

SOCIAL RESEARCH METHODS
Sociology 310 (3 credits)
California State University, Chico
Fall 2014
MWF 1:00pm-1:50pm
MLIB 031

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(or by appointment)

“If we want to understand nature, if we want to master our physical surroundings, then we must use *all* ideas, *all* methods, and not just a small selection of them.”
- Paul Feyerabend, philosopher of science

Course description and objectives

“This course explores the logic and styles of sociological research, focusing on the methods of formulating research problems, the design of social research, and techniques for ensuring the quality and validity of data and conclusions. Both quantitative and qualitative approaches to research are examined.”

Research methods are the approaches and tools used to understand the social world and to answer specific theoretical and applied questions. This course will introduce you to the logic and skills required for sociological research, including quantitative and qualitative approaches. We will examine the advantages and disadvantages of the various research methodologies and designs. Finally, you will be introduced to statistical procedures for analyzing and presenting social science data that are frequently reported in newspapers, popular magazines, and scholarly journals.

Sociology program learning outcomes for this course:

- Demonstrate critical thinking through verbal and written communication. (#1)
- Demonstrate the ability to design, and evaluate quantitative and qualitative research. (#2)
- Demonstrate proficiency in the use of technology. (#10)

More specifically, upon completion of this course, you should be able to:

- explain the connections between sociological theory and research
- read and understand sociological research
- translate theoretical and applied problems into research questions that can be studied and hopefully answered
- select appropriate methodologies and modes of observation for answering research questions
- interpret the strengths and weaknesses of various research methodologies
- understand the ethical issues associated with the conduct of social research

- develop skills that could be transferred to the job market and future employment (as well as responsible community citizenship), such as collecting, analyzing, and presenting research results

“I am somehow less interested in the weight and convolutions of Einstein's brain than in the near certainty that people of equal talent have lived and died in cotton fields and sweatshops.”

– Stephen Jay Gould, evolutionary biologist

Prerequisite

None.

Required readings

Babbie, Earl. 2014. *The Basics of Social Research, Sixth Edition*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Cengage. ISBN-13: 978-1-133-59414-7.

Work

This is a three credit hour class. Since you should expect to spend two hours outside of class for every hour in class on reading, assignments, and studying, this means you should plan on devoting six hours of outside time per week to this course.

Attendance

Attendance in Sociology courses is mandatory. It is also to your academic advantage to attend class on a regular basis. *Students who attend class regularly, keep up with the readings, and ask questions to clarify the material have been consistently and statistically shown to perform better on exams and in the class overall.* Only documented emergencies will constitute excused absences. Documentation will only be accepted within one week of your return to class. Please do not contact me about non-emergency absences. Any conflicts with assignments or attendance in the course because of religious holidays should be discussed with the instructor the first week of class. Unless you have a documented emergency there will be no substitutions for quizzes or make-up exams. A missed assignment will result in zero points. Incompletes are rare, and will be given at the discretion of the instructor.

Please be in class on time. Late arrivals are disruptive for both the instructor and the class. Tardiness will be counted as an absence if habitual, or if the student has missed the majority of a class. Please turn off all electronic devices (e.g. phones, tablets, laptops).

Canceled classes

If classes are canceled (other than pre-scheduled “no class days” for holidays) for any reason, class will resume during the next regularly scheduled class period (unless stated otherwise by instructor). Information about the cancellation will be posted on BlackBoard.

Academic Integrity

According to CSU Chico's "Policy on Academic Integrity" (the full policy is available at: <http://www.csuchico.edu/prs/EMs/2004/04-036.shtml>): "Students share with faculty and administrators and staff members the responsibility for academic integrity. The following recommendations are made for students to achieve a campus culture of academic integrity at CSU, Chico. (1) Know and understand the university's policies on cheating and plagiarism. (2) Understand the definitions of cheating, plagiarism, and misuse of sources. (3) Acknowledge University Catalog statements regarding academic honesty at the time of registration and follow the guidelines of your academic departments and instructors. (4) Bear full responsibility for the content and integrity of all academic work submitted. (5) Understand individual instructors' expectations regarding group work, collaboration, and use of materials prepared for more than one class. Students who are unclear about a specific situation should ask their instructors. (6) Uphold the academic standards of the University. Ignorance of a rule does not constitute a basis for waiving the rule or for avoiding the consequences of breaking that rule. (7) Report suspected instances of cheating to the instructor or department office."

Full information on academic integrity at California State University Chico is available at: <http://www.csuchico.edu/sjd/integrity.shtml>.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the use of others' wording, ideas, or information without acknowledging the origins of the work. When you use someone's exact wording, you must use quotation marks to denote it. However, even if you simply paraphrase or changing a few words, it is still necessary to cite the original source(s). Please see me if you need clarification on this policy. (Definition borrowed from another syllabus: C. André Christi-Mizell).

Plagiarism, although seemingly an unimportant thing—especially in an era of the Internet, photocopiers, mp3's, wikis, open source, etc.—is actually *a very serious thing*. If you are caught plagiarizing work from others or cheating, it is grounds for academic dismissal. This could mean you being kicked out of California State University! (Incidentally, plagiarism is also defined as a federal offense.) At a minimum, plagiarism will result in an automatic failed grade ("F") for the assignment. This is a very undesirable thing to happen to you (from everyone's perspective), so every effort should be made to avoid getting into such situations. There is really nothing good that will come of copying something you did not write and cite. At the end of this syllabus is a "Quick Style Guide for Students Writing Sociology Papers". Please read this before writing your first assignment in this course. If you have any questions about plagiarism or how to properly quote or cite a source, please ask the instructor.

Students with disabilities or special needs

If you have a documented disability that may require reasonable accommodations, please contact the Accessibility Resource Center (ARC) for coordination of your academic accommodations. ARC is located in the Student Services Center 170. The ARC phone number is 530-898-5959 V/TTY or FAX 530-898-4411. Visit the ARC website at <http://www.csuchico.edu/dss/>.

Communication

Chico State email is the appropriate electronic/written channel for official class communication. All students need to use their @mail.csuchico.edu email accounts whenever emailing the instructor. No emails sent from any other email provider will be responded to by the instructor—no exceptions, ever. The list of unacceptable email addresses includes (but is not limited to): @hotmail.com, @yahoo.com, @gmail.com, @aol.com, etc. In emails, be sure to use all proper formalities. This includes signing your name at the end of the email. I would also appreciate you including what class you are in and inquiring about within the email's subject. Note: BlackBoard's internal email system comes pre-established for this course, but will not be used. Also, when using a keyboard-less device to send email, please remember to use proper grammar, complete sentences, and appropriate decorum.

“I start from the position that it is the primary task of the social scientist to formulate a view of the ‘good society’. Accordingly, I insist that all research and scholarship be judged by its relevance to that task—that is, to the tasks of advancing us toward that society.”
- Howard J. Ehrlich, sociologist

Classroom conduct

The classroom environment needs to be supportive of student learning. The classroom must be a space for learning first and foremost, not for other non-academic or non-Sociology purposes. Therefore, the use of various devices during class time is restricted. Of particular note are the restrictions against cellular phones (including iPhones, iPads, BlackBerries, and whatever new toy is helping fuel resource wars in the Congo¹, etc.) and laptop computers usage. More details follow below.

Classroom demeanor and respect

A principle sociological observation is that societies are made up of diverse individuals who serve in varying roles and exist in unequal positions in society. The discipline of Sociology analyzes these various forms of inequalities and seeks to lessen them, through diverse means: socialization to more just and kind norms of interaction, policies of justice and remediation, and structural attack upon hierarchical institutions. To put it succinctly: many groups in society have faced *incredible* levels of inequality in the near and distant past—including racial and ethnic minorities, women and women-identified individuals, non-heterosexuals, religious minorities, working-class folk, immigrants, and differently-abled persons—and these differences deserve greater attention in order to empower, protect, and create justice. These patterns and objectives do not merely exist in the “real world”, but they are also mirrored in the classroom.

This general realization about inequality now means the automatic acknowledgment of each individual's *innate* human rights. Such human rights are not granted by governments, but are the

¹ The so-called “conflict minerals”, a.k.a. the “3T’s”, include tin, tantalum (coltan), and tungsten. Never heard of this? Google it.

consequences of one's birth and the social protections that others afford them. Thus, we have the right to be free from harassment, degradation, humiliation, discrimination, prejudice, and so forth. Students who feel threatened and under attack in the classroom will have great difficulties learning and will not wish to continue their educations: this is an unacceptable situation. Name-calling and epithets directed at *any* class participant is completely unacceptable and is grounds for immediate rejection from the classroom. Treat those around you as you would wish to be treated. Participating in class discussion in a respectful fashion will be appreciated by your fellow students and your instructor. If you have any questions about this policy, please discuss with me during office hours.

Tape recording

Taping—whether analog or digital—of lectures or classroom discussions of any kind shall not be done with prior permission of the instructor and the Accessibility Resource Center.

Cell phones, other electronic devices, and Why The World Will Not End With Your Phone Off

Surprisingly, human civilization has existed for many millennia (no joke!) prior to the development of cell phones and text-messaging (one could argue humanity was happier during this earlier, less-wired period—and if survey data were available, I would enthusiastically construct a testable hypothesis to that effect!) and will hopefully exist for many more once whatever new technology is created. During this long period of humanity, people have survived without having to check messages and texts every five minutes. And since you are paying good money for this class, why would you want to spend it texting? Needless to say, I can easily tell when students are texting during class, so just abstain from using them—do not be rude to your fellow classmates or insult my intelligence by such childishness. Please turn off all cell phones, ringers, alarms, etc. prior to the start of class. **You may not use your cell phone while class is in session, nor are you permitted to text-message.** I realize there may be situations in which you must be able to be contacted (e.g., you have a sick child); if so, please turn off the ringer on your phone and inform me prior to class that you may be called.

If your cell phone or other telecommunications devices are either visible or in your hands at any time during class quizzes or exams (even when you have completed yours, but other students are still working), you will be *assumed* to be cheating and will receive an automatic failed (“F”) grade for that assignment. Again, no exceptions will be given to this policy. To avoid this penalty, turn the device off and place it safely within any bags or purses while class is in session, or do not even bring them to class in the first place.

Laptops, PDAs, iPods, iPads, smartphones, blah blah blah, etc.

The use of these devices tends to be highly disruptive and distracting to other students. Thus, the use of these devices, even for taking notes, is *strictly prohibited*. I do not care if all of my students own them or not. I do not care if “every professor” lets you use them in class—I do not. These technologies—whether “essential”, Rube Goldberg-esque, or mere bread and circuses—will be waiting for their users immediately after class ends. Thanks.

“Most institutions demand unqualified faith; but the institution of science makes skepticism a virtue.”

- Robert K. Merton, sociologist

Schedule

Below is an outline of weekly topics and readings. We will generally be covering one chapter each week, although some chapters will warrant greater attention and time. Also, the chapters will not be covered in a totally linear fashion. Any modifications to the course schedule will be announced well in advance. You are responsible for any changes in the syllabus that are announced in class. Having missed class that day is no excuse for not complying with the change.

Class Days	Topic	Readings
Aug 25-29	Introduction to Research Methods	Babbie, Ch. 1
Sep 3-5	The Role of Theory in Research	Babbie, Ch. 2
Sep 8-12	Reading & Writing Research	Babbie, Ch. 15
Sep 15-19	Research Ethics	Babbie, Ch. 3
Sep 22-26	Research Design and Causality	Babbie, Ch. 4
Sep 29-Oct 3	Conceptualization & Operationalization	Babbie, Ch. 5
Oct 6-10	Configuring Data	Babbie, Ch. 6
Oct 13-17	Sampling / EXAM 1	Babbie, Ch. 7
Oct 20-24	Experimental Research	Babbie, Ch. 8
Oct 27-31	Survey Research	Babbie, Ch. 9
Nov 3-7	Field Research	Babbie, Ch. 10
Nov 10-14	Unobtrusive Research	Babbie, Ch. 11
Nov 17-21	Evaluation Research	Babbie, Ch. 12
Nov 24-28	THANKSGIVING BREAK	
Dec 1-5	Qualitative Data Analysis	Babbie, Ch. 13
Dec 8-12	Quantitative Data Analysis	Babbie, Ch. 14
	EXAM 2	

Grade Composition and Grading Scale

1) weekly BlackBoard discussions (20%)	A	> 93%	C+	77-80%	D-	60-63%
2) online quizzes and peer-reviews (25%)	A-	90-93%	C	73-77%	F	< 60%
3) two exams (30%, 15% each)	B+	87-90%	C-	70-73%		
4) one research proposal (25%)	B	83-87%	D+	67-70%		
	B-	80-83%	D	63-67%		

“What I am suggesting is that by addressing ourselves to issues and to troubles, and formulating them as problems of social

science, we stand the best chance, I believe the only chance, to make reason democratically relevant to human affairs in a free society, and so realize the classic values that underlie the promise of our studies.”

- C. Wright Mills, sociologist

Requirements

This course is reading intensive and will require a dedication to completing weekly reading assignments (as listed above). The complexity of course material will compound with time—each new topic builds upon previous topics. Consequently, it is *crucial and imperative* that students stay current with reading assignments, as it will be very difficult to catch-up.

As the semester progresses, students need to be sure that they understand the required material. As this subject matter is crucial to the discipline of Sociology (and other social sciences), comprehension will be very important for future courses, as well. Thus, if something is unclear, students need to find answers to their questions.²

A substantial portion of students’ grades will come from grappling with assigned readings—whether through online discussions or in-class quizzing. In-class exams, while not an unimportant part of the class, is weighted the least important, mainly due to substantial student anxiety over in-class exams. The final research proposal is the culmination of all this learned knowledge.

Weekly BlackBoard discussions

Students are required to post two different sets of discussions weekly during the semester, based on readings. (1) Questions pertaining directly to *the week’s required readings* must be submitted by Monday at classtime (i.e., 1pm). (2) Two separate responses to questions, comments, or answers based upon the aforementioned questions that must be completed by 1pm on Thursday of the same week. Posts that are time-stamped later than the time due will have points deducted.

Good discussion posts will include relevant information from the readings, including direct quotes if need be, necessary to understand the post. Directly grappling with reading material is required. Possible content for posts may include the description of major, tangible concepts from the reading; real-world connections with the reading; relating the reading to personal experiences, current events, or other topics in the course; or questions designed to clarify some confusing aspect of the reading. Students may ask questions in their posts, but questions must be analytical questions (e.g. “When Babbie discusses mixed-methods, in what ways does he mean

² Suggestions for answering questions: 1) re-read the book, paying careful attention to all the important and relevant details, including previous material that may inform the current question, 2) ask fellow classmates, and 3) ask the instructor. These suggestions should be tried in this order. Thus, if a student cannot understand what the book means or if the answer cannot be found in the book, ask a classmate (especially one who read the book). If no other classmates understand or know the answer to the question, it may be a systematically difficult matter, so ask your instructor. If the instructor does not know the answer (!!!), he will find the/an answer for you.

for all methods to be treated as ‘equal partners’ in the analytic strategy?”), i.e. questions *cannot* be of a “true/false” character (e.g. “Does Babbie discuss quasi-experimental designs?”). Challenge yourself to go beyond your usual comfort level. You will undoubtedly challenge and impress your fellow classmates and your instructor in the process. Response and counter-response posts must be of an upper-division-level quality (if you are uncertain, ask your peers or instructor for what qualifies as this level of quality). Thus, posts like “yea, I agree” or simple one sentence responses are simply unacceptable and will not count. Instead, should answer questions posed by other students, give additional supporting evidence (or contradicting examples), or simply engage in a conversation with the subject matter. Longer, conversational responses are especially encouraged.

The types of potential questions students may have after doing academic reading for a class include: opinion, quiz, clarification, and synthesis. Each represents a particular quality of comprehension of the question-asker and a general challenge to the question-answerer. Each successive type of question should be understood as an increase in the rigor, difficulty, and intellectualism of the discussion. Thus, quiz questions are (sort of) more higher-order than opinion questions. Clarification questions are more higher-order than quiz questions, and so on (with synthesis questions being the highest-order possible). ***For this class, opinion and quiz style questions are unacceptable***—they do not represent a sufficiently stringent quality of question. Instead, based your questions upon the clarification or synthesis standards.

Type	What	Question	Answer	Improvement
Opinion	Inquiring what others think about something in the reading	States a particular understanding and asks others to interpret	No correct answer; answer is relative and rooted in each person's experience	Request suitable evidence to backup opinion Demonstrate how one's opinion is not really an opinion, but more universal
Quiz	Testing others' understanding of certain facts in the reading	Seeks a specific interpretation or response	A correct answer [supposedly] exists	Create an applied scenario Avoid questions that center on mere definitions
Clarification	Asking others to illuminate and expound upon something unclear in the reading	States the present level of understanding, but asks for more	A better answer exists	Discusses what is understood, but raises points of contention Answer should help sort out the issues of disagreement

Synthesis	Requesting that others combine different ideas together from the reading	Identifies two (or more) ideas that have potential overlap	A good answer finds the ways in which the ideas mesh or contradict	Requires two (or more) as of yet unassociated ideas that some potential overlap can be detected Proposing an example or scenario to assist others in identifying areas of overlap/synthesis
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The following are guidelines that will help you write better questions and responses.

Read everything: do *not* attempt to write questions or respond to questions if you have not read the assigned readings. It will be very clear to the instructor and your fellow students that you have not done appropriate work ahead of time. By participating without preparing ahead of time is disrespectful to others who have made such efforts, as it lowers the quality of discussion. Also, writing questions based upon only the first page of the reading will make it *very* clear to others that you likely only read that far into the chapter—so, read on and develop a more learned question.

On-topic: questions and responses must be pertinent to the course and the subject matter of the week. If questions and responses pertain to ideas previously covered in the course, a clear connection must be made.

Open-ended questions: questions should not be written as to require a simple “yes” or “no”. Such questions do not suitably challenge readers and do not encourage critical thinking. Consequently, open-ended questions force others to respond with longer, more deliberately-argued responses.

Include citations: you *must* reference which page your questions and responses pertain to. If you provide information (including answers) that come from outside of the assigned text, you *must* give a complete citation that will assist others in finding this information (as you did).

Online quizzes and peer-reviews

An indeterminate number of quizzes will be given throughout the semester to complete online. These quizzes will be unscheduled, but announced in class. The quizzes can pertain to *anything* happening in the course, including required readings, class lectures, or group discussions (even those occurring the same day as the quiz).

Also, periodic online peer-reviews will be assigned on BlackBoard regarding the research proposal paper (see below). For each of these peer-review assignments, (1) students will post on BlackBoard information regarding their research proposal plans. Students need to provide detailed answers that are pertinent to the questions. Then, (2) each student must read five other students’ proposal plans, and offer three specific responses for each: (a) what do you like about the proposal (i.e., what is solid, creative, or interesting?), (b) what question do you have about the proposal (i.e., what is unclear?), and (c) what suggestion would you make (i.e., what could be

done or considered to improve the proposal?). No more than eight responses should be offered for each student's proposal; if a student already has had eight responses, select another student to respond to. Make sure the feedback is constructive, considerate, specific, thorough, and as un-repetitive (compared to previous responses) as possible.

Exams

There will be two exams, a midterm exam and a second exam (which will probably be referred to as a "final", but it is not comprehensive). All the material, including readings from the text, handout readings, lectures, and class discussions prior to both exams will constitute potential questions for the exams. The exams will be a mixture of multiple choice and short answer essay questions.

Research proposal paper

Students must craft a practical research proposal that is aimed at addressing some sort of social issue at California State University, Chico. The research must utilize, at least in part, quantitative methods (i.e. surveys, experiments, etc).

Through-out the first half of the semester, a sizable percentage of online time will be spent engaged in group discussions on student's research projects. For example, this is a brief list of some of the different discussions that will help students formulate their projects:

- What do you want to learn with sociological research?
- Is there an interesting sociological theory you would like to explore or test?
- What research project related to CSU Chico do you wish to do?
- What are five research studies that deal with your research topic?
- How will you locate and/or sample people for your study?
- What methodology will you use for your project?

Proposal requirements and components:

Overview and statement of research problem

- What topic/social issue is to be interrogated/addressed?
- What is the research question?
- What is the purpose of the research? What do the goals of your research involve?
- Why should anyone care?
- Why are you personally interested in your topic and how you choose it?
- How will your research contribute to the existing literature?
- Are there any ethical/political/moral concerns related to you topic/project?

Theory and literature review

- What is the theoretical paradigm and theory/theories used?
- What are the major theoretical concepts being researched?
- What, in general, does the existing research literature say about this problem?

- What have been the general findings in previous research?

Variables and hypotheses (or casual hypotheses)

- How are the relevant phenomena conceptualized and operationalized?
- What validity, reliability, and generalizability concerns does the research involve?
- What hypotheses are involved in the study?
 - The hypotheses must (a) relate two or more variables, in a (b) statement of interrelationship.

Design

- What is the study population?
- What sampling design will be used?
- What does your sampling design involve? How will the study population be accessed?
- What methodological approach(es) does the research use?
- Why is this approach the best method for your research problem?
- How will questions be worded?
- Are there any foreseeable logistical concerns the study might encounter?
 - i.e. funding, time limitations, accessing sample population, etc.

References / bibliography

Due on the last day of class instruction (December 12). More details will be given in class as the semester progresses.

“The academy is not paradise. But learning is a place where paradise can be created. The classroom with all its limitations remains a location of possibility. In that field of possibility we have the opportunity to labour for freedom, to demand of ourselves and our comrades, an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress. This is education as the practice of freedom.”

- bell hooks, feminist

Common Grammar Mistakes

1. *Always* read your writing out-loud before turning it in and have someone else read it for you. It is unlikely that any professor in the history of academia has ever written anything for official publication that they did not read over and re-write at least twice. Seriously—no one gets it right the first time!
2. Do not use contractions. Instead of “don’t” write “do not”. Contractions tend to be a bit too informal for academic writing.
3. Unless you are writing a third-wave feminist essay, there is no reason to be writing about “guys and girls”. These terms are very informal and might be interpreted as patronizing. The true binary contrast would be “boys and girls” or “guys and gals”. Use “boys and girls” only when the people are under 18 years old. Otherwise call all adults “men and women”.
4. Make sure you are using the proper tense. If you did something in the past write it that way, not as if you are narrating. Thus, write “I said to her...”, instead of “I say to her...”
5. Numbers under fourteen (14) or fifteen (15) should be written out as words (“fourteen”), not as numbers using digits (“14”). Some hold this standard even higher, arguing that any amount under a hundred (100) should be spelled out. The exception to this rule is a number that has a fractional part, such as 3.1415 (pi). Moreover, no sentence should ever start with a number, but should be spelled out (or ought to be re-written).
6. No paragraph should be as long as a page – break your ideas up into smaller units. The same goes for long sentences, particularly those with many commas.
7. Do not write for a formal academic paper in the way that you informally speak. A lot of spoken language is completely unnecessary when writing. For example: “So, I think that those guys could basically have gotten in big trouble with the cops for what they were trying to pull” could be better written as “The men could have been arrested for their actions”. If you type something exactly as you would say it in general, informal conversation, you probably should try re-wording it.
8. Make sure you clarify who “they”, “that”, “s/he”, “it” is. Oftentimes the object to which they words refer to is unclear. For example: “The boy played with his dog outside. But he was scared by the unexpected car that drove up.” In this example, who was scared: the boy or the dog? Avoid this confusion by re-stating who is doing the action: “But the boy was scared by the unexpected car that drove up”.
9. Be wary of words that are spelled differently and have different meanings, but sound similar: accept/except, our/are, then/than, they’re/there/their, to/too/two, your/you’re, we’re/were/where, etc.
10. Every piece of information that is not your own idea or researched fact *must* be cited. An in-text citation must follow any chunk of information in your writing, including the author’s last name and the year it was written in parentheses. All full-text citation must be listed at the end of the paper in a “References” section, additionally including the title, publisher information, and page numbers. Failing to do this constitutes plagiarism.