

Introduction to Research Methods (280:005)
Department of Sociology
University of New Mexico
Fall 2009

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Classroom: 333 Dane Smith Hall
Class time and day: 9:30 am - 10:45 am Tuesday & Thursday

INTRODUCTION AND COURSE GOALS

OVERVIEW

This course covers the major research techniques which sociologists use to observe and interpret the social world. We will focus on issues of the logic of research and research design and the general procedures for research design. In particular, we will discuss a variety of techniques of gathering data including surveys, experiments and quasi-experiments, field research, and unobtrusive methods like content analysis and historical research. The goal of this course is to help students become more knowledgeable practitioners, consumers, and evaluators of social science data and research.

REQUIRED READINGS

Students should expect to spend six hours per week preparing for class sessions. The readings are available on WebCT. To access WebCT, log into *myunm* using your NetId and password; click on the *my courses* tab; and then click on *SOC 280*.

- students should download the readings as soon as possible. Waiting until the day before the test to download articles is strongly discouraged
- students are encouraged to put all of the readings in a three-ring binder to facilitate organization
- an additional five readings are required for the research project

Note: WebCT also includes lecture overheads and questions to take notes on over the readings.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. There are three exams. Tests will cover material from lectures, class discussions, and readings. About ½ of each exam will consist of multiple choice/fill in the blank questions and about ½ will consist of short answer and essay questions. You are responsible for all assigned readings, even if they are not discussed in class.

Exams are not curved.

Make-up policy. Students are allowed to miss one exam – a second exam missed cannot be made up. Students who miss an exam must wait three weeks after the original test date before taking the make-up exam. After three weeks have passed, the student needs to set-up with my consent a time and date for the make-up exam. I must be present during the make-up exam, and this typically means taking the make-up exam during my office hours. Students who fail to show up for the alternate exam (for what ever reason) will receive a score of zero on the missed exam. Students who miss exam 3 will receive an incomplete for this course and must take a make-up during the next semester following the same procedures. Students who fail to make-up exam 1 or 2 before the last day of class (12/10/2009) will receive a score of zero for the missed exam.

2. There is one research project for this class.

Using quantitative content analysis methodology, each student will select an important sociological issue that can be addressed using this methodological approach, review the existing literature that has addressed this issue (5 readings), collect and analyze the appropriate data, and write a short journal-style paper reporting the research. The paper will be 10-15 pages in length, due Friday (12/11) by 5:00 pm in 1106 Social Sciences Building (Week 16). Students may work with one other student on this research project. There are two mandatory meetings with Professor Santoro to discuss, and give feedback on, the research project.

Beginning on page 7 of this handout is the complete description of the research project.

3. There are two extra-credit opportunities in this class.

- Students may receive an additional points for research questions that are especially creative (5%), that involve especially extensive data collection (5%), and/or that collect data over a wide range of years (5%).

- Students may have “effort” points added onto their final class grade for those who demonstrate a deep commitment to learning and excelling in this class. Criteria for effort points include stellar attendance (95% is the minimum) and consistent and constructive classroom participation. Note that effort points does not simply mean attending the class.

COURSE GRADE

Grades are determined as follows		Grades are based on the following scale			
Exam 1	15%	Grade	% of total points	Grade	% of total points
Exam 2	20%	A+	100-97.0	C	76.9-73.0
Exam 3	15%	A	96.9-93.0	C-	72.9-70.0
Content Analysis Paper	50%	A-	92.9-90.0	D+	69.9-67.0
	100%	B+	89.9-87.0	D	66.9-63.0
		B	86.9-83.0	D-	62.9-60.0
		B-	82.9-80.0	F	Below 60
		C+	79.9-77.0		

KEYS TO PERFORMING WELL IN THIS CLASS

1. *Attend all class meetings.* The surest way to perform poorly in this class is to miss days, especially given that we meet only twice per week. It is nearly impossible to get the required information discussed on the day missed, and you are likely to miss important information like course adjustments and miscellaneous deadlines.
2. *Take detailed notes.* A common theme for students who perform poorly in this course is to have poor notes. Another common theme is that students will not be able to understand their own notes – this means that students do not understand the material during lecture and thus have almost no chance of correctly answering questions covering that material. Taking notes is not easy, so be prepared to work. A helpful suggestion is to type up your notes after each class.
3. *Ask questions.* At times I may speak too fast, the material may be complicated, you may miss a line of argument, etc. But I cannot clarify unless I am made aware that something needs to be clarified. Times to ask questions are during class, before class, or in my office hours.
4. *Take advantage of the extra-credit.*
5. *Take advantage of my office hours.* Discussing lecture, reading material, and especially the research project with me during my office hours can really help students. The key here, however, is to take advantage of this opportunity early.
6. *Take notes on the readings.* In particular, make sure you take notes on the questions I ask about the readings.

ADDITIONAL NOTES & CLASS POLICIES

1. All pagers and cell phones need to be turned off before class begins.
2. Any student who, because of disability, may require some special arrangements in order to meet course requirements should contact me as soon as possible to make necessary accommodations. It is the responsibility of the student to request accommodation for individual learning needs. UNM will make every attempt to accommodate all qualified students with disabilities. For further information, contact the Office of Accessibility Services at 277-3506.
3. If you miss a class meeting, ask a fellow student for a copy of their class notes. I do not lend out my notes. If you come late or miss a class, it is your responsibility to make sure to ask other students or myself after class if I made any announcements or distributed handouts. If you need to leave class early, please let me know before class begins. Because I do not lend out my notes, I strongly encourage students to get phone numbers or email addresses of a classmate or two so that you can get copies of their notes if needed.
4. During lectures, I expect that you will demonstrate respect to me and other students by paying attention and by avoiding activities that could disrupt me and/or others in the class. In particular, it is not acceptable for students to sleep, read, converse with others, or otherwise engage in disrespectful and/or disruptive behavior during the class. It is nearly impossible for me to concentrate on lecturing and guiding discussions, and for others to hear, pay attention, and participate in discussions when students are behaving in disrespectful and/or disruptive ways. Any individual who violates these expectations will receive one warning in the form of an admonishment from Professor Santoro. That is, I will call attention to your violation when it occurs and remind you of the policy. A second violation will lead to a failing grade in the course and a report of the academic misconduct to the College of Arts and Sciences.
5. Students who email me Monday through Thursday should expect a 24 hour wait until the email message is answered; students who email me Friday through Sunday should expect that the email will be answered no later than Monday after class. Email queries should be concise and students should expect concise replies.
6. Students should not call me at home.
7. I do not email grades. Exam grades are posted on WebCT.
8. Additional office hour appointments are possible but missing a scheduled appointment without prior notification will result in this privilege being lost.
9. I will follow University policy for academic misconduct. University policy states that each student is expected to maintain the highest standards of honesty and integrity in academic and professional matters. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, dishonesty in quizzes, tests, or assignments as well as claiming credit for work not done or done by others. When a violation of the regulation occurs in connection with a course, the faculty member is authorized to take whatever action is deemed appropriate, but no penalty in excess of an "F" in the course and the involuntary withdrawal of the student from the class may be imposed. Whenever this penalty is imposed; the instructor may report the case in full detail in writing to the Dean of Students, who may impose additional sanctions or refer the matter to the Student Conduct Committee for a determination of whether additional sanctions are warranted.

10. In situations in which a student believes that he or she has been unfairly or improperly treated by a faculty member, the student should first try to resolve the grievance informally by discussing the grievance with the faculty as soon as possible. If the student and faculty cannot reach agreement, the student should discuss the grievance with the chairperson of the department. If the grievance is still not resolved, the student should discuss the grievance with the appropriate Dean. If you have any questions, please contact the Dean of Students Office at 277-3361.

11. For students who wish to drop this course after the official deadline, I am willing to give a grade of W/WP only if the student is currently passing the course (D- or higher) OR if the student makes this request to me *prior* to taking all three exams.

Below is the course outline; note that it is subject to modification. All readings are available on WebCT.

Week 1 (8/25, 8/27)	Week 2 (9/1, 9/3)	Week 3 (9/8, 9/10)	Week 4 (9/15, 9/17)	Week 5 (9/22, 9/24)
Course Introduction Human Inquiry & Social Science 1. <i>New York Times</i> ' articles	Limitations to Social Science Content Analysis 2. Color Blind 3. No Sissy Boys Here	Content Analysis 4. Media Framing of Movement Protest Paradigms & Theories 5. Lesbian Motherhood	Theory Testing Causality 6. The Effect of Country Music on Suicide 7. Reassessing the Link between Country Music and Suicide	Catch-up (9/22) Exam 1 Review (9/24)
Week 6 (9/29, 10/1)	Week 7 (10/6, 10/8)	Week 8* (10/13)	Week 9 (10/20, 10/22)	Week 10 (10/27, 10/29)
Exam 1 (9/29) Research Project Meeting #1: Feedback note: no class on 10/1 but students must sign-up and meet with Professor Santoro (1106 Social Sciences Building)	Library Research (10/6?) we are tentatively scheduled to meet in the Zimmerman Library (Room B-30 – the computer lab in the basement) on 10/6 but the date may change Research Design (10/8) 8. The Persistence of Political Attitudes Among 1960s Civil Rights Activists	Measurement 9. Socialization and Racial Identity among Black Americans * Note: no class on 10/15	Ethics 10. Controversies Surrounding Laud Humphreys' Tearoom Trade 11. Laud Humphreys and Research Ethics Sampling 12. <i>Imaginandose Mexicano</i>	Surveys 13. Data Collection Mode and Social Desirability Bias in Self-Reported Religious Attendance
Week 11 (11/3, 11/5)	Week 12 (11/10, 11/12)	Week 13* (11/17, 11/19)	Week 15 (12/1, 12/3)	Week 16 (12/8, 12/10)
Test 2 Review (11/3) Exam 2 (11/5)	Field Research 14. Researching Dealers and Smugglers Experiments 15. From Summer Camps to Glass Ceilings	Quasi-Experiments 16. David Duke and Black Threat Research Project Meeting #2: Feedback note: no class on 11/19 but students must sign-up and meet with Professor Santoro (1106 Social Sciences Building) * Note: no class on 11/24 & 11/26	Historical Research & Analysis of Existing Statistics 17. The Civil Rights Movement and the Right to Vote	Test 3 Review (12/8) Exam 3 (12/10) Research Paper Due Friday (12/11) by 5:00 pm in 1106 Social Sciences Building

Research Project Description

The purpose of the Research Project is to provide students the opportunity to “do” sociology. All students will conduct and report sociological research using content analysis. The basics of the Research Project involve (a) selecting a topic, (b) reviewing existing research on the topic, (c) collecting data, (d) analyzing data, and (e) writing a report summarizing the research.

Students may work with *one* other student on this project. Each student will receive the same grade for the assignment - no exceptions. Students who wish to work with another student need to let me know *in writing* no later than the first research meeting (October 1st). Be aware that there are both advantages and disadvantages to working with another student. One recommendation: only work with another student if you had already established a relationship with the student prior to taking this course.

The Research Project is worth 50% of your final course grade. The written report is due December 11th by 5:00 pm in 1106 Social Sciences Building. Early papers are accepted. Late papers will receive one of two penalties: papers turned in less than three days late will receive a five percentage point reduction; papers turned in more than three days late will receive a ten percentage point reduction. Note that papers turned in after three days late may not be graded in time before course grades must be submitted to the Registrar – in this situation the student will receive an I for the course and the I will be changed after the paper is graded early the following semester.

There are two mandatory meetings with Professor Santoro to discuss, and give feedback on, the research project. See the syllabus for scheduled meeting dates. A sign-up sheet will be distributed during class in the week leading up to the meeting date. Five percentage points will be deducted from the research project grade for students will fail to sign-up or show up for either of the two scheduled meetings.

The written report must use 12 point font and one inch margins on all sides; must be typed and stapled or firmly bound together; must be left-justified only; and must be double spaced and include page numbers. Reports should include a cover or title page that contains your name, our course number, the date, and the title of the paper. Five percentage points will be deducted for papers not meeting these requirements. Papers should be about 10-15 pages in length, not including appendix material. Grades are based on the quality of the material – not on the length of the paper.

It is advised (but not mandatory) that students have an additional hard copy of their written document in case one is lost by myself.

The class has been designed around students’ ability to conduct research – it is half of your grade. Given that there is considerable freedom to choose your research topic and given that you have a solid four months to complete this project, the expectation is that you will tackle this assignment with great enthusiasm and motivation and will strive for excellence and thoroughness.

Guidelines

1. Picking your research question.

- always keep in mind whether your research topic is “doable” – there are lots of potentially great ideas but many of them require data that are either unavailable or too time consuming to collect.
- pick a topic that you are interesting in and/or have some background information about.
- it is very helpful to use comparisons. For instance, a person can examine magazine depictions of Anglos and Latinos (one type of comparison) and examine such images across two different types of magazines (a second layer of comparison). Comparisons make it easier to generate interesting results.
- note that you do not have to report everything that you originally tested for or examined. For the example noted above, perhaps you find interesting differences between Anglos and Latinos but no differences across the two different types of magazines that were examined – in this case, it is best to simply discuss your race/ethnicity findings and combine the results for the two types of magazines.
- sociology is not about the trivial and thus your research should not be about trivial matters. For instance, you should not ask a question like “do men dress differently than women” and report that men are less likely to wear dresses than women. That is trivial. Pick a topic that is meaningful. You will need to be able to justify the sociological importance of your work.
- make sure your research has a central theme. For instance, it is better to ask “what are the positive and negative images of the family in the TV show *The Simpsons*” rather than “how does the TV show *The Simpsons* depict the images of the family, race issues, sexual orientation, and patriotism.”

2. The written report will have eight sections or headings labeled Introduction, Literature Review, Hypotheses, Data & Methods, Findings, Conclusion, References, and Appendix.

3. In the “Introduction” section of your paper, be clear what is the purpose or objective of your research. This is typically done in the first paragraph of your written report. It is helpful, for instance, to start the paper off with a sentence like: “The purpose of this content analysis is to ...” Typically, 2 or 3 sentences is needed to fully explain the purpose of your research. Next, and (typically) in the same paragraph, discuss why this topic is important – that is, why is it worthy of our attention. An introduction is typically about one page long.

- it is acceptable to draw upon the ideas presented in the research that you have reviewed (discussed below) to help justify the importance of your topic – but make sure to use proper citations.
- if students submit to me the written (typed) introduction *before* either of our two scheduled meetings I will provide written feedback during the meeting.

4. In the “Literature Review” section of your paper, discuss *five research articles* that have addressed your research question or a related question. You are not the first person to do research on your specific topic or a closely related topic, and thus you want to summarize what others have done and what others have found. In

general, make sure you provide enough information about each article so that I am convinced that you actually read the article. We will meet in the Zimmerman Library to learn how to locate research articles.

- research articles are studies that use sociological methods to analyze data. Review articles, for instance, will not count toward your five research articles even though such articles are often helpful for locating citations for research articles (review articles may be cited; but they will not count toward your five articles).

- cite articles in the text in one of two ways:

- Men earn more money than women (Smith 1995).

- Smith (1995) found that men earn more money than women.

- *do not* provide the title of the research article in your literature review section. That is, do not do the following: “According to the article “Why Men Earn More Money Than Women,” Smith (1995) argued that ...”

- avoid direct quotations – always try to summarize ideas in your own words. If you absolutely have to use a direct quotation, use page numbers. Example: Smith (1995:45) noted that “men have all the economic fun.”

- there is no one correct way to organize your “Literature Review” section. Perhaps the easiest approach for this assignment and the one that I would recommend is to spend one paragraph discussing/summarizing each article that you reviewed. (Note: this approach strays from how literature reviews are typically done in “real” research but it is acceptable for this assignment.) While there is no precise formula for what needs to be summarized, the four most important things to discuss are (a) what was the dependent variable (i.e., what is the author trying to explain), (b) what method did the author use to answer the research question; (c) what did the author find (especially in terms of the findings that are relevant to your research), and (d) how is the article relevant to your study.

- you will attach to the back of your document the five articles that you read.

5. All projects should make predictions, or hypotheses, concerning your findings. In the “Hypotheses” section of your paper, discuss at least three but no more than five of these predictions or hypotheses. This may be presented in about a paragraph or two (remember that you do not have to list ALL of your hypotheses). Make sure to explicitly state your hypotheses (a predicted relationship between variables). If it is not clear from the Literature Review section of your paper, make sure to specify *why* you made such predictions. Hypotheses can be supported from past research, from common sense, or from sociological theory. Hypotheses typically take the following format:

H₁: Advertisements will show men in higher prestige occupations than women.

6. In the “Data & Methods” section of your paper, report in detail on what you did and how the research was conducted. This section counts for most of your point total for this assignment. The key is to be as explicit as possible. The general rule is to ask yourself could someone else use your descriptions to replicate the analysis. One major part of this section includes a discussion and justification of your sample (e.g., why the specific magazine was picked, why the specific year was chosen, why the specific issue was selected), including a

description of your criteria for data inclusion (e.g., did you examine all ads, just full page ads, just full page ads with pictures of women, just full page ads with pictures of at least one woman but no more than two women, etc.). This should take about one page. A second major part of the data and method's section is a discussion of how you operationalized (or measured) your variables. In terms of variable operationalizations, it is often very helpful to provide two or three examples to illustrate how you coded certain variables. This should take at least two pages, if not longer. In addition, make sure to note what is your unit of analysis and what is your sample size.

- you need to get a "hard copy" of your data sources in order to analyze them (e.g., a video of the TV show you want to analyze, a copy of the magazine you will examine).

- how many observations are necessary? This is a tough question to answer because it depends upon the quality of each observation and how long it takes to code each observation. If an observation takes five minutes to code and record, then the expectation is that one could code easily 200 or more observations (e.g., coding an advertisement along a few easily observable dimensions). If an observation takes an hour or more to code (e.g., coding a ½ hour long television sitcom), perhaps only 20 can be collected. *My expectation is that students will spend at least 20 hours coding data.* In general, more observations are better than few observations.

- data can be entered into spreadsheets (e.g., excel) or statistical programs (e.g., SPSS) – while this may be helpful it is not necessary.

- recall that both inductive and deductive methods are typically used (start off with an idea of your coding procedures, look at observations, change how you code, etc.).

- avoid variables that are near constants

- small sample data sets (such as a sample size of 20) are likely to suffer from insufficient data gathering and should be done only with prior approval

7. Summarize your findings or results in the "Findings" section of your paper. Detail what you found, what patterns emerged, which of your hypotheses were confirmed, and what if anything was surprising. This may include examining variable means, percentages, bar charts, frequencies, etc. It is also helpful for those who analyze written statements or pictures to provide some of these as a way to better illustrate a particular argument.

8. In your "Discussion & Conclusion" section of your paper, begin with a brief summary of your findings – typically no more than one paragraph – and then discuss how your findings comment upon a larger sociological issue(s). If, for instance, you examined gender and magazine advertisements, what do your findings tell us about gender relations in US society? This section should roughly parallel your discussion on the importance of your project that was elaborated upon in the "Introduction" section, but it is typical for a new issue or two to be raised or expanded upon. Finally, discuss any weaknesses of your project (e.g., what went wrong, what concepts in hindsight were perhaps too difficult to measure, how might this study be improved upon) and directions for future research.

9. In the “Reference” section of your paper, list alphabetically the citations of the articles that you used in your text. I have listed some examples:

Portes, Alejandro. 1984. “The Rise of Ethnicity.” *American Sociological Review* 49:383-97.

Portes, Alejandro, and Cynthia Truelove. 1987. “Making Sense of Diversity.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 13:359-85.

Stack, John F., and Christopher L. Warren. 1992. “The Reform Tradition and Ethnic Politics.” Pp. 160-85 in *Miami Now!*, edited by Guillermo J. Grenier and Alex Stepick. University Press of Florida.

10. The “Appendix” section of your paper simply includes material that is attached to the back of your document. In the appendix, attach supplemental material to your written report which will include (but not be limited to): (1) all of your completed hand-written code sheets (see me if you do not have hand-written code sheets) or a print out of your SPSS, Excel data set (if used); and (2) a copy of the five articles you used.

Extra-Credit

Extra-credit may be earned in one of three ways.

1. Research questions that are especially creative – possible 5% extra-credit. While it is hard to define what precisely “creative” means, the opposite of creative would be to use research ideas presented in class or in class readings.
2. Research projects that involve especially extensive data collection – possible 5% extra-credit. While I am expecting 20 hours of data collecting, a project that doubles that would be quite impressive.
3. Research projects that collect data over a wide range of years – possible 5% extra-credit. For instance, a research project that collects data over a 50 year period would be very impressive.

Writing Tips

1. Good documents take multiple re-writes.
2. Have another person read the paper – do they understand it?
3. Check the document with “Grammatik” (WordPerfect) or other grammar programs (its good for picking-up passive sentences, very long-sentences, noun-verb agreement, etc.) as well as spell check your document.
4. Topic sentences: every paragraph has a purpose or goal which is implicitly or (better yet) explicitly stated at the beginning of each paragraph. Make sure each sentence within the paragraph speaks to that purpose or goal.
5. If a paragraph is longer than a page, it’s probably too long.

6. One idea per sentence. Often a sentence with lots of commas or which uses “and” a lot indicates that the sentence should be split up.

7. Vary sentence length (not all long & not all short).

8. Shorter and simpler is almost always better. Example:

BAD: “Previous work that has studied the social and political outcomes of the black struggle for equality have found a wide range of contradictory results.”

GOOD: “Research on the outcomes of the civil rights movement has been mixed.”

9. Explicit outlines are good. For instance: “Gender played a role in social movement mobilization in three ways. First Second Third”

10. It is difficult to write a sociological paper without first knowing the results.

THE NEXT PAGE PRESENTS THE GRADING SHEET FOR YOUR PROJECT – IT MAY BE SLIGHTLY MODIFIED

Student name(s):

Introduction (5 points)

- clarity and coherence (theme) of research question (3 = very clear; 0 = very unclear):
- clarity of discussion of sociological importance of work (2 = very clear; 0 = very unclear):

Literature review (10 points)

- clarity of discussion of five research articles (5 = very clear; 3 = most clear; 0 = all poorly summarized):
- relevance of five research articles to study (5 = all relevant; 3 = most relevant; 0 = relevance often unclear):

Hypotheses (5 points)

- clear, justified & related to research question (5 = all; 3 = most; 0 = none presented):

Data & Methods (52 points)

- correctly notes unit of analysis (2 = yes; 0 = no):
- correctly notes sample size (2 = yes; 0 = no):
- justify sample/data set (15 = outstanding; 10 = strong but some limitations; 5 = attempted but significant limitations):
- clarity of operationalizations (15 = all clear; 7 = most clear; 5 = most vague; 0 = all vague):
- sufficient data gathering (18 = clearly yes; 5 = more needed; 2½ = very weak):

Findings & Discussion (10 points)

- clarity of discussion (7 = very clear; 3½ = some clear; 0 = not clear):
- discussion of hypotheses' support (3 = all/most stated clearly; 1½ = some stated clearly; 0 = none):

Conclusion (5 points)

- summary of findings (2 = done well; 1 = vague; 0 = not done):
- comment upon larger sociological issue (2 = done well; 1 = vague; 0 = not done):
- weaknesses acknowledged (1 = yes; 0 = no):

Reference section (5 points)

- reference section (5 = included and done correctly; 2 = included but missing cites; 0 = none):

Appendix section (8 points)

- coding sheets (5 = yes, 2½ = included but incomplete; 0 = not included):
 - a copy of five articles (3 = yes; 0 = no)
-

Penalties

Format Deduction (5 pts.) _____ Meeting(s) Missed (5 pts.) _____ Late (5-10 pts) _____

Extra-Credit

Creativity (5 pts.) _____ Extensive Data Collection (5 pts.) _____ Exceptional Longitudinal Study (5 pts.) _____

Total points:

Notes: