

**Sociology 304: Sociological Research Methods**  
**Tuesday & Thursday, 10:05am-11:30am**  
**Berkus 243**

**Instructor:** John T. Lang  
**Office Hours:** Wednesday, 10:00am – 1:00pm  
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**Course Website:** <http://moodle.oxy.edu>

“Somewhere, something incredible is waiting to be known.”

-- Carl Sagan

“There is nothing like looking, if you want to find something. You certainly usually find something, if you look, but it is not always quite the something you were after.”

-- J. R. R. Tolkien

“We have a habit in writing articles published in scientific journals to make the work as finished as possible, to cover up all the tracks, to not worry about the blind alleys or describe how you had the wrong idea at first, and so on. So there isn't any place to publish, in a dignified manner, what you actually did in order to get to do the work.”

-- Richard Feynman

“‘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.... and most importantly just now, the release rather than the restriction of the sociological imagination.”

-- C. Wright Mills

## **INTRODUCTION**

This course looks at the ways sociologists collect information about social phenomena with a special emphasis on what can be done to yield information that is trustworthy and useful for our theoretical understanding of social life. It assumes no background in research methods or statistics. We will talk about the scientific method, the complexities of applying methods to social research, ethics and bias, and research design. You will also learn about major quantitative and qualitative methodologies, including surveys, interviews, ethnography, experiments, participant observation, and content analysis – and have opportunities to try out these methods.

Other classes you have taken, both in Sociology and other disciplines, had the goal of teaching you *what we know*. In this class, you will learn *how we know* what we know. By the end of the semester you will:

- (1) be familiar with research methods used by social scientists to examine and explain the complexities of the social world;
- (2) have the necessary skills to understand and critically evaluate both the methods and results of published research, as well as the world around you; and
- (3) be able to design, implement, and analyze your own social research.

### **Please Note**

Prerequisite: Sociology 101.

First year students or graduate students may not enroll in this class.

## REQUIRED MATERIALS

There is no required textbook in this class. You will access the readings on the course website. This means that this class does not cost a lot and you can access the materials for the class from nearly any computer. There are times, however, that our computers or the Internet are not as reliable as we would like. Avoid disaster. Get the readings well before the class in which they will be discussed. Connectivity problems are not acceptable excuses for not being ready.

## GRADING

There will be four homework assignments; the first 3 are each worth 20%; the fourth and final homework is worth 40% of your final grade. These assignments will require you to apply the techniques learned in class. Each assignment will come with its own detailed set of instructions.

### Attendance, Reading & Class Participation

Our time together is brief and we have a wealth of ideas to exchange and explore in that limited period. I expect you to come to class on time and remain here until class is over. You may miss 2 class sessions without penalty. After that, for each missed class your final course grade will drop one fraction of a letter grade. For example, if your work is above average and earns you a B, that absence will cause your final grade to drop to a B-. For every additional absence, the grade will continue to fall by the same fraction of a letter grade.

Arriving late or departing early twice equals one absence. I have this policy to encourage students to attend class and to do well in the course. I do not distinguish between "excused" and "unexcused" absences. You are, therefore, strongly encouraged not to miss class carelessly because of the possibility of unexpected or unavoidable absences during the semester. No matter the reason, it is always your responsibility to contact other students to learn what you've missed and to get notes.

## COURSE GRADES

Do NOT count on a curve. I will assign letter grades for the entire course as follows:

93.0 and higher = A	73.0 to 76.99 = C
90.0 to 92.99 = A-	70.0 to 72.99 = C-
87.0 to 89.99 = B+	67.0 to 69.99 = D+
83.0 to 86.99 = B	60.0 to 66.99 = D
80.0 to 82.99 = B-	59.99 and lower = F.
77.0 to 79.99 = C+	

Letter grades in this class have the following meaning:

- A *Outstanding performance*. You have demonstrated very thorough knowledge and understanding of all the material, truly superior critical thinking, and expressed insightful and original thoughts clearly. You have completed all required assignments and they have been among the best in the class.
- B *Good performance*. You have demonstrated solid knowledge and understanding of the material and good critical thinking. You have also shown the ability to express your ideas clearly. You have completed all required assignments and they have been of good quality.
- C *Satisfactory performance*. You have demonstrated basic knowledge and understanding of the major concepts taught in the class and some critical thinking. You have completed all or most of the required assignments and they have routinely been free of significant problems.

- D *Deficient performance.* You have only acquired a limited understanding of the class material. You have failed to complete all the required assignments and they have routinely had serious problems.
- F *Failure.* You have failed to learn a sufficient proportion of the basic concepts and ideas taught in the class. You have failed to complete many required assignments and they have routinely had serious problems.

### **COURSE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**

I will hold you responsible for the information in this syllabus, so I expect you to read it, understand it, and ask questions about anything you don't understand.

*Office Hours:* I hold three official office hours each week. I also encourage you to make an appointment outside of office hours or come by my office anytime to see if I'm available. I am happy to discuss class concepts, college more generally, musings about majors, future planning, or graduate school.

*Feedback:* I love getting feedback on my teaching and how the class is going. I value your input and I am willing to make changes to the class according to your preferences. Please share with me any comments, suggestions, and ideas you may have, and help me make this a great class. If you would like to do so anonymously, you can type and print out a note and drop it in my mailbox in the administrative offices in Swan Hall.

*Class Demeanor:* While we may find ourselves disagreeing, we must do so with respect, a commitment to hearing what others have to say, and a willingness to think and rethink our own positions. Personal insults have no place in the college classroom.

*Technology in Class:* Please turn off your cell phones when you come to class. Similarly, text messaging will not be tolerated in class. You are welcome to bring your laptop to class and use it to take notes, access readings we're discussing, and the like. You are not welcome to surf the web, check email, or otherwise perform non-class-related activities during class. Here's my best advice: If you aren't using it to perform a task specifically related to what we are doing in class at that very moment, put it away.

*Special Accommodations/Learning Differences:* Students with documented disabilities who are registered with Disability Services are required to present their accommodation letter to the instructor at the beginning of each semester or as soon as possible thereafter. Any student who experiences significant physical or mental impairments may contact Disability Services at (323) 259-2969 to learn about available services and support. More information is available at <http://www.oxy.edu/disability-services>

*Assignments:* A hard copy of all papers/assignments must be handed in at the start of class on the scheduled date. Late assignments are docked 1 grade per day. Computer and printing problems are not a good excuse for missing a deadline. Make sure to print your papers early enough to be able to address any problems before class. Keep a paper and electronic copy of everything you hand in until you receive your course grade.

*Academic Integrity:* As is always the case, you are responsible for your own work. If you find yourself questioning whether you have documented or cited your sources properly, it is your responsibility to come see me about these issues prior to submitting an assignment. If you are thinking about submitting work that is not your own due to pressure, frustration, perfectionism, or any other reason, please talk to me. I am here to help you resolve these issues before they become a problem for your academic career. Academic integrity violations, including plagiarism, will be taken very seriously. A description of Occidental's academic ethics policies is available in the Student Handbook and on the following webpage:

<http://www.oxy.edu/student-handbook/academic-ethics/academic-ethics>

## **CLASS SCHEDULE**

Although I will do my best to keep us on schedule, it is possible that we will make some adjustments during the semester. I will give as much notice - both in class and on the course website - when changes are necessary.

### **AUGUST**

#### *Week 1*

27 Welcome to the class

### **SEPTEMBER**

#### *Week 2*

1 Social Inquiry

Berger, "An Invitation to Sociology"

Ruane & Cerulo, "The Sociological Perspective"

Mills "On Intellectual Craftsmanship"

3 What are Sociological Research Methods?

Becker, "Cases, causes, conjunctures, stories, and imagery"

Geertz, "Thick description: Toward an interpretive theory of culture" (<http://goo.gl/rar8Ji>)

Goffman, "On fieldwork"

#### *Week 3*

8 Picking a Research Question

Handout: Homework 1 – What do I want to know?

Graff & Birkenstein, "Introduction"

Graff & Birkenstein, "They Say"

Davis, "That's Interesting"

10 Guest Lecture on Zotero

Bring your laptops to class with Zotero installed.

ASA Quick Style Guide

In-Text (Citation) References (<https://goo.gl/15bbjM>)

Reference Page Formatting (<https://goo.gl/Tsgy8v>)

#### *Week 4*

15 Guest Lecture Online Datasets

Bring your laptops to class.

17 Ethics in Sociology

McLemee, "Wide-Stance Sociology"

Milgram, "Problems of Ethics in Research"

Blee and Currier, "Ethics Beyond the IRB: An Introductory Essay"

Singal, "The Case of the Amazing Gay-Marriage Data" (<http://goo.gl/PlfshM>)

#### *Week 5*

22 Ethics in Sociology

Goffman, "On the Run"

Singal, "The Internet Accused Alice Goffman..."

Campos, "Alice Goffman's Implausible Ethnography"

24 5-Minute Presentations – Part 1

What do you want to know? Why is it interesting to you?

*Week 6*

29 5-Minute Presentations – Part 1

What do you want to know? Why is it interesting to you?

**OCTOBER**

1 Reviewing the Literature

How to write a literature review (<http://goo.gl/TzzYBv>)

6 steps to writing a literature review (<http://goo.gl/4jD4Sz>)

Distinguishing between a theoretical and a contextual literature review

(<http://goo.gl/ReJiJc>)

DUE: Homework 1 – What do I want to know?

*Week 7*

6 Dilemmas of Qualitative Research

Goodwin and Horowitz, “The Methodological Strengths and Dilemmas of Qualitative Sociology”

Bryman “Integrating quantitative and qualitative research”

Small “How to Conduct a Mixed Methods Study”

Handout: Homework 2 – What have others said?

8 Interviewing

Baker & Edwards “How many qualitative interviews is enough?”

Hermanowicz, “The Great Interview”

King & Horrocks, “Interviews in Qualitative Research”

*Week 8*

13 NO CLASS. FALL BREAK.

15 Observing, Participating, Listening

Atkinson and Hammersley, “Ethnography and Participant Observation”

Evans, “Beyond the Throwaway Society”

Eliasoph “Theorizing from the Neck Down”

DUE: Homework 2 – What have others said?

*Week 9*

20 Survey Research

Groves, “Three Eras of Survey Research”

Schuman, “Sense and Nonsense about Surveys”

Qualtrics Basic Training, Step 1 and 2 (<http://goo.gl/L2IFKs>)

Handout: Homework 3 – What is the design?

22 Survey Research

West and Saperstein, “New Categories are Not Enough”

Bhutta, “Not by the Book”

Stern, Bilgen, and Dillman, “The State of Survey Methodology”

*Week 10*

27 Read at least 5 sources that use your same methodology. Find a model article and outline it. What can you learn from this work? Bring your article/outline to class.

29 Research Tools – What do you need?

**NOVEMBER**

*Week 11*

3 NO CLASS. Individual appointments.

5 NO CLASS. Individual appointments.

*Week 12*

10 Analyzing Qualitative Data

Kleinman & Kolb. "Traps on the Path of Analysis"

Weston, "Analyzing Interview Data"

Carley, "Coding Choices for Textual Analysis" (p. 81-91)

DUE: Homework 3 – What is the design?

12 Human Subjects / IRB Requirements

Oxy's IRB FAQ (<http://goo.gl/dCgCII>)

Oxy's IRB Approval Request Form (<http://goo.gl/23QNux>)

*Week 13*

17 Writing About Your Research

Becker, "One Right Way"

Becker, "Terrorized by the Literature"

Handout: Homework 4 – Putting It Together

19 In Class Workshop - Homework 4

*Week 14*

24 In Class Workshop - Homework 4

26 NO CLASS. THANKSGIVING BREAK.

**DECEMBER**

*Week 15*

1 Wrapping Up

DUE: Homework 4 – Putting It Together

Grades will be submitted by December 14. Good luck! I'm looking forward to a great semester!