Research Methods

SC21001
O’Neill 211
September - December, 2013
Monday, Wednesday, Friday - 10:00am - 10:50am

Instructor: Mr. Alexander Hernandez
Office: McGuinn 410A
E-mail: alexander.hernandez@bc.edu
Office Hours: Mondays: 9:00am – 9:50am, Wednesdays: 9:00am – 9:50am or by appointment

Course Description

How is knowledge created? How do we know what we know? Can we ever really know anything? While the study of research methods may not be most people’s idea of exciting, the fact is that methods work is at the very heart of all knowledge. This class is in many ways a backstage pass to the study of everything. The skills that you will acquire in this course will be relevant for any career path you choose. The ability to formulate a question, find the data relevant to your question, analyze those data, and present your findings are skills that you benefit your professional and personal life.

Course Objectives

• Develop working knowledge of how knowledge is collected, presented and, disseminated
• Learn the ethical, political, and pragmatic issues involved in the research process
• Discover where and how to find and evaluate social science research
• Gain a practical understanding of the various methodological tools used for social scientific research
• Learn to collect, analyze and interpret research data

Perennial Questions – In this course we will examine several vital questions, including:

• What makes society work?
• How does society evolve?
• What is truth within our society? Other societies?

Cultural Diversity – In addition this course will examine how race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality are perceived in American society and other cultures.

Historical Perspective - In order to understand the field of sociology, a history of our paradigms must be examined as well. We will discuss how American ideals have been shaped by social, cultural and political change since our nation’s founding. For example, we will discuss how the misconceptions that we learn as children influence us today.
Methodology - The way in which sociology as a discipline and sociologists as social scientists are able to report on and study societies must be examined as well as the findings themselves. As part of becoming a critical thinker and an examiner of everyday life, this course will challenge all approaches to obtaining sociological “knowledge” in order for students to better understand our society and other societies. In order to do this we will be considering the various techniques employed by sociologists including interviews, surveys and ethnography. We will weigh the positives and negatives of each method in order to better understand the science of sociology.

Creating a Personal Philosophy – This course, in its attempt to help students think more critically about everyday life, our social structures, and social change, will help students uncover what their own, unique approach to life is. More specifically, each student will, in effect, create his or her own sociological perspective. In order to achieve this end, students will be presented with a wealth of information on some of our most important social issues (e.g. racism, sexism, etc.). This information will come in many forms that are familiar to students including books, magazine articles, movies, music and of course prepared lecture. From this they are expected to cultivate their own viewpoint on the issues and then present them in the form of class discussion, homework assignments, and exams.

Course Requirements/Grading:

Class Attendance is required. You should attend every class unless you are ill or faced with an emergency. Many in-class activities cannot be made up and papers must be turned in on time. It is extremely difficult to understand sociological topics without being able to relate them to your own life and experiences. You can get a lot of information from the readings, but without coming to class you risk missing important discussions, and we will miss your input.

BE WARNED: The class lectures are meant to complement the readings, but they will not repeat the readings. New, original information will be available in every class session. You can get a lot of information from the readings, but without coming to class you risk missing important discussions. Because of this, you will earn a portion of your grade from your attendance and participation in class activities. If you miss a class activity or if you do not participate, you will lose points from your final point total. I do not excuse absences as you are all adults and can decide whether your personal issues warrant missing a class.

CLASS ASSIGNMENTS

Each week I will post a written assignment to Blackboard. The purpose of these assignments are to ensure that you are engaging with the class material outside of the classroom and actually learning. These assignments can take many forms so be sure that you give each one careful attention.

It is the student’s responsibility to ensure that they submit their paper properly and on time. I do not accept late papers. The only exception is if there is a legitimate excuse such as a death in the family or medical emergency. However, even in this case it is the student’s responsibility to provide proof as to why they missed the assignment. As always, remember “Murphy’s Law” (see addendum for more information). These assignments will be worth 50% of your grade.

EXAMS – EXAM 1: October 7th & EXAM 2 or RESEARCH PAPER: December 19th
We will have **two** exams throughout the course. **Each exam will be worth 25% of your grade.** I reserve the right to use a variety of question types including but not limited to multiple choice, True/False, short answer and essay questions. Students will be eligible to take a make-up exam only at the instructor’s discretion with proper documentation.

Instead of a second exam, some of you may elect to write a research paper instead. For this research paper, you will be conducting a small independent research project. You can choose to do an experiment, interviews, surveys, an ethnography, or content analysis. Your paper must be at least 5,000 words and must be submitted electronically the same day as the class final exam. If you decide that this option is best for you, you must tell me no later than **November 8th**. Like the exam, this paper is also **worth 25% of your grade.**

**POP EXTRA CREDIT/QUIZZES**

I reserve the right to give pop extra credit/quizzes at any time throughout the semester.

There are four ways to earn extra credit: (1) Class participation that demonstrates deep insight and/or understanding of our social world, (2) through the submission of articles, clips, music or pictures that directly relate to the course (**along with 3-5 sentences for each that demonstrates why the item is sociologically relevant**), (3) through the completion of an extra credit assignment which can found under the “Extra Credit” tab on Blackboard, and (4) the completion of a 4,000 word essay (**you must discuss this option with the instructor before starting no later than October 14th**).

**GRADE BREAKDOWN**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Percentage of Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class Assignments</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exam One</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exam Two/Research Project</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
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**POINT CONVERSION SCALE**

- 97-100 = A+
- 90-96 = A
- 87-89 = B+
- 80-86 = B
- 77-79 = C+
- 70-76 = C
- 67-69 = D+
- 60-66 = D
- 0-59 = F

**Academic Integrity and Plagiarism Policy:**

I take cheating and plagiarism **VERY** seriously. I have included an excerpt of the university’s academic integrity policy in the addendum. It is your responsibility to know what the policy is and to ask questions if anything is unclear. **When in doubt, ask!**

**Other Important Notes:**

- For other important dates and information, such as withdrawal, audit, incomplete, and repeat course policies, refer to your college handbook.
Instructor reserves the right to change the syllabus and class schedule if necessary. If this is the case, an announcement will be made in class.

Course Readings

Readings will be required throughout the course and they will be available online through Blackboard. The readings will be posted at least one week before they are to be discussed in class. I will be posting announcements as well as sending out emails to inform students when a reading has been posted but it is the student’s responsibility to listen for any classroom announcements regarding the readings.

Course Schedule

Wednesday, September 4
- Introduction to Course
- Review of Syllabus

Friday, September 6
- Overview of Class and Topics

The Sociology of Knowledge, Objectivity, and the Postmodern Condition?

Monday, September 9
- Video – The Obsolete Know-It-All by Ken Jennings – 18 minutes
- Salsa Dancing into the Social Sciences (Chapter 1 & 3) by Kristin Luker - 30

Wednesday, September 11
- The Hidden Side of Everything by Levitt and Dubner – 13
- How is the Ku Klux Klan Like a Group of Real-Estate Agents? By Levitt and Dubner - 35

Friday, September 13
- On Being Sane in Insane Places by David Rosenhan – 22
- False Memories of Fabricated Political Events by Frenda et al – 8
- The Truth Wears Off by Jonah Lehrer - 10

Monday, September 16
- You Are Not So Smart by David McRaney (Part 1) - 27
Wednesday, September 18
- You Are Not So Smart by David McRaney (Part 2) - 18

Friday, September 20
- Uncertain Knowledge by Fine and DiFonzo – 6
- The Rationality Project by A.J. Jacobs - 27

Conspiracy Theories or What if the government is injecting our Chicken McNuggets with AIDS?!?

Monday, September 23
- Conspiracy Theories by Sunstein and Vermeule - 26

Wednesday, September 25
- Video – The Vaccine Wars
- A Race to Save the Orange by Altering Its DNA by Amy Harmon - 13

Friday, September 27
- Balance as Bias by Boykoff and Boykoff – 12
- A Convenient Untruth by Michael Shnayerson - 14

Ethics

Monday, September 30
- If Hitler Asked You to Electrocute A Stranger, Would You? Probably by Philip Meyer – 11
- Racism and Research by Allan Brandt - 9

Wednesday, October 2

Friday, October 4
- Tearoom Trade by Donald Warwick – 12

Monday, October 7
***Exam One***

**The Basics of Social Research**

**Wednesday, October 9**
- What’s it All About? by Kristin Luker - 18

**Friday, October 11**
- What is This a Case of, Anyway? by Kristin Luker - 25

**Monday, October 14**

***No Class – Columbus Day***

**Literature Review and Theory**

**Wednesday, October 16**
- Reviewing the Literature by Kristin Luker - 23

**Friday, October 18**
- Sibling Relationships and Influences in Childhood and Adolescence by McHale et al. – 18
- The Associations between Parents’ References to Their Own Past Substance Use... Kam and Middleton - 22

**Monday, October 21**

***We will be meeting in the library today***

**Wednesday, October 23**
- Three Decades of Sexual Content on Prime-Time Network Programming by Hetsroni – 31

**Friday, October 25**
- Where Have All the Criminals Gone? by Levitt and Dubner – 27
- A Normative Explanation of Antisocial Punishment by Irwin and Horne – 9

**Experiments**
Monday, October 28
- **Video:** Freakonomics: Incentives – 24 minutes
- Does the Truth Lie Within? by Levitt and Dubner - 4

Wednesday, October 30
- The Impact of Psychological Stress on Men's Judgments of Female Body Size by Swami and Tovee – 5
- Gender Differences in Receptivity to Sexual Offers by Clark and Hatfield - 17

Friday, November 1
- Partisan Bias in Factual Beliefs About Politics by Bullock et al – 30

**Interviews**

Monday, November 4
- Older Adults’ Perspectives on Successful Aging by Reichstadt et al. – 11
- Studying across difference by Margaret Anderson – 9

Wednesday, November 6
- Lottery Winners and Accident Victims by Brickman et al. – 11
- Connecting methods and epistemology by Rosalind Edwards - 14

Friday, November 8
- Condom Use Among Adolescents and Young People in a Southern African township by MacPhail and Campbell – 15
- White like me? By Charles Gallagher - 16

**Ethnography**

Monday, November 11
- Why Do Drug Dealers Still Live with Their Moms? by Levitt and Dubner - 26

Wednesday, November 13
- The Meaning of the Purchase by Elizabeth Bernstein – 33
- The Curious Eclipse of Prison Ethnography by Loic Wacquant - 27

**Friday, November 15**

- Virtually Naked by Lomanowska and Guitton - 8

**Surveys**

**Monday, November 18**

- Audience Evaluating Statistics by Joel Best – 8
- Numbers Don't Lie by Karen Cerulo - 7

**Wednesday, November 20**

- Behind the Data by Colby King – 2
- Measuring Same-Sex Relationships by Bates and Demai – 4
- Sexual Communication, Satisfaction, and Condom Use Behavior... by Lehmiller et al. - 12

**Friday, November 22**

- Politicization of Science in the Public Sphere by Gordon Gauchat – 21
- The Causes and Consequences of Distinctively Black Names by Fryer and Levitt - 39

**Monday, 25 – Friday, 29**

***Thanksgiving Break! - No Class***

**Content Analysis**

**Monday, December 2**

- Visibility That Demystifies by Sara Netzley – 19
- An Analysis of Hyper-Masculinity in Magazine Advertisements by Vokey et al. – 15
- Appealing Appeals by Loseke and Fawcett - 18

**Wednesday, December 4**

- Taming the Big Data Tidal Wave by Bill Franks - 26
Friday, December 6

Evaluating Research

Monday, December 9

- Wrong by David Freedman - 34

- Video – On Being Wrong by Kathryn Schultz

- The 7% Rule by Philip Yaffe - 3

Wednesday, December 11

***Final Exam – December 19th @ 9:00am***
Addendum to Syllabus

**Email:** Please **DO NOT** email me for the following reasons:

- You are not going to attend class, but you just wanted to let me know.
- You missed a class and wanted to find out if “we did anything important.”

These types of emails will not be answered so just don’t send them!

Please **DO** email for the following reasons:

- You want to talk to me but you can’t attend the normal office hours and you want to make an appointment.
- You have a simple question that can be answered in 1-2 sentences. I will not answer long, complex questions through email. You should come see me during my office hours if you want to chat about any of those kinds of questions.
- You have an EMERGENCY situation and need immediate attention (from an instructor... for other types of emergencies, please dial 911).

Also, please be sure to be very specific in your email. “I want to stop by to talk about my paper grade” doesn’t help me as much as “I want to stop by on Tuesday to talk about the grade I got on Paper #2.”

**SOME ADVICE:** Come to office hours if you have a problem. It is much easier to solve a problem when I can work with you face to face.

**Murphy’s Law:** *Anything that can go wrong, will go wrong.*

You need to protect yourself against the craziness of life. Back up your work (I recommend www.dropbox.com). Begin your papers early just in case your computer explodes (I have seen it happen!) or a terrible tragedy occurs. Make friends with your peers so if you have to miss class you will still have the notes. You never know what will come up so don’t leave your grade up to chance!

**Class Notes:** All of my class materials including PowerPoint’s and lectures are my personal property and are not to be distributed without my permission. In addition, my lectures are NOT to be recorded.

**Academic Dishonesty: Cheating and Plagiarism**

> “Plagiarism, or literary theft, is defined as appropriating the literary composition of another person, including parts, passages, or language of the writing, and passing off the appropriate material as one’s own. Plagiarism is the failure to give proper credit or citation to one’s sources of information. It includes the failure to use conventional methods of documentation for material quoted or paraphrased. Additionally, plagiarism includes allowing someone else to compose or rewrite an assignment for a student.” Please see the college handbook for more information. You can also use that as a reference during the course. If cheating or plagiarism is discovered the student will receive a grade of zero (0) for the assignment. Further disciplinary action will be taken upon a second incidence including a grade of “FF” for the course.

**Students with Disabilities:**
If you are a student with a documented disability seeking reasonable accommodations in this course, please contact Kathy Duggan, (617) 552-8093, dugganka@bc.edu, at the Connors Family Learning Center regarding learning disabilities and ADHD, or Paulette Durrett, (617) 552-3470, paulette.durrett@bc.edu, in the Disability Services Office regarding all other types of disabilities, including temporary disabilities. Advance notice and appropriate documentation are required for accommodations.