

Doing Sociology

Sociology 1015-090: Fall 2014

2 Credit Hours

Online Course



Instructor:

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Office Hours: Beh S 417; By appointment

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Course Content and organization:

This course is an introduction to basic forms of data presentation and analysis. By *data*, we mean all sorts of empirical observations that we use to support or oppose an argument. This course focuses on quantitative data – data that are presented in numerical form. *Presentation* refers to the multiple ways that data are summarized and made accessible (e.g. tables, charts, trend-lines, scatterplots, etc.). You will be introduced to several different analytical methods including cross-tabulation, correlation, regression, and others. The course will also expose you to some basic research concepts including sampling, causation, as well as independent and dependent variables. The main goal of the course is to introduce you to basic tools of data analysis and presentation, as well as helping you to understand the underlying logic. We will not be dealing with statistical formulas and calculations, rather we will focus on becoming familiar with using data to interpret and explain social phenomena in the world around us.

It is important to begin with the understanding that data analysis is not just for so-called “experts.” The tools and concepts taught in this class are not just for those “producing” the data, but also for the “consumers” of data. We all are consumers of data at some level. We are constantly made aware of data within our worlds, from the trivial to the essential: “4 out of 5 dentists recommend” and “less than two out of five Americans support...” It is important to be able to process and think critically about the information we encounter every day – be it as students in a sociology class, consumers at the shopping mall, or as citizens in a democracy. This class is designed to help you become better “consumers” of data. It is also designed to create a solid foundation for the subsequent courses taught in the sociology major (especially statistics). It should also provide a useful base for those of you who will eventually go on to become producers of data in the form of your own research.

The course is organized around a workbook accompanied by a user-friendly data analysis software program called Student ExplorIt. The program can be installed from the CD and 3.5” diskette included in the workbook, from the files posted in Canvas, or accessed online from any computer with an internet connection. Details and instructions will be posted on Canvas. The program utilizes a variety of data which sociologists find particularly interesting. For example surveys addressing social attitudes across the United States, rates of suicide across nations, measures of economic development across the globe, and many more. You will learn about the world around you while acquiring basic analytical tools. For each chapter you will complete an

online exercise that uses the program to answer a series of questions about the results including objective measures and subjective interpretations. The exercises will encourage you to explore patterns in the data, conduct basic analysis, and interpret the results.

Text:

Rodney Stark: *Doing Sociology: A Global Perspective* (4th Edition).

Course Requirements and Grading Criterion:

Quizzes

The course will consist of 15 chapters, each associated with an assignment. Each student is required to submit their own work! Cheating will not be tolerated. Any student caught cheating will receive a zero and may face more severe consequences depending on the situation. As a student you have both rights and responsibilities that are outlined in the Student Handbook. I would recommend that you become familiar with the University regulations which also provide me as your instructor with rights and responsibilities as well. **It is strongly recommended that you complete the assignment in your workbook first, and then submit your answers online.** While the workbook questions do not match the online questions perfectly, it will be less stressful if you have already completed the workbook. You will also want to complete your workbook in order to use it as a study guide for the final exam. Each chapter will have a supplemental introduction which can be found on Canvas. This will be relevant information that should help clarify confusing topics, and even provide answers to some of the more difficult questions. These short (2-3 pages) **readings are required.**

Assignments due dates are listed on the course schedule below. **Late assignments will not be accepted.** Because exercises will be completed online, students must have regular access to a computer that is connected to the Internet.

Critical Thinking

Throughout the semester we will switch gears from doing exercise from the book to examining actual published articles and book chapters. These articles and chapters will cover a wide variety of topics. I will post a PDF of the article in that week's module. While the topics may be of interest to some the real goal of these assignments are to get you to think critically about the data presented therein. Many of these articles will be challenging on an intellectual level as they are written for an academic audience. You are required to read the entire article. To help clarify these articles I will provide a supplemental summary and list of key points. For each critical thinking exercise I will ask certain questions which you are required to write short answers to. This is your opportunity to think deeply about the state of the science and not to write your opinion about the subject. It is perfectly fine to agree or disagree with what is presented on a personal level. You will be graded on how well you answer the questions asked. There will be 5 critical thinking exercises throughout the semester. Due dates are listed on the course schedule below.

Late assignments will not be accepted. Because the critical thinking exercises will be completed online, students must have regular access to a computer that is connected to the internet. More information will be given the week the assignment is due.

Final Exam

In addition to the exercises (both chapter quizzes and critical thinking), you will have to take and pass a final examination. The exam will be comprehensive, covering the material addressed throughout the semester. The format will be very similar to weekly exercises except that it will be taken on paper and not on a computer. You will receive more information regarding the final exam later in the semester.

Grading Criteria

Chapter exercises	50% (10 exercises at 5% each)
Critical Thinking	25% (5 exercises at 5% each)
Final examination	25%

Grades will be calculated as follows: 100-90 =A; 90-80 =B; 80-70 =C; 70-60 =D; below 60 =F; within each range, 0 to 2.99 will earn a minus, 7 to 9.99 will earn a plus.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Statement

The University of Utah seeks to provide equal access to its programs, services and activities for people with disabilities. If you will need accommodations in the class, reasonable prior notice needs to be given to the Center for Disability Services, 162 Union Building, 581-5020 (V/TDD). CDS will work with you and the instructor to make arrangements for accommodations.

Faculty and Student Responsibilities

“All students are expected to maintain professional behavior in the classroom setting, according to the Student Code, spelled out in the Student Handbook. Students have specific rights in the classroom as detailed in Article III of the Code. The Code also specifies proscribed conduct (Article XI) that involves cheating on tests, plagiarism, and/or collusion, as well as fraud, theft, etc. Students should read the Code carefully and know they are responsible for the content. Accord-

ing to Faculty Rules and Regulations, it is the faculty responsibility to enforce responsible classroom behaviors, beginning with verbal warnings and progressing to dismissal from class and a failing grade. Students have the right to appeal such action to the Student Behavior Committee.” “Faculty...must strive in the classroom to maintain a climate conducive to thinking and learning.” PPM 8-12.3, B.

“Students have a right to support and assistance from the University in maintaining a climate conducive to thinking and learning.” PPM 8-10, II. A.

- Undergraduate Council Syllabus Guidelines 2008

Course Schedule:

First Days: *Getting Started* (pp. vii –xii) and *Exercise 1* (pp. 1 - 15)

The task for the first two days of class is to install Student ExplorIt onto your computer **or access it online** and complete the first exercise. There is an introductory chapter in the book that will help you become more familiar with the software. Please view the instructions on how to access the software online posted in Canvas. **Your assignment includes emailing the instructor IN CANVAS during the first 2 days of class (August 26th and 27th) to let him know that you have successfully accessed the program and have gone through the introduction – or to let him know about any problems that need to be solved. Everyone needs to be up and running and have the first assignment completed by Friday August 30th.**

DUE DATES:

August 30th: *Chapter 1: Suicide and Social Facts*

Data on suicide were the basis for one of the earliest pieces of classic sociological research –so it’s a good place to start your study of data analysis! In this chapter, you’ll explore attitudes about suicide taken from a large national and international surveys, as well as differences in suicide rates across both states and countries. You’ll begin with distributions of single variables (univariate distributions) and move to cross-tabulations that allow us to examine the possible relationship between variables.

September 6th: *Chapter 2: Sex and Sampling*

We certainly hear a lot about sex in popular culture –and see quite a bit of it as well! How much of what we hear and see is an accurate representation of people’s lives? In this chapter, we explore data that will begin to answer questions about how much sex people have, and how it is related to a variety of other characteristics. We’ll also learn why surveys conducted on relatively small sample sizes can accurately tell us a great deal about a whole population.

Exercise 3: Comparisons and Correlation

“Correlation” is one of the most basic and important concepts in social scientific research. It refers to the extent to which the level of one variable (like per capita wealth) and that of another variable (like automobile ownership) tend to be related. You’ll learn some basic tools that allow social scientists to visually represent and systematically measure that kind of relationship.

September 13th: *Critical Thinking Exercise 1*

The article and accompanying summary will be posted in the week 3 module. Questions for the assignment will also be available (and should be completed) in the same module. Instructions as to what is expected will also be available in the week 3 module.

September 20th: Chapter 4: Socialization: Gender Roles

“Men are from Mars and women are from Venus” –at least, that’s what we’re socialized to think. But are they really? In this chapter, you’ll look at some cross-national survey data that will allow you to examine differences in gender roles across nations. You’ll also examine survey data from the United States that compares attitudes across different gender roles at home and in the workplace.

Chapter 5: Deviance

Why is it that the modern world seems so wrought by “social pathologies” like drug and alcohol abuse? Here you will consider some classic sociological ideas about social disorganization –its causes and consequences. You’ll examine correlation matrices (i.e. tables that look at the relationships among multiple pairs of variables) to see how economic development and social mobility is (or isn’t) related to those problems.

September 27th: Critical Thinking Exercise 2

The article and accompanying summary will be posted in the week 5 module. Questions for the assignment will also be available (and should be completed) in the same module. Instructions as to what is expected will also be available in the week 5 module.

October 4th: Chapter 6: Stratification

All known human societies have been stratified to some degree (characterized by structured inequalities). But the differences in the *level* of inequalities across societies are vast. This chapter presents data from “traditional” societies with different social structures and at different levels of development, and allows you to examine how those differences are related to levels of inequality. This chapter also looks at contemporary societies, so you can see how the U.S. compares to other nations around the world.

October 11th: Chapter 7: Intergroup Relations

Prejudice and discrimination are a part of our world that most would like to see disappear, but remain clearly entrenched. This chapter will allow you to compare measures of prejudice across societies. Some of the patterns may surprise you! You’ll also be able to compare states and counties across the United States to see which are the most diverse. See how Utah compares to the rest of the nation.

Chapter 8: Marital Satisfaction

We hear a lot about the decline of marriage in modern society, but it’s still a central social institution. This chapter will allow you to look at the changing patterns of marriage and divorce, and to compare how satisfied (or dissatisfied) people are with their “domestic” lives across states and around the world.

October 18th: Fall Break!! Woohoo!

October 25th: Critical Thinking Exercise 3

The article and accompanying summary will be posted in the week 9 module. Questions

for the assignment will also be available (and should be completed) in the same module. Instructions as to what is expected will also be available in the week 9 module.

November 1st: *Chapter 9: Religion*

Social scientists (and many others) have predicted the end of religion for centuries –a prediction known as secularization thesis. However, this prediction has not yet come to pass. Still, levels of religiosity vary greatly even within a single society like the United States. Here you'll examine those patterns –and it may make you think a little differently about religion.

Chapter 10: Job Satisfaction

Winning the lottery, quitting my job, and living a life of leisure –truly this *is* the American dream! Once again, the data might suggest something very different. In this chapter, you'll examine attitudes towards work in the U.S. and in other countries.

November 8th: *Critical Thinking Exercise 4*

The article and accompanying summary will be posted in the week 11 module. Questions for the assignment will also be available (and should be completed) in the same module. Instructions as to what is expected will also be available in the week 11 module.

November 15th: *Chapter 11: A Century of Trends*

One of the most important dynamics of any data is how they change over time. This chapter focuses on time series data –and how sociologists present those data in the form of trend lines. You will examine trends in variables that impact population growth (and decline) –like fertility, diseases, and life expectancy. These are the basics of the demographer's toolbox!

November 22nd: *Chapter 12: Diffusion and Cultural Complexity*

Human beings are tremendous innovators, but individual innovations are not the primary reason why we have developed such complex cultures and societies. The more important reason is diffusion –a great invention like the wheel rolls around the world pretty quickly! What makes some societies so open to diffusion, while others are so isolated?

Chapter 13: Fertility

There are well over six billion people on the earth now, and whether that total climbs to nine, twelve, fifteen, or even higher in the coming decades has important implications for all life on earth. Patterns of fertility are therefore of crucial interest to sociologists. This chapter presents data on differences in fertility rates across societies and over time –and will prompt you to consider the causes of those differences.

November 27th (29th): *Critical Thinking Exercise 5*

The article and accompanying summary will be posted in the week 13 module. Questions for the assignment will also be available (and should be completed) in the same module. Instructions as to what is expected will also be available in the week 13 module.
other variables at the same time.

December 6th: *Chapter 14: Regression*

By now you should be comfortable with systematically measuring the relationship between

two variables. In the social sciences we're mostly interested in patterns of relationships between many variables at a time so we rely heavily on *multivariate* analysis –more specifically, on multiple regression. It's a bit busier, but based on all of the ideas that you already know. Here you will see that sometimes the relationships between variables are misleading unless you consider

December 13th: *Chapter 15: Spuriousness *Last Day Of Class!*

“Correlation” as the old saying goes “does not prove causation.” Spurious is a fancy word that just means false –so a spurious correlation is a relationship that isn't a cause-and-effect relationship but one where another (sometimes invisible) variable is at the root of things. In this chapter, those invisible variables will be brought out into the open.

TBA: *Final Examination*

Students will sign up for an examination time slot via the UOnline website: www.uonline.utah.edu. There will be several times as well as locations available for the exam. More information will be provided during the course.

*This syllabus is subject to change at any time. Updates will be sent via email or updated on Canvas and will be considered as obligatory as the information in the syllabus itself.

Please contact me with any questions. Learning in the online environment can create new challenges and also opportunities for students. I am here to help and glad to do so!