

# **SYA 4300: Sociological Analysis: Survey of Methods**

Florida Atlantic University, Spring 2012

MW 1230-150 GCS 208

3.0 credits

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## **REQUIRED TEXTS**

Emerson, Robert and Rachel Fretz and Linda Shaw. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*.

Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Luker, Kristin. *Salsa Dancing Into the Social Sciences: Research in an Age of Info-Glut*.

Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Additional (short) readings to be included on Blackboard

## **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course will examine the various methods used in sociological research. These include survey methods, ethnographic fieldwork, interviewing, and basic quantitative analysis. We will consider the history of social scientific research within U.S. sociology, dating back to the Chicago school of sociology and its path-breaking studies of urban life, race ethnicity, gangs and delinquency, and subcultures. We will also consider issues related to the philosophy and epistemology of the social sciences, in particular: 1) postmodern challenge to scientific notions of objectivity and absolute truth; 2) the challenge by feminist and postcolonial scholars regarding the study of the “Other” in anthropology or sociological studies of so-called deviance. Finally, we will examine questions of ethics by considering some famous cases of social research and experiments (e.g., the Milgram study, Zimbardo’s Stanford prison experiment) that have raised major questions regarding the use of human subjects.

Students will not only consider what professional sociologists have done, they will also get a taste of doing research themselves by briefly employing some of the methods discussed in class. Students will work as a team to create and distribute a pilot survey; they will also work individually on ethnographic fieldwork and conduct an in-depth interview. They will also examine how professional sociologists have analyzed and summarized their data in the presentation of scientific articles.

## **COURSE OBJECTIVES**

The study of social scientific methods provides students with an array of skills that are potentially useful in a wide range of social and professional settings. These include:

- How to formulate a research question with a working hypothesis

- How to utilize sampling, operationalization, and generalization in the design of a research project
- How to organize existing scientific research into a literature review and bibliography
- How to read a scientific research paper and summarize it in an abstract

Furthermore, students in this course will get hands-on experience working on mini-projects of social research. The objectives of these will include:

- Working with a research team to create and administer a pilot survey and analyze the preliminary data
- Engaging in ethnographic fieldwork and writing fieldnotes
- Conducting and transcribing an in-depth interview
- Developing a coding scheme for content analysis of media

### EXAMS, PAPERS, AND EVALUATION

2 in-class exams: 25 points each=50%

2 short (2 pages) papers: 5 points each=10%

Final exam: 20 points=20%

Attendance: 10 points=10%

The in-class exams are scheduled for February 22 and April 2. They will consist of a mixture of multiple-choice and true/false questions and one short essay, and they will draw equally from lectures and assigned readings. Make-ups will be scheduled only if the student has arranged one with the professor **beforehand**. For the final exam, students will write about a selected topic in a paper of 5-6 pages, due on the date of the final (May 2). The short (2 page) writing assignments will ask students to respond to required readings and are intended to facilitate class discussions. Papers will be due January 25 and February 27.

Sign-in sheets for attendance will be distributed twice during every class session, once at the beginning of class and once at the end. The first three halves of class missed do not affect the student's grade, with one point deducted for each half of a class missed thereafter. Grades are posted on the Gradebook section of Blackboard and it is the student's responsibility to check their grade and notify me if there are any mistakes or discrepancies.

### GRADING SCALE

A	93-100 points
A-	90-92.5
B+	87-89.5
B	83-86.5
B-	80-82.5
C+	77-79.5
C	73-76.5
C-	70-72.5
D+	67-69.5
D	63-66.5
D-	60-62.5
F	59.5 or below

### CODE OF ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Students at Florida Atlantic University are expected to maintain the highest ethical standards. Academic dishonesty is considered a serious breach of these ethical standards, because it interferes with the University mission to provide a high quality education in which no student enjoys an unfair advantage over any other. Academic dishonesty is also destructive of the University community, which is grounded in a system of mutual trust and places high value on personal integrity and individual responsibility. Harsh penalties are associated with academic dishonesty. For more information, see the Code of Academic Integrity in the University Regulations at [http://www.fau.edu/regulations/chapter4/4.001\\_Code\\_of\\_Academic\\_Integrity.pdf](http://www.fau.edu/regulations/chapter4/4.001_Code_of_Academic_Integrity.pdf).

### DISABILITY POLICY STATEMENT

In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), students who require special accommodation due to a disability to properly execute course work must register with the Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD) -- in Boca Raton, SU 133 (561-297-3880) – and follow all OSD procedures.

### CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE

University policy on the use of electronic devices states: “In order to enhance and maintain a productive atmosphere for education, personal communication devices, such as cellular telephones and pagers, are to be disabled in class sessions.” Over the past few years in colleges all over the U.S., we have seen a disturbing increase in the number of students who use laptops to be on the internet or play video games and effectively check out of the classroom. In many instances, however, they may be taking notes and therefore “multi-tasking,” but recent studies have shown that when students are not allowed to use laptops they generally do better in class because they can’t multi-task quite as well as they think they can. For generations college students have taken notes with paper and pen, and most of them turned out OK. The use of phones for text messaging can be even more distracting and downright disrespectful to the professor and the other students in the

class. Of course, the use of phones is harder to police, so all I can ask from you is your consideration and cooperation. The bottom line is that I want to teach you, I want you to learn something, and that other stuff gets in the way.

### INTELLECTUAL DIVERSITY

The best classes are ones where a diversity of viewpoints is represented and articulated. I encourage students to form their own opinions about sociological issues after investigating the evidence available and considering a variety of theoretical perspectives. Students are free to voice their viewpoints, and in fact will be rewarded for doing so, as long as they are respectful to others in the class. Students' grades are based on their mastery of sociological concepts, theories, and research, not their opinions about particular issues. In other words, students need not agree with the professor or the authors of assigned readings; they simply need to understand their arguments.

### AVOIDING TXT-SPEAK

Here some common errors that no college student should ever make but nonetheless are becoming increasingly common in our age of text messaging, email, etc.:

Your: possessive of you, as in "Your toe is on fire" or "Your house is lame"  
You're: contraction of you are, as in "You're fabulous" or "You're going to be a star"  
**You're** going to drive **your** teacher insane if you keep spelling this way.

It's=contraction of it is, as in "It's a humid day in Florida" or "It's going to be dumb"  
Its=plural possessive of it, as in "That's its limit" or "Build its foundation"

There=a place, as in "Put it in there" or "There go my dreams"  
They're=contraction of they are, as in "They're going to break my legs."  
Their=plural possessive of they, as in "That's their food" or "It's their friend"  
**They're** going out **there** to get **their** stuff.

We're=contraction of we are, as in "We're going to kick your ass" or "We're here"  
Were=past tense of the plural conjugation of "to be," as in "They were all there" or "The dogs were sleeping."  
Where=a place, as in "Where are we going?" or "That's where your shoes go."  
**We're** going to the place **where** the animals **were** being fed.

A **novel** is a work of fiction. Non-fiction books, which are all we read in this class, are simply called **books**, never **novels**.

The title of a book should be written in italics, as in *Social Movements: An Introduction*. It is also acceptable to underline books titles, as in Social Movements: An Introduction. The title of an article, or a chapter in an anthology, should be placed in quotation marks, as in "Reclaiming the Commons" or "New Revolts against the System." **A book title should not appear in quotation marks.**

## SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND READINGS

January 9-11

### **I. Forms and Processes of Social Research**

Luker, *Salsa Dancing Into the Social Sciences*, ch. 1

January 16-18

### **II. The Historical Roots of American Sociology and Social Research**

Luker, *Salsa Dancing Into the Social Sciences*, ch. 2-3

January 23-25

### **III. Research Questions and Case Studies**

Luker, *Salsa Dancing Into the Social Sciences*, ch. 4

Jan 30-Feb 1

### **IV. “They Say, I Say”: The Literature Review**

Luker, *Salsa Dancing Into the Social Sciences*, ch. 5

February 6-8

### **V. Sampling, Operationalization, Generalization**

Luker, *Salsa Dancing Into the Social Sciences*, ch. 6-7

February 13-15

### **VI. Data Collection and Forms of Analysis**

Luker, *Salsa Dancing Into the Social Sciences*, ch. 8

Emerson et al., *Writing Ethnographic Methods*, ch. 1

February 20-22

### **VII. Qualitative Research and Field Methods**

### **FEBRUARY 22: EXAM #1 IN CLASS**

February 27-29

### **VIII. How to Write Fieldnotes: Participating, Observing, and Jotting Notes**

Emerson et al., *Writing Ethnographic Methods*, ch. 2

March 5-7: Spring Break

March 12-14

### **IX. Writing Up Fieldnotes II: Creating Scenes on the Page**

Emerson et al., *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*, ch. 3-4

March 19-21

### **X. Processing Fieldnotes: Coding and Meaning**

Emerson et al., *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*, ch. 5-6

March 26-28

**XI. Writing an Ethnography**

Emerson et al., *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*, ch. 7

April 2-4

**XII. Interviewing**

**APRIL 2: EXAM #2 IN CLASS**

April 9-11

**XIII. Content Analysis**

Luker, *Salsa Dancing Into the Social Sciences*, ch. 9

April 16-18

**XIV. Historical-Comparative Analysis**

Luker, *Salsa Dancing Into the Social Sciences*, ch. 10

April 23-25

**XV. Data Reduction and Analysis**

Luker, *Salsa Dancing Into the Social Sciences*, ch. 11

**Final Examination: Friday, April 27, 1030-100**