



Texas A&M University-Commerce
Department of Sociology and Criminal Justice
COURSE SYLLABUS

SOC 331: Social Research Methods

Instructor: R. N. Singh, Ph. D.

Professor of Sociology & Criminal Justice

Texas A&M University-Commerce

Tel. 903-886-5332

Office Hours: 8 to 5, Monday-Friday; you can meet with me by appointment only

e-mail: Raghu.Singh@tamuc.edu

COURSE INFORMATION

Materials – Textbooks, Readings, Supplementary Readings:

Earl Babbie, *The Practice of Social Research*, 13th edition (12th edition will be acceptable);
Wadsworth, ISBN: ISBN: 13-978-1-133-04979-1.

YOU ARE REQUIRED TO BUY THE BOOK; YOU WILL NOT BE ABLE TO COMPLETE THE COURSE WITHOUT ACCESS TO THE BOOK. I AM TRYING TO PLACE IN

UNIVERSITY LIBRARY IN COMMERFCE ONE COPY OF THE BOOK ON CLOSED RESERVE ONCE I LOCATE ITS COPY. DO NOT DELAY AND GET A COPY FROM ONLINE SOURSES OR UNIV. BOOK STORE (Telephone: 903-886-5215).

Course Description/Explanation:

This course will provide you an overview of research methodology in the social sciences, including sociology & criminal justice. The course will include survey and experimental designs, and sampling and scaling techniques. Both quantitative and qualitative techniques of analysis will be presented. Credit, 3 semester hours.

Student Learning Outcomes/Core Competencies:

1. Learn basic concepts about important issues in social research methodology
2. Understand why research is important in sociology and criminal justice
3. Enhance communication skills and reading/research acumen

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Instructional Methods/Activities/Assessments

This course will provide a variety of activities and assessments to assist you in achieving the outcomes/objectives for the course. You will work toward achieving these outcomes through discussions/comments, assignments, and exams. Below is an explanation of each course requirement including due date, assignment instructions, and other requirements.

Discussion Posts: (10 discussion posts @ 10 points each = 100 total course points)

Student Learning Outcomes #1-#3: Learn basic concepts about important issues in social research methodology; understand why research is important in sociology and criminal justice; enhance communication skills and reading/research acumen.

Each of the 10 **Discussions** is directly related to the assigned readings during a week. Upon completion of the assigned readings, you are expected to engage in an **ongoing** discussion/debate with your classmates. Your contributions to the discussion forums will be graded for **quality** and a **detailed analysis** linking the material to a critical appraisal of research methods. In all cases, students must cite in-text and provide a full bibliography/works cited at the end of their post for all citations mentioned in the post (See information later in the syllabus for more information on citing utilizing APA citation format.)

These discussion posts should be **the equivalent of ½ page or more in length**. The specific discussion assignment is located in each unit Week and may be accessed by clicking on the Discussion link under each week starting February 3, 2014. Discussion Posts are due by 11:59PM EST on each **Friday of the week**. IT IS IMPORTANT THAT YOU POST FIRST YOUR OWN ASSESSMENT AND COMMENTS ON THE TOPIC BEFORE POSTING RESPONSES OR COMMENTS ON OTHERS (UPTO TWO OR THREE COMMENTARIES ON OTHERS' POSTINGS.) YOU WILL NOT BE ALLOWED BY eCOLLEGE TO POST ANY COMMENTS AFTER FRIDAY MIDNIGHT EACH WEEK. SO BE PLANNED TO WORK ON THIS EVERY WEEK STARTING FEBRUARY 3rd.

Assessment Method: Discussion posts will be graded based on the following criteria:

1. Read the discussion question carefully.
2. Read assigned readings from the textbook and get ideas from that for the question you need to address. You may google on the topic of the question, if you want to, and develop a rough outline of your comments on the question.
3. Type in your response to the question. Be clear in your statements and avoid being too brief. You are writing a short essay on your response. Give examples where possible for illustrating your arguments.
4. Quote on the subject of the discussion question from your textbook and/or online/other sources as needed. However, use your own words. Do not write long quotes. I want to know HOW YOU feel/think about the issue involved in the question
5. Organize your answer in short paragraphs (write an introduction, your arguments, and a concluding statement). Avoid punctuation errors.
6. List references used for short essay at the end using APA style manual.
7. Your short essay on the question must be submitted on restricted dates from past midnight on Monday of the week and before midnight on Friday; no exceptions. DO NOT MISS ANY WEEK'S DISCUSSION AS I WANT YOU TO MAKE THE BEST GRADES. MISSING ANY WEEK'S DISCUSSION WILL MEAN A ZERO ON DISCUSSION.

Comment Posts: (2 to 3 comments on other students' postings each week @ 5 points each week = 50 total course points; or 5 points per week's discussion.)

Student Learning Outcomes #1-#3: Learn basic concepts about important issues in social research methodology; Understand why research is important in sociology and criminal justice; Enhance communication skills and reading/research acumen.

Comment posts are responses you make to the original discussion posts that you and your classmates post each week. You are **required** to make a minimum of **2 or 3** comments each week.

Comment posts should be meaningful. Merely agreeing or disagreeing with a classmate will not be looked upon favorably and will result in a loss of points. A meaningful post is one that moves the discussion forward in some substantive way through providing one's perspective, additional information through research, or reframing the discussion in some new way. You are expected to engage in an **ongoing** discussion/debate with your classmates. Your comments will be graded for **quality**, and **relevance**. Your comments will also be graded based on your ability to engage in critical thinking.

NO LATE COMMENTS ARE ACCEPTED. All comment posts are due by 11:59PM EST on Each Friday.

Assessment Method: Comments will be graded using the criteria for Discussion stated above. Be courteous; no unworthy language please even if you disagree with others.

***Please note that each discussion and its accompanying comments will be graded together. You will note that each gradebook entry for each discussion is worth 15 points (10 points for the discussion and 5 points for 2 or 3 commentaries or your comments on other students' postings).**

Major Assignment Paper(1 paper @ 150 course points)

Student Learning Outcomes #1-#3: Learn basic concepts about important issues in social research methodology; Understand why research is important in sociology and criminal justice; Enhance communication skills and reading/research acumen

Assignment Instructions: This assignments asks you to apply what you are learning with respect to conceptualization, operationalization, and measurement. To that end, this paper asks you to provide specific information on a study that you might conduct. Organize your paper as follows:

1. Pick a topic upon which you might wish to conduct research. Think about this topic carefully as you must be able to conceptualize, operationalize, and measure variables. Refer to academic research articles for some guidance should you require it. You will need to determine what the independent and dependent variable(s) are for your fictitious study.
2. Identify and conceptualize variables
3. Identify what variables are independent and/or dependent variables
4. Operationalize each variable.

5. Develop measurement operations for each variable. Be sure indicate what level of measurement you will use and provide an example of the way in which you will measure each variable.

For example:

I am conducting a study on a reading program for female offenders. I am interested in determining whether reading impacts recidivism. The reading level of offenders is the independent variable and recidivism is the dependent variable. The variables I will use in my study are: Age, Race, Reading Fluency, Reading Level, Reading Comprehension, Rearrest, Reconviction. I will conceptualize my variables in the following way (I am only providing a conceptualization of one variable for the purposes of this example). Rearrest is defined as whether or not a person is rearrested within three years of leaving prison. I will operationalize this variable by accessing national databases on arrests to determine whether people in my study were rearrested after the date that they left prison. The level of measurement for the rearrest variable is nominal. I will measure this variable as follows: Was an offender rearrested after they left prison Yes or No?

This assignment should use **MAXIMUM** 12-point font and contain your name. There is no page limit to this assignment but you should make sure that the work you turn in contains all of the information you were asked to provide for each variable. This assignment is due by 11:59PM EST on the deadline stated in your calendar.

Assessment Method: Students will be assessed using the Major Assignment Paper Grading Rubric. Be sure to review this rubric carefully to ensure that your paper includes all components of the paper upon which you will be graded. The rubric will be posted in your course in the near future. FOLLOW THE GUIDE GIVEN BELOW:

A Guide to Writing Your Research Proposal in SOC 331

Most students and beginning researchers do not fully understand what a research proposal means, nor do they understand its importance. To put it bluntly, one's research is only as good as one's proposal. A high quality proposal not only promises success for the project, but also impresses about your potential as a researcher. A research proposal is intended to convince others that you have a worthwhile research project and that you have the competence and the work-plan to complete it. Generally, a research proposal should contain all the key elements involved in the research process and include sufficient information for the readers to evaluate the proposed study.

Regardless of your research topic and the methodology you choose, all research proposals must address the following questions: What you plan to accomplish, why you want to do it and how you are going to do it. The proposal should have sufficient information to convince your readers that you have an important research idea, that you have a good grasp of the relevant literature and the major issues, and that your methodology is sound.

The quality of your research proposal depends not only on the quality of your proposed project, but also on the quality of your proposal writing. A good research project may include not only good idea, but also your writing coherent, clear and compelling.

Following aspects need to be discussed on your proposal (total 5-6 pages):

- **Abstract**
- **Objectives of Your Study: Statement of Research Topic (or Research Problem)**
- **Brief Literature Review**
- **Research Methods:**
 1. **Sample**
 2. **Proposed Data Collection Technique**
 3. **Proposed Data Analysis Overview**
- **Expected Results/Findings and Conclusion**

Abstract (1 page):

It is a brief summary of approximately in 250 words. It should include the research question, the rationale for the study, the hypothesis (if any), and the method. Descriptions of the method may include the design, procedures, the sample and any instruments that will be used.

Introduction (1 page):

The main purpose of the introduction is to provide the necessary background or context for your research problem. How to frame the research problem is perhaps the biggest problem in proposal writing. If the research problem is framed in the context of a general, rambling literature review, then the research question may appear trivial and uninteresting. However, if the same question is placed in the context of a very focused and current research area, its significance will become evident.

There are no hard and fast rules on how to frame your research question just as there is no prescription on how to write an interesting and informative opening paragraph. A lot depends on your creativity, your ability to think clearly and the depth of your understanding of problem areas.

The introduction typically begins with a general statement of the problem area, with a focus on a specific research problem, to be followed by the rationale or justification for the proposed study. The introduction generally covers the following elements:

- State the research problem, which is often referred to as the purpose of the study.
- Provide the context and set the stage for your research question in such a way as to show its necessity and importance.
- Present the rationale of your proposed study and clearly indicate why it is worth doing.
- Specify the hypothesis you want to study. Identify the key independent and dependent variables of your experiment.

Literature Review (1 page):

The literature review serves several important functions:

- Ensures that you are not "reinventing the wheel".
- Gives credits to those who have laid the groundwork for your research.
- Demonstrates your knowledge of the research problem.
- Provides new theoretical insights or develops a new model as the conceptual framework for your research.
- Convinces your reader that your proposed research will make a significant and substantial contribution to the literature (i.e., resolving an important theoretical issue or filling a major gap in the literature).

There are different ways to organize your literature review. It is helpful to keep in mind that you are telling a story to an audience. Try to tell it in a stimulating and engaging manner. Do not bore them, because it may lead to under-evaluation of your worthy proposal.

Research Methods (1-2 pages):

The Method section is very important because it tells your "Research Committee" how you plan to tackle your research problem. It will provide your work plan and describe the activities necessary for the completion of your project. The guiding principle for writing the Method section is that it should contain sufficient information for the reader to determine whether methodology is sound. Some even argue that a good proposal should contain sufficient details for another qualified researcher to implement the study.

You need to demonstrate your knowledge of alternative methods and make the case that your approach is the most appropriate and most valid way to address your research question. Typically, the method section consists of the following sections:

- Design -Is it a questionnaire study or a laboratory experiment? What kind of design do you choose?
- Subjects or participants - Who will take part in your study? What kind of sampling procedure do you use?
- Instruments - What kind of measuring instruments or questionnaires do you use? Why do you choose them? Are they valid and reliable?
- Procedure - How do you plan to carry out your study? What activities are involved? How long does it take?

Expected Results and Discussion (1/2 page):

Obviously you do not have results at the proposal stage. However, you need to have some idea about what kind of data you will be collecting, and what statistical procedures will be used in order to answer your research question or test your hypothesis.

It is important to convince your reader of the potential impact of your proposed research. You need to communicate a sense of enthusiasm and confidence without exaggerating the merits of your proposal. That is why you also need to mention the limitations and weaknesses of the proposed research, which may be justified by time and financial constraints as well as by the early developmental stage of your research area.

Last, don't forget to organize the sources of citations you used in the proposal as a title of References.

A proposal is to be expected no less than 4 pages and no longer than 6 pages in length, typed and double-spaced. Be sure to use a reasonable font (10-12 size), and check your paper for spelling and grammatical mistakes. The best project should be organized and thorough, yet concise. You may select your title of your project.

Common Mistakes in Proposal Writing:

- Failure to provide the proper context to frame the research question.
- Failure to delimit the boundary conditions for your research.
- Failure to accurately present the theoretical and empirical contributions by other researchers.
- Failure to stay focused on the research question.
- Failure to develop a coherent and persuasive argument for the proposed research.
- Too much detail on minor issues, but not enough detail on major issues.
- Too much rambling -- going "all over the map" without a clear sense of direction.
- Too many citation lapses and incorrect references.
- Too long or too short.
- Sloppy writing.

Pre-writing and Presentation

You are required to submit before the completion of our Unit 3, in the Virtual Office online, a title of your proposed research and its overview in a short paragraph (what you plan to do). The instructor will provide (so everyone will know who is doing what) comments/suggestion/approval/assistance in virtual office. Further details on assignment will be provided later, as needed.

YOU WILL SUBMIT YOUR PROPOSAL IN THE DROPBOX BY THE DEADLINE GIVEN IN YOUR CALENDAR.

GRADING

Assignments for this course will be scored using a points system. Below is an explanation of how each assignment type will be scored.

Assignment Type	# of Assignments	Point Value	Total Points
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Discussions	10	10	100
Comments	2 minimum comments in 10 weekly discussions	5	50
Major Assignment	1	150	150
Exams	Take 2 out of 3 exams	100	200
Reading Assignments	In 10 units		
		TOTAL	500

Total points possible for the term = 500.

450 – 500 = A
400 – 449 = B
350 – 399 = C
300 – 349 = D

Grades will be available in the gradebook so that students can track their progress in the course on an ongoing basis.

Interaction with Students

Students who Email me outside of regular office hours can expect a reply within 24 hours M-F. Students who Email me during holidays or over the weekend should expect a reply by the end of the next regularly scheduled business day.

COURSE AND UNIVERSITY PROCEDURES/POLICIES

Course Specific Procedures

Academic Honesty

Students who violate University rules on scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including (but not limited to) receiving a failing grade on the assignment, the possibility of failure in the course and dismissal from the University. Since dishonesty harms the individual, all students, and the integrity of the University, policies on scholastic dishonesty will be strictly enforced. In **ALL** instances, incidents of academic dishonesty will be reported to the Department Head. Please be aware that academic dishonesty includes (but is not limited to) cheating, plagiarism, and collusion.

Cheating is defined as:

- Copying another's test or assignment
- Communication with another during an exam or assignment (i.e. written, oral or otherwise)
- Giving or seeking aid from another when not permitted by the instructor
- Possessing or using unauthorized materials during the test
- Buying, using, stealing, transporting, or soliciting a test, draft of a test, or answer key

Plagiarism is defined as:

- Using someone else's work in your assignment without appropriate acknowledgement
- Making slight variations in the language and then failing to give credit to the source

Collusion is defined as:

- Collaborating with another, without authorization, when preparing an assignment

If you have any questions regarding academic dishonesty, ask. Otherwise, I will assume that you have full knowledge of the academic dishonesty policy and agree to the conditions as set forth in this syllabus.

Policy for Reporting Problems with eCollege

Should students encounter ecollege-based problems, the following procedure **MUST** be followed.

- Students must report the problem to the help desk.
- Students **MUST** file their problem with the helpdesk and obtain a helpdesk ticket number
- Once a helpdesk ticket number is in your possession, students should Email me to advise me of the problem and to provide me with the helpdesk ticket number
- At that time, I will call the helpdesk to confirm your problem and follow up with you

PLEASE NOTE: Personal computer/access problems are not a legitimate excuse for filing a ticket with the helpdesk. I strongly encourage you to check for compatibility of your browser BEFORE the course begins and to take the Blackboard tutorial offered for students who may require some extra assistance in navigating the platform. ONLY Blackboard-based problems are legitimate.

Attendance Policy

While this is an online course, students are expected to ‘attend classes’ and actively participate by logging into the course regularly. Student participation/activity will be monitored by the professor. The more time you spend in the classroom, the better off you will do in the course.

Late Work

In principle, I do not accept late work and do not believe in allowing students to turn in work after the due date. My position is that everyone knows the rules of engagement at the beginning of the term and that it is the student’s responsibility to ensure that they plan accordingly to submit their assignments in a timely manner. However, I also do understand that sometimes there are circumstances outside one’s control that may impact timely submission of assignments. To that end, I have developed a policy on late work. Please note that this policy applies **ONLY** to your reflection paper assignments and not to discussion or comment submissions.

Late assignment will be accepted after the due date and time up to 1 day (24 hours) late. Twenty (10) points will be deducted from all late assignments. Assignments turned in more than one day late will not be accepted/graded. No late comments are accepted in discussions.

Drop Course Policy

Students should take responsibility for dropping themselves from the course according to University policy should this become necessary.

University Specific Procedures:

ADA Statement

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact:

Student Conduct

All students enrolled at the University shall follow the tenets of common decency and acceptable behavior conducive to a positive learning environment. (See *Code of Student Conduct from Student Guide Handbook*). Students should also consult the Rules of Netiquette for more information regarding how to interact with students in an online forum:

<http://www.albion.com/netiquette/corerules.html>