

Introduction to Social Research*
SOCY-320-001
Batelle-Tomkins, Room T30
Spring 2013 M/Th 1.10pm – 3.50pm
<http://tinyurl.com/AUSOCY320>

Professor: jimi adams, PhD **Office:** Batelle-Tomkins, T22 **Email:** jadams@american.edu
Office Hours: M 1:30-4:30pm, or by appointment (to schedule – <http://jimiadams.youcanbook.me>)

Course Description

“Method” has to do, first of all, with how to ask and answer questions with some assurance that the answers are more or less durable. “Theory” has to do, above all, with paying close attention to the words one is using, especially their degree of generality and their logical relations. The primary purpose of both is clarity of conception and economy of procedure, and most importantly just now, the release, rather than the restriction of the sociological imagination.”

C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination* (2000 [1959]: 120)

Our daily lives are inundated with events that can be informed by social science. There are often numerous voices making social scientific claims about expected occurrences in those events, how individuals may interpret those occurrences, and how, in the future, we might be able to bring about changes in those observed associations. While those myriad claims may occasionally agree, oftentimes they offer contradictory explanations of the very same event. Without the proper tools to evaluate and interpret social science, we have limited recourse to adjudicate between the proposed possibilities. However, all answers are not created equally. Some explanations of events are better than others. Attempted interventions to bring about changes in observed outcomes based on poor interpretations of previous events can result in no change at all, or even lead to outcomes completely opposite what is intended. Therefore, our aim in this course is to begin to develop the necessary toolkit for conducting and evaluating social scientific research.

The basic outline of the course will involve a brief re-introduction of the social scientific approach (particularly as represented within sociology), followed by covering some of the primary approaches social scientists employ to conduct their research, then concluding with a brief introduction to some of the available strategies for analyzing the data that results from sociological research endeavors. Throughout this course, in addition to reading about and discussing social scientific research methods, you will begin the process of constructing several components of your own potential research projects, drawing on the methods we discuss. We will engage each part of this process with an eye to understanding our sociological research methods are intricately linked to the overarching aims of developing sociological theories and our empirical knowledge of the social world.

By the end of the course you should be able to:

- 1- Describe several of the primary research strategies used by social scientists;
- 2- Identify some of the strengths/weaknesses that come with each of those strategies;
- 3- Be a better equipped to evaluate the social scientific claims you encounter on a daily basis;
- 4- Write more clearly than when you started this course; and
- 5- Have a complete research proposal for potential use as your senior thesis drawing on one (or more) of the methods we cover.

* This syllabus benefited greatly from feedback from students in previous versions of the course and syllabi/materials for similar courses taught by Michelle Newton-Francis, Rachel Sullivan Robinson, Chenyang Xiao (American University), Ryan Light (University of Oregon), and Jenny Trinitapoli (Penn State University). I gratefully acknowledge their influence in developing this course.

Required Text:

- Luker, Kristin. 2008. *Salsa Dancing into the Social Sciences: Research in an Age of Info-Glut*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Additional readings, available via Blackboard (others will be added at a later date):

- Angotti, Nicole & Amy Kaler. 2013. "The More You Learn the Less You Know? Interpretive Ambiguity across Three Modes of Qualitative Data." *Demographic Research* 28(33): 951-980.
- Brückner, Hannah & Peter S. Bearman. 2005. "After the Promise: the STD Consequences of Adolescent Virginity Pledges." *Journal of Adolescent Health* 36:271-78.
- Dubrow, Joshua K. & jimi adams. 2012. "Hoop Inequalities: Race, Class and Family Structure Background and the Odds of Playing in the National Basketball Association." *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 47(1): 43-59.
- Freedman, David A. 2004. "Sampling." pp. 986-990 in M. Lewis-Beck, A. Bryman, and T. F. Liao (eds). *Encyclopedia of Social Science Research Methods*. Vol 3. Sage Publications.
- Khan, Shamus & Dana R. Fisher. 2014. *The Practice of Research: How Social Scientists Answer their Questions*. New York: Oxford University Press. (excerpts)
- Scheper-Hughes, Nancy. 2004. "Parts Unknown: Undercover Ethnography of the Organs-Trafficking Underworld." *Ethnography* 5(1): 29-73.
- Trinitapoli, Jenny. 2007. "I Know this isn't PC, but...: Religious Exclusivism among US Adolescents." *Sociological Quarterly* 48: 451-483.

Course Requirements

I - Research Proposal (up to 150 points):

The final product from this course will be a complete draft of a research proposal of appropriate scope to prepare you to conduct research for your major seminar in sociology course (SOC 492). The final version of this proposal will have several elements (described in more detail on a separate handout to be distributed later), which will be developed throughout the semester.

II - Six Homework Assignments (up to 180 points total, 30 points each):

While we could simply discuss the research strategies employed by sociologists, hands-on experience with some of them will enhance your knowledge of these approaches. As such, the proposal, and these homework assignments will assist in giving you partial tastes of that experience. I will provide a separate assignment description for Assignments 2-6 (via Blackboard) well in advance of their respective due dates (listed on the course calendar). Assignments 2-3 & 5-6 will provide templates that you will revise into components of your final research proposal. All assignments are due by **NOON** on the due dates listed on the course calendar. Please note, you are welcome to complete any assignment early (once the assignment is available on Blackboard).

- **Assignment # 1 – Human Subjects Training (Due by – September 12th)**
 - You will complete one of AU's Institutional Review Board Training Courses (<http://www.american.edu/irb/IRB-Training.cfm>). If your likely research topic will address health in any way, you should complete the training for the National Institutes of Health. If your planned research topic will not address health, use the version from the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative. Upon completion of either course, you will submit the Certificate of Completion that NIH/CITI provides, which requires that you pass a series of quizzes covering the training's various modules. **This training is required for the course; students who do not complete the training by the due date will NOT receive a passing grade for the course.**
- **Assignment # 2 – Literature Search (Due by – September 26th)**
 - For this assignment, you will do a systematic library/database search on a research question of your choosing. You will then provide a list of potentially useful bibliographic

sources and a summary of one such source. Drawing on these sources you will then provide a testable hypothesis for your planned research project.

- **Assignment # 3 – Literature Review (Due by – October 10th)**
 - For this assignment you will conduct a mini-literature review pertaining to your proposed research topic. This will require you to read (at least 5) primary research articles pertaining to your topic, summarize the “current state of knowledge” about that subject, and draw on the existing literature to refine your research question(s) and research hypothesis/hypotheses.
- **Assignment # 4 – Article Summary/Critique (Due by - varies)**
 - You will complete a summary and critique of one primary research article that uses one of the primary research techniques we discuss this semester. For this article summary/critique you will describe the strengths/weaknesses of the author’s use of the particular research technique and compare/contrast those with possible uses of another primary research strategy. To complete this assignment, you will select one of the assigned additional readings (only from those marked with # on the course schedule). The Assignment is due **before class**, on the day the article will be covered.
- **Assignment # 5 – Inductive Approach Brief (Due by – November 7th)**
 - This assignment will entail describing an approach that allows you to answer an inductively-oriented research question.
- **Assignment # 6 – Deductive Approach Brief (Due by – November 27th)**
 - This assignment will entail describing an approach that allows you to answer a deductively-oriented research question.

III – Two Exams (up to 120 points total, 60 points each)

The course will include two exams – each worth 60 points – consisting of a variety of question formats. One of these will be completed in-class; the other is a take-home exam. Each will cover material from lectures *and* readings.

IV - Quizzes / In-class Writings (up to 50 points total)

Most class meetings will include an in-class quiz and/or responsive writing. These will serve varied purposes, which may include (among others): reading comprehension, evaluating conceptual understanding or reactions to course content. Your lowest 2 quiz/writing scores will be dropped from your final grade total.

Grading

Grading Expectations:

The grades you earn will reflect how thoroughly your work demonstrates the specific assignment requirements *and* overall course aims, which will correspond to the following sets of expectations:

- F Work that **fails to address** the assignment's **minimum requirements** will earn grades in the F range.
- D Work that **incompletely addresses** the assignment's **minimum requirements** will earn grades in the D range.
- C Work that **addresses only** the assignment's **minimum requirements** will earn grades in the C range.
- B Work that, **in addition to** meeting an assignment's **minimum requirements**, also **occasionally reflects engagement** with other material from the course where appropriate, in ways that **meet course objectives** will earn grades in the B range.
- A Work that, **in addition to** meeting an assignment's **minimum requirements**, also **consistently reflects engagement** with other material from the course where appropriate & in ways that **exceed course objectives** will earn grades in the A range.

Potential Points/Allocation:

| | | | |
|---------|-----------|--------------|-------------------|
| Exams | 120 (24%) | Assignments | 180 (36%) |
| Quizzes | 50 (10%) | Final Paper | 150 (30%) |
| | | Total | 500 (100%) |

Final Grade Computation:

Your final grade will be determined by summing the number of points earned across all required course components. Letter grades will be determined from your point total as follows:

| Letter Grade | Points Range | Letter Grade | Points Range | Letter Grade | Points Range |
|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| A | 463+ | B | 413-437 | C | 363-387 |
| A- | 448-462 | B- | 398-412 | C- | 348-362 |
| B+ | 438-447 | C+ | 388-397 | D | 300-347 |

Any student accumulating 299 or fewer points will receive an F for the course.

A Note about Grading – The goal of this course is to introduce you to the field of social networks while giving us the opportunity to learn together. While I attempt to be extremely flexible in the way that grades can be earned, I will not spend my time giving students extra opportunities to gain points beyond what is described in the syllabus. My desire is that grades are of a secondary concern in this class, while I am aware that they are probably your first priority. As a result I have tried (to some degree) to give you the chance to tailor your grade for the course to your desires and expectations. I will make every effort to return all graded materials to you as quickly as possible.

Course and College Policies**Late Work:**

- Written Assignments – Any written assignments will be penalized 10% of the potential grade for each day they are late, and will not be accepted more than 5 days after the due date.
- Exams – Students who miss an exam must contact the instructor IMMEDIATELY to make arrangements for a make-up exam. Missing an exam is highly discouraged.

Written Assignments Format:

All Assignments & your final proposal should:

- Be submitted as Word (.doc or .docx) files to the corresponding Blackboard Assignment;
- Be named as YourLastName_YYYYMMDD_Assignment (e.g., my Literature Search would be adams_20130926_Assignment2.docx);
- Be properly formatted which includes:
 - ✓ double-spaced,
 - ✓ 1-inch margins,
 - ✓ 11 or 12 point New Times Roman font, and
 - ✓ page numbers;
- Be properly sourced - i.e., providing full *in-text citations and bibliographic information using ASA Format*. (An ASA style-guide is available on Blackboard.);
- Be spell-checked and carefully proofread before submission.

When submitting an assignment to Blackboard, please be certain that you have the final version you intend to upload for grading. Re-submissions will not be accepted for any “I forgot to...” reasons, and original submissions are the versions that will be graded.

Course Communication:

- *The Syllabus* has answers to the most common questions pertaining to the course. Be sure check the syllabus first, before asking me about due-dates, assignment requirements, etc.
- *Blackboard* will be used for the majority of communication in this course. You can find a copy of the syllabus, additional assigned readings, and all assignments there. I will also post any lecture notes after each class. I strongly encourage you to make visits to this resource a regular part of your preparation for this course.
- *E-mail* should be used for quick communications (things that can be responded to in no more than a few sentences); use office hours for anything requiring more depth. You should only use your AU email account for communication related to this course; I will not read/respond to emails from your personal accounts (e.g., Yahoo!, Hotmail, etc). Please consider e-mail as subject to the same standards of communication as you would all other forms written material in this course (i.e., you should use complete sentences, proper punctuation, etc.). I will typically respond to email within two *work* days. I will **not**, under any circumstances discuss grades over email.
- *Office Hours* are available to add to your experience in this course. Please make use of them. These are meant to supplement required course work and in-class elements. As such, while I am happy to discuss course materials or other aspects of sociology/academia in general with you during this time, they should not be viewed as an opportunity to ask “What did I miss in class?” (You should find peers in the class with whom you can share notes for that purpose.)

Academic Integrity and Conduct:

All students are expected to follow the policies of American University with respect to academic conduct and integrity. For more information on academic integrity at AU, please go to <http://www.american.edu/academics/integrity/code.cfm>. Your registration in this course assumes your familiarity with these standards. Any violations of this policy will be referred to the AIC administrator.

Request for Academic Adjustment or Accommodation:

Please notify the instructor at the beginning of the class if you are a student with a documented disability who may require appropriate accommodations so we can make arrangements to ensure your needs are addressed in this course. If you need university assistance with documentation or with services, please see Disability Support Services (206 Mary Graydon, 885-3315), or visit their website at: <http://www.american.edu/ocl/dss/For-Students-Services-Provided.cfm>

University Services:

I encourage you to seek out appropriate university services that support your learning and success. Among those, where appropriate, please consider making use of the Academic Support Center (243 Mary Graydon Center, www.american.edu/ocl/asc/index1.html); the computer services/technology help (<http://www.american.edu/oit/index.cfm>), the Writing Center (228 Battelle-Tompkins Hall, <http://www.american.edu/cas/writing>), and Library Research Help (<http://www.american.edu/library/ask/index.cfm>).

Emergency Preparedness: In the event of a declared pandemic (influenza or other communicable disease), American University will implement a plan for meeting the needs of all members of the university community. Should the university be required to close for a period of time, we are committed to ensuring that all aspects of our educational programs will be delivered to our students. These may include altering and extending the duration of the traditional term schedule to complete essential instruction in the traditional format and/or use of distance instructional methods. Specific strategies will vary from class to class, depending on the format of the course and the timing of the emergency. Faculty will communicate class-specific information to students via AU e-mail and Blackboard, while students must inform their faculty immediately of any absence due to illness. Students are responsible for checking

their AU e-mail regularly and keeping themselves informed of emergencies. In the event of a declared pandemic or other emergency, students should refer to the AU Web site (www.prepared.american.edu) and the AU information line at (202) 885-1100 for general university-wide information, as well as contact their faculty and/or respective dean's office for course and school/ college-specific information.

Tentative Course Schedule

Please Note, this schedule is subject to change – all changes will be announced in class.

| Day | Topic | Readings Due | Assignments Due |
|--------|---|--|-------------------------|
| 29 Aug | Introductions & Frameworks | none | |
| 5 Sep | The Big Picture & Logic | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Luker, pp. 1-39 • BB - Corell | |
| 12 Sep | Canonical Research & Measurement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Luker, pp. 40-75, 229-232 • BB - Angotti | HW 1 |
| 19 Sep | Reviewing the Literature | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Luker, pp. 76-98 • Library Tutorials on <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Information Literacy & ◦ Literature Reviews | |
| 26 Sep | Sampling | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Luker, pp. 99-129 • BB – Freedman | HW 2 |
| 3 Oct | | <i>Exam 1</i> | |
| 10 Oct | Diving in | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Luker, pp. 129-154 • #BB – Schepper Hughes (HW4) | HW 3 |
| 17 Oct | Participant Observation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Luker, pp. 155-189 • #BB – Khan (HW4) | |
| 24 Oct | Interviews | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • #BB – Trinitapoli (HW4) | Presentations I |
| 31 Oct | Surveys | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • #BB – Hargittai (HW4) | Presentations II |
| 7 Nov | Historical & Comparative & Data Analysis | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Luker, pp. 190-197 • #BB – Dubrow (HW4) | HW 5 |
| 14 Nov | Data Analysis cont'd | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Luker, pp. 198-216 | Exam 2 Due |
| 21 Nov | Data Analysis cont'd | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • #BB – Brückner (HW4) | |
| 28 Nov | <i>NO Class Meeting - Thanksgiving</i> | | HW 6 (27 Nov) |
| 5 Dec | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Luker, pp. 217-225 • #BB - Small (HW4) | |
| 12 Dec | | <i>Final Proposal Due – by 2:15 pm</i> | |