

**Sociology 251**  
**RESEARCH METHODS**  
**UNC @ Chapel Hill**  
**Fall 2018**

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Class Meeting: TTH 3:30-4:45

**OVERVIEW**

Research Methods is an introduction to the logic and methods of sociological research – why and how sociologists (and other social scientists) conduct research. This course will enable you to critically evaluate the research of others and carry out your own research in the social sciences. Major topics include the relationship between theory and research, variables and measurement, causality, the political and ethical dimensions of research, and the major modes of sociological research – including experiments, qualitative fieldwork and interviews, surveys, content analysis, and historical methods. The principles and skills we develop in this course have broad applicability. You will develop critical thinking skills to better evaluate your own assumptions and ideas and those you encounter about how society works in all domains such as education, politics, culture, religion, health care, criminal justice, or the economy.

We encounter social scientific research everywhere. Schools and nonprofits use research to determine whether they are making a difference. Politicians and political parties use surveys and focus groups to determine what voters think and how to change their views or behavior. Businesses use the same methods to gauge how customers respond to products and to identify new and emerging opportunities. Journalists collect their own data and regularly turn to social scientific research to describe patterns in society. With access to so much research, we need to be able to understand and critically evaluate research as citizens and in our careers.

This course combines a broad introduction to research methods with application to questions about protest and social movements. We will read research about activism, and we will collect data using surveys and interviews about social movements. This focus will allow us to develop a deeper understanding of how research methods can be used.

## **COURSE GOALS**

This course has the following goals that build on each other.

- (1) Understand and apply core principles of research design.
- (2) Critically evaluate sociological research assessing the strengths and weaknesses of research design.
- (3) Design and carry out basic sociological research using core methods of sociology, providing an important foundation for future courses (Sociology 252) and research opportunities (e.g., Senior Thesis).

## **READING**

Our main text is Janet Ruane's *Introducing Social Research Methods*. We will also read some additional articles and selections from studies to illustrate concepts and research strategies. These supplementary readings are listed on the syllabus and will be available on sakai. All readings on the syllabus are required and should be completed before the designated class meeting.

## **ASSIGNMENTS**

Exams: Combine short answer and short essay questions covering material from all course readings, class presentations, and discussions.

Concept quizzes: Three short quizzes to assess understanding of major concepts. I will provide a list of concepts for each section of the course to prepare for quizzes. The dates with quizzes are marked with an asterisk on the syllabus (9/6, 10/16, 11/15).

Class research project: We will work together to design and administer surveys and interviews. Part of your grade will be based on contributions to the survey and interview design, data collection, and entry/coding. Using this data, you will write a final report and make an in-class presentation that summarizes your research findings and analysis.

Participation: Attendance and participation is required. To receive credit for participation, you must arrive on time, come prepared, and participate in discussion and activities. This will include short assignments that you either bring to class or complete during class. You may miss a reasonable number of classes (up to 3) without it adversely impacting your grade.

## **GRADES**

### Grade Distribution

|                              |     |
|------------------------------|-----|
| Participation                | 10% |
| Exam 1                       | 20% |
| Exam 2                       | 20% |
| Quizzes/Concepts             | 10% |
| Data collection and entry    | 20% |
| Research report/presentation | 20% |

### Grade Scale

A=100-94; A-=93-91; B+=90-88; B=87-84; B-=83-81; C+=80-78; C=77-74; C-=73--71; D+=70-68; D=67--61; F=60 and below.

### **MEETINGS AND CONTACTING ME**

You can drop by to meet with me during office hours or by appointment other times of the week. Email is generally the best method to reach. Immediately after class is another good time to have short discussions or set up meetings.

### **POLICIES**

If you have an extraordinary set of circumstances that make it impossible for you to meet a deadline, you must see me prior to the deadline. Extraordinary circumstances might include a serious illness or death in your family, but it would not include personal travel, extracurricular activities, or fulfilling the requirements of other courses.

Homework and papers turned in after the deadline will be penalized by deducting a half letter grade for each day it is late. For example, an A- paper becomes a B+ if turned in one day late, a B if two days late, a B- if three days late, and so on.

Sakai will be used for announcements and to make copies of the syllabus, handouts, and assignments available to you. You should check sakai regularly for announcements related to course assignments and schedule.

Laptops, tablets, and other devices will not be used in class for taking notes. Although some students are able to use these devices effectively, my experience and research on learning indicates that laptops in the classroom are a distraction more often than not.

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill facilitates the implementation of reasonable accommodations, including resources and services, for students with disabilities, chronic medical conditions, a temporary disability or pregnancy complications resulting in difficulties with accessing learning opportunities. All accommodations are coordinated through the Accessibility Resources and Service Office. [See the ARS Website for contact information: accessibility.unc.edu](https://ars.unc.edu).

### **HONOR CODE**

Your participation in this course is covered by the UNC Honor Code (<https://studentconduct.unc.edu/students>). If you have questions about any forms of academic dishonesty please see me, and I will be happy to clarify. You should be especially attentive to plagiarism. The UNC Writing Center has a handout that describes what plagiarism is, why it should be avoided, and how to avoid it. Link: <https://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/plagiarism/>

## **COURSE SCHEDULE**

### Week 1: Sociology, Research and Science

- Aug 21 Barry Yeoman, "[Can Moral Mondays Produce Victorious Tuesdays?](#)"
- Aug 23 Ruane, Ch1, "How Do We Know What We Know? Science as a Superior Way of Knowing"

### Week 2: Principles of Research Design

- Aug 28 Ruane, Ch 2 and 4, "The Language of Science and Research: Learning to Talk the Talk and Walk the Walk" and "Designing Ideas: What Do We Want to Know and How Can We Get There?"
- Aug 30 Workshop: Evaluating a Research Design  
Wahlstrom et al, "'Conscience Adherents' Revisited: Non-LGBT Pride Parade Participants"

### Week 3: Ethics and Politics of Research

- Sept 4 Ruane, Ch 3, "It's the Right Thing To Do"
- Sept 6 (\*) Snow and Soule, "Conceptualizing Social Movements"

### Week 4: Measurement

- Sept 11 Ruane, Ch 5, "Measure by Measure: Developing Measures—Making the Abstract Concrete"
- Sept 13 Pescosolido et al, "Culture and Conflict: The Portrayal of Blacks in U.S. Children's Picture Books Through the Mid- and Late-Twentieth Century"

### Week 5: Validity and Reliability

- Sept 18 Ruane, Ch 6, "All That Glitters Is Not Gold: Assessing the Validity and Reliability of Measures"
- Sept 20 TEST 1: Science, Research Design, and Measurement

### Week 6: Causality

- Sept 25 Ruane, Ch 7, "One Thing Leads to Another ... or Does it? Tackling Causal Analysis"  
Michael Lovaglia "From Summer Camps to Glass Ceilings: The Power of Experiments"

Sept 27 Wouters and Walgrave, “Demonstrating Power: How Protest Persuades Political Representatives”

Week 7: Causality and Design Continued

Oct 2 McAdam, “Recruitment to High-Risk Activism: The Case of Freedom Summer”

Oct 4 Workshop: Research Plan, Next Steps

Week 8: Surveys

Oct 9 Ruane, Ch 8, “The Questionnaire: Would You Mind Taking the Time to Answer a Few Questions?”

Oct 11 Fisher et al, “How Do Organizations Matter: Mobilization and Support for Participants at Five Globalization Protests”

Week 9: Survey Design

Oct 16 (\*) Workshop: Survey Design and Pre-testing

Oct 18 MID TERM BREAK

Week 10: Interviewing

Oct 23 Ruane, Ch 9, “Having the Talk: Person to Person Information Exchanges”

Oct 25 Simi et al, “Addicted to Hate: Identity Residual among Former White Supremacists”

Week 11: Field Research

Oct 30 Ruane, Ch 10, “Field Research: Welcome to My World”

Nov 1 Sobieraj, “Reporting Conventions: Journalists, Activists, and the Thorny Struggle for Political Visibility”

Week 12: Sampling and Case Selection

Nov 6 Ruane, Ch 11, “Sample This! How Can So Few Tell Us About So Many?”

Nov 8 Workshop: Survey Data and Interview Guides

Week 13: Analyzing Social Science Data

Nov 13 Ruane, Ch 12, “Show Me the Numbers: Descriptive Statistics and Inferential Statistics”

Nov 15 (\*) Workshop: Analyzing Survey Data

Week 14:

Nov 20 TEST 2: Causality, Surveys, Interviewing, Field Research, and Sampling

Nov 22 THANKSGIVING

Week 15: Writing a report and presenting research findings

Nov 27 Singleton and Straits, “Writing Research Reports”

Nov 29 Workshop: Refining Your Analysis

Week 16: Finalizing Analysis and Report

Dec 4 Workshop: Peer Feedback on Preliminary Findings

Dec 13 Final Exam – Presentations at 4pm