

Sociology 304: Sociological Research Methods
Tuesday & Thursday 1:30pm – 2:55pm
Rangeview 242

Instructor: John T. Lang

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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

Welcome to Sociological Research Methods! 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 utilized 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

You will be expected to use a calculator from time to time in the class. It does not have to be fancy. It should be something other than the calculator on your cell phone.

Both books are available at the Occidental College Bookstore. You can also find them online at your favorite book seller.

1. Graff, Gerald and Cathy Birkenstein. 2006. *They Say/I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing*. W.W. Norton & Co.
ISBN-13: 978-0393924091

2. Babbie, Earl R. 2007. *The Basics of Social Research*, 4th Edition (Paperback). Wadsworth Publishing.
ISBN-13: 978-0495094685

GRADING

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

20% = Homework	25% = Midterm Exam
10% = Observation Project	25% = Final Exam
20% = Research Report	

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. Arriving late or departing early twice equals one absence. After that, for each missed class the 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.

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 – 20%

There will be 4 homework assignments. You will typically have a week to complete the assignment. The nature of these homework assignments will vary depending on the topic we are studying. Your assignments should be typed unless otherwise specified. Be sure to include the homework number on the copy you give to me. Assignments are due at the beginning of class.

Observation Project – 10%

The goal of this project is to introduce you to structured field observation. Working in small groups, you will develop a hypothesis, collect data to test your hypothesis, and write a report documenting your methods, findings, and conclusions. More detailed instructions will be handed out at a later date. We will discuss it more at that time.

Research Report – 20%

The culminating product for the course is a research report. The research report is a 10-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. I will distribute detailed guidelines for the paper separately.

Exams – 50%

There will be one exam during the semester and a comprehensive final exam. In addition to testing your general knowledge of important terms and concepts in sociological research

methods, the exams will require you to apply what you are learning in class. For example, I may ask you to select the most appropriate sample technique for a specific research question and population that we have not previously discussed in class, or I may ask you to critique a research project described in the exam. Thus, while you should know general definitions of terms, you must also be able to know how to use the research techniques we cover in class.

COURSE GRADES

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

92.5% and higher = A	72.5 to 77.49% = C
90.0 to 92.49% = A-	70 to 72.49% = C-
87.5 to 89.99% = B+	67.5 to 69.99% = D+
82.5 to 87.49% = B	62.5 to 67.49% = D
80.0 to 82.49% = B-	60.0 to 62.49% = D-
77.5 to 79.99% = C+	59.99% and lower = F.

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 on the 3rd floor of Middle Swan.

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 or set them on silent mode 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: Any student eligible for and needing academic adjustments or accommodations because of a disability should talk to me sometime in the first two weeks of class. All discussions will remain confidential. If you have questions or concerns about what constitutes a learning disability, I encourage you to contact the friendly folks over at the Center for Academic Excellence (x2849).

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/x8000.xml>

Readings

Your most basic duty in this class is to read all of the assigned texts. Be sure to read the calendar of class meetings, readings, assignments, papers, and exams. All readings are due on the day they are listed. You must have read them carefully, taken notes, and be prepared to discuss them intelligently.

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.

SEPTEMBER

3 Welcome to the class

8 Human Inquiry and Science

Peter Berger, "An Invitation to Sociology"

Graff and Birkenstein, "Preface" and "Introduction" (pp. ix-14)

Graff and Birkenstein, Appendix (pp. 133-135)

Babbie, Chapter 1

10 Paradigms, Theory, and Research

National Academy of Sciences, "Science, Evolution, and Creationism"

Babbie, Chapter 2

Assignment Handout: Homework 1

15 Ethics in Sociology

Laud Humphreys, "Tea Room Trade"

Scott McLemee, "Wide-Stance Sociology"

Stanley Milgram, "Problems of Ethics in Research"

Babbie, Chapter 3

17 In-class discussion: how to pick a research topic

Booth et al. *The Craft of Research*, Chapters 3-4.

Assignment Due: Homework 1

Assignment Handout: Homework 2

22 They Say

Babbie, Chapter 15

Graff and Birkenstein, Part 1 (pp. 15-48)

24 Research Design

Babbie, Chapter 4

Assignment Due: Homework 2

- 29 Conceptualization, Operationalization, and Measurement
Booth et al. *The Craft of Research*, Chapters 5-6
Babbie, Chapter 5
Assignment Handout: Homework 3

OCTOBER

- 1 Validity and Reliability
Babbie, Chapter 5
- 6 Indexes, Scales, and Typologies
Babbie, Chapter 6
Assignment Due: Homework 3
- 8 Sampling
Babbie, Chapter 7
- 13 Class Discussion of Assignments and Q & A for Midterm Exam
- 15 MIDTERM EXAM. Bring pencils. Be on time.**
- 20 Fall Break
- 22 Experiments
Babbie, Chapter 8
Assignment Handout: Homework 4
- 27 Survey Research
Babbie, Chapter 9
Howard Schuman, "Sense and Nonsense about Surveys"
- 29 Qualitative Field Research
Babbie, Chapter 10
Assignment Due: Homework 4
Assignment Handout: Observation Assignment

NOVEMBER

- 3 Unobtrusive Research
Babbie, Chapter 11
- 5 Class Discussion of Assignments
- 10 I Say
Graff and Birkenstein, Part 2 (pp. 49-98)
- 12 Interviewing
Joseph Hermanowicz, "The Great Interview: 25 Strategies for Studying People in Bed"
Carol Warren et al. "After the Interview"

17 Field Research

Maxine Baca Zinn, "Field Research in Minority Communities: Ethical, Methodological and Political Observations"

Robert Emerson, "Observational Field Work"

19 NO CLASS – work on your Observation Assignment.

24 Q & A and Class Discussion of Research Report
Assignment Due: Observation Assignment

26 Thanksgiving

DECEMBER

1 Tying It All Together

Graff and Birkenstein, Part 3 (pp. 99-132)

3 Five Minute Research Report Presentations

8 Last Day of Class

Assignment Due: Research Report

Question & Answer for Final Exam

Final Exam - Tuesday, December 15 at 1:00 p.m.

Good luck! I'm looking forward to a great semester!