INTRODUCTION TO SOCIAL RESEARCH
Sociology 220
Spring 2019
Tu/Th 1:15-2:35pm, Education 022

Professor: Elizabeth Popp Berman
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Office Hours: Wednesdays 2:30-5:30pm, and by appointment
Sign up at https://www.wejoinin.com/sheets/exdpy

Co-teacher: Ji-Won Lee
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Email: jlee28@albany.edu
Office Hours: Thursdays 3-5pm, 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 using these research methods yourselves, as well as learning to evaluate the evidence behind claims that others make.

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. We 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, describe, and begin to use 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 or 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 by others
REQUIRED BOOK
You will need to acquire the following textbook, at the campus bookstore or elsewhere. Either the first or second edition is acceptable. The list price is $95, but as of this writing it is available new on Amazon for $85, used on Amazon from $40, or can be rented at the bookstore for $40:


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:

- **Five assignments (55%)**. These are exercises in evaluating, designing, and conducting research. They include:
  - Annotating an academic journal article (5%)
  - Evaluating how the U.S. government measures poverty (10%)
  - Writing and testing a short survey (10%)
  - Conducting a field observation and coding your field notes (15%)
  - Constructing cross-tabulations using data from gapminder.org

- **A midterm (15%) and final exam (15%)**. These are relatively short exams including multiple choice and short answer questions. They focus on definitions and simple application of concepts that are not fully covered in the assignments. The final exam is cumulative.

- **Class participation (15% of total grade)**. This includes attendance (you may have two unexcused absences without penalty) and active participation in discussion and class activities.

The grading scale is as follows:

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<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>92-100</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90-91</td>
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<td>B+</td>
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<td>B</td>
<td>82-87</td>
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<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>80-81</td>
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<td>C+</td>
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<td>C</td>
<td>72-77</td>
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<td>C-</td>
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<td>D+</td>
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<td>D</td>
<td>62-67</td>
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<td>D-</td>
<td>60-61</td>
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<td>E</td>
<td>59 or below</td>
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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, or when we are doing work that requires their use. 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/for-better-learning-in-college-lectures-lay-down-the-laptop-and-pick-up-a-pen/](https://www.brookings.edu/research/for-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 us 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 spring sport, please tell us the first week of class so that we can discuss any accommodations you may need. Also feel free to tell us in advance any other circumstances it would be helpful for us to know about (e.g. you are a single parent, or employed nearly full time).

• If you are struggling for personal or academic reasons, please talk to us sooner rather than later! While everyone has to complete the work to pass the class, we are not totally inflexible with students who are communicating with us and making a serious effort. But we can’t do much if you come to talk to us during finals week about the reason you missed half the assignments.

ASSIGNMENT AND EXAM DUE DATES
Assignment due dates are approximate and may be adjusted if necessary.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Assignment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Th 2/7</td>
<td>Assignment 1—Annotating a research article</td>
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<td>Th 2/21</td>
<td>Assignment 2—Evaluating the U.S. poverty measure</td>
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<tr>
<td>Th 3/14</td>
<td>Midterm</td>
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<td>Tu 4/2</td>
<td>Assignment 3—Writing and testing a survey</td>
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<td>Tu 4/16</td>
<td>Assignment 4—Observing social hierarchy in public space</td>
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<td>Tu 4/30</td>
<td>Assignment 5—Constructing and analyzing data tables</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wed 5/15</td>
<td>Final exam (1:00pm)</td>
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INTRODUCTION TO SOCIAL RESEARCH

In addition to the readings listed below, we may occasionally assign additional short readings, which will be posted to Blackboard. Readings should be completed before the class for which they are assigned.

Week 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Reading</th>
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<tr>
<td>Th 1/24</td>
<td>Introduction to the class</td>
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Week 2

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Reading</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tu 1/29</td>
<td>Ch. 1—Introduction: Why Care about Research Methods?</td>
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Ch. 2—Science and Social Research: From Theory to Data and Back
(A copy of these chapters are on Blackboard)

Th 1/31

Ch. 3—The Ethics and Politics of Research: Doing What’s “Right”

Week 3

Reading academic research and understanding research designs

Tu 2/5


In-class lab: How to read an academic journal article for its research methods

Th 2/7

Ch. 4—Research Designs: It Depends on the Question

Turn in Assignment 1—Annotating a research article (based on Tilcsik 2011)

Week 4

Research designs and concept measurement

Tu 2/12

(Read today’s articles primarily to understand their research designs)


Th 2/14

Ch. 5—Measurement: Linking Theory to Research

Start working on poverty measurement assignment

Week 5

Measurement

Tu 2/19


Continue working on poverty measurement assignment

Th 2/21

Turn in Assignment 2—Evaluating the poverty measure

Week 6

Sampling

Tu 2/26

Ch. 6—Sampling: Case Selection as a Basis for Inference

Th 2/28

Week 7

Experiments

Tu 3/5

Ch. 7—Experiments: What Causes What?

**Th 3/7**

**Week 8**  **Midterm week**

**Tu 3/12**  Midterm exam

**Th 3/14**  No class (Professor Berman out of town)

**SPRING BREAK WEEK**

**Week 9**  **Surveys**

**Tu 3/26**  Ch. 8—Surveys: Questioning and Sampling
Start working on survey assignment

**Th 3/28**  Continue working on survey assignment

**Week 10**  **Field research and interviews**

**Tu 4/2**  Ch. 9—Field Research and In-Depth Interviews: Systematic People Watching and Listening
Start preparing for field observation

**Turn in Assignment 3**—Survey construction

**Th 4/4**  Read short selections of close observation from several ethnographies
Continue preparing for field observation

**Week 11**  **Interpreting and coding qualitative data**

**Tu 4/9**  Ch. 13—Qualitative Data Analysis: Searching for Meaning
Bring field notes to class and discuss

**Th 4/11**  Work on coding field notes

**Week 12**  **Working with secondary data**

**Tu 4/16**  Ch. 10—Existing Data Analysis: Using Data from Secondhand Sources (pp. 295-309 only)
Turn in Assignment 4—Field observation and coding

Start using Gapminder

Th 4/18  Ch. 12—Using Statistics for Description and Inference (pp. 362-381 only)
Continue working with Gapminder

Week 13  Quantitative data analysis

Tu 4/23  Work on data tables assignment

Th 4/25  Work on data tables assignment

Weeks 14/15  Flex days

Catchup day(s), and/or one or more of the following topics: content analysis, comparative-historical methods, mixed methods, evaluating research claims in the media

Tu 4/30  Turn in Assignment 5—Constructing cross-tabulations

Th 5/2

Tu 5/7

Final Exam Wed 5/15 at 1:00pm