

Introduction to Sociological Research (SOC 100-401)

Mon/Wed 3:30-5:00, ANNS 111

Instructor

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As a science, sociology uses various tools to establish knowledge about the social world, as one step in the process of producing explanatory (and ideally, predictive) theory. The purpose of this course is to introduce students to different sociological methods, including survey research and associated quantitative/statistical analysis, interviewing, ethnography, historical-comparative and archival research, experimentation, and (time permitting) computer simulation. We will review basic mechanics for applying these methods, and discuss the assumptions behind each, and the kind of insight each yields. Requirements include three written assignments, two quizzes, and two examinations. The class is required of sociology majors, and satisfies the College quantitative data analysis requirement.

On the course blackboard site:

- Readings
- Writing resources
- Announcements
- Sociologists in the news
- Assignments
- Sociology links
- Exam preparation

Required books (available at the Penn bookstore):

Fischer, Claude, et al. *Inequality by Design: Cracking the Bell Curve Myth* (Princeton University Press, 1996).

Royce A. Singleton and Bruce C. Straits. *Approaches to Social Research*. 4th ed. (Oxford University Press, 2005).

Additional readings are available on the class web site, mainly as links to online articles.

Requirements

Assignment 1: Measurement. Propose and justify possible indicators of some latent variable on Penn's campus, such as isolation and social consciousness. Then put these variables into a causal model (diagram), and relate them to long-term outcomes. (Detailed instructions online.) Maximum of 10 points.

Assignment 2: Quantitative analysis. Analysis of GSS (General Social Survey) data using SDA online archive. (Detailed instructions online.) Maximum of 15 points.

Assignment 3: Ethnography. Analyze some public setting for the implicit rules people use to navigate through it. Suggestions: street corners, train station. You will have the option to conduct this as a group project. (Detailed instructions online.) Maximum of 15 points.

Reading quizzes (maximum of 3 points each): Two reading quizzes, on successive Mondays, will motivate you to come prepared to discuss assigned readings on interviewing and ethnography.

Midterm (maximum of 22 points). This will be an in-class exam, with format ranging from short definitions to medium-length essays.

Final exam (maximum of 32 points). This will be a **cumulative** exam, of the same format as the midterm though longer.

Other issues:

Attendance: To do well in the course, you need to attend the lectures. No credit will be given for attendance and participation. However, you should attend class since the exams will cover material presented in the lectures but not in the text (and conversely), and you should participate because (a) that gives you a chance to test out your understanding of the concepts and (b) it's more fun to talk than to be lectured to. If you miss a class, you are responsible for getting lecture notes from a classmate—I will *not* put my PowerPoint slides online (except for tables and some figures). If, during the course of a lecture, anything is unclear, ask a question! If something doesn't make sense to you, it probably doesn't make sense to other people either.

Due dates: *All written assignments are due on the dates given below, in paper form.*

Assignments will be docked 1/2 point per day late, inclusive of weekends, to a maximum of a 5 point deduction. (Though I require a hard copy, if you submit a paper late you should email me a copy so that I know when to stop applying the penalty.) If you miss a reading quiz you will be able to take a harder one at the end of the next class period. The College Office must confirm illnesses, emergencies, etc., allegedly responsible for missed examinations or work not submitted by the final examination. Lacking such confirmation (which the College Office must communicate to me directly), you will receive zero credit on missed examinations and incomplete work.

Extra credit: None.

Religious holidays: The class will operate in compliance with the University's Policy on Secular and Religious Holidays, available online at <http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/osl/holidays.html>.

Reading: To do well in the course, you also need to keep up with the reading. Be warned I will *not* summarize all readings during lectures, and I promise that every exam will include questions about aspects of the readings not covered in class.

Writing: Your written assignments will be graded not only for content but for logic, clarity, and mechanics. Remember to proofread your work carefully. When assignments are returned, take note of any corrections or recommendations, and incorporate these into later writings. Some tips:

1. All papers should have introductory and concluding paragraphs.
2. Write plainly; avoid flowery language and minimize metaphors.
3. Avoid moral evaluations.
4. Avoid claims that you cannot substantiate. (Ex: "For hundreds of years, women have struggled to balance family and career.") Only state something as a fact if you have supporting evidence, or you can cite someone reputable who does, or it is something truly self-evident (e.g., "a misstep while crossing the street can result in injury").
5. Avoid vacuous statements. An example: "Detailed observations and interpretation of these observations garnered during field research is essential in determining the significance of our data." Conserve toner.

6. Use the thesaurus sparingly. So-called synonyms are rarely truly synonymous, and you should never use a thesaurus in an attempt to create the impression that your vocabulary is larger than it actually is.
7. Quote written sources sparingly.
8. Use in-text citations of the format (Gibson 2004, p. 12) or (Gibson 2004:12), and then provide full bibliographic information at the end of the paper. (The format of the bibliography is up to you – the important thing is that you give me enough information that I can locate your sources if I'm so inclined.)

Neither the instructor nor the T.A. will read drafts of papers, but both will provide feedback of virtually any other sort.

Academic honesty: Any work submitted must be your own, and all sources must be carefully documented. (See the Penn Code of Academic Integrity, online.) Cases of suspected plagiarism will be reported, with severe consequences for anyone found guilty.

Grading

Some of your papers *may* be graded with letter grades. These will be translated into percentages as follows:

A+ = 100%	B+ = 88%	C+ = 78%	D+ = 68%
A = 95%	B = 85%	C = 75%	D = 65%
A- = 92%	B- = 82%	C- = 72%	D- = 62%
			F = (depends)

The final grades will be calculated as follows, based on your cumulative percentage for the semester:

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-
			< 60% = F

Note that *all final grades are final*, unless a calculation error was made. Under no other circumstances will a course grade be changed.

Class Schedule

Date	Lecture topics	Reading	Exam/due
Sept. 5	Intro	S&S chs. 1-4 S&S pp. 384-89	
Sept. 10	Theory & research		
Sept. 12	Variables and units, measurement		
Sept. 17	Causation	S&S pp. 484-87 (top ½ of page) <i>Inequality by Design</i> Preface, Appendix 1, chs. 1-4 “After the Bell Curve”* “Twin Studies”*	
Sept. 19			
Sept. 24			
Sept. 26			
Oct. 1	Surveys: sampling and design	S&S ch. 5 <i>Listen</i> : “What’s in a Number”* S&S chs. 8-9 “A Reader’s Guide to the Polls”* “The True Clash of Civilizations”*	Paper #1 due
Oct. 3			
Oct. 8	Statistics primer	S&S pp. 456-79, ch. 15 <i>Listen</i> : “Tough Report on Daycare”*	
Oct. 10			
Oct. 15	Fall break—no class		
Oct. 17	General Social Survey (GSS) & Exam review		
Oct. 22			Midterm
Oct. 24	Experimentation: laboratory, field, and natural	S&S chs. 6-7 “What Makes Us Healthy?”* “Leadership Stability”* “The Data in Your Lap”* “Music Lab”*	
Oct. 29			
Oct. 31			Paper #2 due
Nov. 5	Interviewing	“In Their Own Words”* “Unmarried with Children”* “National Identity & Boundaries”* “Talk of Love”*	Reading quiz
Nov. 7			
Nov. 12	Ethnography	S&S ch. 10 “Interactional Vandalism”*	Reading quiz
Nov. 14			
Nov. 19	Conversation analysis	“Invisible Inequality”*	
Nov. 21	No class	“Balinese Cockfight”*	
Nov. 26	Historical research: comparative and archival	S&S ch. 11	
Nov. 28			Paper #3 due
Dec. 3	Simulations	“Seeing Around Corners”*	
Dec. 5	Conclusion	S&S ch. 16	
12/14 12-2		Final exam	

* Online under Course Documents/Readings

† Recommended reading, not required (added since start of the semester)