**Sociology 205: Introduction to Social Research**

Spring 2016 Burnett 121, T/R 2:00-3:15 pm

Instructor: Alian Kasabian, PhD Email: aliank@unl.edu

Office: 934 Oldfather Hall, 234 Whittier Research Center (WRC) Office (WRC): (402) 472-7708

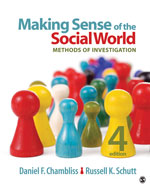
Office Hours: Tuesdays 3:30-4:30pm (in OLD) or by appointment

“Research is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose.” ~Zora Neale Hurston

**Prerequisite:** 3 hours of sociology or related social sciences

**Course Description:** Introduction to the techniques of collecting and analyzing data and techniques of research reporting.  Emphasis on interpretation and evaluation of sociological research.

More specifically, this course will introduce you to sociological research and methods, and provide a foundation for future research. Sociology is a science, and we use the scientific method to investigate the social world, and build upon previous knowledge and research. In this class, you will become familiar with the variety of concerns and methods available to sociological researchers, through lectures, discussions, and exercises. At end of this course you should be able to:

* Understand the ethics of social research
* Assess the existing literature and research
* Construct sociological research questions and hypotheses
* Compare and contrast methodological approaches

Besides preparing you for future coursework and research, this class should make you a better consumer of information.

**Required Text:**

Chambliss, Daniel F., and Russell K. Schutt. 2013. *Making Sense of the Social World: Methods of Investigation, 4th Ed.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Additional materials will be available on Blackboard (Bb)

**Classroom Guidelines:**

This is an intense course, with a lot of material to cover. To make the best use of the time allotted, it is important that you follow these guidelines:

* Be actively present and participate constructively in class discussions. This also means not being distracted by media or technology (phones, tablets, laptops, etc.). If such devices are a distraction to me or other students, you will be asked to put it away.
* Communicate any issues or needs to me in a timely manner. You need to take responsibility for your own learning.
* Be respectful and courteous of others’ points of view, and the confidentiality of personal experiences that may be shared.

I expect you to come to class prepared, with readings and assignments completed. As your instructor, I will do my best to be prepared and well informed about our materials, responsive to class needs, and open to learning from you.

**Communication:**

The best way to reach me is 1) in class and 2) **via email**. The phone number at the top of the first page is my desk in the Whittier Research Center (2200 Vine). I have mailboxes in the Sociology Department (7th floor of OLDH) and SRAM (9th floor of OLDH), which are open from 8am to 5pm. Emailis the easiest way.

A note on etiquette: Emails to your instructors need to include a subject line, a greeting, an identification of the class you are referring to, a description of any attachment(s), and the name used in class. Failure to include these details may result in your message being deleted or flagged as spam. I am unlikely to respond to emails when the information requested is available in the syllabus. If these conditions are not met, and you have not received a reply within 24 business hours, please send a follow-up email.

To reach you, I will use Blackboard, and it is your responsibility to make sure your contact information is current in Blackboard and MyRed.

**Resources:**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD): 132 Canfield Administration. | (402) 472-3787 |
| Writing Assistance Center: 129 Andrews Hall | (402) 472-8803 |
| Sociology Department: 711 Oldfather Hall | (402) 472-3631 |

**Policies:**

* **Academic Honesty/Dishonesty:** Cheating and plagiarizing are very serious academic offenses. Please be academically honest in this and every course. It is your responsibility as a student to be familiar with UNL policies concerning academic dishonesty, and what qualifies as academic dishonesty. If a student is caught cheating, the following protocol will be utilized: The student will receive a “0” on the assignment or exam. The incident will be reported to Dr. Julia McQuillan, the Chair of the Sociology Department. The incident will be reported in writing to UNL’s Judicial Affairs.

Plagiarism is an unfortunately common occurrence on college campuses. Taking someone else’s work/words and using them as your own is a serious offence. The Office of Graduate Studies has put together a website to help students better understand plagiarism and how to avoid it. If you are ever unclear about what constitutes plagiarism or if you just want a refresher, please take advantage of this resource, which can be found at: <http://www.unl.edu/gradstudies/current/plagiarism.shtml>

* **Disabilities:** Students with disabilities are encouraged to me for a confidential discussion of their individual needs for academic accommodation. It is the policy of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln to provide flexible and individualized accommodation to students with documented disabilities that may affect their ability to fully participate in course activities or to meet course requirements. To receive accommodation services, you must be registered with the Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) office, 132 Canfield Administration, 472-3787 voice or TTY.
* **Technology/Media in the Classroom:** I allow technology in the classroom, with the understanding that is not disruptive to other students or myself. I give 3 warnings, and then the entire class loses technology privileges.
* **Attendance:** I do not have a mandatory attendance policy. However, in class points and activities cannot be made up, and I do not share my notes. As part of taking responsibility of your own learning, it is your responsibility to get notes from fellow classmates. I suggest making friends early.
* **Personal Emergencies:** Life happens. In the event of a personal emergency, it is your responsibility to contact me and make arrangements. You are still responsible for your school work. I can be flexible, and am willing to work with a student to complete the course, but it must be done in a timely manner.
* **Grading:** I will do my best to grade your materials in a timely manner. That being said, there are certain rules to be followed.

1. I only accept emailed work by prior arrangement. Late work will be docked 10% for each day (counting weekends and holidays) it is late.
2. The final grade is based on points, not percentages, so rounding issues should not a concern.
3. As a busy human, I have been known to make mistakes. Should I make a mistake unrelated to content (i.e. grade entered wrong, bad math, etc.), you may approach me at any time. If it a content related issue (i.e. question wording, or you disagree with my grading), you may contest it in writing. You must submit your well written argument for your case with the graded assignment, and it should draw on class materials to make your case.

F = No work done, or work done to such a low standard that it wastes the professor’s time to grade it. When students turn in F-level work (if they turn it in at all), it is obvious that they did not prepare, did not study, or simply did not care enough to do the work at the level expected in college.

D = Some work done, but not well enough to meet the standard set by the professor for basic completion of the work assigned. When students turn in D-level work, they have skimmed, skimped, or skipped over the important points and simply filled in a space or checked off a box. There is very little, if any, thought apparent in work at this level.

C = Average. This is the basic level that all professors expect of college students. When students turn in C-level work, they have answered all questions at the minimum level expected for competency in the course, but they have not pressed beyond that point. If all you’re doing is completing homework to the bare minimum standard or writing papers by their page count, this is the grade you can probably expect.

B = Above average. This is the level of a student who goes the extra mile. Instead of just answering a question, this student makes a point of investigating the question and responding at a level above the baseline. This student’s work shows a better level of comprehension of the material than is expected. This level of work may show a few errors, but the quality of the work exceeds the expectations of the course.

A = Superior. This is a level not easily achieved. This student goes beyond the extra mile and does their best to produce professional-quality work. This level of work has been combed over and checked to reduce and eliminate errors, it shows a high level of understanding and comprehension of the material, and the quality of the work is observably better than B-level work.

**Assignments:**

Unless instructed otherwise, **all written assignments for this class should be typed, in Times New Roman or Arial 12 point font with 1” margins**, and stapled (if turned in as a hardcopy). The majority of the assignments will be submitted online as a **.doc**, or **.docx** file via Bb. All essay type assignments should be double-spaced, and any references presented in ASA format, including in-text citations. All assignments are graded for writing ability, as well as content. The UNL libraries has resources on plagiarism and citation styles: <http://unl.libguides.com/content.php?pid=135579&sid=1161809>

Also, Wikipedia is not a valid academic source for this class. It is a great place to start, but you should never plagiarize from the site or use it as a primary source of information. We will be going over how to find scholarly information in class. If you need further help getting academic sources, see me.

CITI Training: Complete a self-paced, online training course by the end of week 4. You create an account at <https://www.citiprogram.org/>, register as a UNL student, and complete the Social/Behavioral Research Investigators and Key Personnel – Basic Course. When finished, save a copy (or paste a screenshot into a .doc file) of your completion certificate to submit via Bb.

Weekly Reading Reports: Submit to the Blackboard Discussion board a brief report each day prior to the start of class that summarizes the most important point you took away from each of the assigned readings for that day. You should be able to do this in three sentences or less (i.e., you should not be writing a full and comprehensive summary). I will use these reports as a check that you are completing the readings. Once you have posted your own report, you will be able to read what others have written to get a sense of what they took from the readings.

Discretionary Points: Over the course of our 28 meetings, I will offer points for small in-class efforts (usually 5 points). If any points remain at the end of the course, they will be given based on class engagement and participation.

**Doing Research**

The majority of the points (~90%) in this class will be based off of the topic and research questions you choose in the 2nd week of class. You may change your topic as the class goes on, but it will make the work harder for you, as many of the early assignments are components of the later assignments. Your research question defines the steps you will take to complete a research project. In this course, you will lay the foundation for a research project, completing what we call “the front end” of a research paper.

Research Question: We will start talking about this on the first day, and you will submit your sociological research question in the second week. A sociological research question investigates the social world – patterns, meaning, or phenomena across groups. Submit this online before class, and have a chance to edit it after the class activity.

Library Search: This is a research task. You will find a book on your topic and photocopy the title page and a page inside that is related to your topic. Then find two peer-reviewed research articles through JStor/Sociological Abstracts/Ebsohost/etc. and print the title and abstract. Turn in 4 pieces of paper stapled together. Make sure to include your name.

Theories: Sociological research is guided by theory. Find two theories that could be used to explain your research question. Turn in a description of each theory, with an explanation of how each are related to your research question. Cite your sources.

Literature Details: Find three peer-reviewed research articles that are related to your research question. For each article, describe the goal of the research, the measures they used that are relevant to your topic, the method they used to answer their research question(s), who was included in their analysis, and a brief (2-3 sentence) summary of the relevant findings.

Concepts & Measures: Now that you have examples of how other research has done it, conceptualize and operationalize the variables you would use to conduct your own research. This must include the dependent variable, and at least one independent variable.

Foundation Assignment: Use what you have learned, and the Doing Research assignments so far, to describe the foundation of your research. This includes your research question, theory, concepts, operationalization, and examples of different ways to measure your concepts. Cite your sources.

Sampling Design: Describe your target population, and the type of sampling method that would be most appropriate. Explain the strengths and weaknesses of the design you chose.

Survey Questions: Write a ten question questionnaire that could be used to collect data to answer your research question. You can use only one open-ended question. Explain why you chose these questions (extra consideration for discussions of validity and reliability). Cite sources, if appropriate. After submitting a digital copy online, bring a copy to class on the due date.

Cognitive Interviews: Evaluate your survey questions using cognitive interviews with at least 3 people. You will turn in an interview protocol, the results of your interviews, and your response to the process.

Literature Review: Summary of the relevant research related to the specific topic. It should show your understanding of the current research, relationships between previous studies, gaps and limitations in previous research, and how it relates to your own research. Look at how peer-reviewed articles structure their literature reviews for examples. Cite your sources.

Rough Drafts: In week 13, you will turn in your first rough draft of the final paper (see below for more details) to me, which I will forward to an assigned reviewer. You will get 10 points for following directions – submitting a digital copy online and bringing a hardcopy to class that has your name, page numbers, and is stapled. This draft will not be graded for content, but it is in your best interest to provide as much material as possible. This is also an opportunity for you to get feedback from me before the final paper. Failing to turn in this draft reduces the number of points possible for your reviewer. To combat this, you will be penalized 20 points on your final paper grade if you do not turn it in.

After the first peer review, you will have a couple of days to address what issues you can before submitting a 2nd draft on Bb for a second peer review. Again, you will be penalized 20 points on your final paper grade if you do not turn it in.

Peer Review: In the last month of class, you will be a reviewer for two of your peers. It is your job to provide feedback to the writers. For each review, submit a short report to me, summarizing what was good, bad, and how the writer can improve. For the first review only, search for two new academic sources that will help your author’s paper. Include the citations for these, and the explanation of how they would improve the paper in your report to me. You will then meet with your reviewer in class to discuss these issues in detail. Reviewers will not be penalized for receiving poor papers, but must still address what is lacking. Examples of good reviews will be available on Bb.

The Final Paper: The final paper will be similar to the front end of the academic research you reviewed. The primary difference is that you will describe two different methods to address your research question – both qualitative and quantitative. You will use previously completed work that you have had a chance to improve upon, as well as new information. This is a high stakes assignment, and failing to complete it will result in failing the class.

* Cover page: Using ASA format
* Introduction: Set up your research for the reader
* Literature Review
  + Theory
* Research Questions
* Methods:
  + Qualitative Design:
  + Quantitative Design:
  + Critique of Methods
* Reference page: Cite all source materials in ASA format

Note: Extra credit will be offered over the course of the class, but no more than 20 points can be accumulated.



**The Sociological Imagination** |(Excerpt from Ch. 1: The Promise) | C. Wright Mills (1959)

Neither the life of an individual nor the history of a society can be understood without understanding both… The sociological imagination enables its possessor to understand the larger historical scene in terms of its meaning for the inner life and the external career of a variety of individuals. It enables him to take into account how individuals, in the welter of their daily experience, often become falsely conscious of their social positions. Within that welter, the framework of modern society is sought, and within that framework the psychologies of a variety of men and women are formulated. By such means the personal uneasiness of individuals is focused upon explicit troubles and the indifference of publics is transformed into involvement with public issues…

No social study that does not come back to the problems of biography, of history and of their intersections within a society has completed its intellectual journey. Whatever the specific problems of the classic social analysts, however limited or however broad the features of social reality they have examined, those who have been imaginatively aware of the promise of their work have consistently asked three sorts of questions:

(1) What is the structure of this particular society as a whole? What are its essential components, and how are they related to one another? How does it differ from other varieties of social order? Within it, what is the meaning of any particular feature for its continuance and for its change?

(2) Where does this society stand in human history? What are the mechanics by which it is changing? What is its place within and its meaning for the development of humanity as a whole? How does any particular feature we are examining affect, and how is it affected by, the historical period in which it moves? And this period - what are its essential features? How does it differ from other periods? What are its characteristic ways of history-making?

(3) What varieties of men and women now prevail in this society and in this period? And what varieties are coming to prevail? In what ways are they selected and formed, liberated and repressed, made sensitive and blunted? What kinds of `human nature' are revealed in the conduct and character we observe in this society in this period? And what is the meaning for 'human nature' of each and every feature of the society we are examining?

Whether the point of interest is a great power state or a minor literary mood, a family, a prison, a creed - these are the kinds of questions the best social analysts have asked. They are the intellectual pivots of classic studies of individuals in society - and they are the questions inevitably raised by any mind possessing the sociological imagination. For that imagination is the capacity to shift from one perspective to another - from the political to the psychological; from examination of a single family to comparative assessment of the national budgets of the world; from the theological school to the military establishment; from considerations of an oil industry to studies of contemporary poetry. It is the capacity to range from the most impersonal and remote transformations to the most intimate features of the human self - and to see the relations between the two. Back of its use there is always the urge to know the social and historical meaning of the individual in the society and in the period in which she has her quality and her being.

Mills, C. Wright. 1959. “The Promise.” *The Sociological Imagination.* New York: Oxford University Press.

**Formulating A Sociological Research Question**

In most cases, you will be asked to pick a question that you would like to research. How do you pick a good one?

* **Pick a topic that really interests you.** Don't start by trying to figure out what is the "right" question to pick. Start by thinking of topics that really grab your attention and that you really want to know more about.
* **Narrow it down to a question.** For example, let's say that you are really interested in why women earn less than men. That is a great question, but it is a big one. You will not be able to answer it in a ten-page paper. You could narrow it down by saying that you want to look at why there is a difference in income between male and female doctors or business executives. Those are manageable questions.
* **Is your question sociological?** If you are writing for a sociology class, you want to make sure that your question is sociological. A good basic definition of a sociological question is as follows: Sociological questions are questions that examine the social meaning or patterns of a phenomenon. The key here is that it has to be social - involving groups rather than individuals - and it has to address patterns or meanings. Let's take the example of AIDS. Here are three very interesting questions about AIDS.
  1. What treatments are effective in prolonging the lives of AIDS patients?
  2. Does having AIDS increase the likelihood a person will be depressed?
  3. Does treatment for HIV vary by social class and ethnicity?

The first question is a medical question. The second is a medical and psychological question. Only the third is really a sociological question. Why? Only the third question looks at patterns among groups. Sociologists also look at questions of meaning. So another sociological question on AIDS could focus on the symbolic meaning of AIDS in contemporary America. The key is to make sure that you are looking at patterns and meaning for groups, not individuals.

Sociology at Queens College. n.d. “Formulating a Question.” Retrieved January 3, 2016. (<http://qcpages.qc.cuny.edu/writing/sociology/question.html>).





The instructor reserves the right to make changes to the syllabus and course schedule (including reading assignments) as deemed appropriate for educational purposes. All such changes will be announced in class.