Graduate Research Methods
SC 710.01
SPRING, 2009
Meets Wednesdays 12:30 TO 3 PM

OFFICE HOURS: THURSDAYS 1 TO 2:30

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A note to my students:

Welcome to our class!

I am excited to have you on-board and look forward to our working together to make your learning experience positive and fruitful. The journey we are embarking on is not easy, but I anticipate that all of you are excited and eager to learn the skills necessary to move forward in your sociological careers. Research methods is a vital piece of the puzzle of research inquiry and is a basic building block to getting at complex social problems. Your journey in this course will require commitment on your part to putting in the time necessary to learn research skills and applications of these skills to a variety of social problems. The course is built around the acquisition of both theoretical and practical methods applications. It requires that you spend the time between our class meetings in dialogue with the readings and application of these reading through “hands-on” assignments” as well as a semester long research proposal preparation. If you do not feel you have the time to engage with this course, then I strongly urge you NOT to take this course unless you are prepared to put in the effort between our course meetings. This course meets only once a week, but you must devote the time during the week to engage with this course.

I look forward to our journey!

My best wishes,

Sharlene Hesse-Biber

Course Description:

This course introduces you to a range of research methods in the social sciences. We will briefly consider epistemological issues by examining a variety of perspectives on knowledge seeking. These perspectives challenge and attempt to move beyond positivist social science.

We will consider a variety of methods including in-depth interviewing, field research, survey research. Unobtrusive methods (content analysis), experimental research, and action research. Additionally, we will briefly introduce mixed-methods research designs.

This course seeks to prepare you for the complexities of the real world of social research, with all its myriad problems. Considerable attention will be given to the comparisons among alternative methods and an assessment of the relative strengths and limitations of each method. In connection with each methodology, we deal with issues such as measurement,
reliability, validity and sampling. The readings in the course reflect both theoretical/conceptual research issues and first-hand experiential research accounts.

Each student is asked to prepare a well-developed research proposal on a topic suitable for an M.A. or Ph.D. thesis.

BE SURE TO TAKE TIME TO APPRECIATE NATURE AND YOUR FAVORITE ANIMAL!!
COURSE REQUIREMENTS

A. Class Attendance and Participation (15%). Four percent (4%) is deducted from your final grade for each class missed.

YOU ARE ALLOWED ONE UNEXCUSED ABSENCE with no grade reduction. ALL OTHER ABSENCES ARE NOT EXCUSED. Students are responsible for the assigned readings, taking part in class discussions, and presenting oral summaries of their research projects. The seminar format relies on your informed contributions and therefore it is important that you read all relevant articles before the class in which they will be discussed. You will be required to lead at least ONE class discussion. Please bring hard copies of all articles discussed for a given week.

B. THREE Short Methods Papers (10% each=30% of your grade)

You will get 3 mini-methods paper assignments during the course of the semester. Each paper should be no more than 5 TO 6 pages in length.

C. TWO “Hands-on” Assignments (15% each assignment =30% of your grade)

This is the “practice” part of our course.

• 1. Hands-On Assignment #1 is an Observation Study
• 2. Hands-On Assignment #2 Analysis of Data

D. The Research Proposal (25%)

Your Research Proposal is critical to your academic career (25%). It prepares you to TRANSLATE what you have learned into your own research praxis.

• Pre-proposal Assignment #1 (not graded)
• Pre-proposal Assignment #2 (not graded)
• Final Proposal (25%)

One of the goals of this course is to help students prepare a research proposal (see handout on “Proposal Guidelines” on a topic suitable for an M.A. or Ph.D. thesis. To this end, there will be two intermediate assignments that will lead to the generation of a final proposal. You will be asked to team up with a classmate and give each other feedback on your pre-proposal assignments. While the two pre-proposal assignments will not be graded, you are required to submit them on time.

Built into the reading list is a set of required and recommended readings to guide you as you engage in the process of proposal writing. Our class meets only once a week, but I hope that you will also get together with your “research partner(s)” to engage in a collective process of proposal dialogue and writing outside of class. The pre-proposal assignments are set up to enable you to gradually create the building blocks of a complete proposal. You and your partner
will give feedback to one another on your pre-proposal assignments.

**Instructions, Tips, & Guidelines for Proposal Assignments (DUE IN STAGES)

Pre-Proposal Assignment #1 DUE FEBRUARY 11TH.

How you are guided in the writing of your proposal will depend on whether or not you proposal is from a Qualitative or Quantitative Approach. Different Approaches required somewhat different proposal steps. So… I will provide you with more specific guidelines later, depending on what route you decide to take with regard to your research approach.

The objective of this proposal assignment is for you to explore a possible topic for research, to develop skills in formulating a problem, and to learn to specify a research question. You will be asked to justify your proposed research and conduct a literature review.

Pre-proposal assignment number one requires the following:

- Take the IRB (on-line test) to receive your IRB certificate.
- Obtain an IRB research proposal form on the Boston College Research Website. In addition to handing in your pre-proposal assignment number one, go over what is required for an IRB proposal and bring a print out of this form to class filling out all those parts that are required for this pre-proposal assignment number 1 and placing this information on the form. Please attach the IRB -- form filled out up to what you can do -- and hand this in with assignment number one.

Your pre-proposal paper requires that you provide:

- **Research Statement and Research Question** (1-2 pages): Briefly describe the problem. Describe the purpose of your research and conclude with a clearly-stated research question.
- **Significance** (1 page): This section provides the rationale and justification for the research. For example, who cares about the answer? Is present opinion divided? How important is it to have an answer to this question? What are the implications for practice/policy of various possible outcomes of the research?
- **Review of Relevant Literature** (5-6 pages, double spaced): This review provides background information about your topic – it summarizes what is known about the subject, and critically analyzes prior research on the topic. This review lets the reader know that you understand the problem and provides a context for your proposed research. It also discusses studies that include concepts that you are focusing on.

[Note: IF YOU ARE DOING A QUANTITATIVELY DRIVEN APPROACH YOU WOULD ALSO NEED TO DEFINE YOUR TERMS AND CONCEPTS:
- **Conceptualization and Operationalization**: Specify key concepts on which your study will focus and how you intend to operationalize them as variables. Discuss the issues of reliability and validity of measurement of key variables.
- **Hypotheses**: If applicable, state the key hypotheses to be tested, indicating independent and dependent variables.]

- **A Complete Bibliography**: Use APA style. (I HAVE A HANDOUT ON THIS ASK MY FOR IT)

Pre-Proposal Assignment #2: DUE MARCH 18TH

This assignment will ask you to describe the research method/s for your proposed study. You are asked to specify your primary data collection method/s and sampling procedure/s. Additionally, if applicable, you should include a description of the design of your instruments and provide sample questions.

NOTE: This assignment builds on the previous one and you should include your revised work from assignment #1 when you submit assignment #2. Please be sure to incorporate suggested improvements into both your revisions to assignment #1 and your new work in assignment #2.

Therefore, in addition to your revised assignment #1, please submit:
• (2 pages): Describe your research design and data collection method.
• **Sample**: Specify your sample, how it will be selected, whether it is random, etc.
• **Other Methodological Issues** (1-2 pages): Indicate any additional concerns you have regarding methodological issues in your study, such as response rate, sampling bias etc.
• **Ethical and Political Considerations**: Briefly discuss any ethical or political concerns you may have with your proposed research focus and/or procedures. (2 /3 pages).

**IF APPLICABLE:**
• **Instrumentation and Measurement**: Provide and discuss sample instruments to be used. For example, for a survey, you would include a questionnaire or interview schedule; for in-depth interviewing, a set of open-ended questions; for content analysis, a coding sheet. Also include instructions to respondents or recorders.

You are required to hand continue to fill in the IRB proposal form with additional information as per assignment number 2. Attach IRB form to your paper.

**Final Proposal Assignment: DUE APRIL 29TH**

The final proposal should build on the work you did in the previous two assignments. You should have revised and improved your previous work based on the feedback you have received. Please refer to the Research Proposal guidelines in your “handouts” packet to include all relevant sections. Your final proposal should include an abstract, a budget, etc. (ASK ME FOR THE RESEARCH PROPOSAL GUIDELINE EVALUATION). A complet filled out IRB for is also required and should be attached to your final proposal.

**LATE ASSIGNMENT POLICY:**

I CANNOT ACCEPT ASSIGNMENTS VIA EMAIL. ALL ASSIGNMENTS MUST BE HANDED IN THE BEGINNING OF CLASS.

IF AN ASSIGNMENT IS NOT HANDED IN DURING CLASS IT WILL BE CONSIDERED LATE AND THE NEXT TIME YOU CAN HAND IT IN IS THE NEXT CLASS PERIOD.

TO BE FAIR TO OTHER STUDENTS WHO HAND IN THEIR WORK ON TIME, I WILL DEDUCT ONE LETTER GRADE FOR EACH COURSE DAY THE ASSIGNMENT IS LATE.

PLEASE BACK UP ALL YOUR WORK. THIS IS YOUR RESPONSIBILITY. PLEASE NO EXCUSES FOR LATE WORK.

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<th>Short Methods Paper #1</th>
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<td>Short Methods Paper #2</td>
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<td>Hands-On Assignment #1 (Research Observations)</td>
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<td>PRE-PROPOSAL #2</td>
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<td>HANDS ON ASSIGNMENT #2 (ANALYSIS)</td>
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Short Methods Paper #3 (documents)

**PROPOSAL WORK:**

**EXCHANGE DRAFT PROPOSALS WITH RESEARCH PARTNER**

**PROVIDE FEEDBACK TO PARTNER (VIA FEEDBACK SHEET)**

**FINAL PROPOSAL**

<table>
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<th>Wednesday, April 1st</th>
<th>Wednesday, April 29th</th>
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<tr>
<td>NO LATER THAN APRIL 8TH</td>
<td>FEEDBACK TO YOUR PARTNER IS DUE NO LATER THAN APRIL 12TH. YOUR RESPONSE TO YOUR PARTNER’S FEEDBACK AND FEEDBACK SHEET OF YOUR PARTNER’S COMMENTS IS DUE IN CLASS ON APRIL 15TH.</td>
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What are qualitative and quantitative approaches to social inquiry? Examples of each approach will be discussed looking at specific research articles students provide during class.

Assigned Readings:
- Hesse-Biber and Leavy, Chapters 1 and 2.

I. Traditions in Epistemology: Overview and Critical Analysis

January 21st Overview of Major Epistemological Positions

Positivism and the Scientific Method

Post-empirical Traditions

Assigned Readings available on Blackboard for SOC710:

January 28th From Epistemology to Methodology: Implications for Research

What is Induction? Deduction?

Assigned Readings available on Blackboard for SOC 710:

Reminder: Methods Paper #1 due Feb 4th (next week).

Short Methods Paper Assignment #1: Induction vs. Deduction (Due February 4th)

Please read the following articles:

Answer the following questions in essay format (no more than 7 pages). How is Bloemraad’s article an example of a deductive sociological approach? In what ways is Becker’s piece in line with an inductive, grounded theory approach? How distinct, and in what ways, are deductive and inductive thinking in their approach to empirical analysis? What is the
relationship (if any) between 1) statistical analysis and deductive thinking and 2) qualitative research and inductive thinking? What do you think about the relationship between theory and evidence?

II. Doing Social Research

SHORT RESEARCH METHODS PAPER ASSIGNMENT # 1 IS DUE TODAY: FEBRUARY 4th.

February 4th. I. Research Dimensions

From Theory to Research
The Stages of Research
The Nature of Causation

II. The Research Problem

Formulation of Specific Research Questions and Hypothesis
Quantitative and Qualitative Designs

Assigned Reading:
• Revisit Chapters 1, 2, Hesse-Biber and Leavy,
• Chapter 3 Hesse-Biber and Leavy
• Proposal Reading—Creswell (2003), Chapter 4.

Practice: What is Causality?

Be prepared to discuss the following questions in class.
What is Causality? What are quantitative approaches to causality? Qualitative approaches? Why is the experimental approach held out as the best method to unearth causality?

February 11th

Measurement in the Social Sciences
Quantitative Measurement Conceptualization and Operationalization

Question: What is Qualitative Measurement? Does it exist? Why or Why not? Be prepared to take a stance on this question.

PRE–PROPOSAL ASSIGNMENT # 1 IS DUE TODAY.

***In-class exercise*** on measurement will be handed out and is based on today’s readings.

Assigned Readings:
• Neuman. “Qualitative and Quantitative Measurement.” Chapter 7. (Available via Blackboard)

Reminder: Short Methods Paper #2 is Due February 18th; Here is your Short Methods Paper Assignment #2:

Race and ethnicity are key sociological concepts in sociology, but how we conceptualize race is a difficult task. Can we conceptualize and operationalize the concept of race? Why or why not? Is there a link between data collection and measurement? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the different ways this concept is conceptualized and measured in these articles? How can we study race with reifying this concept and making it a biological category of analysis?

For this assignment please read all of the following articles:


III. Qualitative Research Methods

February 18th

Field Methods/Ethnographic Methods

Assigned Readings:

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Hesse-Biber and Leavy, Chapter 7.

SELECT ONE (Available in Blackboard for SC710):


SELECT ONE of the FOLLOWING: (Available in Blackboard for SC710):


READ ALL:

Food for Thought: Be prepared to answer the following questions in class.
What are the underlying assumptions and ideas each of these authors brings to the study of ethnography? What insights and suggestions do you find that particularly resonate with you? What is not addressed that needs to be?

February 25th:  Intensive Interviewing and Focus Group Interviewing
Food for Thought: Be prepared to answer the following questions in class.
What are the underlying assumptions about interviewing and data collection held by DeVault, Riessman, Morgan and Edwards? What specific insights and ideas are helpful? Problematic? What is not covered that you think is important? Where do these authors diverge in their opinions on the interview process? Converge? Compare and contrast a positivistic perspective on the interview process with a feminist perspective. In what ways are they different? Similar?

Assigned Readings:
• Proposal Reading—Creswell (2008), Chapters 6 & 7. (Available: BlackBoard)

Practice (All are Available on Blackboard for SOC710):

March 4th  
**SPRING VACATION**

March 11th  :  Computers in Qualitative Data Analysis
Assigned Readings:

- Harry Wolcott Book: Chapters 1-4

THERE IS NO CLASS ON WEDNESDAY, MARCH 4TH SPRING VACATION

March 11th Analyzing Qualitative Data

Assigned Reading:

- **Finish Wolcott Book**

IV. Quantitative Methods:

PLEASE NOTE: THIS IS A VERY SHORT INTRO. AS WE ARE PRIMARILY FOCUSING ON QUALITATIVE METHODS IN THIS COURSE BECAUSE OF THE VERY LIMITED TIMEFRAME IF YOU WOULD LIKE MORE EXTENSIVE READINGS IN THESE METHODS, PLEASE SEE ME. YOU WILL BE GETTING A MORE DETAILED INTRODUCTION TO SURVEY RESEARCH IN YOUR REQUIRED STATISTICS COURSES

March 18th PRE-PROPOSAL ASSIGNMENT #2 IS DUE TODAY!

Quantitative Research Methods: Survey Research
Sampling
Questionnaire Construction
Interviewing
Data Reduction
Assessment of Strengths and Weaknesses of Survey Research

Assigned Readings:
• SELECT A TEXTBOOK CHAPTER ON SURVEY RESEARCH, READ IT AND BRING IT TO CLASS FOR DISCUSS OF WHAT YOU SEE AS THE BASIC ELEMENTS OF THE SURVEY RESEARCH APPROACH.


March 25th

HANDS ON ASSIGNMENT: DATA ANALYSIS #2 IS DUE TODAY

Unobtrusive and Experimental Methods

Assigned Readings:
• Hesse-Biber and Leavy. The Practice of Qualitative Research. Chapter 8.
• Neuman, “Experimental Research.” Chapter 9.

Practice (Available on Blackboard for SC710):

Methods Paper Assignment #3: Document Research

**Bunny Alert: This is due in one week on April 1st (no fooling)**

Instead of talking to people or observing people, Ferree and colleagues try to understand society through the analysis of documents. What are the advantages and drawbacks of doing research using documents? Why are their data and research design appropriate for their research question? (Or, why wasn’t it?) How confident do you feel about their data collection, data analysis and conclusions? Why do you feel this way? Is there anything you would have done to improve the research?

V. Combining Qualitative and Quantitative Methods

April 1st (we have class today!) Mixed Methods Research: Combining Qualitative and Quantitative Methods

**** Short Methods Paper Assignment #3 (document research) is due today****

***In-class exercise:***

Assigned Readings:
Theory:


Food for Thought: Are two methods better than one? Is the whole greater than the sum of its parts?

Practice:


April 8th: NO CLASS THIS WEEK: EXCHANGE PROPOSALS WEEK AND EASTER BREAK.

PLEASE WORK ON YOUR PROPOSAL THIS WEEK. YOU MUST EXCHANGE A DRAFT OF YOUR PROPOSAL TO YOUR RESEARCH PARTNER SOMETIME THIS WEEK. AND YOUR PARTNER MUST GIVE YOU FEEDBACK ON YOUR PROPOSAL (VIA FEEDBACK SHEET) NO LATER THAN APRIL 15TH. PLEASE HAND IN A COPY OF YOUR FEEDBACK SHEET TO ME AS WELL ON APRIL 15TH.

APRIL 15TH: Action Research

PLEASE PROVIDE YOUR RESEARCH PARTNER WITH YOUR FEEDBACK SHEET BEFORE APRIL 12TH AND PLEASE HAND IN A COPY OF YOUR PARTNER’S FEEDBACK SHEET ON APRIL 15TH. WITH YOUR RESPONSE TO YOUR PARTNER’S COMMENTS.

Assigned Readings:


April 22 and April 29th: ALL CLASS ABSTRACTS ARE DUE ON APRIL 22ND.

FINAL PROPOSALS ARE DUE APRIL 29TH.

Presentation of Student Proposals