Sociological Analysis
SOC 226 Fall 2015

Professor: Elizabeth Onasch (elizabeth.onasch@northwestern.edu)
Teaching Assistants: Christopher Robertson (christopherrobertson2013@u.northwestern.edu)
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Office Hours
(Onasch): Mondays 1-3pm, Wednesdays 1-3pm, and by appointment
(Yung): Thursdays: 10am-12pm
(Robertson): Tuesdays: 12-2pm

Class Meeting: Mondays and Wednesdays, 3:30-4:50pm
Location: 555 Clark B01

Course Description
The sociological lens for understanding the world around us relies on social research, but many people and professions outside the realm of sociology also rely social research to inform policies, political decisions, and personal opinions. Productive engagement with social research requires being able to evaluate research, which, in turn, requires an understanding of the process and components of designing and carrying out social scientific studies. In this course, we will discuss the logic and methods of social research, qualitative and quantitative analysis of social data, and ethical, political, and policy issues in social research.

Course Goals
After completing the course, students will be equipped to:

- Describe a variety of qualitative and quantitative social scientific research methods, including their advantages, limitations, and underlying assumptions
- Discuss the ethical, political, and policy issues of social research
- Adjudicate between competing interpretations and explanations of social data
- Evaluate the design, methods, and findings of social scientific research
- Design and implement research to answer a research question, and analyze and interpret the results

Textbook and Materials

We will also be reading articles and book chapters throughout the quarter, which will be available on Canvas and, when applicable, through the course reserve at the library.
Course Format

There will be short lectures during the course; however, most classes will consist of guided discussions, small group activities, student presentations, and structured debates. The course will also incorporate multi-media materials, such as film and news clips.

Course Requirements:

Class Attendance and Participation (15%)

Class discussions and activities are important parts of the course and will be much more productive if students are present and prepared. Student participation will be evaluated according to the quantity (students who have not spoken in class will be called upon) and quality of their remarks, as well as their contributions made to small group activities. Students will receive a midterm evaluation of their participation in order to gauge how well they are meeting these requirements.

Students may miss one class with no penalty, regardless of the explanation. The second absence must have my approval, otherwise, it will cost 1/3rd of the participation grade (5% of the total course grade). The third absence, regardless of the explanation, will cost the whole participation grade, and a student who misses four or more classes will fail.

If you miss class, please consult your fellow classmates for notes on what we covered in that session. You may also come to office hours (or make an appointment) to discuss what you missed.

Discussion Questions and Comments (10%)

In order to digest the course readings and be prepared to participate in class, students are required to submit discussion questions or comments before each class.

These questions and comments should relate to the reading assigned for the coming class. Questions must not be in a “yes or no” format, but rather, should be designed to spark a discussion, or seek a clarification about a point in the readings. Comments may express opinions about a point in the readings, but should back up these opinions with data, or comments may link the readings to current events. Comments should also be designed to facilitate a class discussion.

You may be called upon in class to share your comment or question, if you do not have a chance to do so otherwise.

Students should submit one comment or question on Canvas by **10pm on Sunday and Tuesday nights**. You may choose four classes during the quarter for which you will not submit a comment or question; therefore, no late submissions will be accepted.
Short Presentation of Social Scientific Research (15%)

Students will choose one class during weeks 6-10 when they will present a social scientific study of their choice. These should be studies that relate to the topic of that the chosen presentation date, and have appeared in the media. The presentation should last no longer than five minutes, and should briefly address the following questions:

- What are the research questions of the study?
- Why are these research questions important (e.g., policy implications, popular perceptions, etc.)?
- What do we already know about this (previous research)?
- What is the hypothesis?
- What data does the study use?
- What methods did the study use to collect these data?
- What is the argument based on the findings?
- How is this argument made (type of analysis)?
- What is the answer to original research question?
- Are there recommendations for future policies or research?

Students should also describe one critique they have of the study, based on the concepts, measurement, type of data and analysis, or the conclusions that were drawn.

Finally, the students should comment on why they chose this study, including how it appeared in the media, and how it relates to the topic of the class meeting. Presentations may use PowerPoint or PowerPoint alternatives like Prezi, but this is not required. The presentations will be evaluated according to how well they address the points described above within the allotted time; please keep in mind that a concise, clear, and thorough presentation requires preparation and practice.

Midterm (20%)

This in-class midterm will consist of short answer, multiple choice, and fill in the blank questions that will test knowledge of the concepts and terms introduced in the first half of the class.

Research Proposal (40%)

The final product of this course will be a research proposal. Throughout the quarter, students will turn in elements of the proposal, which will be described in greater detail in class handouts that will also be posted online. These assignments include:

- Topic and Research Question (5%) due October 12
  
  Students must meet with either the professor or one of the TAs to discuss their topic and research question before submitting this assignment.

- Literature Review and Hypotheses (5%) due October 28
- Proposed Methods and Data (10%) due November 11
- Anticipated Findings and Policy Implications (included in complete draft)
• Draft of Complete Proposal (Optional) due November 23
• Final Research Proposal (20%) due December 7

The final proposal will include all of the above elements and should be 8-10 pages long. The proposal will be evaluated according to how well it meets the requirements of the assignment, (as detailed on the handout) and according to how well the student has incorporated feedback on the previously submitted elements of the proposal.

Extra Credit: Redline Ethnographic Observations (two percentage points)

For extra credit, students may conduct ethnographic observations on a redline train. To complete this assignment, students will:

• Propose a research topic concerning the passengers on the red train
• Ride the red line from the Howard station to the 95/Dan Ryan station
• Observe the people getting in and off the train, as well as the interactions and behaviors of passengers, and take discrete notes while on the train if possible
• Write up field notes (at least two pages) as soon as possible after riding the train
• Write a two page memo discussing what you found to be the most important patterns in social interactions and behaviors on the train, and how your observations shifted or aligned with your original research topic.

To receive full credit, students must turn in both the fieldnotes and their memo.

Grading

(15%) Class Attendance and Participation
(10%) Discussion Questions and Comments
(15%) Short Presentation of Social Scientific Research
(20%) Midterm Exam
(40%) Research Proposal
  (5%) Topic and Question
  (5%) Literature review and Hypothesis
  (10%) Methods and data
  (20%) Final paper

100%
Grading scale:  A  93-100  C+  77-79
    A-  90-92  C  73-76
    B+  87-89  C-  70-72
    B  83-86  D  60-69
    B-  80-82  F  < 60

Academic Integrity

Students are required to abide by Northwestern University's academic integrity policy. Student work in this class may be analyzed electronically for violations of this policy and may also be included in a
database for the purpose of testing for plagiarized content. We will discuss the Northwestern policy, as well as rules for citation during the course. You may also find more information at:

- http://www.northwestern.edu/provost/policies/academicintegrity
- http://www.weinberg.northwestern.edu/handbook/integrity/

**Student Accommodations**

Any student requesting accommodations related to a disability or other condition is required to register with AccessibleNU (accessiblenu@northwestern.edu; 847-467-5530) and provide the professor with an accommodation notification from AccessibleNU, preferably within the first two weeks of class. All information will remain confidential.

**Laptop and Cellphone Policy**

Students may use laptops in class to take notes and refer to course readings. Students may not surf the web, chat, skype, or use the computer for other non-class related activities during the class session. Students should also refrain from using their cellphones during the course; please have your phone on silent and do not read or send text messages. Using a computer for non-class related activity or using cell phones in class disrupts everyone’s engagement will negatively affect your participation grade.

**Course Schedule and Readings**

Please read all assigned readings. Any changes to the reading list, which may be made if we need to move more quickly or spend more time on any topic, will be announced ahead of time in class and on Canvas.

**Week One- What is Social Scientific Research?**

**Monday, September 21st** – Introduction to the Course

Reading: Babbie, Chapter One

**Wednesday, September 23rd** - Paradigms, Theory, and Research

Reading: Babbie, Chapter Two


**Week Two- Introduction to Ethical and Political Issues in Research**

Monday, September 28th – The Ethics and Regulation of Social Research (Chapter 3)

Reading: Babbie, Chapter 3

Wednesday, September 30th – Politics and Pressures within the Social Sciences

Reading:

- Case Study
  - Statement by University of Texas at Austin, Department of Sociology Chair: [http://www.utexas.edu/cola/sociology/news/article.php?id=7572]

**Week Three** – Designing a Research Project

Monday, October 5th - Research Design

Reading: Babbie, Chapter Four

- Skim the Office of Undergraduate Research website:
  [http://undergradresearch.northwestern.edu/]

Wednesday, October 7th - Theory and Research

Readings: Babbie, Chapter Five


**Week Four** - Designing a Research Project II

Monday October 12th - The Logic of Sampling

Reading: Babbie, Chapter Seven


**Due: Research Proposal Topic and Research Question**

Wednesday, October 14th – Overview of qualitative and quantitative methods

Reading:

**Week Five – Library Research**

Monday, October 19th – Midterm

Wednesday, October 21st – Using a Library and Surveying the Literature

**Class will meet at the library**

Readings: Babbie, Appendix A: Using the Library


**Week Six – Experiments and Survey Research**

Monday, October 26th – Experiments

Reading: Babbie, Chapter Eight

- ONE of the following three studies (be prepared to discuss your chosen study):

Wednesday, October 28th - Survey Research

Reading: Babbie, Chapter Nine


**Due: Research Proposal Literature Review and Hypotheses**

**Week Seven – Qualitative Research**

Monday, November 2nd – Qualitative Field Research

Reading: Babbie, Chapter Ten


Wednesday, November 4th- Content Analysis

Reading: Babbie, Chapter Eleven


Week Eight – Comparative Historical and Evaluative Research

Monday, November 9th – Comparative Historical Sociology

Reading:

• Mayrl, Damon and Nick Wilson. “What do Historical Sociologists do all Day?”

Wednesday, November 11th- Evaluation Research

Reading: Babbie, Chapter twelve

• This American Life. 2015. Episode 562: The Problem We All Live With (podcast)

Due: Research Proposal Data and Methods

Week Nine – Qualitative Data Analysis

Monday, November 16th – Interpretive Analysis

Reading: Babbie, Chapter Thirteen

Wednesday, November 18th- Coding and Modeling Qualitative Data

Reading:

- TBA

**Due: Extra Credit Ethnography Assignment**

**Week Ten** – Quantitative Data Analysis

Monday, November 23rd- Quantitative Analysis

Reading: Babbie, Chapter 14

- TBA

**Due: (Optional) Research Proposal Draft**

Wednesday, November 25th – In-Class Film: Musen, Ken. 1991. Quiet Rage

**Week Eleven**- Reading Week

Monday, November 30th- Office Hours (consult about final paper)

Wednesday, December 2nd- Office Hours (consult about final paper)

**Week Twelve**- Exam Week

**Final Research Proposal due Monday, December 7th at 12pm**