

Introduction to Research Methods

Tell me and I forget; teach me and I remember; involve me and I learn
Benjamin Franklin

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SOC 3111

Fall 2013—Sec 70

6:00 to 8:30 pm

Wed—Sandy 122

COURSE DESCRIPTION & OBJECTIVES

Research Methods is an introduction to the theory and practice of social science research. The primary objectives of the course are:

- ◆ familiarize students with the different types of methods that are used to accumulate evidence in the social sciences;
- ◆ expose students to the logic of data analysis;
- ◆ give students an opportunity to conduct their own research and to critique existing social science research;
- ◆ aid students in developing their skills in formal, scientific writing;
- ◆ offer students experience in both oral and written presentation of original work.

Group discussions, analysis exercises, sociological research and individual presentations will be used to achieve these learning objectives. The course will culminate in a student conference in which each student will present and discuss the results of his/her own research project.

COURSE OVERVIEW

Required Texts

Newman, W. Lawrence. *Social Research Methods: Qualitative & Quantitative Approaches*. 6th Ed. Pearson.
Pyrzczak, Fred. 2005. *Evaluating Research in Academic Journals* (4th Ed). Glendale, CA: Pyrczak Publish.

Grading

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|---|------------|
| Project Preliminaries | 20% |
| Academic Journal Evaluations | 20% |
| Research Project Proposal | 40% |
| Attend/Participation/Presentations | 20% |

Special Accommodations

The University of Utah seeks to provide equal access to its programs, services and activities for people with disabilities. If you need accommodations in the class, reasonable prior notice needs to be given to the Center for Disability Services (CDS), 162 Olpin Union Building, 581-5020 (V/TDD). CDS will work with you and the instructor to make arrangements for accommodations. All written information in this course can be made available in alternative format with prior notification to the Center for Disability Services. Please discuss any concerns with the professor as soon as possible.

Grading Criterion

- A** An *excellent* work in all or nearly all aspects of the assignment. The student exemplifies originality of ideas, superior depth of thought, and extensive grasp of topics as well as technical superiority.
 - B** A competent work with a lapse here or there. Ideas are clear and properly expressed; the writing is technically solid. The assignment is effective in meeting all criteria but does not rise to distinction.
 - C** An adequate work, but not good. Student ideas tend to be oversimplified, reductionistic, and lack sufficient explanation or exploration. Problems may also exist with grammar, logic, or ability to express thoughts in a manner reflective of a junior level class.
 - D** A minimal effort by the student—the work is marred by problems with almost all aspects of the assignment. This is not considered a competent performance.
 - E** A failing mark, generally reserved for assignments which are not submitted or miss the target on virtually every criteria of the project.
- +/- Plus or minus may be given in addition to each of the grade levels when deemed appropriate.

PARTICIPATION (20% of course grade)

Given the “hands-on” nature of this course, regular attendance is strongly encouraged. Active participation is also expected. This class will be conducted in a *Socratic format* with emphasis on professor and student interaction and understanding through questions and comments. The professor will use this forum to present key concepts not detailed in the major texts under consideration. The *Socratic* model is employed to encourage analysis, critical thinking, preparation, and long term learning on the part of the student. Each should come prepared to discuss the subject scheduled on the calendar. Note cards will be marked for every student, and response notes will be given based on the quality of comments offered: + (plus), √ (check), √- (check minus), - (minus), or 0 (zero)—representing roughly the grades of A, B, C, D, and E.

ACADEMIC JOURNAL EVALUATIONS (20% of course grade)

One of the key aspects of understanding social research method is the direct application of principles to existing scholarly work as exemplified in current academic journals. During the course of the semester, students will choose two articles from any current social science journal (preferably articles they are using for their project paper) and evaluate these according to the criteria learned in the course and through the required texts. Each of the evaluations will count **10%** of the course grade, or **20%** for the total. The format will be distributed by the professor. **NOTE: Evaluations due 13 & 20 November.**

RESEARCH PROJECT PRELIMINARIES (20% of course grade)

The **research project/class presentation** is an *exercise* that will acquaint students with many elements involved in conducting social science research from beginning to completion. As you develop the project you will go through several steps that are building blocks. Each involves a cumulative piece of the project, beginning with elementary problem identification and moving to the two final pieces: the written report and oral presentation. **The style guide of the American Psychological Association (APA) will be the format of this project.**

- (1) **Topic approval**—Submit a one paragraph statement on a topic of interest as the subject of your **non-reactive data** research, explaining what the topic is and why it is important enough to be researched. This topic will be approved or modified as the semester progresses. A thorough discussion will be conducted in class concerning successful completion of the research project before the *topic approval* is due. **NOTE: The working topic is due 25 Sept.**
- (2) **Working literature review/bibliography**—Researchers always begin a study by looking at what else has been done on that topic. So, after the topic has been approved, immediately begin work finding at least **six peer-reviewed social science journal articles** on that subject. The list should be in a standard format for bibliographic references (for a sample format of sources see the Bibliography in the Newman text.). To begin, see **Sociology Research Guide** (www.lib.utah.edu/ResGuides/sociology.html) **NOTE: Working bibliography due 9 Oct.**
- (3) **Annotated bibliography**—After researchers find reputable references to their research, they read this information in order to learn what else is known about the subject of their research. The **annotated bibliography** consists of short summaries of each of the references appearing on your *working bibliography*. The short summaries should not quote or paraphrase the published abstract for the article, but should include:
 - ◆ short descriptions of the author's objectives (major question(s) the author was seeking to illuminate),
 - ◆ a description of the *nature of the data* on which the conclusions were based (survey data, qualitative data, case studies, comparative historical studies, experiments, etc.);
 - ◆ a description of *how the data were gathered* (face-to-face interviews, participant observation, quantitative analysis, etc.) and the nature of the cases studied, or the sample;
 - ◆ a short summary of what the author(s) concluded. **NOTE: The annotated bibliography is due 30 Oct.**
- (4) **Mini-proposal**—Once researchers learn what is already known about their subject and create a bibliography, they write a **research proposal**. Proposals are used to gain clearance to proceed with research. Authorization typically issues from funding agencies, committees that safeguard human subjects, and others, such as faculty advisors. You will write a very brief version, or **mini-proposal**. The *mini-proposal* will be **3-4 pages** in length, and it will contain the following elements in this order:
 - (1) statement of the subject of the proposal, including why it is important;
 - (2) overview of what is known about the subject, including the literature review—based on the references;
 - (3) working hypotheses (both null and working) which would facilitate the investigation of this topic;
 - (4) listing and defining the key concepts, constructs and variables;
 - (5) identifying possible *non-reactive data* to be collected and why;
 - (6) likely operationalization (or measurement) of the key concepts;
 - (7) probable population, sample size and description;
 - (8) probable methods of data collection;
 - (9) possible ethical considerations (if any);
 - (10) desired results. **NOTE: The mini-proposal is due 6 Nov.**

RESEARCH PROJECT (40% of course grade)

Students will design and conduct a research project. The project includes choosing a unique research topic, designing an appropriate study *using non-reactive data*, including specifying testable hypotheses, designing an appropriate data collection plan, and specifying an appropriate sampling strategy. The result will be a research paper presented to the class near the end of the semester and submitted in writing. Written reports will follow the standard format of a published research article. The report should be approximately 8 to 12 double-spaced pages of text. Each student will present the results of their research project during the “student conference” at the end of the semester. The formal presentation will be about 10 minutes. Presentations should be both creative and professional. Final project papers will include a completed version of the *mini-proposal* with all elements in place reporting the student’s findings in their research, as follows:

- (1) abstract;
- (2) the literature review—based on the references;
- (3) statement on how you propose to study the subject;
- (4) hypotheses (both null and working);
- (5) listing and defining the key concepts;
- (6) identifying data collected;
- (7) operationalization (or measure) of the key concepts;
- (8) population studied;
- (9) sample size and description;
- (10) methods of data collection;
- (11) ethical considerations (if any);
- (12) results;
- (13) limitations of study;
- (14) future work to be done.

NOTE: Final project due 4 December

COURSE CALENDAR

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|----------------|--|
| 28 Aug | Introduction to course material; presentation of syllabus |
| 4 Sept | Why do research? What are the major types of research? Newman—Chpts 1 & 2 |
| 11 Sept | Background for evaluating research reports; Evaluating titles; Evaluating abstracts Pyrczak—Chpts 1, 2 & 3 |
| 18 Sept | Theory and research; <i>Successful completion of the Research Project and distribution of sample papers</i> Newman—Chpt 3 |
| 25 Sept | The meanings of methodology;----- WORKING TOPIC DUE! How to review the literature and conduct ethical studies Newman—Chpts 4 & 5 Evaluating introductions and literature reviews; A closer look at evaluating literature reviews Pyrczak—Chpts 4 & 5 |
| 2 Oct | Strategies of research design; Qualitative and quantitative measurements Newman—Chpts 6 & 7 Evaluating instrumentation Pyrczak—Chpt 8 |

- 9 Oct Writing the research report;-----**WORKING BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE!**
Newman—Chpt 16
- 14--19 Oct **FALL BREAK—NO CLASS!!**
- 23 Oct Nonreactive research and secondary analysis;
Qualitative and quantitative sampling
Newman—Chpts 11 & 8
Evaluating samples when researchers generalize;
Evaluating samples when researchers do not generalize
Pyrszak—Chpts 6 & 7
- 30 Oct Survey research;-----**ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE!**
Field research
Newman—Chpts 10 & 13
Evaluating analysis and results sections: quantitative research
Pyrszak—Chpt 10
- 6 Nov Experimental research;-----**MINI-PROPOSAL DUE!**
Analysis of quantitative data
Newman—Chpts 9 & 12
Evaluating analysis and results sections: qualitative research;
Evaluating discussion sections
Pyrszak—Chpts 11 & 13
- 13 Nov Historical-comparative research;-----**JOURNAL ARTICLE EVALUATION 1 DUE!**
Analysis of qualitative data
Newman—Chpts 14 & 15
Putting it all together
Pyrszak—Chpt 13
- 20 Nov **RESEARCH CONFERENCE**-----**JOURNAL ARTICLE EVALUATION 2 DUE!**
- 27 Nov Finalizing the research project—Library/computer lab
- 4 Dec **RESEARCH CONFERENCE**-----**RESEARCH PROJECT DUE!**

NOTE: Those who wish their grades mailed to them should attach a *legal size*,
peel & stick, self-addressed, stamped envelope with their final paper.

That's All, Folks! Have a great holiday!