**SOCL 2321—Summer II 2018**

**Research Methods**

**Instructor:** Dr. Anjuli Fahlberg

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**Location:** 154Ryder Hall

**Class time:** MW 1:30-5:00pm

**Office Hours:** After class or by appointment

**Office Location:** 943 Renaissance Park

**Course Description:**

One of the core distinctions between the social sciences and the humanities is the former’s emphasis on *evidence*. Sociology in particular aims to make sense of the social world by applying rigorous research methods—originally based on the scientific method—to explore, define, measure, and explain social issues. The goal of this course is to give students an introduction to the various tools employed by sociologists to study the social world, offering them opportunities to experiment with some of them and to reflect thoughtfully on the benefits and shortcomings of each of them. These include quantitative and qualitative methods, experiments, and historical and policy analysis, among others. This course will prepare students to apply these methods to various types of research questions and to move forward with a research topic of interest to them.

**Course Objectives:**

By the end of the course, students should be able to:

1. Critically reflect on perspectives on knowledge about the social world, its uses, and the processes by which it is constructed.
2. Identify the steps involved in generating and answering research questions and testing hypotheses.
3. Describe the differences between the primary research methods used in social sciences, including their advantages, challenges, and limitations.
4. Conceptualize and plan a sociological research study from beginning to end.
5. Critique the methods and findings presented in news and academic articles.

**Required Texts:**

Schutt, Russell. 2012. *Investigating the Social World: The Process and Practice of Research.* Sage Publications. 7th Edition.

Other readings are accessible on Blackboard.

**Assignments and Grading**

**Grading Breakdown:**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Attendance & participation | 15% |
| NIH Certificate | 5% |
| Writing Assignments (3) | 45% (15% each) |
| Survey questionnaire | 5% |
| Participant-observation assignment | 5% |
| Interview manuscript | 5% |
| Final presentation/poster | 20% |
| Total | 100% |

*ATTENDANCE & PARTICIPATION: 15 %*

Participation includes class attendance, completion of the required reading materials, and active and informed participation in discussions and learning activities.

Students are allowed one unexcused absence. Additional absences must be excused with a doctor’s note or will result in -3 points from your final grade for each missed day (or -1.5 if you miss an hour or more). ALL absences or tardiness should be communicated to be AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. I will check my email before each class, so if you’ll be out for any reason, email me.

*“PROTECTING HUMAN RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS” NIH CERTIFICATE: 5%*

The certificate can be received by completing the free training at this website (<https://phrp.nihtraining.com/users/login.php>). The training will take approximately two hours and has a series of quizzes throughout it. Please plan accordingly. Once you have completed the training, you will receive a certificate. Please save the certificate as a .pdf or take a screen shot of it and paste it into a word document. Then upload the document to the Assignment's section on Blackboard. Upload by July 11th.

*WRITING ASSIGNMENTS (15% each)*

**Assignment 1: Research Proposal (5-6 pages double-spaced)**

The purpose of this assignment is to get you to begin to think strategically about your Capstone project or some other research project you plan to do. It can contain a mix of paragraphs, bullet points, graphs and charts. It should answer each of these questions:

1. **Introduction:** What is a topic/population/setting that interests you? Why? What do you find interesting about it? What, if anything, have you done regarding this topic already?
2. **Literature Review:** What have you read about this topic so far? This could include news articles, books, journal articles. If you haven’t read anything about it yet, spend 30-60 minutes searching words related to your topic on google, Wikipedia, and Google Scholar ([www.scholar.google.com)](http://www.scholar.google.com)). List 5 interesting sources and 1-2 sentences about what each one says about your topic.
3. **Research Question:** Based on what you’ve read and what you find interesting, what are some questions you might have about this topic? List 3-5 questions. They can be broad or narrow.
4. **Research Methods:** What types of research methods might you use for this project? Just brainstorm based on (a) any methods you have used already; (b) the types of data you think you will be able to access; (c) your personality and where you want to spend time (i.e. behind a computer screen or talking to people?); (d) any other reason that draws you to particular methods. Discuss how you might apply 2-3 different methods (one paragraph each).
5. **Broader Implications:** What are you hoping to get out of this project? What’s in it for you—personally, professionally, politically, etc? What might other people get out of it? (one paragraph minimum)

Upload final draft by midnight on Saturday July 21st.

**Assignment 2: Reflection on Survey Research (4 pages double-spaced)**

The purpose of this assignment is to reflect on the process and outcomes of your survey research projects. Your reflection should answer the following questions:

1. What research hypotheses were you trying to test? Why?
2. How did you go about designing your survey questions (i.e. how did you determine indicators for your variables, how did you phrase your questions, what types of questions did you use, etc?) What challenges did you face and how did you address these?
3. What were some of your preliminary findings? Did any of them surprise you? How do you explain your findings? What additional questions has it raised for you?
4. After having done this, what do you think are the benefits and limitations of survey research? If you were to do this again, what would you do the same/differently?

Upload by midnight on Saturday, July 28th.

**Assignment 3: Reflection on Qualitative Research (4 pages double-spaced)**

The purpose of this assignment is to reflect on the process and outcomes of your qualitative research project, including your field notes and interviews. Your reflection should answer the following questions:

1. What research question(s) were you trying to explore? Why?
2. How did you decide what to focus on during your participant-observation? What, if any, new ideas or questions did that activity generate? What was that experience like?
3. How did you design and edit your interview questions? How did you gain rapport with your interview subjects? What did you learn from your interviews?
4. How did you determine which variables to code? What are some of your findings, conclusions, or additional questions generated from this data?
5. What challenges did you encounter throughout this process? And what would you do the same/differently for future projects?

Upload by midnight on Saturday, August 11th.

*TOOLS TO ANSWER YOUR RESEARCH QUESTION: 15%*

Survey questionnaire (5%)

* Develop a closed questionnaire with 5-7 substantial questions as well as five demographic questions.
* Upload questionnaire by July 25th.

Participant observation field notes (5%)

* Observe and participate in a public place for thirty minutes. Jot down notes as possible. Then type up the field notes and insert your thoughts and analysis (i.e. what you saw and how you felt about your role as a researcher). Final notes should be 2-3 pages single-spaced.
* Upload notes by August 1st.

Coded interview transcript (5%)

* Using the interview guide you generated in class, conduct an eight to ten-minute interview with a classmate. Use a voice recorder to tape the interview and then transcribe the interview. Then, using NVivo, generate 5-10 relevant codes and code your transcript.
* Upload coded transcript by August 9th.

*FINAL PRESENTATION OR POSTER SESSION: 20 %*

Instead of submitting a final paper, the class will VOTE between a final presentation and a poster session.

Final presentation: Students each prepare an 8-minute powerpoint presentation in which they explain their research project, what they did and found in their research projects, and what methods they plan to use in their Capstone or major research project (as well as population, location, research questions, etc). A more detailed set of questions will be provided if students opt for this option.

Poster session: Students put together a poster which will include images of their survey instruments, charts with their findings, research questions, plans for the future, etc. Instead of presenting to the class one at a time, we will put the posters on the wall and walk around talking to each other in a more casual format.

**Course Policies**

**Classroom etiquette:**

**Students are expected to actively participate in class discussions by critically engaging with the material and with key concepts, themes, and stories. Questions or comments that challenge traditional assumptions or normative values are encouraged, though these should always be provided in a thoughtful and respectful manner.**

**Technology in the classroom:**

**If your reading materials or assignments are on your computer or tablet, you may refer to these during class discussions or to take notes. Otherwise, please refrain from using these devices. Cell phones should be on silent at all times, and students should restrict checking their phones during class.**

**Food and breaks:**

**Remaining engaged in class—alert, attentive, and participative—will make the class more interesting and productive for all of us. Students are therefore encouraged to bring food and drinks, as these can be helpful to remaining alert. However, you should NOT be late to class because you were in line buying food, so plan accordingly. Students will also be given a 15-minute break each class.**

**Assignments:**

**All assignments should be completed by the deadline. Please email me 24 HOURS IN ADVANCE if something comes up that prevents you from completing the assignment on time. Students who do not get explicit permission from me in advance will be penalized for tardiness.**

**Plagiarism:**

**Plagiarism is a serious offense and can result in severe consequences. You should cite any fact that is not widely known and any idea that is not your own. Keep track of what you are reading and where you are obtaining your information, and become comfortable with including the authors’ last name(s) and dates of publication after each “borrowed” fact or idea. Citing what you have read not only protects you from plagiarism, but also demonstrates to your reader that your writing is well-researched.**

**For more details, Northeastern’s Academic Integrity Policy can be found here:** <http://www.northeastern.edu/osccr/academic-integrity-policy/>

**Sources:**

**We now suffer from an over-abundance of information, and it is easy to get overwhelmed by these sources and not know how to find them or which ones are credible. We will discuss this in greater detail in class, but students should be thoughtful about the credibility of each source. As a general rule, these sources are valid: books, scholarly articles, news articles by a mainstream newspaper, and reports issued by the government or major NGOs. You can find many of these on scholar.google.com. Invalid sources include: Wikipedia, blogs, and websites not affiliated with a credible organization.**

**Communication**

**Please email me or stop me after class for any questions or concerns or to talk further about the course material. I will be happy to provide you additional ideas and resources relevant to your areas of interest. While out-of-class communication with me is not required to get a good grade, students who actively email or talk to their instructors are much more likely to understand the assignments, gain greater insights into the topics, and perform well.**

**I will make every effort to respond to email within 24 hours on weekdays and 48 hours on weekends. Feel free to email again if I have not responded within that time frame, as sometimes things fall through the cracks.**

**I am available to meet upon request. Please inform me after class or by email if you would like to meet.**

**I will typically return graded assignments with feedback within a week. You are expected to read this feedback and incorporate it, when appropriate, into future assignments.**

**Accommodations for different learning styles**

**We each learn differently, and I have attempted to construct a grading system that takes into account multiple learning and presentation styles. However, some may require special accommodations in order to fulfill certain requirements of the class. If you anticipate any challenges fulfilling the expectations listed above, please talk to me in the first week of class so we can create a plan that will meet your needs.**

**Class Schedule & Reading List**

**Note: Some readings assignments may change, so pay attention for announcements in class, and read whatever is up on Blackboard for that day, as well as the assigned chapters from your textbook.**

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| **Date** | **Topics** | **Readings** | **Activities** | **Assignments Due** |
| **M July 2** | **Introduction** |  | **Ethnographic activity: Whose truth?** |  |
| **M July 9** | **The purposes of knowledge** | **Schutt, Ch 1, 2**  **Durkheim, “The Rules of Sociological Method,” Preface to the Second Edition, 31-47.**  **C. Wright Mills, “The Sociological Imagination,” Chp 1** | **From questions to concepts** |  |
| **W July 11** | **Epistemology and Ethics** | **Schutt, Ch 3**  **Collins, Patricia Hill. 1986. “Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought”**  Chambers, Cynthia & Helen Balanoff. 2009. “Translating ‘Participation’ from North to South: A Case Against Intellectual Imperialism in Social Science Research” | **Class project on the history of social theorists** | **Upload NIH certificate** |
| **M July 16** | **Assembling a research project: From question to data collection** | Schutt Ch 4, 6  Find and read 4-5 articles relevant to your research question | **Revision of research proposal** | **Bring research proposal draft** |
| **W July 18** | **Sampling, Survey Research 1** | **Grant application for DAVILA**  **Cuevas et al. 2018.** “The Role of Cultural Factors on Dating Aggression and Delinquency Among Latino Youth”  **Schutt Ch 5** | **Prof. Carlos Cuevas presents on DAVILA** |  |
| **S 7/21** | **Assign. #1** | **Submit research proposal** |  |  |
| **M July 23** | **Survey Research Design** | Schutt Ch 8  Guthrie, Gerard. 2008. “Questionnaires” in *Basic Research Methods: An Entry to Social Science Research*.  DeKeseredy, Walter and Martin D. Schwartz. “Measuring the Extent of Woman Abuse in Intimate Heterosexual Relationships: A Critique of the Conflict Tactics Scales” | **Students practice and revise questionnaire** | **Draft questionnaire** |
| **W July 25** | **Interpreting survey data & Locating data sets** | **Schutt Ch 14**  **Pierotti, Rachel. 2013.** Increasing Rejection of Intimate Partner Violence: Evidence of Global Cultural Diffusion” *American Sociological Review*.  **Watch: RStatsInstitute, “SPSS For Beginners,” first three videos (1, 2, 3)**  <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ADDR3_Ng5CA>  **Install SPSS25 (myNEU<Services&Links<Study and Course Resources<Software Downloads) and import your data** | **Armin presents on data sets**  **Practice w/ SPSS** | **By Tuesday at noon: Students re-take everyone’s surveys**  **For class: Bring cleaned data in Excel**  **Upload questionnaire to BB** |
| **S 7/28** | **Assign. #2** | **Submit reflection on Survey Research** |  |  |
| **M July 30** | **Participant-Observation** | **Schutt Ch 9**  **Charmaz, Kathy. 2008. “Grounded theory as emergent method,” *Handbook of Emergent Methods*.**  **Emerson, Taking Field Notes, Chapter 1**  **Sample Field Notes, 2016**  **Goffman, “On the Run,” Appendix** | **PO in Boston** |  |
| **W Aug 1** | **Interviews** | **Jody Miller. 2008. “Getting Played: African American Girls, Urban Inequality, and Gendered Violence.” Just Ch 1.**  Jacob, Stacey & Furgerson, S. Paige. 2012. “Writing Interview Protocols and Conducting Interviews: Tips for Students New to the Field of Qualitative Research.” | **Students design interview questionnaire** | **Upload PO assignment to BB, bring to class** |
| **M Aug 6** | **Coding interviews and field notes** | Warren, Caren & Kristine N. Williams. 2008. “Interviewing Elderly Residents in Assisted Living,” Qualitative Sociology.  Small, Mario. 2011. “How to Conduct a Mixed Methods Study: Recent Trends in a Rapidly Growing Literature,” *Annual Review of Sociology.*  Schutt Ch 10 | **Sarah Faude presents on coding;**  **Students interview each other** | **Bring your final interview questionnaire** |
| **W Aug 8** | **Focus groups**  **Putting it all together** | Anthony J. Onwuegbuzie et al. 2009. “A Qualitative Framework for Collecting and Analyzing Data in Focus Group Research,” *International Journal of Qualitative Methods.*  Zhu, Wei & Jeffra Flaitz. 2005. “Using Focus Group Methodology to Understand International Students’ Academic Language Needs: A Comparison of Perspectives,” *Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language*. | **Students practice coding in NVivo**  **Students practice focus groups** | **Upload coded transcript to BB** |
| **S 8/11** | **Assign. #3** | **Submit reflection on Qualitative Research** |  |  |
| **M Aug 13** |  | **NO CLASS—work on final presentation/poster** |  |  |
| **W Aug 15** | **Policy Analysis, Content analysis (social media) and GIS mapping** | **Schutt, Ch 11, 12**  **Sassen, Saskia. 1991. “The Global City: New York, London, and Tokyo.” *Princeton University Press.* Ch. 1.**  **Article by Ineke**  **Desmond, Matthew & Nicol Valdez. 2012. “**Unpolicing the Urban Poor: Consequences of Third-Party Policing for Inner-City Women,” *American Sociological Review.* | **Prof. Ineke Marshall presents on ISRD3** |  |
| **8/20 or 8/21** | **Final** | **Final presentations OR Poster Session** |  |  |