SC210.01: Research Methods  
Fall 2011  
Tuesdays and Thursdays 1:30 p.m.-2:45 p.m.

Prof. Deborah Piatelli  
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Office hours: TBD  
McGuinn 425

Course Description

What can be known? How can we know it? How does one’s worldview influence the process of social research? What are the stages and processes of research? What research should be done? This course will introduce you to basic concepts, methods, and issues involved in both quantitative and qualitative social science research. We will consider the interplay of theory, epistemology, methodology, and method, exploring the multiplicity of paradigms that shape how one chooses to approach and conduct social science research. This course will focus your thinking on the broader issues surrounding the production of knowledge, and we will consider the many ethical issues that may arise within the context of the research process.

Course Objectives

* Discover your epistemological position and gain an understanding of how you will approach and conduct research as a social scientist.
* Develop an understanding of the various methodological tools available to sociological researchers and be able to decide what methods are appropriate for particular research questions.
* Acquire research skills by collecting, analyzing, and interpreting a variety of data.
* Develop a proposal for research on a sociological topic of your choice.

Required Text (available in bookstore and on reserve)

Course Requirements

Class participation (15% of your grade)
Much of the learning will take place in the classroom through participation in class discussions and small group exercises. It is expected that when you are in class you will participate. In-class exercises are not graded; however, they offer applied learning and prepare you for your graded assignments. Hence, excessive absences and lateness will be noted as this has an effect on group participation. Over the course of the semester, short informal written assignments on the readings will be assigned and will count towards your class participation grade. These assignments will be distributed in class before the due date and a copy can also be found on Blackboard.

Assignments and due dates (45% of your grade)
You will be asked to complete five assignments (3 graded and 2 ungraded) in addition to the final paper (a research proposal) over the course of the semester. More specifics on each assignment can be found on the respective assignment sheet on Blackboard. The ungraded assignments will eventually become a part of your final research proposal, which will be graded.

GRADED ASSIGNMENTS
Assignment 1 (10%) Epistemological position paper Due date: Thurs., Sep. 22
Assignment 4 (15%) Survey data collection and analysis Due date: Tues., Nov. 1
Assignment 5 (20%) Interview data collection and analysis Due date: Thurs., Dec. 8

UNGRADED ASSIGNMENTS
Assignment 2 Research Question Due date: Thurs., Sep. 29
Assignment 3 Literature Review Due date: Thurs., Oct. 13

Final Paper: Research Proposal (40% of your grade) Due date: Tues., Dec 15
You will be asked to prepare a research proposal on a sociological topic of your choice. The final report should be between 12-15 pages in length, double spaced. More specifics on this project are covered in the attached final paper handout also available on Blackboard Vista. All assignments are also available on Blackboard Vista.
**Late work.** If you have extenuating circumstances, you must come see me BEFORE the due date to discuss a possible extension; otherwise you will lose 5 points each class period the assignment is late.

**A note on academic integrity**

In regards to this course, there will be many times when we will work in groups. Sharing of information and ideas are encouraged. However, when working on individual assignments, it is expected that you do your own work. When using published work, you must cite the work. If there are any questions on proper method of citing or any other matter, please see me. For more information on Boston College’s academic integrity policy, please visit: http://www.bc.edu/integrity.
Course Schedule

Tuesday, September 6
Introduction and course overview
Experimenting with research design

I. EPISTEMOLOGY, METHODOLOGY, AND METHOD

Thursday, September 8
Paradigms of inquiry

Readings:
*Neuman, Chapter 4: The Meanings of Methodology

Tuesday, September 13
(cont.)

Readings: CHOOSE ONE READING. DO SHORT ASSIGNMENT


Thursday, September 15
The role of theory in our work
The literature review

Readings: CHOOSE ONE RESEARCH PROPOSAL. DO SHORT ASSIGNMENT

*Neuman, Chapter 5 (through pg. 128): The Literature Review and Ethical Concerns
*Quantitative Research Proposal BLACKBOARD
*Qualitative Research Proposal BLACKBOARD
II. DESIGNING RESEARCH AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Tuesday, September 20
(cont).

Readings:
* Neuman, Chapter 6: Qualitative and Quantitative Research Designs

Thursday, September 22
Procedural ethics

Readings:
* Neuman, Chapter 5 (pg. 129 to end): The Literature Review and Ethical Concerns
* Neuman, Appendix A: American Sociological Association Code of Ethics

Tuesday, September 27
Ethics in practice

Readings: DO SHORT ASSIGNMENT

III. MEASUREMENT AND SAMPLING

Thursday, September 29
Conceptualization and operationalization
Begin survey assignment group work

Reading:
* Neuman, Chapter 7 (through pg. 188): Qualitative and Quantitative Measurement

Tuesday, October 4
Sampling

Reading:
* Neuman, Chapter 8: Qualitative and Quantitative Sampling

Thursday, October 6
Reliability and validity

Reading:
* Neuman, Chapter 7 (188-198): Qualitative and Quantitative Measurement
IV. QUANTITATIVE DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Tuesday, October 11
Surveys

Reading:
* Neuman, Chapter 7 (pg. 198 on): Qualitative and Quantitative Measurement
* Neuman, Chapter 10: Survey Research

Thursday, October 13
(cont.)

**ASSIGNMENT #3 DUE**

Tuesday, October 18
Quantitative data analysis

Thursday, October 20
(cont.)

Readings: DO SHORT ASSIGNMENT

V. CONTENT ANALYSIS

Tuesday, October 25
Film in class: Peace, Propaganda and the Promised Land: U. S. Media and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

Reading:
* Neuman, Chapter 11: Nonreactive Research and Secondary Analysis

Thursday, October 27
Film discussion and content analysis

Tuesday, November 1
Survey group report

** ASSIGNMENT #4 DUE**

VI. QUALITATIVE DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Thursday, November 3
Interviewing

Reading:
Tuesday, November 8  
(cont.)

*Reading:*
*Andersen, Margaret L. (1997). Studying across difference: Race, class, and gender in qualitative research. Pp. 70-78 in *Through the prism of difference: Readings on sex and gender*, edited by Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, Michael A. Messner, and Maxine Baca Zinn. LIBRARY RESERVE

**CHOOSE ONE READING AND DO SHORT ASSIGNMENT**


Thursday, November 10
Focus groups
Mixing methods

*Reading:*

Tuesday, November 15
Interpretation

*Reading: DO SHORT ASSIGNMENT*
Thursday, November 17
Analyzing qualitative data
Grounded theory

Reading: DO SHORT ASSIGNMENT

Tuesday, November 22
(cont.)

HAPPY THANKSGIVING

Tuesday, November 29
Fieldwork and community-based research

*Neuman, Chapter 13: Field research

CHOOSE ONE READING AND DO SHORT ASSIGNMENT

*McIntyre, Alice. (2000). Constructing meaning about violence, school and community: Participatory action research with urban youth. The Urban Review. V32, 2, 123-154. LIBRARY RESERVE

Thursday, December 1
(cont.)

Tuesday, December 6
Interview discussion and final paper review

**ASSIGNMENT #5 DUE**

Thursday, December 8
LAST CLASS

**FINAL PAPER DUE ON: Tues., December 13 @ 5 p.m. via email**