

SOCL 2211 Methods of Sociological Research

Dr. Danielle Thomas

Dthom68@lsu.edu

SOCL 2211 Methods of Sociological Research

Class: T/TH 1:30-2:50pm, 102 Tureaud

Office: Stubbs 10 (basement)

Office Hours: Thursdays 10-11:30am or by appointment

Course Introduction:

Prerequisite: SOCL 2001 and SOCL 2201 or equivalent. Open to sociology majors; open to others with permission of instructor. Scientific methods and their application in sociological research, including problem selection, research design, measurement, data sources and evaluation of data.

By now, you have declared a major and are probably familiar with the sociological imagination. The sociological imagination is the ability to connect biography (circumstances of individuals and groups) to history (large scale social patterns and the histories of societies). Sociologists look beyond individuals and their choices and behaviors to the social structures and institutional contexts that shape them. This doesn't mean individuals are invisible for sociologists; but we are concerned with the relationships and interactions between individuals and institutions.

Sociologists ask a lot of questions about the way things work in society. Methodology is the "science of finding out" and includes "procedures for scientific investigation." In this course, we will learn about the methods of social research used by sociologists to answer questions. Instead of just studying methods, we will also practice applying them. I call this class the "life skills" class for sociology majors because if you hope to graduate and get a job using your degree, this is the class where you will see what sociologists actually do and pick up marketable job skills. It is also the "applied" class, because if you've spent several semesters learning about sociology, but wondering if it's possible to "do sociology" and have a positive impact on the world, this is the class where you will get to see how sociology can be used to make a difference.

Sociology degrees are relevant for numerous fields work, including (but not limited to) law enforcement, social work, politics, administration and human resources, community outreach and nonprofit work, etc. Lots of students also use a BA in sociology as a foundation for graduate studies, going on to become lawyers, counselors, teachers, researchers, etc. It is a really flexible field of study that can be applied in creative ways, and it is relevant to almost any career you choose because understanding the way groups of people work can help you excel in almost any work environment.

You will learn how to design research projects, look at different types of data, use multiple research methodologies to answer different questions about society. This class will require reading and classroom engagement. All students will complete research proposals, finishing the course with something you could expand on in the future. You will receive feedback on your work and have opportunity to work on a project interesting to you.

Course Values:

This will probably be one of the tougher classes you take on your way to becoming a sociologist. Sometimes it will feel like trying to absorb information from a firehose. We will move quickly and constantly go between class information and class projects. With that kind of pace, two key course values are **effort** and **engagement**. What I ask of each student is that you put the work in to succeed in the class. Success isn't a letter grade. It's gaining understanding and abilities and leaving the class one step closer to your goals inside and outside of the classroom.

Effort is attending class, doing assignments, reading the textbook, etc. Effort means not giving in to frustration or boredom and continuing to work toward your goals. But engagement is also important. Engagement means being actively present in class and reading to use the information, not just memorize it. Engagement is asking questions and thinking critically.

SOCL 2211 Methods of Sociological Research

If everyone practices effort and engagement, the class might be hard, but it will be a good semester and you'll get something out of our time together.

Course Objectives

- 1) Understand the basic methods of research in sociology
- 2) Become a competent reader and practitioner of social research
- 3) Gain marketable skills in social science that are useful in multiple fields of work

Students will accomplish these objectives by:

- 1) Completing assigned readings, attending class, and participating in lectures and discussions
- 2) Completing several small projects using different research methods
- 3) Completing a final research proposal that can become part of a portfolio and/or built upon in future studies in sociology

Textbook and Reading:

The reading for this course will come from W. Lawrence Neuman's *Basics of Social Research: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches 3rd Edition*. This is a relatively affordable book you can purchase online or in the LSU bookstore. **The textbook is required.**

Each week we will cover 1-2 chapters in the textbook. I will provide outlines that will help you know what is most important in the chapter. You are responsible for keeping up with the reading and making sure you complete the reading by the end of the week it is assigned. If you come to class without reading, you will struggle to complete in-class activities or be lost in class discussions. The reading will also help you complete the 4 mini-projects and the final research proposal.

BRING YOUR BOOK TO CLASS EACH DAY. Sometimes we will need books to do class activities, and it will also be helpful for you to be able to reference your book in class while taking notes.

Attendance:

I will take attendance randomly 10 times during the semester and it will count as 10% of your final grade in the class. Coming to class is important, and I want to reward students who attend consistently. There are no makeups for missing these days, although I will accept a legitimate excuse with documentation (e.g. a doctor's note). If your absence is excused, I will drop that particular day's grade for you so that it will not count against you.

Mini Projects

Throughout the semester, you will complete 4 Mini Projects that require you to put into practice some research skills you are learning. More extended descriptions and directions for each project will be posted to Moodle. Here is a short summary:

Mini Project 1: come up with a research question or a hypothesis and then write a short review of literature using at least 5 peer-reviewed scholarly articles connected to your question. It should be 3-5 pages double spaced. Choose your topic / question wisely, because I recommend you continue to use it for subsequent mini projects and your final research proposal. It will be a time saver if all of your projects connect to the same topic!

Mini Project 2: write a 15-question survey (including 5 demographic questions and 10 questions meant to measure what you are studying). Include a 2-3 page (double spaced) report indicating the sampling process you would use if you were to use this survey for a research project, and what type of survey method (e.g. telephone, mail-out, email, in-person, etc.).

SOCL 2211 Methods of Sociological Research

Mini Project 3: Choose either option A or option B.

- A) Content Analysis: Find some textual data related to your topic – this can include anything from newspaper or magazine articles, television shows, movies, music lyrics, etc. – and then take a sample of the data that includes 3 articles/episodes/songs/etc. and conduct a content analysis of the data. Your analysis can be quantitative, qualitative, or both. Write a short report – 3-5 pages double spaced – that describes the data you picked, how you chose to conduct the content analysis (e.g. did you count or code? Or both?) and 3 key findings (what was interesting?)
- B) Survey Analysis: Give your survey from mini project 2 to 30 people in the population group you are interested in (it's ok if it is not a random sample since this is just a class exercise). Plug the data into SPSS and then run a brief analysis that includes testing at least 3 hypotheses. Write a short report – 3-5 pages double spaced – that summarizes who you surveyed, your hypotheses, and the results of your hypotheses tests.
 - a. If you think there is existing survey data related to your topic that you can access – i.e. questions on the General Social Survey – then you may get approval from me to use that data instead of your own survey data to conduct your analysis and then write your report. I recommend this option as a time saver if you can locate some data!

Mini Project 4: Choose either option A or option B.

- A) Field Research: Choose a public social setting related to your topic. Spend 5 hours observing that setting in one or multiple sittings (e.g. five times for one hour or one time for five hours would be ok). Take detailed field notes during your observations. Clean up your notes afterwards – make sure they are typed, add any details you remember later, etc. – and then submit them. Please note, 5 hours' worth of field notes done correctly will end up being at least 5 pages single spaced or 10 pages double spaced, possibly more.
- B) Interview Research: Find someone who is connected in an important way to your topic. This should be someone with life and/or professional experience that will help you understand your topic and answer some questions concerning it. Try to avoid close friends and family members unless there is a really good reason to choose them. Request an interview, come up with 5 interview questions, and then record your interview. Make sure your questions are not simply yes/no questions but can actually generate conversation and stories. This is called a semi-structured interview. Transcribe the interview based on the recording (listen to it and type it all out!). Try to keep the interview between 20-30 minutes. Transcription is tedious! Turn in your interview transcription with a brief (one paragraph) explanation of why you interviewed this person. Make sure to have the person sign the informed consent form on Moodle before the interview and submit a copy of this along with the assignment.

Exam

The only exam in this course will be a final exam, which will be an exam that challenges you to apply what you have learned rather than regurgitate information. We will have two days of class to review and practice for this exam. If you have completed the readings and mini projects, and attended the review days, you should be prepared for the final! **The final exam is Monday, December 3, from 3-5pm in Tureaud 102.**

Final Research Proposal

As a final project in the class, you will choose either mini project 2, 3, or 4 to expand into a larger research proposal. The proposal will include several sections: introduction, research question / hypothesis, literature review, methodology, and significance / conclusion. If you have done a good job on the mini projects, quite a bit of the proposal will already be complete. We will also have three weeks of class dedicated to working on the proposals. During in-class work days, we will go over the different sections of the proposal and you will have a chance to ask questions and revise your work. The final product should be very polished since we are spending so much time in class on them! **The research proposal is due before midnight on Tuesday, December 4.**

SOCL 2211 Methods of Sociological Research

Plagiarism & Other Forms of Cheating

I have a zero-tolerance policy for plagiarism and cheating. If I catch you, it is an automatic zero on the assignment or exam you have plagiarized or cheated on. I am also required to report instances of cheating to LSU, and you will have a hearing and possibly be put on academic probation or even expelled from the university.

If you have questions about plagiarism, please ask before turning in your work so we can review it together. For more information concerning plagiarism, review the following document:

<https://www.lsu.edu/lsonline/docs/Academic-Integrity-Orientation-Moodle-Module.pdf>

Additionally, when you submit assignments on Moodle, it will give you a **similarity score**—scores above 10% are suspicious, and I will consider anything above a 15% as plagiarized. Please make adjustments and resubmit the assignment if you have a high similarity score.

Extra Credit:

Each student will have the opportunity to earn up to 2 points extra credit in their final grade. To earn the extra credit, you have two options to choose from. You can only earn up to 2 points, so there is no need to do both.

PLEASE NOTE: since this is a very generous extra credit offer – 2 points in your FINAL grade (e.g. a 88 in the class would become a 90) – I will not negotiate grades or come up with additional extra credit opportunities at the end of the semester. Final grades are final grades.

Option 1:

I do a lot of community outreach work in the Gardere neighborhood. There are opportunities for college students to tutor Mondays-Thursdays from about 3-6pm. There are also opportunities to assist with sports programs (football, soccer, dance/cheer).

For this option, you would be required *to serve in Gardere with the tutoring and/or sports programs for a minimum of 10 hours during this semester. You would then write a 2-page essay that:* 1) briefly discusses some of your observations made while serving and 2) identifies a research question and describes a research project that you believe would be beneficial to the community and/or the organizations who are serving the community. Although it is a short essay, your project idea should be well thought out and show that you understand how to apply research skills in the real world.

You will need to email me to express interest in serving and I will help connect you with the right opportunity. There will be a service log to track your hours and have someone from the community organizations (or me, if I am present when you are) sign off on.

Option 2:

Sociologists often write books based on large research projects. For this option, you will choose a book from a list I provide (on Moodle). Each book is based on a large social research project conducted by a sociologist or anthropologist. *You will read one of the books and write a 3-5 page essay that* 1) summarizes the research, focusing especially on the major question(s) the researcher asks and the methods used to answer them and 2) discusses two things you found most interesting about the author's conclusions.

The essay should clearly demonstrate you read the entire book. If there is not enough evidence you have read the book in your essay—if I suspect cliff notes or online summaries were used—you will not receive full credit.

****for options 1 and 2, the essays must be submitted on Moodle by before midnight on Tuesday, November 20 (before Thanksgiving break)****

SOCL 2211 Methods of Sociological Research

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

I follow LSU's guidelines to provide reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. For more information, visit the Office of Disability Services website: <https://www.lsu.edu/disability/students/types-accommodations.php>

If you qualify for accommodations such as a note taker or extra time for exams, please make sure to submit your accommodations letter during the first week of the semester so there is no delay in services.

If circumstances in your life are making it difficult for you to succeed in this course, please reach out to me sooner than later so we can discuss possible options and assistance. I am committed to facilitating a course where all students have an opportunity to learn and contribute.

Grades:

| | |
|----------------|-----|
| Attendance | 10% |
| Mini Project 1 | 15% |
| Mini Project 2 | 15% |
| Mini Project 3 | 15% |
| Mini Project 4 | 15% |
| Final Exam | 10% |
| Final Proposal | 20% |

Grade Scale:

| |
|-----------------------|
| A+: 97.5-100% (4.3) |
| A: 92.5-97.49% (4) |
| A-: 89.5-92.49% (3.7) |
| B+: 87.5-89.49% (3.3) |
| B: 82.5-87.49% (3) |
| B-: 79.5-82.49% (2.7) |
| C+: 77.5-77.49% (2.3) |
| C: 72.5-77.49% (2) |
| C-: 69.5-72.49% (1.7) |
| D+: 67.5-69.49% (1.3) |
| D: 62.5-67.49% (1) |
| D-: 59.5-62.49% (0.7) |
| F: 59% or below (0) |

SOCL 2211 Methods of Sociological Research

COURSE CALENDAR

| DATE | Reading | Assignment |
|-------------------|--|--|
| T 8/21 | NA | |
| Th 8/23 | Ch. 1 | |
| T 8/28 | Ch. 2 | |
| Th 8/30 | | |
| T 9/4 | Ch. 3 | |
| Th 9/6 | | |
| T 9/11 | Ch. 4 | |
| Th 9/13 | | |
| MONDAY 9/17 | | Mini Project 1 due on Moodle (Research Question and Review of 5 articles) by 11:59pm |
| T 9/18 | Ch. 5-6 | |
| Th 9/20 | | |
| T 9/25 | Ch. 7-8 | |
| Th 9/27 | | |
| MONDAY 10/1 | | Mini Project 2 due on Moodle (Survey) by 11:59pm |
| T 10/2 | Ch. 9-10 | |
| Th 10/4 | Fall Break, no class | |
| T 10/9 | | |
| Th 10/11 | | |
| MONDAY 10/15 | | Mini Project 3 due on Moodle (Content Analysis or Survey Analysis) by 11:59pm |
| T 10/16 | Ch. 11-12 | |
| Th 10/18 | | |
| T 10/23 | Ch. 13-14 | |
| Th 10/25 | | |
| MONDAY 10/29 | | Mini Project 4 due on Moodle (set of field notes or interview transcript) by 11:59pm |
| T 10/30 | Reviewing Research Proposal Assignment | **choose a mini project to extend into a research proposal |
| Th 11/1 | Proposal work day (no class) | |
| T 11/6 | In class proposal workshop | Research Question(s) |
| Th 11/8 | In class proposal workshop | Review of Literature |
| T 11/13 | In class proposal workshop | Methodology |
| Th 11/15 | In class proposal workshop | Significance |
| T 11/20 | Proposal work day (no class) | Extra Credit Essays due on Moodle by 11:59pm |
| Th 11/22 | Thanksgiving (no class) | |
| T 11/27 | Final Exam Review Session 1 | |
| Th 11/29 | Final Exam Review Session 2 | |
| M 12/3 from 3-5pm | Final Exam | |
| Tuesday 12/4 | | FINAL PROPOSAL DUE ON MOODLE (by 11:59pm / before midnight) |