

Methods of Empirical Investigation

Spring 2008, Grinnell College
Soc 291-02: T/Th 12:45-2:05, ARH 120
Course website on PioneerWeb

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This course focuses on the fundamentals of research design, the practice of social research and the process of social scientific discovery. This semester we will hone our ability to:

- Articulate strong and compelling research questions
- Select research methods that fit the research questions and field setting
- Uphold a commitment to ethical conduct in research with human subjects
- Gain entry into the research setting and establish rapport with study participants
- Collect, analyze and interpret data in multiple forms
- Propose research projects and write up study reports
- Understand and make use of others' work in the scholarly literature

The course involves intensive preparation, small and large group discussions, short lectures, field activities, individual literature reviews and research proposals. Our readings include a methods text, a collection of essays on the practice of social science research, and supplementary readings.

Our main course text, by Schutt, will usher us through the core tenets of conducting sociological research, interpreting our findings, and integrating our work with that of other researchers. Perecman and Curran's edited handbook will provide insights from experienced researchers on best practices in specific areas of social science research; it also provides useful bibliographies of further resources in each of these areas. Additional readings will deepen our consideration of theoretical and practical concerns in social science research.

Required Books & Supplies:

1. Schutt, Russell K. 2006. *Investigating the Social World: The Process and Practice of Social Research*. 5th edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press.
2. Perecman, Ellen and Sara Curran, eds. 2006. *A Handbook for Social Science Research: Essays and Bibliographic Sources on Research Design and Methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
3. Supplementary articles and book chapters on E-reserve.
4. Your personal RefWorks library (we will develop this library over the semester).
5. A reading and field journal (a notebook of your choice dedicated to this purpose).

Assignments & Grading

Homework assignments (15%). Regular homework assignments will address specific methodological approaches and techniques.

Sociology conference & response paper (10%). Grinnell will host the Iowa Sociological Association's annual conference on April 4. We will attend the conference as a class and you will write a 2-3 page essay in response to conference proceedings.

Literature Review (15%). Early in the semester you will identify an area of research interest. Based on this topic you will conduct a literature search (aided by RefWorks and library databases -- we will hold lab sessions on each), generate an annotated library of sources (in RefWorks) and produce a literature review.

Exams (2 x 15% = 30%). Two exams will be given during the semester that draw upon readings, discussion, lecture and other activities.

Research Proposal (20%). As your final project for the course you will propose a research project. Your proposal will clearly articulate a specific research question, a theoretical framework and a methodological plan; it will address ethical issues and threats to validity and reliability; it will locate the project in the context of the relevant literature and explain the project's implications for social science and beyond. We will develop components of the proposal throughout the semester.

Participation and other assignments (10%). Given that this course revolves around discussion of the readings, small group work, lectures, in-class assignments and other activities, ***your attendance, preparedness and active participation are essential.*** There are multiple ways of participating actively in class -- overall I expect you to be physically and psychologically present and to interact critically with the material and your classmates. I will periodically assign in-class or take-home assignments that will contribute toward this part of your grade.

Reading and field journal: This course requires a significant amount of reading, writing and discussion. Your reading journal will be your greatest tool for cultivating your skills in research design and coming to class prepared to actively participate. Please have a notebook dedicated to this course that you can use to take notes on readings, discussion and lecture, to keep track of in-class work, and to record field notes. The journal is not graded; however your efforts will be reflected in your ability to participate in discussion, in your formal written assignments and in your preparation for exams.

Notes on reading: Use these questions to guide your reading and notetaking when reading research reports:

1. What is/are the main *research question(s)* of the study?
2. What *theories* contextualize the study?
3. What *methods* are used to collect, analyze and interpret data?
4. What are the main *findings* of the study?
5. What *conclusions* are drawn based on these findings, and what are their *implications*, both in relationship to the literature and in general?
6. What is important about the study? Why does it matter: a) to social science; b) to the world; c) to you?

The college's Reading Lab offers further specific strategies on effective and efficient reading in the liberal arts environment.

We will use RefWorks bibliographic software to keep track of, and make notes on, research we read this semester. Developing this skill will serve you well throughout your academic career -- it's never too soon to start organizing your personal library, and the technology saves time and headaches in generating bibliographies for papers.

A note on writing: While what you write is essential, *how* you present your ideas in writing is also extremely important. The writing assignments for this course will provide opportunities to exercise and strengthen your writing skills. I strongly recommend that you take advantage of the college Writing Lab for assistance with your assignments for this and other classes.

Expectations & Policies

I will do everything I reasonably can to help you meet your goals in this course and to maintain a respectful classroom atmosphere. I expect you to do the same. Please see me or contact me by email to talk about any questions or problems you have with the material, my presentation of it, or classroom dynamics.

Accessibility: If you need any kind of accommodation in order to participate fully in the course, contact me and Joyce Stern in Academic Advising (ext. 3702) as soon as possible to make the necessary arrangements. "Grinnell is committed to making accommodations for students with physical, learning or psychological disabilities" (*Student Handbook* p. 2), as am I.

Academic honesty & citing sources: As in every course, you are expected to abide by the college's standards of honesty in academic work as outlined in the *Student Handbook*, which require each student to "acknowledge explicitly any expressions, ideas, or observations that are not his or her own." I am required to bring suspicious coursework to the attention of the Committee on Academic Standing. It has become quite easy to find out whether a student has copied sections of a text from written sources or from the internet – do not be tempted.

In addition, in accordance with academic protocol, I expect that every formal paper for this course will contain a footnote acknowledging assistance of any kind that you received in producing the paper, including advice from Writing Lab staff or feedback from a fellow student. (Again, I encourage you to take advantage of the college's outstanding Writing Lab -- just be sure to cite the staff person who helps you.)

For citations of sources in papers for this course, we will use the American Sociological Association reference style. Documentation on ASA style will be provided.

Written work & deadlines: Bring completed assignments to class or deliver them to my box in Carnegie 115 by 4pm on the due date. Please print double-sided whenever possible. *All written work must be printed out and handed in; I do not accept emailed work.*

Your written work must be handed in **on time. I do not accept late work** unless you talk with me and get my permission for an extension *before* the day the assignment is due. *If you get an extension, send me an email summarizing our agreement, print it out and attach it to your late*

work. Even if you have been granted an extension, assignments turned in late may be subject to a grade penalty.

Attendance: I take attendance at the beginning of class. More than two unexcused absences will negatively affect your grade, as will cross-talk, sleeping in class, repeatedly arriving late, or leaving early without notifying me beforehand. An absence is counted as excused only when I receive an email or note from Academic Advising, the Health Center or the Athletics Office.

Please note that **you are responsible** for any and all material missed due to absences. Get the emails and phone numbers of your discussion group members or other classmates and if you miss a class, ask them to review what was covered and/or lend you their notes. (Do not ask me what was covered, or if we did anything important. Do not tell me you are skipping my class to study for another class.)

Contacting me: I expect to be in contact with students throughout the semester. Please come by during office hours to discuss course content, thoughts or concerns about assignments, or for extra explanation or assistance. My office hours are posted weekly outside my office (ARH 121). If you are not available during office hours, we can schedule another time to meet. I am online daily during the week, so email is the best way to reach me.

Acknowledgements: Thank you to David Cook-Martin, Susan Ferguson, Jane Hood and Kent McClelland for substantial contributions to the development of this course.

Course schedule: Consider the following a tentative outline, subject to change. You should complete the assigned readings by class time on the date specified.

"HB" = Perelman & Curran, *A Handbook for Social Science Research*.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Key Concepts</u>	<u>Readings & Assignments</u>
Week 1: Fundamentals of Social Research		
T 1/22	Welcome & Introduction	
Th 1/24	Types & goals of social research Theories, relationships, hypotheses, concepts & variables The craft of social science	Schutt Preface & Chapter 1 HB Introduction Mills, "On Intellectual Craftsmanship" (handout)
Week 2: Theoretical and Philosophical Approaches to Social Research		
T 1/29	Positivism & constructionism	Neuman Ch.4, "The Meanings of Methodology" (E-reserves)
Th 1/31	Critical approaches	Hesse-Biber et al (E-reserves) Homework #1 due

Week 3: Research Problems and Research Questions

T	2/5	Formulating research questions; dependent & independent variables; inductive vs deductive approaches	Schutt 53-57, 69-79, Appendix B Sherman & Berk, "The Specific Deterrent Effects of Arrest for Domestic Assault" (E-Reserves) Homework #2 due
Th	2/7	RefWorks Lab	TBA

Week 4: Reviewing the Literature

T	2/12	Scholarly journals & locating one's work in the literature	Schutt 57-68 Neuman, "The Literature Review" (E-reserves) Schutt Appendix C, C-8 to C-26: South & Spitze, "Housework in Marital & Non-marital Households" Schutt C-1 to C-7
Th	2/14	Literature Search Lab	Schutt Appendix D TBA

Week 5: Research Ethics

T	2/19	Ethics in research with human subjects Informed consent Institutional Review Boards (IRBs)	Schutt 79-84 "Final Report of the Tuskegee Syphilis Study Legacy Committee" ASA Code of Ethics: "General Principles," "Informed Consent" & "Research Planning..." Grinnell IRB Forms HB 11: Curran, "Ethical Considerations for Research in Cross-Cultural Settings"
Th	2/21	Ethical dilemmas in research Research plans & ethics statements	Humphreys, excerpts from <i>Tearoom Trade</i> (E-reserves)

Week 6: Conceptualization & Measurement; Archival Research

T	2/26	Defining & operationalizing concepts; indicators, measures, validity & reliability	Schutt Ch. 4
Th	2/28	Guest Lecture - Laura Sachiko Fugikawa	HB 1: Vitalis, "The Past is Another Country" Add'l reading TBA

Week 7: Causation & Research Design

T	3/4	Criteria for causation Mechanisms & context	Schutt Ch. 6
Th	3/6	Research Design	HB 10: Watts, "In Search of the Holy Grail: Projects, Proposals & Research Design..."

Week 8: Review

T	3/11	Review	
Th	3/13	Midsem Exam	

Weeks 9-10: **SPRING BREAK**

Week 11: Qualitative & Historical Comparative Methods

T	4/1	Field research, ethnography, participant observation	Schutt Ch. 9 HB 3: Gottlieb, "Ethnography: Theory & Methods"
Th	4/3	Guest Lecture - Peter Hennen	Schutt Ch. 12 HB 4: Giles-Vernick, "Oral Histories as Methods & Sources"
F	4/4	ISA Conference	

Week 12: Qualitative Methods

T	4/8	Entering the field, field notes, interviewing, theoretical sampling	MacLeod, Ch. 1: "Social Immobility in the Land of Opportunity" & Appendix: "On the Making of <i>Ain't No Makin' It</i> " (E-Reserves) HB 8: Harrell, "Ethnographic Methods"
Th	4/10	Qualitative data analysis, focus groups, combining methods, ethical issues	HB 5: Short, "Focus Group Interviews" Schutt Ch. 10

Week 13: Sampling & Survey Research

T	4/15	Samples, populations, generalizability, probability & nonprobability sampling	Schutt Ch. 5 NYT articles on U.S. Census
Th	4/17	Survey research, writing questions, indexes, designing questionnaires	Schutt Ch. 8 HB 6: Park, "Using Survey Data in Social Science Research in Developing Countries"

Week 14: Secondary Data, Content Analysis & Quantitative Methods

T	4/22	Secondary data analysis & content analysis	Schutt Ch. 13
Th	4/24	Statistics, preparation of data, univariate distributions	Schutt 441-466

Week 15: Quantitative Analysis

T	4/29	Crosstabs, regression, ethical issues	Schutt 466-483 HB 2: Schrank, "Case-Based Research"
Th	5/1	Combining quantitative and qualitative methods	HB 7: Piore, "Qualitative Research: Does it Fit in Economics?" HB 9: Schrank, "The Case Study and Causal Inference"

Week 16: Catch-up & Review

T	5/6	TBA	HB 12: Schrank, "Bringing It All Back Home"
Th	5/8	Catch-up & Review	TBA

Final exam due Thurs. May 15 at noon.