

# ASOC 220: Introduction to Social Research

Fall 2017

Tu/Th 1:15-2:35pm, Earth Sciences 108

Lab Tu or Th 2:45-3:40pm, Humanities 041

**Professor:** Elizabeth Popp Berman

**Office:** Arts & Sciences 346

**Email:** [epberman@albany.edu](mailto:epberman@albany.edu)

**Office hours:** Tu 3-5, Th 4-5, and by appointment

**Sign up at:** <https://www.wejoinin.com/sheets/exdpy>

**Co-teacher:** Danielle George

**Office:** Arts & Sciences 340

**Email:** [dgeorge@albany.edu](mailto:dgeorge@albany.edu)

**Office hours:** M 12:30-1:30, W 11-1, and by appointment

## **Course description**

This course is an introduction to methods of conducting sociological research. We will cover the topics of research design, measurement and sampling, as well as a range of research methods including experiments, surveys, interviews and fieldwork, and secondary data analysis. In the process, you will practice these research methods yourselves, as well as learning to evaluate others' use of them.

Some of you may go on to conduct research of your own in honors theses, graduate school, or in your careers, and this course will give you a foundation for doing that. However, all of you will be exposed to social scientific research in the media and other contexts. I particularly want you to leave with the basic tools needed to evaluate the quality of such research, including the methods it uses and its research design. The world needs not just producers of research, but informed consumers as well—and soon this will be you.

## **Course objectives**

At the end of this course, you should be able to:

- Identify and describe major methodological approaches in sociology
- Use deductive and inductive reasoning to move from theory to evidence (and back)
- Use sociological theories to generate research questions or hypotheses and develop basic research designs appropriate to answer/test them
- Demonstrate an understanding of sampling, measurement and data collection
- Operationalize concepts into measurable variables
- Evaluate the precision, reliability, and validity of data sources
- Understand the difference between probability and non-probability samples
- Discuss the strengths and limitations of different research methods, either in general or as used in specific studies
- Evaluate the quality of social scientific claims made in the media

### **Books to purchase**

You will need to acquire the following textbook, at the campus bookstore or elsewhere. The list price is \$95, but as of this writing it is available new on Amazon for \$72, used on Amazon from \$60, or can be rented at the bookstore for \$45:

Dixon, Jeffrey C., Royce A. Singleton, Jr., and Bruce C. Straits. 2016. *The Process of Social Research*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

All other readings will be posted to Blackboard (<https://blackboard.albany.edu/>).

### **Course requirements**

Your grade for the class will be based on three main components:

- **Four assignments (each worth 10% of your grade)**. These are exercises in evaluating, designing, and conducting research. You can expect these to be 2-4 pages each.
- **A midterm (15%) and final exam (25%)**. These will consist of both short answers—e.g. definitions or simple application of concepts—and longer questions that test your ability to evaluate and design research. The final exam is cumulative.
- **Class participation (20% of total grade)**. This includes attendance (you may have two unexcused absences without penalty), active participation in discussion and class activities, and occasional in-class assignments.

The grading scale is as follows:

A	92-100	C	72-77
A-	90-91	C-	70-71
B+	88-89	D+	68-69
B	82-87	D	62-67
B-	80-81	D-	60-61
C+	78-79	E	59 or below

### **What's the deal with the labs?**

You each had to sign up for a lab section for the class; half the class is in the Tuesday lab, and half in the Thursday lab. We will not use the labs every week; however, we will occasionally use them. I will let you know at least a week in advance if we will be using the lab, but you should keep the slot open in your schedule until then.

### **Classroom protocol**

- Students are expected to arrive on time to class and to remain for the entire class. If you arrive late, but within the first ten minutes, you will receive half credit for the day's attendance; you must arrive within the first ten minutes to receive attendance credit.
- Use of cell phones, laptops, and tablet is not permitted without explicit permission. Cell phones are a major distraction, and while laptops can obviously be used for legitimate academic purposes, they too offer many temptations. Research increasingly demonstrates that

students learn less when they use laptops in class: <https://www.brookings.edu/research/better-learning-in-college-lectures-lay-down-the-laptop-and-pick-up-a-pen/>.

- Except with an excused absence, **late work will lose one-third letter grade per day late** (i.e., an A- will become a B+, or a C+ will become a C). “Excused absence” means either talking to me in advance about a planned absence or providing documentation of a major and unpredictable event or emergency (serious illness, death in the family, flat tire).
- Any student who engages in academic dishonesty (cheating on an exam, borrowing text from the internet, copying assignments from a friend, etc.) will automatically receive a failing grade on the assignment and will be referred to the University Judicial System, which can administer more serious punishment, including suspension or expulsion.
- If you are registered with the Disability Resource Center or an athlete in a fall sport, please tell me the first week of class so that we can discuss any accommodations you may need. Also feel free to tell me in advance any other circumstances it would be helpful for me to know about (e.g. you are a single parent, or employed full time).
- If you are struggling for personal or academic reasons, please talk to me sooner rather than later! While everyone has to complete the work to pass the class, I am not totally inflexible with students who are communicating with me and making a serious effort. But I can’t do much if you come to talk to me during finals week about the reason you missed half the assignments.

### **Assignment and exam due dates**

Tu 9/19	Assignment 1—Annotating a research article
Th 10/5	Assignment 2—Evaluating the U.S. poverty measure
Th 10/19	Midterm
Tu 11/7	Assignment 3—Observing social hierarchy in public space
Th 11/30	Assignment 4—Constructing and analyzing data tables
Wed 12/13	Final exam (10:30am-12:30pm)

### **Schedule of topics and readings**

In addition to the textbook chapters, you can expect additional reading to be assigned each week. Generally, you will have one textbook chapter and one journal article (or shorter selections, like research reports or news articles, adding up to a similar length) to read per week. Additional readings will be posted to Blackboard.

#### **Introduction (Tu 8/29 and Th 8/31)**

Read for Th 8/31: Ch. 1—Introduction: Why Care about Research Methods? (A copy of this chapter is on Blackboard)

#### **Science and Social Research (Tu 9/5 and Th 9/7)**

Read for Tu 9/5: Ch. 2—Science and Social Research: From Theory to Data and Back

**The Ethics and Politics of Research** (Tu 9/12 and Th 9/14)

Read for Tu 9/12: Ch. 3—The Ethics and Politics of Research: Doing What’s “Right”

**Research Designs** (Tu 9/19, no class Th 9/21, Tu 9/26)

Tu 9/19: Turn in Assignment 1—Annotating a research article

Read for Tu 9/19: Ch. 4—Research Designs: It Depends on the Question

**Measurement** (Th 9/28 and Tu 10/3)

Read for Th 9/28: Ch. 5—Measurement: Linking Theory to Research

Th 10/5: Turn in Assignment 2—Evaluating the poverty measure

**Sampling** (Th 10/5 and Tu 10/10)

Read for Th 10/5: Ch. 6—Sampling: Case Selection as a Basis for Inference

**Experiments** (Th 10/12 and Tu 10/17)

Read for Th 10/12: Ch. 7—Experiments: What Causes What?

**Midterm Th 10/19**

**Surveys** (Tu 10/24 and Th 10/26)

Read for Tu 10/24: Ch. 8—Surveys: Questioning and Sampling

**Field Research and In-Depth Interviews** (Tu 10/31 and Th 11/2)

Read for Tu 10/31: Ch. 9—Field Research and In-Depth Interviews: Systematic People Watching and Listening

Tu 11/7: Turn in Assignment 3—Observing social hierarchy in public space

**Existing Data Analysis** (Tu 11/7 and Th 11/9)

Read for Tu 11/7: Ch. 10—Existing Data Analysis: Using Data from Secondhand Sources

**Multiple Methods** (Tu 11/14 and Th 11/16)

Read for Tu 11/14: Ch. 11—Multiple Methods: Two or More Approaches Are Better Than One

**Quantitative Data Analysis** (Tu 11/21, no class Th 11/23, Tu 11/28)

Read for Tu 11/21: Ch. 12—Using Statistics for Description and Inference

Th 11/30: Turn in Assignment 4—Constructing and analyzing data tables

**Qualitative Data Analysis** (Th 11/30 and Tu 12/5)

Read for Th 11/30: Ch. 13—Qualitative Data Analysis: Searching for Meaning

**Reading and Writing in Social Research** (Th 12/7)

Read for Th 12/7: Ch. 14—Reading and Writing in Social Research: It’s All about Communication

**Final Exam Wed 12/13, 10:30am-12:30pm**