The Sociological Perspective"

6 What are Sociological Research Methods?

C&S, Chapter 1

C&S, Chapter 2

11 Ethics in Sociology

Scott McLemee, "Wide-Stance Sociology"

Stanley Milgram, "Problems of Ethics in Research"

C&S, Chapter 3

13 Guest Lecture by Carey Sargent on Zotero, Brown LearnLab

ASA Quick Style Guide

18 Guest Lecture by Carey Sargent on Open Data, Brown LearnLab

20 Picking a Research Question

Handout: Homework 1 – What do I want to know?

Graff & Birkenstein, "Introduction"

Graff & Birkenstein, "They Say"

25 5-Minute Presentations

What do you want to know? Why is it interesting to you?

28 Reviewing, Proposing, and Reporting Research

C&S, Chapter 12

OCTOBER

2 Reviewing the Literature

C&S, Appendix A

DUE: Homework 1 – What do I want to know?

4 Qualitative Methods: Observing, Participating, Listening

Handout: Homework 2 – What have others said?

C&S, Chapter 9

9 Qualitative Methods: Interviewing

King & Horrocks, "Interviews in Qualitative Research"

Guest Lecture – Danielle Dirks

11 Qualitative Methods: Participant Observation
Reading TBA
Guest Lecture – Richard Mora

16 NO CLASS. FALL BREAK.

18 Conceptualization and Measurement
C&S, Chapter 4
DUE: Homework 2 – What have others said?

23 Sampling
C&S, Chapter 5
Handout: Homework 3 – What is the design?

25 Survey Research
C&S, Chapter 7

30 Survey Research
Howard Schuman, “Sense and Nonsense about Surveys”

NOVEMBER

1 Research Tools – What do you need?

6 Research Tools – What do you need?

8 NO CLASS. Individual appointments.

13 What if things go wrong?
DUE: Homework 3 – What is the design?

15 Presenting Your Research
Becker, “One Right Way”

20 Presenting Your Research
Becker, “Terrorized by the Literature”
Handout: Homework 4 – Putting It Together

22 NO CLASS. THANKSGIVING BREAK.

27 In Class Workshop - Homework 4

29 In Class Workshop - Homework 4

DECEMBER

4 Wrapping Up
DUE: Homework 4 – Putting It Together

Grades will be submitted by December 17. Good luck! I'm looking forward to a great semester!