

Research Methods in Sociology
(Course website available @ <http://vista.ncsu.edu>)

Dr. Steve McDonald
steve_mcdonald@ncsu.edu

SOC711-002 Mondays, 1:30-4:15p Room 111 in 1911 building	Office Hours: Wednesdays, 12:45-2:45p Room 343 in 1911 building
--	---

Course Description & Objectives:

This course is intended to provide graduate students with an appraisal of the logic and practice of sociological research. The course focuses on the foundational features of social research and examines their practical application through a variety of methodologies (i.e., experimentation, survey research, qualitative methods, content analysis, social network analysis, and comparative historical analysis). The strengths and weaknesses of these research strategies will be introduced and discussed throughout, with the hopes of providing students with a basis for critically evaluating social research and (more broadly) paradigmatic debates. Students will also have an opportunity to apply their knowledge of research methods through the development of a research proposal and the completion of a number of research assignments.

Prerequisites:

This course is designed for first year Sociology graduate students. If space permits, graduate students outside of the sociological discipline may be admitted into the course with the permission of the instructor. Students are expected to have had some exposure to research methodology at the undergraduate level. Students without such a background should contact the instructor to discuss this issue as soon as possible.

Course Materials:

Two textbooks are required for this course:

Alan Bryman. 2008. *Social Research Methods*. 3rd edition. Oxford University Press. (\$50)

Fred Pырczak and Randall R. Bruce. 2007. *Writing Empirical Research Reports*. 6th edition. Pырczak Publishing. ISBN: 1884585752 (\$26)

Supplemental texts are listed below. These are not required, but may serve as useful resources:

Ronald Czaja and Johnny Blair. 2004. *Designing Surveys: A Guide to Decisions and Procedures*. Pine Forge Press. (\$40)

Clive Seale (ed). 2003. *Social Research Methods: A Reader*. Routledge. (\$45)

Delbert Charles Miller and Neil J. Salkind. 2002. *Handbook of Research Design and Social Measurement*. Sage. (\$160)

Other required readings will be drawn primarily from the empirical research literature. These readings will be made available via the Internet. A complete list of these readings will be provided to the students on the first day of class.

Course Evaluation:

Grades will be assigned according to the standard 100 point scale*:

97-100% A+	87-89% B+	77-79% C+	67-69% D+
93-96% A	83-86% B	73-76% C	63-66% D
90-92% A-	80-82% B-	70-72% C-	60-62% D-
			Below 60% F

The overall grade will be calculated as follows:

Midterm Examination	15%
Final Examination	15%
Research Proposal	
Literature Review	5%
Research Proposal	15%
Proposal Presentation	5%
Research Assignments	
EndNoteWeb Assignment	5%
CITI Training	5%
ICPSR Sampling	5%
Methods Wiki	5%
Web Survey	10%
Quantitative Analysis	10%
Field Research Project	5%
Total	100%

* Note: All assignments turned in late will be penalized by a one-letter grade drop for each day past the deadline.

Exams (30% of final grade) —

There will be two examinations, both administered in 111 in the 1911 building. The midterm exam is scheduled for October 6th. The final exam will be held on December 8th. These exam dates will not change. Make-up examinations will be available for the midterm only under extreme circumstances and given proper documentation. Make-up examinations will not be an option for the final exam, nor can the final exam be taken before the scheduled time, as per university policy. The sole exception to this rule applies only for students who have 3 or more final examinations scheduled for the same day. Students who are in this situation should notify the instructor as soon as possible in order to complete the proper paperwork to change the final exam date and time. For further details on university policy, visit:

http://www.ncsu.edu/policies/academic_affairs/courses_undergrad/REG02.20.14.php .

Research Proposal Project (25% of final grade) —

The research proposal project will provide students with the opportunity to design a research study on a topic of their choosing. Students will develop a research question, review the relevant research literature, construct an outline for their proposal, and develop a research proposal. Research projects will outline in detail how the students will go about conducting an empirical investigation, but students are not expected to actually collect or analyze data. Nonetheless, the designs should be feasible and would ideally serve as a proposal for a master's paper or thesis.

Research Assignments (45% of final grade) —

Students will complete a number of assignments designed to provide practical research experience. These assignments will be due at various points during the semester (see schedule for details). Short synopses of the assignments are listed below:

EndNoteWeb Assignment – create an EndNoteWeb account; import & organize citations

CITI Training – complete ethics/human subjects online training course

ICPSR Sampling – report on the sampling design from a dataset in the ICPSR database

Methods Wiki – write a WolfWikis entry on a selected methodological issue

Web Survey – design a survey questionnaire and field a web survey using Survey Builder

Quantitative Analysis – conduct basic statistical analysis using SPSS

Field Research Project – engage in observational analysis of a public setting

Attendance & Class Conduct (ungraded) —

Students will be expected to attend and participate fully in class discussion. A number of factors constitute good participation: coming to class on time and prepared, listening and contributing to discussion, and being respectful of others ideas and views. Gross deviation from these standards will be interpreted by the instructor as a violation of the Code of Student Conduct (see below) and may result in a significant grade reduction. Furthermore, more than one unexcused absence will result in failure of the class.

Incomplete Grades:

A grade of incomplete will be issued only after the following conditions have been met.

- 1) The instructor must be provided with documentation of a serious event that caused the interruption in course participation.
- 2) The interruption in course participation must not have been due to student negligence.
- 3) More than 50% of the course material must have been completed.
- 4) Students must have received a passing grade for the completed material.

For additional information on the university policy on incompletes, see:

www.ncsu.edu/policies/academic_affairs/grades_undergrad/REG02.50.3.php .

Academic Integrity:

Strict standards of academic honesty will be enforced according to the University policy on academic integrity: www.ncsu.edu/policies/student_services/student_discipline/POL11.35.1.php. Cheating will not be tolerated. In accordance with NC State's Honor Pledge (http://www.ncsu.edu/stud_affairs/osc/academic_integrity/), a student's signature on any test or assignment means that you have neither given nor received unauthorized aid. Any form of cheating results in an automatic "F" for the assignment with which it is connected. Violations of the Student Honor Code will be reported to the appropriate person in your department/College (advisor, Dean, etc.). Please consult the Code of Student Conduct (www.ncsu.edu/stud_affairs/osc/code_conduct/) for more information on your rights and responsibilities as a student in this class.

Students with Disabilities:

In accordance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and state law, North Carolina State University is required to accommodate an otherwise qualified individual with a disability by making a reasonable modification in its services, programs, or activities. This regulation addresses the eligibility of students for academic accommodations in educational programs, services, and activities at NC State, as well as the provision of such accommodations to students with various types of disabilities. Students desiring special assistance because of any permanent or temporary disability may be eligible for these services. See: www.ncsu.edu/policies/academic_affairs/course_undergrad/REG02.20.1.php . Contact Disability Services for Students at 513-7653, and consult the website at www.ncsu.edu/provost/offices/affirm_action/dss .

Harassment:

The role of all employees and students is to create and maintain a supportive and harassment-free working and learning environment for all members of the campus community. All faculty, staff and students are responsible for understanding and complying with harassment policies; these policies can be viewed at: http://www.ncsu.edu/equal_op/ . Also, all faculty, staff and students are responsible for knowing where to obtain assistance for resolving concerns. Members of the campus community are encouraged and should feel free to seek assistance, information, and guidance from their department head, supervisor, the Office for Equal Opportunity (513-1234), Human Resources (515-4300) or the Office for Student Conduct (515-2963).

Student Evaluations of the Course:

Online class evaluations will be available for students to complete during the last two weeks of class. Students will receive an email message directing them to a website where they can login using their Unity ID and complete evaluations. All evaluations are confidential; the instructors will never know how any one student responded to any question, and students will never know the ratings for any particular instructors.

Course Schedule: Topics, Readings and Assignments

(*denotes reading materials available on Vista course page)

August 25 – Introduction

September 1 – Labor Day – No class

Bryman, Ch. 1: Social research strategies

Bryman, Ch. 3: Planning a research project and formulating research questions

Bryman, Ch. 4: Getting started: reviewing the literature

September 8 – Theory

(EndNoteWeb Assignment due in class)

*Emile Durkheim. 1982. *The Rules of Sociological Method*, pp. 50-84. Free Press.

*Paul F. Lazarsfeld & Morris Rosenberg. 1955. "The Idea of Social Research Methodology." Excerpted from *The Language of Social Research*. Free Press.

*C. Wright Mills. 1959. "On Intellectual Craftsmanship." Excerpted from *The Sociological Imagination*. Oxford University Press.

*Thomas S. Kuhn. 1970. Excerpts from *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. University of Chicago Press.

*Robert R. Alford. 1998. *The Craft of Inquiry*. Pp. 11-53. Oxford University Press.

September 15 – Measurement

(CITI Training Assignment due in class)

Bryman, Ch. 5: Ethics and politics in social research

Bryman, Ch. 6: The nature of quantitative research

Anders Wikman. 2006. "Reliability, Validity, and True Values in Surveys" *Social Indicators Research* 78: 85-110.

Steven Hitlin, Scott J. Brown, Glen H. Elder, Jr. 2007. "Measuring Latinos: Racial vs. Ethnic Classification and Self-Understandings." *Social Forces*, 86: 587-611.

September 22 – Sampling

Bryman, Ch. 7: Sampling

Robert Crosnoe. 2007. "Gender, Obesity, and Education." *Sociology of Education*, 80: 241-60.

September 29 – Causality

(ICPSR Assignment due in class)

Bryman, Ch. 2: Research designs

*Linda K. George. 2003. "Social Causation and Social Selection." Pp. 674-5 in *Handbook of the Life Course* (ed. J. Mortimer & M. J. Shanahan). Kluwer Academic/Plenum.

Richard A. Miech et al. 1999. "Low SES and Mental Disorders" *American Journal of Sociology*, 104: 1096-1131

Due 4p on October 2: Literature Review Assignment

October 6 – Midterm Exam

October 13 – **Experimentation**

Bryman, Ch. 27: Writing up social research
Pyrzczak & Bruce. 2007. Writing Empirical Research Reports.
Shelley J. Correll. 2007. “Getting a Job: Is There a Motherhood Penalty?” *American Journal of Sociology*, 112: 1297-1338.

October 20 – **Survey Research 1** (Methods Wiki Assignment due in class)

*Robert M. Groves et al. 2004. Ch. 1 & Ch. 6 in *Survey Methodology*. Wiley.
Nicholas L. Danigelis et al. 2007. “Population Aging, Intracohort Aging, and Sociopolitical Attitudes.” *American Sociological Review*, 72: 812-30.

October 27 – **Survey Research 2** (Web Survey part 1 due in class)

Bryman, Ch. 8: Structured interviewing
Bryman, Ch. 9: Self-completion questionnaires
Bryman, Ch. 10: Asking questions

November 3 – **Quantitative Analysis** (Web Survey part 2 due midnight Nov. 2)

Bryman, Ch. 13: Secondary analysis and official statistics
Bryman, Ch. 14: Quantitative data analysis
*Morris Rosenberg. 1968. *The Logic of Survey Analysis*, pp. 3-83. Basic Books.

November 10 – **Qualitative Research 1**

Bryman, Ch. 16: The nature of qualitative research
Bryman, Ch. 17: Ethnography and participant observation
Bryman, Ch. 18: Interviewing in qualitative research
Bryman, Ch. 19: Focus groups

November 17 – **Qualitative Research 2** (Quant. Analysis Assignment due in class)

Bryman, Ch. 22: Qualitative data analysis
Bryman, Ch. 12: Content analysis
D. Michael Lindsay. 2008. “Evangelicals in the Power Elite: Elite Cohesion Advancing a Movement.” *American Sociological Review*, 73: 60-82.

November 24 – **Social Networks/Comparative** (Field Research Assignment due in class)

Historical Research

McPherson, Miller et al. 2006. “Social Isolation in America: Changes in Core Discussion Networks Over Two Decades.” *American Sociological Review*. 71: 352-75.
Elizabeth A. Armstrong and Suzanna M. Crage. 2006. “Movements and Memory: The Making of the Stonewall Myth.” *American Sociological Review*, 71: 724-51.
Bryman, Ch. 24: Breaking down the quantitative/qualitative divide
Bryman, Ch. 25: Mixed methods research

December 1 – **Research Proposal Presentations** (Research Proposal due in class)

December 8 – **Final Exam**