

Soc G211 Introduction to Research Methods

Department of Sociology & Anthropology, Northeastern University
Spring 2006, 6:30 -8:30 pm Wednesday

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Office Hours: Wednesday 1:30-4:30 pm,
and by appointment.

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"Method" has to do, first of all, with how to ask and answer questions with some assurance that the answers are more or less durable. "Theory" has to do, above all, with paying close attention to the words one is using, especially their degree of generality and their logical relations. The primary purpose of both is clarity of conception and economy of procedure, and most importantly just now, the release rather than the restriction of the sociological imagination.

C. Wright Mills 1959. *The Sociological Imagination*, p.178.

Course Goals:

This course is an introduction to the methodology of social sciences. Its main purpose is to survey the major research designs and research techniques that are at the core of contemporary approaches used to study social phenomena. We will begin with the question of why and how we do social research. Then we will study the issues of research design, causation, and the systematic nature of data collection that leads to data that can be trusted. We will explore four research designs and methods: surveys, experiments, qualitative, and comparative-historical methods. The objective of this course is to achieve the following inter-related goals:

- Learn how to ask sociological research questions that can be answered
- Design and write a research proposal
- Develop skills to critically evaluate published social science research, with an emphasis on the methods used to answer research questions.
- Identify a variety of sociological methods and determine which methods might best answer certain research questions.

Course Requirements:

- 1. Preparation and participation.** The course is taught as a combination of lecture and discussion. Thus, your active class participation is an important part of the course. Plan to complete the readings before each class session, and engage in discussion of the materials. In order to facilitate discussion in the seminar and on-line, prepare each week at **least two** questions for discussion and write at least **three** reaction papers during the semester. The reaction papers should be at least 2 pages double-spaced, 12 pt Times Roman in length. Send both the questions and/or the reaction papers to the seminar e-mail distribution list via Blackboard by **Monday at 6 pm**. The reaction papers, discussion questions and in class participation account for **10% of the grade**.
- 2.** I highly recommend you complete the CD Rom exercises (Schutt) for each chapter and to take the tests on the WWW page (www.pineforge.com). Feel free to bring the printouts to the semester if you have any questions.
- 3. Research proposal.** Throughout the semester you will work on a research proposal on a topic of your choice in consultation with me. Before choosing your topic for the research proposal, I highly recommend that you come and talk to me with a short outline or some ideas.
January 23rd: Topic is due, please send your topic and/or research question(s) via e-mail
February 8th: Two-page proposal is due. Describe your research question and/or topic plus 5- 10 references (academic books and refereed journal articles).
March 15th: First draft is due. Focus here on the "what" and "why" of a research proposal: "what" is your research question or problem; and "why" is it an important problem, this includes also a brief, focused literature review. Briefly outline "how" you are going to study your research problem. **20% of the grade**.
April 12th, 19th: Presentation of your proposal in the seminar.
April 19th: Final full proposal is due. Here you will revise the "what" and "why" and expand on the "how" of your research project: This includes a discussion in much more detail of the research design, what information/data you will need to collect, what findings do you expect, etc. (See handout on the convention of research proposals.) The proposal is **50% of the grade**.
- 4.** There will be two **homework assignments** that are critiques of published research. I recommend and encourage that you work in groups to discuss these assignments whenever possible. However, you will formulate and hand in individually written assignments. Each assignment is **10% of the grade**.

Plan in advance! Late assignments and papers will be penalized one full letter grade for each day that they are late. The only exception are religious holidays, please notify me in advance of any such conflicts. Incomplete grades will be given at my discretion only in cases of acute illness, or unforeseen, extraordinary extenuating circumstances. In this case you need to contact me as soon as possible, before the assignment or paper is due. If you have any questions or concerns about your participation in the course, I am available during hours that are listed on the first page. Please

make use of the office hours! In addition, we can arrange meetings by appointment if the regular office hours are not convenient for you.

In accordance with university rules and the “Academic Honesty & Integrity Policy” any form of plagiarism, cheating or other academic dishonesty will not be tolerated and can result in a failing grade for the assignment. Familiarize yourself with citation rules and carefully credit other authors for ideas that are not your own. Do not copy ideas or expressions and do not lift whole sentences!

Required Text (available at the NU bookstore):

Russell K. Schutt, *Investigating the Social World* (4th edition). Pine Forge Press (2003) includes CD with exercises.

Recommended Books (see also Seminar WWW page):

If you are interested in finding out more about issues involved in using specific research designs and methods, there are two very useful series by Sage University Paper. Experts of certain methods have written small booklets of usually less than 100 pages. One series is on **Quantitative Applications** in the Social Sciences. Books include here for example, *Introduction to Survey Sampling* by Graham Kalton, #35, or *Reliability and Validity Assessment* by Edward Carmines and Richard Zeller #17. The other book series is on **Qualitative Research Methods**, for example, *Emotions and Fieldwork* by Sherryl Kleinmann and Martha A. Copp. # 28, or *Interpretive Biography* by Norman Denzin # 17.

Other **advanced** or **specialized books** that I recommend are:

Bardach, Eugene. 2000. *A Practical Guide for Policy Analysis*. New York: Chatham House Publishers.

Becker, Howard. 1998. *Tricks of the Trade: How to Think About Your Research While You're Doing It*. Chicago Guides to Writing, Editing, and Publishing. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Burawoy, Michael et al. 1991. *Ethnography Unbound*. University of California Press.

Booth, Wayne, Gregory Colomb, and Joseph Williams. 1995. *The Craft of Research*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Hesse-Biber, Sharlene Nagy and Michelle L. Yaiser (eds.) 2004. *Feminist Perspectives on Social Research*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hesse-Biber, Sharlene Nagy and Patricia Leavy (eds.). 2004. *Approaches to Qualitative Research: A Reader on Theory and Practice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Naples, Nancy. 2003. *Feminism and Method: Ethnography, Discursive Analysis and Activist Research*. New York: Routledge.

Ragin, Charles. 1987. *The Comparative Method: Moving Beyond Qualitative and Quantitative Strategies*. University of California Press.

Reinharz, Shulamit. 1992. *Feminist Methods in Social Research*. Oxford University Press.

Writing and Mentor Guides for Graduate School that I highly recommend:

Becker, Howard. 1986. *Writing for Social Scientists : How to Start and Finish Your Thesis, Book, or Article*. Chicago Guides to Writing, Editing, and Publishing. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Goldsmith, John A., John Komlos, Penny Schine Gold. 2001. *The Chicago Guide to Your Academic Career: A Portable Mentor for Scholars from Graduate School Through Tenure*. Chicago: University of Chicago.

Miller, Jane. E. 2004. *The Chicago Guide to Writing about Numbers: 123456. The Effective Presentation of Quantitative Information*. Chicago Guides to Writing, Editing, and Publishing. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Moxley, Joseph and Todd Taylor eds. 1997. *Writing and Publishing for Academic Authors*. Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Peters, Robert. 1997. *Getting What You Came For: The Smart Student's Guide to Earning an M.A. or a Ph.D.* New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Find a great bibliography on research about graduate school by Professor Joya Misra:

<http://www-unix.oit.umass.edu/~misra/gradexperience.htm>

The Seminar WWW Page:

We will use Blackboard <http://blackboard.neu.edu/> for communication, announcements, and other course materials etc. Please make sure that you can receive mail at your NU e-mail address.

Handouts, weekly class notes and WWW links of interest are posted on

<http://www.atsweb.neu.edu/zippel/courses/211/index.htm>

Tentative Weekly Schedule

1/11 Introduction: Science, Society, and Social Research

Schutt Ch 1

Recommended: C. Wright Mills. 1959. *Sociological Imagination*. London, New York: Oxford University Press. Read excerpt at <http://www.lclark.edu/~goldman/socimagination.html> and Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann. 1967. *The Social Construction of Reality*. Garden City, NY:Anchor (Books on library reserve).

1/18 Process, Theories and Philophies for Social Research

Schutt Ch 2 and 3.

Booth, Colomb and Williams. *The Craft of Research* Pp. 35-84.

And choose **one** of the following **two** articles:

Grant, Linda, Kathryn B. Ward, and Xue Lan Rong. 1987. "Is There an Association between Gender and Methods in Sociological Research?" *American Sociological Review* 52 (6):856-62.

Dunn, Dana and David V. Waller. 2000. "The Methodological Inclinations of Gender Scholarship in Mainstream Sociology Journals." *Sociological Spectrum* 20:239-57.

Recommended:

Spalter-Roth, Roberta and Sunhwa Lee. 2000. "Gender in the Early Stages of the Sociological Career." ASA Research Brief.

Spalter-Roth, Roberta. 2004. "The Best Time to Have a Baby: Institutional Resources and Family Strategies Among Early Career Sociologists." ASA Research Brief.

Send e-mail with research topic due January 23

1/25 Library Tour: Meet with Christine Oka in the Snell Library

Schutt Appendix D: Finding Information,

Karides, Marina, Joya Misra, Ivy Kennelly and Stephanie Moller. 2001. "Representing the Discipline: 'Social Problems' Compared to 'ASR' and 'AJS'." *Social Problems* 48 (1): 111-128

Handout "Research Problem" => "List of Journals and other tips for the Research Proposal"

<http://www.atsweb.neu.edu/zippel/courses/211/handouts/index.html>

2/1 Conceptualization and Measurement

Schutt Ch 4,

Appendix B: Questions to Ask about a Research Article

Reread: Karides, Marina, Joya Misra, Ivy Kennelly and Stephanie Moller. 2001. "Representing the Discipline: 'Social Problems' Compared to 'ASR' and 'AJS'." *Social Problems* 48 (1): 111-128

Jacobs, Jerry. 2004. "Further Reflections on ASR's Greatest Hits." *American Sociological Review* Supplement. 70 (1):1-3 !!! Print out pages 1-6 only!! And read the rest online!

Gibbs, Jack P. 1989. "Conceptualization of Terrorism." *American Sociological Review* 54 (3) 329-40.

Two page proposal due February 8

2/8 Sampling & "What should your research proposal look like?"

Schutt Ch 5

Handout: Research Proposal Draft 1 on website "Handouts" & Schutt p. 56 and 450

Steinmetz, George. 2004. "Odious Comparisons: Incommensurability, the Case Study, and 'Small N's' in Sociology." *Sociological Theory*. 22 (3) 371-400.

2/15 Individual Meetings

for feedback and to discuss the outline of research proposals

2/22 Causation and Research Design and Experiments & How to read a Research Article

Schutt Ch 6 and 7,

Pager, Devah and Lincoln Quillian. 2004. "Walking the Talk? What Employers Say Versus What They Do." *American Sociological Review* .70 (3):355-81

Schutt Appendix C: How to Read a Research Article

Recommended:

Reinharz. "Feminist Experimental Research," p.95-108

Assignment: Survey Article Critique due March 1

3/1 Survey Research

Schutt Ch 8,

Budig, Michelle and Paula England. 2001. "The Wage for Motherhood." *American Sociological Review* 66 (2): 204-225.

Recommended:

Schutt Chapter 12, Reinharz. "Feminist Survey Research," p.76-94

3/8 Spring Break! No seminar

Draft of Research Proposal due March 15

3/15 Qualitative Methods

Schutt Ch 9

Ong, Maria. 2005. "Body Projects of Young Women of Color in Physics: Intersections of Gender, Race, and Science." *Social Problems* 52 (4) 593-671

Lareua, Annette. 2002. "Invisible Inequalities: Social Class and Childrearing in Black Families and White Families." *American Sociological Review* 67 (5) 747-776.

Recommended:

Schutt Chapter 13,

Morgan. David L. 1996. "Focus Groups." *Annual Review of Sociology* 22: 129-52.

Reinharz. "Feminist Interview Research, Feminist Ethnography," p.18-76,

Discussion on Ethnography and Urban Studies. 2002. *The American Journal of Sociology* 107 (6).

Assignment: Qualitative Article Critique due March 22

3/22 Evaluation Research and Action Research

Schutt Ch 10,

Naples, Nancy. "Bringing Everyday Life to Policy Analysis."

Farrington, David. 2003. "Methodological Quality Standards for Evaluation Research." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. 587: 49-68.

Recommended: Bardach, Eugene. 2000. *A Practical Guide for Policy Analysis*. New York: Chatham House Publishers.

Assignment: Historical/Comparative Article Critique due March 29

3/29 Historical and Comparative Methods

Schutt Ch 11,

Savelsberg, Joachim and Ryan D. King. 2005. "Institutionalizing Collective Memories of Hate: Law and Law Enforcement in Germany and in the United States." *American Journal of Sociology* 579-616

Pedriana, Nicholas and Robin Stryker. 2004. "The Strength of a Weak Agency: Early Enforcement of Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the Transformation of State Capacity, 1965-71." *American Journal of Sociology*. 110 (3): 709-60

Recommended:

Mahoney, James. 2004. "Comparative-Historical Methodology." *Annual Review of Sociology* 30:81-10

Reinharz. "Feminist Cross-Cultural Research," p.109-125

4/5 Guest speakers : Maria Stratigaki (Greece) and Mary Daly (Ireland)

Readings to be announced

4/12 Combining Methods & Presentations of Research Proposals

Ferree, Myra M. 2003. "Resonance and Radicalism: Feminist Framing in the Abortion Debates of the United States and Germany." *American Journal of Sociology* 109 (2): 304-44

Wrigley, Julia and Joanna Dreby. 2005. "Fatalities and the Organization of Child Care in the United States, 1985-2003." *American Sociological Review* 70 (2):729-57.

Recommended:

Reinharz. "Feminist Multiple Methods Research," p.197-213.

4/19 Reporting Research & Presentations of Research Proposals

Schutt Ch 14

Keith, Bruce, Jenny Sundra Layne, Nicholas Babchuk and Kurt Johnson. 2002. "The Context of Scientific Achievement: Sex Status, Organizational Environments, and the Timing of Publication of Scholarship Outcomes." *Social Forces* 80 (4):1253-1282

Final Research Proposal due April 19