SOCI W3010: Methods for Social Research

Spring 2012

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CLASSROOM: 310 FAYERWEATHER; TIME: Mondays and Wednesdays, 9:10 a.m. - 10:25 a.m.
PREREQUISITES: SOCI W1000 The Social World or instructor permission required for all Sociology majors.

REQUIRED TEXT: The textbook is available at the Columbia bookstore and is available from multiple locations (on reserves) on campus. Although the textbook is required, you are not required to buy the textbook.


RECOMMENDED TEXTS:


OR


COURSE DESCRIPTION:
This course provides a general overview of the ways sociologists collect and analyze information about social phenomena, focusing on how to collect data that are reliable and applicable to research questions, covering select introductory topics in both qualitative and quantitative social science research. The goals of the course are to expose you to common sociological research methods, both historical and contemporaneous, so as to inform your ability to consume sociological research critically. Since the course is designed to expose you to eclectic research methods, you will not become an expert in the methods presented; instead, the goal of the course is for you to develop a general understanding of the key methods and techniques of social research.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS, GRADING:
This course will require a hand calculator capable of taking the square root. Attendance is obligatory.

1. Homework exercises once every two weeks will allow you to check your understanding of important concepts and keep pace with the lectures. You are required to turn in all the homework assignments but one. The average of your top four scores will account for 20% of your grade. Due to the relatively small percentage these assignments contribute to the final grade, mistakes in them will affect your grade minimally. However, either of:
- not doing the homework assignments in good faith and
- not handing in the required number
will cause you to fail the course.

Homework assignments are due in class, at the very beginning of class. No late assignments will be accepted. Due dates will be either announced in class or printed on the assignment sheets.

No extra credit work will be accepted.

2. Examinations: midterm on March 5 and final exam. The midterm and final exams are cumulative; consult your final examination schedules for the final’s date.

Make-ups on examinations cannot be given.

Distribution:  
- Attendance: 10%  
- Homework: 20%  
- Midterm exam: 30%  
- Final exam: 40%

TENTATIVE TIMETABLE AND READINGS:

Week 1, January 16: Martin Luther King Jr. Birthday Observed - University Holiday; no class.
Week 1, January 18: Overview of the course and introduction
Week 2, January 23: Overview of research design
- S Chapter 1
Week 2, January 25: Overview of research design (continued)
- S Chapter 2, selectively
Week 3, January 30: Ethics in social research and protecting human research participants
- S Chapter 3, selectively.
Week 3, February 1: Elements of research design
- S Chapter 4
Week 4, February 6: Discussion of conceptualization, measurement and operationalization
- S Chapter 5
- Example: the concept of Social Capital in the works of Glenn Lowry, Pierre Bourdieu, etc.; operationalizing social capital.
Week 4, February 8: The science and art of sampling
- S Chapter 6
Week 5, February 13: The importance of experiments and causality, potential outcomes
- S Chapter 7
Week 5, February 15: The observer’s eye: being in the field
- S Chapter 11, selectively.
Week 6, February 20:
- Ethnographic research; participant observations and field experiments

Week 6, February 22:
- Approaches to studying subjects: the case of urban ethnography I

Week 7, February 27:
- Approaches to studying subjects: the case of urban ethnography II

Week 7, February 29:
- Fundamentals of survey research
  - S Chapter 9

Week 8, March 5:
- MIDTERM: Monday, March 5

Week 8, March 7:
- Fundamentals of quantitative sociology: descriptives;
  - M 32-78 OR MNF Chapter 2, selectively
  - S Chapter 15, selectively

Week 9, March 19, 21:
- Probability and the normal distributions
  - M 56-78 OR MNF Chapter 10, selectively
  - S Chapter 15, selectively

Week 10, March 26, 28:
- Sampling distributions, sampling distributions of the sample mean
  - M 223-261 OR MNF Chapter 11, selectively

Week 11, April 2, 4:
- Interval estimation for means and proportions
  - M 320-364; 475-478, OR MNF Chapter 18, selectively

Week 12, April 9, 11:
- Interval estimation continued; hypothesis testing,
  - M 365-437, OR MNF Chapter 15, selectively

Week 13, April 16, 18:
- Examining relationships: scatterplots and correlation; correlation
  - M 79-133 OR MNF Chapter 4, selectively.

Week 14, April 23:
- Simple and multiple regression
  - M 562-596 OR MNF Chapter 5, selectively.

Week 14, April 25:
- Time-permitting: Other topics and applications: sociology in public health and medical sciences/ fundamentals of network theory and analysis

Week 15, April 30:
- Review
OTHER MATTERS
Please let me know if you require disability-related accommodations for this course. Students who need test or classroom accommodations must be registered in advance with the Office of Disability Services (ODS). Students will not be penalized for missing class on religious holidays. Please inform us in advance if you will be absent to observe a religious holiday.

If you experience health or personal problems that cause absence from class or prevent you from turning in an assignment on its due date, contact your class dean as soon as possible, (and except in extreme emergencies), before the relevant absences or due date. Your dean will in turn be in touch with me. The TAs and I cannot grant extensions or tolerate absence without being contacted by your dean.

The TA(s) and or grader(s) for this course will grade your assignments. Please note that they are full-time graduate students in addition to having responsibilities for this course. They are available to you during their office hours, but please respect their time by not sending unnecessary or excessive email, not expecting them to meet outside of office hours, and not expecting them to make their phone numbers available to you.

Students are advised to consult the Columbia College Academic Integrity guidelines (http://www.college.columbia.edu/facultyadmin/academicintegrity) and/or Barnard College’s Honor Code (http://www.barnard.edu/dos/honor.html) as students will be held fully responsible for any failure to comply with these. You are expected to complete the assigned readings before class, and be advised that some of the texts will require more than one reading.