ADVANCED SOCIAL RESEARCH METHODS
SOC 6270
SYLLABUS

Professor: Randy Stoecker       Fall, 2002
Office: SA 9                    W 7:30-10:00 pm
Office Hours: 3-5pm T; 2-5 pm W, and by appointment.
Phone: 530-4975
e-mail: randy.stoecker@utoledo.edu

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the practice of doing sociology. Methodology is one of the most difficult areas to teach and one of the most difficult to learn. Sociological research methodology is deceptive. It often seems to be a matter of applying a simple procedure to a simple question. Too often researchers don't realize just how difficult it is to develop a good question and how important it is to prepare for the shifting ground of any research project until it is too late.

This course is designed to provide you with that preparation. While you will read about many research techniques, many of which you have probably studied before, this course will also provide you the opportunity to design a real research project. This will be an active learning course. There will be no exams, but there will be extensive writing with firm deadlines.

IMPORTANT

This is a graduate level seminar designed to help you compete with graduate students from the highest ranked universities in the nation. As such, it will require you to:
♦ Spend a lot of money
♦ Spend a lot of time
♦ Be professional
To survive this course you are going to need a solid background in social science research methodology, a willingness to work cooperatively and constructively with others, a very high level of motivation, a deep fascination with the research process, and a clear schedule. This course has a very ambitious set of expectations, and we will all have to work very hard to meet them.

COURSE GOALS

I have five goals for this course:
♦ First, I want you to learn how to think about social research from different vantage points.
♦ Second, I want you to develop some intuition about how to design a research project.
♦ Third, I want you to develop some judgement of how to choose and evaluate different research methods and make adjustments "on the fly".
♦ Fourth, I want you to learn how to use practical and applied research methods such as needs assessments and evaluation research.
♦ Finally, I want you to gain experience working collaboratively in a community of scholars.

COURSE ORGANIZATION

The first two-thirds of this course will concentrate on book learning–intensively studying various research perspectives and practices. During the last third of the course you will be developing research proposals.

CLASSROOM PROCESS

We will be engaged in a variety of "hands-on" activities in each class. All of us will also spend much time organizing discussions, presenting our writing to each other, and helping develop each other's ideas.

STUDENT AND INSTRUCTOR RIGHTS AND OBLIGATIONS

As a student, you have the right to criticize and question what you are hearing and reading, without fear of ridicule or threat of retribution. You have the right to be treated equally and with respect. You have the right to be fully informed of course requirements and grading procedures. You have the right to receive prompt and plentiful feedback on your writing assignments. You have the right to receive your tuition and tax dollar's worth of learning from this course.

Your first obligation, as a student, is to give me, your classmates, and our guests, the same respect you have a right to expect. I expect you at all times to be respectful of others in discussion. I will not tolerate abuse or insult of any individuals or groups. I also expect you to show up for class regularly, on time, and prepared. I expect you to be focused on the issues of the classroom.

As the instructor, it is my obligation to respect your rights and act in accordance with them. I will always treat criticisms and questions with the full respect they deserve, apply rules equally, inform you fully of course requirements and grading procedures, and provide you with a quality classroom experience. If I do not know the answer to a question I will try to find it or refer you to someone who does. When I find out I am not being clear, I will try to better explain myself.
It is my right and obligation, as the instructor, to tell you when you are violating the rights of others to a respectful, focused, classroom environment.

**SPECIAL LEARNING NEEDS**

Please inform me if you have any special learning needs so I can adjust the structure and the process of the course to meet those needs.

**INSTRUCTOR CONSULTATIONS**

You should consult with me whenever you have a question about course assignments, lectures, discussions, or readings. I will gladly look over rough drafts of your writing. You should also consult with me whenever you may find yourself interested in the issues raised in the course and you want to discuss them further or get more information. You should always tell me when there is something that might enhance your learning.

**COURSE READINGS**

There are eight required books at the bookstore. I know that's a lot of money, but these are books that anyone with a graduate degree should have on their bookshelf anyway. They are listed in the order that we will use them.


Herbert F. Weisberg, Jon A. Krosnick, and Bruce D. Bowen. 1996. An Introduction to Survey Research, Polling, and Data Analysis, 3rd Ed.

**CLASS LIST-SERV**
This class will have an e-mail list, so that we can communicate efficiently with each other between classes. Participation in the list is mandatory, and should be helpful. You can ask questions, trade resources, and ultimately save time by collaborating over e-mail. Directions for subscribing to, and using, the list are at the end of this syllabus.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

1. **BOOK REVIEWS.** For the first 11 weeks we will be intensively studying a variety of research perspectives and methodologies. You will be reading a book a week, and writing a review of each book--each approximately 2 pages.
   - **DUE**--each Wednesday, weeks 2 through 7 and 10-11.
   - **LATE POLICY**--you can turn one in late, but the grade will drop by one letter for each business day late. Late papers after the first receive no credit.
   - **FORMAT**--here are the topics around which you should organize your review:
     - What are the central questions or issues around which the book is organized?
     - What are the author's answers?
     - What are your criteria for judging the quality of the answers?
     - What is the quality of the answers?
   - You can also send an e-mail revision to the class e-mail discussion list by 5pm the Thursday after the class if you believe you missed something important or misinterpreted something.
   - **GRADING**--your writing will be graded on how thoroughly, concisely, and accurately you address each of the points under "format" and how clearly you communicate. I will grade A, B, C, D, and F (no + or -) on each review. *This is worth half of your final grade.*
   - **Note**--I welcome you to work collectively on the papers.

2. **RESEARCH PROPOSALS.** You will be writing a research proposal in this class. There may be a number of reasons for writing the proposal besides getting a grade.
   - There may be an opportunity to do a real proposal for a real research project with a real community organization. I will let you know as soon as I hear a final word on that.
   - You may want to write a proposal for your thesis.
   - You may be working for an organization that needs to do research.

   **GRADING**--Your grade for this section will be the other half of your final grade. Each week through the second half of the course there will be another section due, which will be graded. The substantive lit review, methodological lit review, and rough draft will each be worth 15 percent of your research proposal grade. The full final draft will be worth 55 percent. Grading criteria will be discussed below in the Course Calendar.

3. **ATTENDANCE.** Show up. Don't come late. I'm not going to grade on attendance, but you might some day want me to supervise you on an internship, be on your thesis committee, or write a letter of recommendation. I only do those things for students who show an intense level of commitment.
COURSE CALENDAR

Week 1, August 28: Course Introduction

Special Guest: Carolina Escarra, from Venezuela, will be visiting the class to discuss her research work with poor communities in Venezuela and her integration of critical theory with practical social research.

Week 2, September 4: Thinking about how to think about research.

Read: Black, Evaluating Social Science Research

Due: Book review

Week 3, September 11: Participatory Action Research

Read: Stringer, Action Research

Due: Book review

Week 4, September 18: Needs Assessment Research

Read: Altschuld and Witkin, From Needs Assessments to Action

Due: Book review

Week 5, September 25: Evaluation Research

Read: Patton, Utilization-Focused Evaluation

Due: Book review

Week 6, October 2: Case Study Research

Read: Yin, 1994. Case Study Research

Due: Book review

Week 7, October 9: Focus Group Research

Read: Steward and Shamdasani, Focus Groups

Due: Book review
Week 9, October 16: No class (because class doesn't fall on either Labor Day or the scheduled fall break, I thought you might like some time off just like everyone else gets.)

Week 10, October 23: Interview Research

Read: Fetterman, Ethnography

Due: book review

Week 11, October 30: Survey Research

Read: Weisberg, Krosnick, and Bowen, An Introduction to Survey Research, Polling, and Data Analysis

Due: book review

Week 12, November 6: Proposals, Human Subjects, and Research Ethics


NRF Proposal Writing Workshop Kit. http://www.nrf.ac.za/yenza/zip/proposal.zip (this is a packet in zip format)


How to Have Your Abstract Rejected, by Mary-Claire van Leunen and Richard Lipton. ftp://parcftp.xerox.com/pub/popl96/vanLeunenLipton

Week 13, November 13:

Due: Lit review on substantive issue and formal research question--the task here is to have a review of the professional literature relevant to your research topic, and to show how that literature contains gaps or disputes that your research will address. This will likely be 5-8 pages with at least 10-16 references.

You will be presenting your lit reviews in class.

Week 14, November 20:

Due: Lit review on proposed research methods--The task here is to choose a method or methods to conduct the research on your question, and review the literature on those methods to show what the strengths and weaknesses of the method(s) are, and how you will use the strengths and overcome the weaknesses. This will likely be 5-8 pages with at least 10-16 references.

You will be presenting your lit reviews in class.

Week 15, November 27: No class. Thanksgiving Break

Week 16, December 4:

Due: Rough Drafts--this is a full draft of the proposal, including your revised substantive and methodological lit reviews, budget, and timeline. It will be fully referenced.

You will be presenting your rough drafts in class.

Week 17, December 11:

Due: Final Drafts--these will be revisions of your rough drafts based on comments from your classmates and myself. I will grade them based on how effectively you incorporate that feedback.

Finals Period: TBA