Sociology 750  
Research Methods for Sociology

Professor: Timothy L. O’Brien, Ph.D.
Location: Bolton Hall, Room 757
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Course Description
This course will acquaint you with major issues in the design of sociological research, and the
collection and analysis of data. We will consider general issues in research design—the role of
texture, causal claims, experimental versus non-experimental strategies, the identification and
selection of cases, measurement, ethics—as well as issues that pertain to specific data
collection and analysis techniques. By its nature, this course provides an overview of several
topics rather than in-depth coverage of a few.

Course Objectives
Most class sessions will involve a combination of structured, formal presentation, individual
and group exercises, and class discussion. For most topics, I will begin by presenting material
that defines the scope of the topic, synthesizes, and outlines the positions taken by the authors
of the readings, and introduces contemporary debates. We will then discuss those debates,
often in the context of relevant empirical research. I encourage you to participate actively
throughout the course—ask questions, challenge what others (including me) have said, relate
the material to your own research experience and interests. The more we all participate, the
more interesting the class will be.

Course Goals
This course aims to accomplish several specific goals. First, to introduce common elements of
research design which transcend specific data collection approaches. Second, to provide a
basic overview of the goals, procedures, strengths, and limitations of major sociological
approaches to data collection. Third, to provide a forum for the discussion of controversies
about sociological research, including debates about specific design and data collection
decisions. Fourth, to teach you how to formulate researchable questions, design research
projects appropriate to answering them, and present your plans effectively. Fifth, to improve
your skills in reading and critiquing sociological research. Sixth, to provide insight into what
the discipline of sociology is by teaching about how it is practiced.

Required Materials and Readings
There are several required books for the course in addition to numerous articles and chapters,
available on D2L. All readings should read carefully prior to the class for which they are
assigned.


**Useful reference books:**


- This book is a basic undergrad textbook in research methods. It may be particularly useful to those of you who have not had an undergraduate course in research methods, or who would appreciate a refresher in the basic issues.

Supplementary readings on course topics are available upon request.

**Course Requirements and Evaluation**

I expect all class members to complete the required readings for each week before class and to come prepared for class discussion. I will occasionally assign brief exercise for class as well. Formal, written requirements include three assignments (collectively worth 40% of your final grade) and a 20-page research proposal (not including appendices; worth 40% of your final grade). The first two assignments are designed to orient your work on your proposal. The third assignment is independent of your proposal. In addition to these written requirements, all class members are required to participate in a research panel that reviews preliminary drafts of proposals. Research is a collective enterprise that involves collaboration of thought and action. It is important that you become accustomed to this aspect of academic work early in your careers. Although this requirement is not graded, you will be penalized for failing to participate actively and effectively. Class participation accounts for the final 20% of your grade.

The three written assignments (besides the proposal) are:
1. A brief description of your general research topic, including the beginnings of a literature review (10%).

2. A brief description of the research design you will use to answer your research questions(s) (10%).

3. A 5-7 page reaction paper that briefly summarizes one of the books that we read for discussion or the Zaret article, and that raises and answers two to three questions about it, with reference to relevant methodological writings. The books that you may use for this assignment are Blee, Goffman, and Ecklund and Scheitle. Reaction papers are due on the second day the book is assigned, except for papers written about Blee, which will be due on Nov. 13 (20%).

In addition, I expect class members to provide evidence that they passed the UWM Humans Subjects Certification test, submitted with your research proposal (https://uwm.edu/irb/training/human-subjects-training-citi/).

The assignments are described in more detail at the end of the syllabus.

Class Schedule and Readings

**Week 1: Sept. 4**  The elements of research design

*What is the question?*


**Week 2: Sept. 11**  Defining cases, sampling, and generalization


Week 3: Sept. 18  
Measurement


Week 4: Sept. 25  
Causality & research design: experimental & nonexperimental strategies


Week 5: Oct. 2  
Time and timing in non-experimental research designs

- Research Question assignment due


Week 6: Oct. 9  
Ethics and social research


**Week 7: Oct. 16 Ethnography**


  - Read: Methodological Appendix, Prologue, Preface, Introduction, and Chapters 1-3

**Week 8: Oct. 23 Ethnography continued**

  - Read: Chapter 4 through the Conclusion

Additional commentary on Goffman’s book TBD

**Week 9: Oct. 30 Survey research**

  - Research Design assignment due


  - Read Appendices and Chapters 1 through 3

**Week 10: Nov. 8 Survey research continued**

• Read Chapters 4 through 8

**Week 11: Nov. 13**  In-depth interviews


**Week 12: Nov. 20**  In-depth interviews continued
The analysis of documents


**Week 13: Nov. 27**  Using existing data sets and official records


**Week 14: Dec. 4**  Review panels meet
• First draft of proposal due

**Week 15: Dec. 11**  Student presentations
• Proposal comments due

**Week 16: Dec. 18**  Research proposals due 10:00am
UNIVERSITY AND SOCIOLOGY DEPARTMENT POLICIES

The Secretary of the University maintains a web page that contains university policies that affect the instructor and the students in this course, as well as essential information specific to conduct of the course. The link to that page is:  http://www4.uwm.edu/secu/news_events/upload/Syllabus-Links.pdf

**Accommodations for Students with Disabilities.** In the pursuit of equal access and in compliance with state and federal laws, the University is required to provide accommodations to students with documented disabilities. It is expected that a statement be placed on your syllabus informing students to contact you to arrange needed accommodations. A sample syllabus statement can be found here: https://uwm.edu/arc/wpcontent/uploads/sites/97/2015/08/Recommended-Syllabus-Statement.pdf.

**Religious Observances.** Policies regarding accommodations for absences due to religious observance are found at the following:  http://www4.uwm.edu/secu/docs/other/S1.5.htm

**Students called to active Military Duty.** Accommodations for absences due to call-up of reserves to active military duty are found at the following: https://uwm.edu/active-duty-military/

**Incompletes.** You may be given an incomplete if you have carried a course successfully until near the end of the semester but, because of illness or other unusual and substantiated cause beyond your control, have been unable to take or complete the final examination or to complete some limited amount of course work. An incomplete is not given unless you prove to the instructor that you were prevented from completing the course for just cause as indicated above. The conditions for awarding an incomplete to graduate and undergraduate students can be found at the following: https://www4.uwm.edu/secu/docs/other/S_31_INCOMPLETE_GRADES.pdf

**Discriminatory Conduct** (such as sexual harassment). Discriminatory conduct will not be tolerated by the University. It poisons the work and learning environment of the University and threatens the careers, educational experience and well-being of students, faculty and staff. Policies regarding discriminatory conduct can be found at: https://www4.uwm.edu/secu/docs/other/S_47_Discriminatory_Policy.pdf

**Academic Misconduct.** Students are responsible for the honest completion and representation of their work, for the appropriate citation of sources, and for respect of others' academic endeavors. Policies for addressing students cheating on exams or plagiarism can be found at the following: https://uwm.edu/academicaffairs/facultystaff/policies/academic-misconduct/

**Complaint Procedures.** Students may direct complaints to the Sociology Department Chair or the Associate Dean for Social Sciences in the College of Letters & Sciences. If the complaint allegedly violates a specific university policy, it may be directed to the Sociology Department Chair, the Associate Dean for Social Sciences in the College of Letters & Sciences, or to the appropriate university office responsible for enforcing the policy. Policies may be found at: https://www4.uwm.edu/secu/docs/other/S_47_Discriminatory_Policy.pdf

**Grade Appeal Procedures.** A student may appeal a grade on the grounds that it is based on a capricious or arbitrary decision of the course instructor. Such an appeal shall follow the established procedures adopted by the department, college, or school in which the course resides or in the case of graduate students, the Graduate School. These procedures are available in writing from the sociology department chairperson or the Academic Dean of the College of Letters & Science. Procedures for undergraduate student grade appeal can be found at: https://uwm.edu/letters-science/advising/answers-forms/policies/appeal-procedure-for-grades

Procedures for graduate student grade appeal can be found at https://uwm.edu/graduateschool/appealing-academic-decisions/

**Final Examination Policy.** Policies regarding final examinations can be found at the following:  http://www4.uwm.edu/secu/docs/other/S22.htm

**Book Royalties.** In accord with Department of Sociology policy, the royalties from the sale of faculty-authored books to students in their classes are donated to a UWM Foundation/Sociology Account to support future awards and activities for UWM students in Sociology.

Update 08/2018