

## **Sociology 357 - Methods of Sociological Inquiry Summer 2007**

**MTWR 12:20 - 1:35 pm  
6116 Social Science**

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**Office Hours:** Mondays and Wednesday 2-4 pm, and by appointment

**Course website:** <http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/~omiroso/357/357.html>

### **Introduction**

Sociology 357 is a basic course on how to do social science research and how to evaluate the research of others. This is a course where you will learn by doing. After an introduction to the elements of research, you will spend most of the semester working on a variety of projects, applying the concepts we cover early on as you conduct your own research, and as we evaluate the research of others. Many heads are better than one when it comes to designing and evaluating social research, so the course will involve group work and a lot of discussion. Coming prepared and being willing to participate are key prerequisites for joining the class.

My goals in teaching this course are (1) to introduce you to the language and logic of sociological research in order to provide you with a good foundation for future learning; (2) to teach you how to read a research report with a critical eye, so that you can know how to tell how trustworthy its information is; (3) to expose you to a variety of research methods that you may encounter in the future; (4) to convince you that social scientific research is not a highly esoteric activity, but rather a relatively straightforward, systematic set of procedures that will allow you to answer your questions about the world; (5) to have you learn first hand about the successes and problems of research by trying out several data collection methods on a small scale; (6) to show you that research is both an intellectual and emotional activity that can be both frustrating and highly rewarding; (7) to make you feel comfortable with confronting basic statistics in a research report, to know how to read them and how to use them in your own research.

Regarding the latter point, Soc 357 is not a statistics course and assumes no background in methods. You will do a small amount of statistics in your projects, which will be easier if you have already had elementary statistics, but you can learn what you need to know for these projects in this course without much difficulty. If you have already taken **any other** research methods course, please talk to me, as this course will probably cover what you already know.

In addition to keeping up with daily readings and assignments, you should plan NOW to set aside substantial blocks of time outside of class to work on projects during the semester. A detailed schedule of due dates is included below.

### **Course Materials**

There are no required books for this course. I have thought about this very carefully, and my take on this issue is that different people have different ways of learning, and that whereas some students need to read the lecture material from a textbook beforehand in order to understand and be able to absorb the

content of the lecture, others find this repetitive and tedious. This is why I am not requiring anyone to buy a textbook. I **strongly recommend** the use of the textbook cited below, yet it is up to you to be aware of how you learn and decide whether this would be an adequate investment for you. In order to make up for the lack of a required textbook in class, I will give you photocopies of the lecture slides that I will use in class. However, you should not take these as substitutes of the textbook, both because you will not have them before class, and because they are in slide form and thus will not be very helpful to you unless in combination with the lecture. Moreover, the textbook contains much more information than I can discuss in the lectures, and therefore it can be a good reference and learning tool. The textbook can be bought at the University Bookstore. Because it is a recommended, and not a required book, the bookstore probably did not order enough copies for everyone in class, assuming that many of you will not buy it. If, for whatever reason, you go to buy the book and cannot find it please tell me so that I can ask them to order more copies as soon as possible. The bibliographic information of the textbook is the following:

Royce A. Singleton and Bruce C. Straits. 2005. *Approaches to Social Research*, Fourth Edition. New York: Oxford University Press.

There is also a series of **required** readings and detailed assignment instructions available in coursepack form at the Social Sciences Copy Center (6120 Social Science), or individually on the course website: [www.ssc.wisc.edu/~omirosa/357/357.html](http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/~omirosa/357/357.html)

You will also need paper or cards in the 3x5" size. This is the smallest size note card, and is also a standard size note pad. You will need about 35 of these for the course (one for each day of class). You may also make them yourself, or recycle cards that have been written on one side.

## Requirements and Grading

The largest share of your grade is based on three major data collection projects and an article analysis. The data collection projects are a structured field observation, a simple questionnaire and a field experiment; these are worth 20% each. A detailed analysis of a professional research article is your "take-home exam" in this class and is worth 20%. A quiz in the beginning of our second week of class that will evaluate your understanding of the basic concepts of research seen in the first few lectures is worth 9%. There will be frequent homework assignments that will be worth a total of 9%. The last 2% is based on giving daily feedback on the class sessions.

The exercises in this class are not "real" research. As you will learn, real research is much too time consuming to fit into a course. You will be doing scaled-down projects that teach you important lessons about research without taking so much time. Everything you do in this class is solely for your education. You are not part of anybody's research project.

## Improving

This is a skills course, and if you work hard enough you can learn to do something you did not get right the first time. You may redo any of the first three research projects in an attempt to improve your work. Redoing an exercise means starting completely over and doing all new work; it is not just correcting the mistakes on the first exercise. You must do better work to get a better grade: this is not extra credit and effort does not count. If you do more than one version of an assignment, your best grade will count. You must allow a week for the grading of any assignment. You must submit the old (graded) exercise and any grade sheets when you submit new work for regrading. I suggest that you speak with me to clarify these instructions before redoing any exercise.

## Homework

The homework gives you practice on major skills that are directly relevant to the graded exercises, particularly the article analysis. It is very important that you have read the articles we will discuss **before** you come to class; otherwise you will not be able to follow or benefit from the instruction in class. It is not necessary for you to write a lot: half a page is usually plenty. It is not necessary that you have studied the reading enough to master it before class. All you need to do is to have read it over so that when I start dissecting the methods in an article, you can follow what I am talking about. The written questions are a "warm up" to get you thinking. If you cannot figure out the answer to a particular question after reading an article, just say so and, if possible, say what your best guess is.

Homework is counted but not graded; if you do it you get credit. If you do 90% or more of the homework, you will receive an A for this portion of your grade (9%, see above); if you do 50% or less, you will receive an F; totals between these extremes will receive intermediate grades. **Homework must be submitted by email to me BEFORE class to receive full credit. In the subject line of the email, start by writing 357 (this will make it easy for me to sort the emails in my inbox), and then include your full name, the date the homework is due, and the word "homework." (e.g. 357 Oriol Miroso, June 25 homework). Please type (or copy & paste) the homework directly into the email, rather than submitting it as an attachment.** Homework submitted by the next class session will be given half credit; after that it will not be accepted at all. Missing class is not an excuse for late homework. The only exception is illness or other circumstances beyond your control (or a religious holiday), which you should explain in writing when you submit the late homework.

**A note on "faking" the homework: DON'T DO IT.** It is extremely obvious when a student tries to "fake" the homework. Lying in such an obvious way destroys the trust that is required for a class like this, where students are given a lot of freedom in the execution of their own projects. If you are too busy or tired or lazy to do the homework, just be honest about it. If I think you are faking the homework, I will communicate this to you and you will get zero credit for that day's work. If it happens a second time, you will get zero credit for any of the homework part of the course (9% of your grade).

## Daily Reactions

At the end of each class, submit on a 3x5 card your name, the date, and **at least** one sentence of reaction to that day's class, indicating what you learned, or something you liked or did not like, found interesting or controversial, found clear or too simplistic, or found confusing and in need of further (or better) explanation; you may also submit comments on the course in general. You can submit a "reaction" only if you were actually in class. You cannot "make up" a reaction, but tell me (in writing) if you are forced to miss several classes due to illness or other problem, and I will make an appropriate adjustment. The grading system will be the same as for homework. I read these after each class, but do not normally return them or comment on them.

## Procedural Matters

**Please bring your assigned readings and a copy of any submitted homework to class.** It is especially important to bring the instructions pertaining to course assignments on the days we discuss them.

I will record attendance using your daily reactions. You are responsible for obtaining information you miss if you are absent. It is inappropriate to use office hours (or telephone calls) to compensate for instruction you missed more or less by choice, such as napping, studying for other classes, or vacationing.

But if you are attending regularly and making the effort to learn (or if your absence is for reasons beyond your control), I will do all that I can to help you.

**Your final article analysis is due on the last day of class, Thursday August 9, in class.** This is also the last time for submitting any re-done exercises. Early papers will be gratefully accepted. If you wish to have your article analysis returned to you, please include a written note stating that you give permission for your graded assignment to be left in the hallway outside my office.

### **Coping with the Summer semester workload**

Each one of the weeks of class in the Summer semester is equivalent to two weeks in the Fall and Spring semesters. Besides the obvious increase in the amount of lecture time each week, in a course which is heavily based on your own work on research projects outside of class managing the workload is a considerable challenge. I have tried to set some sessions (called 'workshops' in the schedule below) for you to work on your own projects during class time, and in which I will be available for consultation (by the way, these are still required classes that you have to attend, particularly as most often they involve group work). I have also tried to make sure that the bulk of work for the assignments (or the time devoted to report writing) coincides with a weekend, so that you will have three days to work on them, and that there is no other homework scheduled at that time. Finally, I have strategically scheduled some special sessions – like two hands-on sessions on statistics at a computer lab, or the two sessions on the ethics of research – so that they will give you more time to work on your assignments. However, you have to be prepared to work hard outside of class and to plan ahead so that you can get all your work done in time. Another negative consequence of the organization of the Summer semester is that we will start working on a different section of the class, which includes a different project, before the due date of the previous assignment. This is problematic because there will be homework due for the new section, and it can be confusing to be working on one project when in class we are discussing another one. That is the reason why, in general, I have set the due dates for your exercises at the most in the first or second lecture of any new section of the course. However, my recommendation is that you use those extra days only to clean up and double-check your reports, and that you aim at having them ready by the last session of each section of the course.

### **Language issues**

As I am sure that you will notice / have noticed right away, I am a foreigner and English is only my third language. I have been living in English speaking countries for a long time now and I hope that this will not be an issue in our communication. However, I want to encourage you to be vocal about any problems that could arise in this respect. If you have difficulties understanding me, or I accidentally 'make up' a word that you never heard before, or there is any issue related to the way I speak English, please feel free to interrupt me and ask me right away in class, or come to see me in my office if it is something more serious and recurrent.

### **Schedule of Topics and Readings**

**Reading and homework due dates given in the syllabus are correct**, even if I do not remind you in class, unless a **written** note on the blackboard or a **written** schedule change sheet alters them. All surnames refer to articles available in your coursepack and online. Between brackets I have indicated the chapters of the recommended textbook that correspond to each lecture in the following format: [S&S 15] (which means Singleton and Straits, Chapter 15). These are **not** required readings.

Homework is DUE on the date noted. That means the homework listed for June 19 is due BEFORE CLASS on the 19<sup>th</sup>.

## Part I : The Logic and Elements of Research

- M June 18**      **Introduction to the class.**
- T June 19**      **Scientific Knowledge.** What is science? How is it different from other forms of knowledge? Concepts and logic of research.  
**Read (for today):** Becker, "Concepts," and Stinchcombe, "The Logic of Scientific Inference." [S&S 2]  
**Homework (for today):**  
1. List two or three things from the readings that you found especially interesting or that you disagree with or have a question about.  
2. Introduce yourself, and tell me what hopes or fears you have about this class. Tell me anything I should know that might affect your ability to participate in class (work schedule, course load, etc.)  
3. What, if any, background in statistics do you have? Don't worry if you have never taken a stats class.
- W June 20**      **The Elements of Research I: Design**  
**Read:** Doob and Gross, "Status of Frustrator as an Inhibitor of Horn-honking Responses," and "How We Did It." [S&S 3]  
**Homework:**  
1. How was the Doob and Gross research project designed? What were its main stages? Did they follow a logical order? What is your opinion on their way of proceeding about their research design?
- R June 21**      **The Elements of Research II: Conceptualization, Operationalization, and Measurement**  
**Read:** Schutt, "Conceptualization and Measurement." [S&S 4]  
**Homework:**  
Review the Doob and Gross article that you read for yesterday's class and answer the following questions:  
1. Give the major independent variable and dependent variable in the Doob and Gross article; tell how each was measured.  
2. State the major theoretical hypothesis of the research and the operational hypothesis that flows from it.
- M June 25**      **The Elements of Research III: Sampling**  
**Read:** Glicken, "Sampling." [S&S 5]  
**Homework:**  
1. Look for a newspaper or magazine article that reports research done with sampling. Reflect on the sampling procedure used in light of what you have read in the Glicken piece (if it is not explicit, reflect on what is missing, why that info should be there, etc.)  
2. Identify specific problems, either intrinsic in the sampling strategy undertaken in the article that you have read, or that you have in understanding how sampling functions and what its key concepts are.

T June 26 Quiz

## Part II: Observation of the Social World

- W June 27** **Field Research:** Introduction to Field Research and Observation  
**Read:** Adler & Adler, "Shifts and Oscillations in Deviant Careers," and "Stability and flexibility: Maintaining Relations Within Organized and Unorganized Groups." [S&S 10]  
**Homework:**  
1. Based on the comments in their article and journal, discuss the roles played and methods employed by the Adlers.  
2. Which of Adler and Adler's findings do you think are most trustworthy? Why? Least trustworthy? Why?  
3. What problems do you think the Adlers faced as they collected their data? Did they give adequate account of how they dealt with these problems?
- R June 28** **Field Observation Exercise I:** Introduction to the project, time to form groups.  
**Read:** Field Observation Exercise in Coursepack. Review previous readings as necessary to be comfortable with the research terms used in this assignment.
- M July 2** **Field Observation Exercise II:** How to write up your report, how to prepare a statistical table summarizing results. Workshop with teammates.  
**Read:** Nothing for today.
- T July 3** **Workshop:** This class will be devoted to clarify problems that come up during you field observation and to work in groups in order to finish the exercise.  
**Read:** Nothing for today.  
**Homework:** Reflect upon the experience of doing field observation. What did you find particularly difficult/challenging? What were the most important problems you had to face? How useful was the exercise? What doubts/question did your field observation leave you with about this research method?
- W July 4** No class

## Part III: Asking Questions

- R July 5** **Intro to Survey Research and Interviewing:** Comparing open & closed-ended questions.  
**Read:** Ransford, "Isolation, Powerlessness, and Violence," and the personal journal; and Ewick and Silbey, "Against the Law" and "Research Methods." NOTE: You may find it useful to read the "Research Methods" part of Ewick and Silbey first. [S&S 8]  
**Homework:** Observation Assignment Due.  
1. List the major variables in each article and tell how at least one was measured, find the sampling details and be prepared to evaluate them in class, and list some of the findings of each article.  
2. Jot down a few notes comparing the strengths and weaknesses of each article's methods. We will discuss this in class.

- M July 9**      **Survey and Interview Research** . Survey instrumentation and use.  
**Read:** Schaeffer and Presser, "The Science of Asking Questions," and handout example of a survey. [S&S 9]  
**Homework:**  
1. Based on the reading, identify at least 5 problems with the survey in the handout and suggest improvements to the wording or the structure of the survey.
- T July 10**      **Questionnaire Assignment.** Assignment explained; class used to form groups and brainstorm project topics.  
**Read:** The questionnaire exercise in the Coursepack so you know what it involves.  
**Homework:** Start to think about possible project topics. Write down 2 or 3 ideas and, based on the readings that you have done and what I said in the previous two classes, discuss the pros and cons of each one of them as the subject of this exercise.
- W July 11**      **Question Writing Workshop.** Class will be a workshop on writing questions. I will give some general principles. You will sit with your groups and work on questions in class. Plan to collect your data as soon as possible after this class.
- R July 12**      **Evaluating Survey Research.**  
**Read:** Rubin, "Measurement of Romantic Love" and journal.  
**Homework:**  
1. Try to explain in your own words the relation between what Rubin is doing and the ideas of validity explained in the lectures.  
2. List three facts that support the claim that the "love" scale is a valid measure.  
3. In class we will discuss whether this kind of research is useful and whether the love scale seems to measure love. Jot down notes to remind yourself of relevant points in this article for this discussion.
- M July 16**      **Coding up Questionnaire Data**  
**Read:** Nothing for today. [S&S 14]  
**Homework:**  
1. Bring completed questionnaires to class. You will develop a coding scheme and code data together in class, so that it is ready to be entered into a spreadsheet.
- T July 17**      **Computer Lab Workshop: Creating your dataset in SPSS.**
- W July 18**      **Computer Lab Workshop: Producing Statistical Results.**
- R July 19**      **Workshop: Analyzing your questionnaire data.** We will go through your statistical results together.
- M July 23**      **Workshop: Writing up your report.** We will continue the discussion of analyzing your data, and discuss strategies for writing your report. I would like you to be able to learn from each other's projects, so please be prepared to share with the other groups the key experiences (things you have learned, what to do, what to avoid) from your survey project (the extent to which we will be able to do this for all the groups will depend on time constraints).

## Part IV: Experiments

- T July 24**      **The Logic of Experiments.** Why experiments are the best way to establish causal relations. The logic of randomization and experimental control. Introduction of experiment exercise.  
**Read:** Aronson et. al. "Experimentation in Social Psychology." [S&S 6]  
**Homework:**  
1. Read the descriptions of research results in the handouts that I will distribute in class, and for each of them state:  
    a. Is the method used observational, correlational, or experimental? If the latter, what kind of experiment is it (within groups or between groups)?  
    b. What are the independent and dependent variables?  
    c. What are some extraneous (uncontrolled) variables that might also explain the results?
- W July 25**      **Workshop: Setting Up Your Experiment.** Class will be devoted to forming groups and initial planning of your experiment. With experiments, you need to figure out everything in advance.  
**Read:** Field Experiment Exercise in Coursepack. [S&S 7]  
**Homework:** Questionnaire report due.
- R July 26**      **The Problem of Internal Validity.** Threats to internal validity. Setting up your experiment right. You should leave the class knowing how to do your data collection. The actual data collection will not take long, but you need to allow enough time for advance planning and for writing up the report. Checklist of things you need to know that are not usually obvious:  
    1. what a manipulated independent variable is and how to do it;  
    2. what randomization is and how to do it;  
    3. how to measure the dependent variable in a way that gives good experimental control.  
**Read:** Nothing for today.
- M July 30**      **Writing Up Experimental Results.**  
**Read:** Darley and Batson, "From Jerusalem to Jericho" and the personal journal; and Pager, "The Mark of a Criminal Record."  
**Homework:**  
1. For each article, identify the independent and dependent variables and how each was measured.  
2. Summarize the key finding in each article. Does it interest you? Why or why not?  
3. For each article answer: What variables were held constant across all experimental trials? What variables were controlled for by randomization? What other possible explanatory variables were not controlled in the experiment?
- T July 31**      **Presentation of Field Experiments.** Each group should be prepared to give a short presentation of what their field experiment was and what the main results of the experiment were. Emphasis should be put on the problems/challenges of this research



method, and on reflection of what went wrong and how it could be addressed if the research were to be replicated.

## Part V: Analyzing Published Articles

- W Aug 1**      **Analyzing Published Articles.** Introduction to assignment.  
**Read:** Article Analysis Exercise instructions.
- R Aug 2**      **Analyzing Articles:** Practice analysis of articles.  
**Read:** Oliver, "If you don't do it, nobody will."  
**Homework:** Field Experiment Exercise due.  
1. In class, we will go over the Oliver article in fine detail, as if we were doing the article analysis. Jot down notes on the following:  
    a. the theoretical hypotheses,  
    b. how each variable was actually measured,  
    c. whether you think these measures are valid,  
    d. details of sampling & how generalizeable you think the findings are.  
2. Choose the article you will want to use for the Article Analysis Exercise. Skim through it and write a few lines about what it is about and what methods it uses. It is not necessary to have read it carefully yet, I just want to make sure that you have chosen it after reading something more than the title and that you have been able to identify the main methods used.
- M Aug 6**      **Workshop on Article Analysis.** We will devote this class to discussing problems with your own article analysis.  
**Read:** Your own article at least TWICE before coming to class.  
**Homework:**  
1. Begin working on the analysis of your article of choice, and list at least three problems/doubts that you have encountered in the process.
- T Aug 7**      **Ethics of Research I.**  
**Read:** UW Madison Human Subjects Protections Tutorial, modules 2 and 3.  
<http://info.gradsch.wisc.edu/research/compliance/humansubjects/tutorial/> . [S&S 16]  
**Homework:**  
1. Go to the Online Ethics Center's case studies on deception in the Social Sciences at <http://www.onlineethics.org/reseth/appe/vol1/justify.html>. Read the three cases and take notes to answer the questions accompanying each case. (We will discuss these cases in class; the notes are intended to be a warm-up to get you thinking, not extended answers to each question). Note that as a member of an Institutional Review Board (IRB) you should use the three principles discussed in the UW Human Subjects Tutorial as a basis for determining whether the proposed deception was justifiable.
- W Aug 8**      **Ethics of Research II.**  
**Read:** Haney, et al., "Interpersonal Dynamics in a Simulated Prison," and pp. 182-189 of the personal journal; Humphreys, "Tearoom Trade" and "Methods."

**Homework:**

1. Briefly give your opinion of the ethics of the research in the Humphreys and Haney et al. articles. What arguments did the authors give to support their research? Was the knowledge gained worth it?

**NOTE:** The Humphreys article contains some fairly explicit but not graphic descriptions of male homosexual sex. Past classroom debates about ethics have concerned the privacy issues of doing the research, and the question of whether gay men and lesbians are helped or hurt by articles like this one; there is also the concern that I am contributing to gay-bashing in assigning this kind of article in times like these. The ethical issues in the Haney et al. article are less controversial today, but are still important. I believe that vigorous discussion and debate about these issues is vital.

**Th Dec 14      Wrap-up and Evaluations.**

**Homework:** Article Analysis Exercise due.

1. Please write down what was good and what was bad about the course format, readings, lectures, content, or process. Suggestions for improvement are very welcome!
2. How useful do you expect the things we have studied to be for you in the future?