



# Social Research Methods

Sociology 0230 (Class #11152)

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**Fall 2019 (2201)**

**Time/Place:** Thursdays 6:00-8:30PM in 2200 Wesley W. Posvar Hall (WWPH)

Instructor: Melanie M. Hughes, PhD

Office: 2611 Wesley W. Posvar Hall (WWPH)

Office Hours: Thursdays 12:00-1:00PM, Fridays 10:30-11:30AM, & by appointment

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## **COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

Much of what we know about the social world is based upon our own experiences and the experiences of those around us. Sociological knowledge, however, is a product of a more rigorous and systematic way of generating information that relies on principles from the scientific method. Throughout this class, students will be introduced to the components of sociological research, including 1) the construction of research questions; 2) the ways in which researchers design their measures and draw their samples; 3) quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection and analysis; 4) the reporting of research results; and 5) research ethics. Because the best way to learn is through *doing*, students will learn about sociological research by designing and completing a sociological study on a topic of their choice.

## **COURSE OBJECTIVES:**

By semester's end, students should be more familiar with what many sociologists do and how they do it. Students will understand each step in the process of social research, from the generation of research questions through reporting the answers to those questions. This course is designed to make students more knowledgeable and critical consumers of social scientific research, wherever they encounter it. Students will also gain familiarity with social scientific writing styles while improving their individual writing skills.

## **REQUIRED READINGS:**

*Textbook:*

- 1) Babbie, Earl R. 2016. *The Practice of Social Research*, 14<sup>th</sup> Edition. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth / Thomas Learning. (Chapter and page assignments in Course Outline refer to this text unless otherwise noted.)
- 2) Longest, Kyle C. 2019. *Using Stata for Quantitative Analysis*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. Sage Publications. (Longest in Course Outline)

*Articles and Book Chapters:* Copies of these materials are posted on CourseWeb at <https://courseweb.pitt.edu>. Most are also accessible through the World Wide Web or through the library.

- 1) Burawoy, Michael. 2019. "Empiricism and Its Fallacies." *Contexts* 18(1):47-53. (Burawoy in Course Outline.) **Read for 11/7.**
- 2) Calnitsky, David. 2019. "Basic Income and the Pitfalls of Randomization." *Contexts* 18(1):22-29. (Calnitsky in Course Outline.) **Read for 9/26.**
- 3) Heaney, Michael T. 2018. "Making Protest Great Again." *Contexts* 17(1):42-47. (Heaney in Course Outline.) **Read for 10/3.**
- 4) Irvine, Janice M. 2012. "Can't Ask, Can't Tell: How Institutional Review Boards Keep Sex In The Closet." *Contexts* 11(2):28-33. (Irvine in Course Outline.) **Read for 9/5.**
- 5) Lahart, Justin. 2009. "New Light on the Plight of Winter Babies Researchers Stumble Upon Alternative Explanation for the Lifelong Challenges Faced by Children Born in Colder Months." *Wall Street Journal*. September 22. (Lahart in Course Outline.) **Read for 9/12.**
- 6) Lindner, Andrew M. 2012. "An Old Tool with New Promise." *Contexts* 11(1):70-72. (Lindner in Course Outline.) **Read for 11/14.**
- 7) Lubet, Steven. 2019. "Accuracy in Ethnography: Narratives, Documents, and Circumstances." *Contexts* 18(1):42-46. (Lubet in Course Outline.) **Read for 11/7.**
- 8) Regnerus, Mark. 2012. "Queers as Folk: Does It Really Make No Difference if Your Parents are Straight or Gay?" *Slate*. June 11. (Regnerus in Course Outline.) **Read for 9/19.**
- 9) Saletan, William. 2012. "Back in the Gay: Does a New Study Indict Gay Parenthood or Make a Case for Gay Marriage?" *Slate*. June 11. (Saletan in Course Outline.) **Read for 9/19.**
- 10) Todd, Michael. 2017. [2008]. "Counting the Dead Freighted with Controversy." *Pacific Standard*. Original August 18, 2008. Updated June 14, 2017. (Todd in Course Outline.) **Read for 10/10.**

*Resources:*

- 1) For preparing your presentations, I have assigned the Public Speaking page from Pitt's Oral Communications Lab (<http://www.speaking.pitt.edu/student/public-speaking/index.html>). The page includes instructions for organizing a presentation, advice on creating visual aids, and tips for all stages of the process. (Public Speaking in Course Outline.) **Read for 11/21.**
- 2) For additional assistance with Stata, I have assigned Stata's resource page (<https://www.stata.com/links/resources-for-learning-stata/>). The page includes links to community-based and official Stata resources. (Stata in Course Outline.) **Read for 10/24.**

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

*Attendance:* Students are strongly encouraged to attend all classes. Class time will consist of lectures, discussions, lab time, small group exercises, and exams. Your active participation and attendance are important to the success of the course for both you and your classmates. Therefore, students are expected to arrive on time and stay for the entire class period. As chronic

absences are likely to negatively affect your grade, I will not penalize you additionally for absences.

*Participation:* Throughout the semester, there will be in-class exercises designed to demonstrate course material. Participation in exercises will count towards your grade. You are excused from one in-class exercise without penalty.

*Reading:* Students will be tested on material covered in the readings, even if it is not discussed in class. Therefore, students are expected to bring any problems in understanding the reading to the attention of the instructor. To facilitate effective discussion, all of the assigned readings are to be completed prior to class on the day scheduled in the course outline.

*Midterm and Final Exams:* The course will include two exams: a midterm and a final. The midterm exam will be administered during the regular class period on **Thursday, Oct. 17**. The final is designed as a non-comprehensive exam but does draw on material from the first half of the course. So, you may want to review your notes from the entire course prior to the final exam. The final exam will be administered **6:00-7:15PM** on **Thursday, Dec. 12**. Both exams will consist of a combination of multiple choice, true/false, and short essay questions. The exams will cover all course material, including course readings, films, in-class discussions and exercises, and lecture material. **Please do not miss an exam.** I will give make-up exams only in the case of a death of a family member or a verifiable emergency situation. Arrangements must be made in advance with the instructor and documentation must be provided. In cases of emergency, students who do not contact me over e-mail within 24 hours of the exam will not be allowed to take a make-up and will receive a zero for that exam.

*Course Assignments:* Students are expected to complete four written assignments. Assignments 1-3 are part of a step-by-step progression that will culminate in a presentation. Students are encouraged to work in on Assignments 1-3 in small groups but must submit independent written work. All work should be submitted in hard copy form, typed and double-spaced. The descriptions below will be supplemented with specific guidelines and a grading rubric for each assignment. You are expected to print out and submit the grading rubric as a cover sheet for each assignment. See CourseWeb.

*Assignment #1 – Research Questions, Propositions, and Major Concepts:* For this assignment, you will generate specific research questions and propositions on a topic selected by the class. **(We will select the topic as a class on Sep. 4.)** You will find and correctly cite literature on your topic, and you will identify the major concepts involved in your study. **This assignment is due Sep. 19.**

*Assignment #2 – Definition, Hypotheses, and Operationalization:* For this assignment, you will define the major concepts in your study, generate testable hypotheses, and decide how the concepts in your study should be measured. You will email questions for the class survey in advance. **This assignment is due Oct. 3.**

*Assignment #3 – Quantitative Analysis:* For this assignment, you will administer the class survey, enter the information from completed surveys into Stata, and analyze your hypotheses using the data collected by the entire class. **This assignment is due Nov. 7.**

*Assignment #4 – Qualitative Exercise:* For this assignment, you will have the opportunity to engage in qualitative field research on a new topic. You will turn in both your field notes as well as a short paper about your experience and research findings. **This assignment is due Dec. 5.**

*Presentation:* You will briefly present the main findings from your survey course project during class on **Nov. 21** or **Dec. 5.** (**You will sign up for a presentation date and time in class on Nov. 7.**) You will evaluate the presentations of your peers, and your participation in peer evaluation will count towards your own presentation grade. Presenters are required to use a PowerPoint presentation, and presentations will be timed.

### **COURSE GRADING:**

Except for the final paper, assignments are due by the beginning of class on the due date. **Late work will be penalized by a 10 percent grade reduction for the first day of lateness, beginning 10 minutes after class has begun on the due date, and then 10 percent for each additional week of lateness (beginning the start of class time the following week).** If something happens that is beyond your control (alien abduction, homework in dog’s stomach), I must have verifiable proof (alien’s or vet’s note). Otherwise, you will be penalized for lateness. Because one of the goals of this course is to improve student writing, assignments will be graded on both content and form. Content refers to the degree to which you complete the requirements, the extent of mastery shown of course material, and the level of analysis applied. Form refers to the clarity of the work you present in terms of grammar, spelling, punctuation, and writing style.

It is my policy NOT to provide feedback on assignments before they are due. I am happy to clarify instructions, but I will not look a completed assignment and tell you whether it is “right” before you turn it in.

Your grade is calculated as follows:

Participation	5%	Exams	40% (20% each)
Assignment 1-4	40% (10% each)	Presentation	15%

If you believe a grading error has occurred at any point during the class, please see me as soon as possible. I will retain all grading materials for two semesters following this one.

### *Letter Grades and Percent Ranges:*

A+ 97-100	B+ 87-89	C+ 77-79	D+ 67-69	F 0-59
A 93-96	B 83-86	C 73-76	D 63-66	
A- 90-92	B- 80-82	C- 70-72	D- 60-62	

### **DISABILITIES:**

If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, you are encouraged to contact both your instructor and Disability Resources and Services (DRS), 140 William Pitt Union, (412) 648-7890, [drsrecep@pitt.edu](mailto:drsrecep@pitt.edu). (412) 228-5347 for P3 ASL users, as early as possible in the term. DRS will verify your disability and determine reasonable accommodations for this course.

## **STUDENT CONDUCT:**

*Withdrawal:* The deadline for monitored withdrawal is **Oct. 25**.

*Classroom Conduct:* This class may at times address sensitive and/or controversial issues. Students are expected to be respectful of diverse opinions and present themselves in such ways as to keep the classroom as safe, open environment for learning.

*Academic Integrity:* Students in this course will be expected to comply with the [University of Pittsburgh's Policy on Academic Integrity](#) Any student suspected of violating this obligation for any reason during the semester will be required to participate in the procedural process, initiated at the instructor level, as outlined in the University Guidelines on Academic Integrity. This may include, but is not limited to, the confiscation of the examination of any individual suspected of violating University Policy. Furthermore, no student may bring any unauthorized materials to an exam, including dictionaries and programmable calculators.

*Laptops and Electronic Devices:* Laptops and cell phones pose a distraction. Even if our intentions are good, it is hard to not text, hop on Facebook, etc. Laptop use may also distract and hinder learning for nearby peers. Even if everyone in class is 100% responsible about using their devices, taking notes in longhand helps you learn and retain course material better. During class, “movie theater” rules apply: no laptops, phones, or other devices with a screen on them should be out during class. Students who violate this policy will be asked to leave. For the science on this, see the following academic research articles on CourseWeb:

- Helene Hembrooke and Geri Gay. 2003. “The Laptop and the Lecture: The Effects of Multitasking in Learning Environments.” *Journal of Computing in Higher Education* 15(1):46-64.
- Faria Sana, Tina Weston, and Nicholas J. Ceped. 2013. “Laptop Multitasking Hinders Classroom Learning for Both Users and Nearby Peers.” *Computers and Education* 62:24-31.
- Pam A. Mueller and Daniel M. Oppenheimer. 2014. “The Pen Is Mightier Than the Keyboard: Advantages of Longhand over Laptop Note Taking.” *Psychological Science* 25(6):1159-68.

*Email Policy:* Each student is issued a University e-mail address ([username@pitt.edu](#)) upon admittance. This e-mail address may be used by the University for official communication with students. Students are expected to read e-mail sent to this account on a regular basis. Failure to read and react to University communications in a timely manner does not absolve the student from knowing and complying with the content of the communications. The University provides an e-mail forwarding service that allows students to read their e-mail via other service providers (e.g., Hotmail, AOL, Yahoo). Students that choose to forward their e-mail from their pitt.edu address to another address do so at their own risk. If e-mail is lost as a result of forwarding, it does not absolve the student from responding to official communications sent to their University e-mail address.

*Gender Inclusive and Non-Sexist Language:* Language is gender-inclusive and non-sexist when we use words that affirm and respect how people describe, express, and experience their gender. Just as sexist language excludes women’s experiences, non-gender-inclusive language excludes

the experiences of individuals whose identities may not fit the gender binary, and/or who may not identify with the sex they were assigned at birth. Identities including trans, intersex, and genderqueer reflect personal descriptions, expressions, and experiences. Gender-inclusive/non-sexist language acknowledges people of any gender (for example, first year student versus freshman, chair versus chairman, humankind versus mankind, etc.). It also affirms non-binary gender identifications, and recognizes the difference between biological sex and gender expression. Students, faculty, and staff may share their preferred pronouns and names, and these gender identities and gender expressions should be honored.

### **COURSE OUTLINE:**

This is a tentative outline for covering particular topics and having readings finished. Students are responsible for adhering to this outline unless otherwise indicated in class.

<b>Dates</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Assigned Reading</b>	<b>Due Dates / Reminders</b>
Aug 29	Course Introduction; Sociology as Science	Ch. 1; Ch. 2 (pp. 44-59)	
Sep 5	Theory; Ethics	Ch. 3; Irvine	Select topic as a class
Sep 12	Research Design	Ch. 4; Lahart	
Sep 19	Measurement	Ch. 5; Regnerus; Saletan	Assignment 1 due
Sep 26	Experiments	Ch. 8; Calnitsky	
Oct 3	Surveys	Ch. 9; Heaney	Email survey questions before class; Assignment 2 due
Oct 10	Sampling I; Review	Ch. 7; Todd	Survey pretest
Oct 17	Midterm; Sampling II	Review for Midterm	*Midterm*
Oct 24	Data Entry <sup>β</sup>	Longest Ch. 1-4; Stata	Bring completed surveys to lab
Oct 31	Analysis <sup>β</sup>	Ch. 14; Longest pp. 131-193	
Nov 7	Qualitative	Ch. 10; Lubet; Burawoy	Assignment 3 due; sign up for presentation slot
Nov 14	Unobtrusive	Ch. 11; Lindner	
Nov 21	Presentations	Public Speaking	Bring copies of peer-review sheet to class
Nov 28	Thanksgiving Break	*No reading*	*No class*
Dec 5	Presentations; Review	Ch. 17	Assignment 4 due; bring copies of peer-review sheet to class
Dec 12	Final Exam	Review for Final	*Final exam*

*Note:* We will meet in the lab, Bellefield Hall 302, on the two days marked <sup>β</sup>.