

SOC 484: Research Design and Data Analysis

Spring 2019, Term 5

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Classroom: Atkinson Courtroom, Thomas Commons

Class Meeting and Office Hours: Class will typically meet from 9-11:30AM M-F (9-11 on Tuesdays) with labs from 1-3 during which time I will also hold office hours. Week 3 involves some additional afternoon classes. Some days may not fit this schedule, so check the [course calendar](#) regularly. This class will require significant work out of these designated class times. Students should plan to devote several hours a night to completing assignments.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

“It’s not *what* scientists believe that distinguishes them but how and why they believe it.”

—Bertrand Russell

This is a course in the logic and procedure of social science research. It is a practical course designed to teach you the concepts and skills that sociologists use to analyze social life. In this regard it proceeds on two distinct levels. The “abstract” level involves dealing with the epistemological and technical principles that form the basis of social research, including determining appropriate research strategies, developing measurable concepts, building and revising social theories in light of empirical data, and confronting ethical dilemmas. This is a crucial component of any inquiry into how to produce “good” research. It is only as you *do* research, however, that you truly grasp what these abstracted principles mean. As such, the course also proceeds at a more “concrete” level—on the ground, so to speak, where you will put the principles to practical use in social science research of your own devising.

In this limited time frame, this course cannot give you all you need to know to be a professional researcher. However it *can* give you the basics you need to become a critical consumer of social research and the background to go on to acquire professional competence, either in more advanced courses or on the job.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Through this course, students will:

- explore the logic of social inquiry and the general role of methods in building sociological knowledge;
- identify and evaluate basic methodological approaches for gathering data;
- examine social science standards for evaluating the quality of research and critically assess scholarly and popular interpretations of social research;
- describe and apply the principles of ethical research;
- design and implement a research study including developing research goals, determining the appropriate research strategies, analyzing data, explaining the strengths and limitations of a particular research design, and conveying data findings in a written research report and in an oral presentation.

This course supports the Educational Priorities and Outcomes of Cornell College with emphasis on Inquiry, Reasoning, Communication, and Ethical Behavior.

At times you will find the workload of this course to be heavy. While the practice of social research can be quite rewarding, there is no getting around the fact that it is demanding work.

GRADED WORK

Participation (5%): The quality of your learning and of each class session is highly dependent on completing the reading and coming to class prepared to engage the material. You are responsible for doing the reading, preparing comments/questions, and participating in the class discussion. Students will be evaluated based on the quality of their presence in the classroom and in course-related activities. “Quality” participation is impossible to obtain without carefully reading and thinking about the assigned reading before every class, attending class, and interacting respectfully with others in the classroom. Your grade will not be based on how often you talk but on how well your presence in the classroom facilitates learning. This means not only speaking constructively but also refraining from activities that inhibit learning. You are expected to be alert, attentive, and prepared. Sleeping, facebooking, or texting in class is not acceptable. There may be occasional classroom assignments and unannounced quizzes that allow you to illustrate your comprehension and analysis of the course material. You are responsible for all assignments and material covered in class, whether or not you attend and regardless of the reasons for any absence. I will encourage and support your participation in our classroom community, but the final responsibility is yours. Missing the final student presentations will drastically affect your participation grade.

Research and SPSS Lab Homework Assignments (10%): This course contains a social research lab component. There will be regular lab assignments some of which will contribute to your research report. Lab homework is evaluated on a credit/no credit basis and you will have the opportunity to revise for credit. Getting behind on labs severely impacts students’ ability to be successful. This daily homework should be a priority. **Lab assignments are due at 8:30 AM via Google drive.** See Moodle for more information. If you are having problems with the lab assignments and cannot submit the work by 8:30 AM you must meet with me during that day’s office hours in order to submit the work for credit. Students will also regularly present the results of labwork in class.

Exams (20% for first exam; 25% for second exam): Exams covering materials from lectures, readings, & labs will take place on **January 25th** and **February 1st**.

Research Project and Report (40%): Students will write a “journal-type” empirical research report based on their own research question and analysis of secondary survey research data. The final research report is due on **Wednesday, February 6th at 5:00 PM**. The details of this assignment are on Moodle and will be discussed in class. *This assignment exemplifies the EPOs Inquiry, Reasoning, Communication, and Ethical Behavior.*

Regular Research Report-Related Assignments: There are several assignments related to the major research project for this course. A research proposal and project lab is due **January 19th at noon** and drafts of the literature review are due on **January 20th at 3PM** and **January 27th by noon**. Drafts of the results section are due **January 29th by PM** and a full draft of the paper is due **Sunday, February 3rd at Noon**. All assignments must be satisfactorily completed in order to receive credit for the research report. Failure to complete a satisfactory paper will result in a failing grade for the course.

Peer Review Work: Students will be assigned peer review groups in which they will read and provide constructive feedback on various components of the research report discussed above. Details will be discussed in class.

Report Presentation: Students will formally present their work on **February 5th & 6th** (if necessary). A presentation schedule will be distributed later in the block. When not presenting their own work, students are expected to be an attentive audience and ask questions of the presenters. In addition, students will provide peer evaluations of these presentations.

COURSE INFORMATION

Late Work: It is very important that you keep up with assignments as they are due; falling behind will have a negative impact on your performance and your understanding of the material. Without either prior approval or evidence of a serious emergency, research and lab assignments may not be accepted, exams and presentations will not be rescheduled, and other late work may be penalized.

Grade Scale: **A** 93-100; **A-** 90-92; **B+** 87-89; **B** 83-86; **B-** 80-82; **C+** 77-79; **C** 73-76; **C-** 70-72; **D+** 67-69; **D** 63-66; **D-** 60-62; **F** Below 60

However, failure to turn in course assignments (including labs) and/or missing more than 2 class sessions may result in a failing course grade. Failing the Research Project will result in a failing course grade.

Course Accommodations:

College Policy regarding students with disabilities: Students who need accommodations for learning disabilities must provide documentation from a professional qualified to diagnose learning disabilities. Students requesting services may schedule a meeting with the disabilities services coordinator as early as possible to discuss their needs and develop an individualized accommodation plan. Ideally, this meeting would take place well before the start of classes. At the beginning of each course, the student must notify the instructor within the first three days of the term of any accommodations needed for the duration of the course.

I would appreciate hearing from anyone in this class who has a particular need related to this course. If you would like to request course accommodations for any reason, see me after the first class or make alternative arrangements to meet with me within the first 3 days of the course. While I am reasonably sure we can work out whatever arrangement is necessary, course accommodations should be requested before there is a failure to meet course requirements.

Academic Misconduct:

College Policy: Cornell College expects all members of the Cornell community to act with academic integrity. An important aspect of academic integrity is respecting the work of others. A student is expected to explicitly acknowledge ideas, claims, observations, or data of others, unless generally known. When a piece of work is submitted for credit, a student is asserting that the submission is her or his work unless there is a citation of a specific source. If there is no appropriate acknowledgement of sources, whether intended or not, this may constitute a violation of the College's requirement for honesty in academic work and may be treated as a case of academic dishonesty. The procedures regarding how the College deals with cases of academic dishonesty appear in the catalog, under the heading "Academic Honesty."

Cheating, plagiarism, and other forms of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Any student in this course who is involved in academic dishonesty (portraying another person's work or ideas as their own, submitting the same or similar papers in more than one course without permission from the course

instructors, facilitating plagiarism, etc.) will not earn credit for the relevant assignments, may be formally charged with academic dishonesty, and may receive a failing grade for the course.

Additional Resources: There are a number of resources on campus to support your academic work. In developing and completing your assignments, I encourage you to utilize the support of the following individuals and resources:

- *Meghan Yamanishi*, the Social Sciences Consulting Librarian—can help with library research, evaluating sources, citation, etc.
- *Jessica Johanningmeier*, the Quantitative Reasoning Consultant—can help with finding appropriate datasets, assessing research articles, SPSS, interpreting quantitative data; etc.
- *Laura Farmer* and the Writing Studio—can help with peer review, writing skills, citations, etc.
- *Amy Gullen* and the Academic Media Studio —can help with power-point and other presentation media.

These individuals and offices can provide both basic help as well as advanced guidance to help polish your research, writing, and presentation skills.

COURSE MATERIAL

- Daniel Chambliss and Russell Schutt, 2016. *Making Sense of the Social World*, 5th Ed. (C&S)
- Earl Babbie, William E. Wagner, III, and Jeanne Zaino. 2016. *Adventures in Social Research*, 9th Edition. Sage Press. (Babbie et al)
- Additional Required Readings are available on Moodle.
- Recommended Material: Optional reading, available on Moodle, will provide additional information and guidance on various topics related to research methods.

