

Gillham  
Summer  
2000

## **Introduction to Research Methods**

**Soc 3201 -- Summer B Term, 2000**  
**Monday-Friday 7:30-9:05 A.M.**

### **SYLLABUS**

INSTRUCTOR: Patrick Gillham  
OFFICE: Ketchum 03C  
OFFICE HOURS: T/R 9:10 - 10:10 or by appt.

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#### **COURSE DESCRIPTION --**

This course aims to familiarize students with a variety of quantitative and qualitative methods used by sociologists to acquire reliable and valid answers to sociological questions. One of the best ways to gain appreciation for research is to study the way methods link to both theory and data analysis. Thus, we begin the course by examining this link and we will revisit this connection throughout the semester. Another way to gain appreciation for social research is to apply the methods. In doing so we answer the question of how methods are carried out and why a particular method may be more appropriate than another. Consequently, an important portion of this course is dedicated to using the different methods. Finally, appreciation for methods comes by expanding one's sociological imagination. Therefore, this course will concentrate on sharpening your sociological thinking, with the intent of extending your intellectual pleasure, professional and human development. Completion of Social Statistics (soc 2061) is a prerequisite for this class. If you have not completed the statistics course, please speak with me at the end of the first day of class.

#### **PAT'S ASSUMPTIONS --**

- A. Learning is important and rewarding -- that is why we are here.
- B. Learning is reciprocal and communal. It evolves from participation and reflection, and it flows from listening to and speaking with others.
- C. It can be fun!
- D. Learning necessitates tolerance, postponement of judgment, and the courage to speak out. This can be very difficult to do.
- E. Conflict isn't necessarily bad. As our own perspectives are challenged we are able to refine and adapt them to account for new information (i.e., we grow intellectually and more).
- F. Nobody has all the answers and that's okay.

**GENERAL EXPECTATIONS & ENCOURAGEMENTS** -- Because learning is important, reciprocal and done within the context of a community, all of us (myself included) are encouraged to come to class prepared. For you, prepared means arriving on time, with assignments completed (e.g., readings and written work), willing to participate in (but not monopolize) discussions, and ready to respect (but not necessarily to agree with) others. Given the class meets at 7:30 a.m.(!), arriving prepared also means arriving awake. We will strategize on ways to make the early hour a benefit rather than a drag. Contributions are important from both women and men, thus, both will be encouraged to participate fully. *Because tolerance is necessary for learning, we are all expected to respect each other whether or not we agree with what is being expressed.* Consequently, no rude interruptions nor intimidating outbursts will be tolerated. Because conflict isn't necessarily bad, all are encouraged to be open to challenges (including the instructor). Finally, because nobody, as far as I can tell, has all the answers, it is okay to occasionally say --"I don't know."

**CLASS/LECTURE** -- The purpose of these gatherings is to disseminate and discuss the historical and philosophical background, as well as the concepts and ideas important for understanding research design and methods. During this period we will occasionally discuss the reading and engage in activities that help

make the more difficult ideas easier to grasp. During each class you will have the chance to ask questions about the reading, though class periods will not be dedicated to reviewing all the course readings. Hence, it is *your responsibility* to keep up with, and critically engage the readings to do well in this class. I encourage you to talk with me if you are having difficulty with any aspect of the course. Given the difficulty of the material, attendance is highly recommended if you wish to receive a passing grade.

**READINGS** --The course readings are meant to expose you to the philosophical underpinnings and practical processes of doing social research.. You may purchase the following required text at the UMC Bookstore.

Charon, Joel M. 1992. *Ten Questions: A Sociological Perspective*.

Schutt, Russell 1999. *Investigating the Social World*.

Charon's book is a "reader" that identifies key sociological questions. Nothing is more discouraging than to take a class and not know how the material connects to the larger discipline. This book will aid in linking research methods with the broad field of sociology. Schutt's *Investigating the Social World* is the textbook for the semester. It will provide conceptual and practical tools necessary to master why and how to do social research. You will likely want to hold onto this book for later reference, particularly if you plan to do a senior research project, pursue graduate school, or take a research job. These books are excellent and should make for intelligent and worthwhile reading.

A few articles will be placed on reserve at Norlin Library that you are to read as well. The course schedule notes the dates by which materials should be read. *You are expected to come to class having read and thought about the assigned subject matter*. This does not mean a 5 minute scan just before class. Much of what you encounter on the exams will come from the readings in the form of application and "objective" questions (I'll say more about this as we approach the first exam).

**GENERAL COMMENTS ON GRADING** -- Going to school for the sole purpose of getting a particular grade sucks. It makes learning a chore rather than a pleasure and tends to encourage students to identify "success" with self worth. I also understand that some students are taking the class because it is required and they just want a passing grade. These things considered, I believe that you can learn a lot from this course that will be applicable to you personally and professionally, regardless of your educational goals. Hence, I suggest you take this course with the intent to learn as much as possible about thinking sociologically, rather than trying to get an A or B. Because the University requires it, I issue grades. Based upon the University's grading criterion (read handbook and catalog if you are unfamiliar with these policies), and my notion of fairness, please keep the following in mind:

1. If you study 3 hours outside of class for each in class credit hour (this equals 4.5 hours a day or 22.5 hours a week of outside work for this course), attend all the classes, adequately prepare for exams, and do all the written work, then you will be doing what is expected of you. An average grade given out for doing what is expected of you is a C. C means competent/average work. It doesn't mean "terrible work" neither does it mean below average or incompetent work. Sociology can be just as difficult to understand as any of the hard sciences. While the material may make sense intuitively, this class will not be easy. For some people it may be more difficult than a math or science course.

2. B work is better than average, i.e., good to very good. Some students who get a B may feel they deserved an A. Read on.

3. An A is given out for consistently excellent work, not good work, not average work, and certainly not for below average work. In other words, those who do outstanding work will be rewarded with an A. Those who do not do outstanding work will not be rewarded with an A.

4. D work is minimum passing. If you want to do better than this then you will need to engage the reading and class materials, attend class daily, and study. A D does not mean dumb. Instead, it often suggests that you did not apply yourself and/or that you need to improve your study and writing skills.

5. Education is not a sporting event where you can cruise along for most of the game, then turn it on in the end and expect to miraculously win. I therefore suggest that you apply yourselves from the beginning of class, particularly if you hope to achieve an A or B. No extra credit will be given in this course. As it is you will have plenty to do and learn.

6. In some classes, cheating can become a problem. Cheating includes using work that is not your own, copying from others, using cheat sheets on exams, or practicing other means to dishonestly report what you know (e.g., plagiarism). If caught cheating, student will be given an automatic F for the assignment, will receive the maximum of a D+ for the class, and will be reported to the academic dean for further recourse.

### **JOURNALS, PROJECTS, EXAMS & ATTENDANCE --**

1. Journals: You will be expected to keep a journal and turn in 1-2 page, hand-written or typed entries each day. The purpose of these assignments is to help you reflect on the readings and connect them to the class discussions. Sometimes you will answer specific questions, other times you will elaborate on an out of class research activity. No late entries will be accepted, though you can miss two without penalty. If you fail to turn in 7 or more thoughtful writings, you will receive a zero for the journal grade.

2. Projects: Normally, when taking a research methods course, students write a research proposal to help them apply the materials learned in class. Ideally, students begin the research proposal after they begin thinking like researchers, which usually isn't until later in the semester. Thirteen weeks of material compressed into a 5-week summer semester makes this type of assignment unmanageable, because students don't get the time to assimilate the materials soon enough to think like researchers. In place of a research proposal, I am assigning two projects worth 25 points each. The projects will entail reading a journal article and writing a paper that applies what you are learning in the class. While this is not the same as writing your own proposal, these assignments should help you better engage in the kind of thinking necessary to write one.

**Project 1** – Using Sociological Abstracts (“SocAbstracts”), find an article written in the last 10 years that addresses a research question you come up with after watching the video on the WTO demonstrations (we’ll watch the video in class on Friday, 7/14). You can access SocAbstracts at the Norlin Library computers near the reference information desk. SocAbstracts can also be found online using the CU Libraries Chinook System (<http://libraries.colorado.edu/>). From the main Chinook page click on “Article Access”. Next, click on “First Search Gold and Silver”, then click on “First Search Gold”. From here go to SocAbstracts and follow the instructions for conducting a search. After conducting the search, read through the abstracts to find out which article best addresses your question. Make a copy of the abstract, then find the article in the library. If the library does not carry the periodical you are looking for, then get the next best article from your search. Copy the article. Read Shutt’s “Questions to Ask About a Research Article” in Appendix C. Then read the article with these questions in mind. Based on the article you found, write a paper that answers the first 14 questions. Provide one paragraph for each question. Use Shutt’s “How to Read a Research Article” in Appendix D as a template for writing your paper.

**Project 2** – Using the same article you found for Project 1, answer questions 15-23 in Shutt’s Appendix C. Write one paragraph for each question. Exclude Q. 22 unless you are familiar with the literature. Rely on Appendix D to help with format.

3. Exams: There will be a midterm and a cumulative final exam. They will consist of multiple-choice, short and long essay questions. The midterm is worth 100 points, the final is worth 150. Missing any exam will reduce your grade for the course to an F.

4. Attendance: You may miss 2 classes for any reason without penalizing your grade. Missing more than any combination of five classes will give you a zero for attendance (for university policy on attendance see p.66 of the 1996-97 Student Handbook). Entering class late is distracting so please arrive early. People who are chronically late, will be assigned tardies. Two tardies will equal one absence. Neglecting attendance will indicate to me that you have not gained sufficient academic knowledge about research methods to receive an average or better grade.

5. Weekends Off: Just because this is a condensed semester doesn't mean it will be easy. In fact, this class will likely be one of the more difficult ones you've taken as a sociology major because it is a core course that requires mastery of abstractions and processes, and because we must cover a lot of challenging material in a short period of time. Thus, please keep in mind that you will do as much work during this 5-week period as you would during a normal semester. To help ease burn out, I have structured the course so that no reading or homework assignments are due on Mondays. Giving you the weekends off means that you will need to work especially hard during the week. If you are employed or taking another class, I encourage you to reduce your work hours or consider dropping the other class so that you will have a manageable and enjoyable experience this semester.

**GRADE BREAKDOWN --**

Midterm	--	100 points
Cumulative Final Exam	--	150
Project 1		25
Project 2		25
Journals/Quizzes	--	50
Attendance	--	50
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Total	--	400 points possible

To figure your grade at the end of the semester add your total points. The following are the grade cut-offs:

400-372 = A	347-332 = B	307-292 = C	267-252 = D
371-360 = A-	331-320 = B-	291-280 = C-	251-240 = D-
359-348 = B+	319-308 = C+	279-268 = D+	239-0 = F

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**IMPORTANT DATES --**

7/21	Project 1 due at beginning of class
7/28	Midterm
8/8	Project 2 due at beginning of class
8/11	Cumulative Final -- Friday, 7:30-10:30 a.m.

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## SCHEDULE OF READING AND TOPICS

### INTRODUCTION – SOCIOLOGY & KNOWLEDGE

#### WEEK 1 (7/11/00-7/14/00)

7/11/00 Guiding Question/Topic: Intro & syllabus  
Tues.

Reading: None

Journal Questions: None

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7/12 Guiding Question/Topic: Ways of Knowing (Epistemology)  
Wed. What is Sociology?  
Theory, Methods & Data Analysis  
The Problem of Social Order  
Application vs. Theory

Reading Due: Syllabus , please read it carefully  
Genesis 1-4 (On Reserve)  
Giddens, "What is Sociology?" Pp. 1-10 (On Reserve)  
Charon, Chapter 3 "How is Society Possible"

Journal Questions: Briefly discuss what the engraving over Norlin's West entrance means, how you learn, and what your and my responsibilities are in your education. In a sentence or two, define sociology in your own words and note any questions you have about the syllabus.

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### II. PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS, RESEARCH QUESTIONS, DESIGN & DATA

7/13 Guiding Question/Topic: The Origins of Social Thought & Research Methods -- Identifying  
Thurs. Social Facts

Reading Due: Schutt Preface & Chapter 1  
Charon, Chapter 1 "How Do Sociologists Study Society?"

Journal Questions: Based upon yesterday and today's readings, as well as your own thoughts, discuss a few reasons why sociology developed in the Europe and North America rather than on the continents of Asia, Africa, or South America. Briefly discuss how sociology is linked to science, how descriptive research differs from explanatory, and define the differing types of validity that you as a sociologist would attempt to achieve in your research.

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7/14 Guiding Question/Topic: Social Research Processes & Problems  
Fri.

Reading Due: Schutt, Chapter 2  
Charon, Chapter 8  
Durkheim, "The Rules of Sociological Methods" Skim. (On Reserve)

Journal Questions: Using a few quotes from Durkheim, discuss what he means by “social facts” and how he understands sociology as different from other academic disciplines. Next, relying on Schutt and Charon, discuss ways that sociologists identify research questions, and describe how deductive research differs from inductive.

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**WEEK 2 (7/17-7/21)**

7/17 Guiding Question/Topic: Art and Sociology -- Creating Variables from Concepts  
Mon.

Reading Due: None

Journal Questions: None

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7/18 Guiding Question/Topic: Conceptualization, Measurement, & Variables cont...  
Tues.

Reading Due: Schutt, Chapter 3, Appendix B & C (This will help with Projects 1 & 2).

Journal Questions: Clearly specify a research question that came to you while watching the WTO film, then operationalize an independent and dependent variable from concepts related to this question. Identify your variables “level of measurement” and try to ensure that your variables are both reliable and valid. What do you find most difficult about this process? Why is it important to review the literature before beginning a study?

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7/19 Guiding Question/Topic: Sample Logic “*To see a world in a grain of sand...*” William Blake  
Wed.

Reading Due: Schutt, Chapter 4

Journal Questions: Suppose students carry out a research project for a class using all the names in the first three pages of a city telephone directory as a sample of the people living in their community. Based on today’s readings, is this a good sampling method? Why or why not?

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7/20 Guiding Question/Topic: The Problem of Causation – Independent vs. Dependent Variables, Relationships vs. Associations, Determinism vs. Freewill  
Thurs.

Reading Due: Schutt, Chapter 5  
Charon, Chapter 6

Journal Questions: Read through a current newspaper or magazine. Identify an idiographic causal explanation for why a historical event (like a war or change in stock market) occurred or why a person ended up doing something notable (like achieving high office or committing a heinous act). Identify the major influences mentioned in the causal process and explain how well the article fits the criteria for a causal explanation.

Based on ideas from Charon, Chapter 6, discuss the capacity to which actors involved in the story were free to act. Convert this explanation to a nomothetic one by restating the major influences as variables that could affect many people.

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7/21 Fri. Guiding Question/Topic: Literature and Social Research

**PROJECT 1 DUE AT BEGINNING OF CLASS**

Reading Due: None

Journal Questions: None

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**III. QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH DESIGN & DATA COLLECTION**

**WEEK 3 (7/24-7/28)**

7/24 Mon. Guiding Question/Topic: A Primer on the Distinction between Quantitative & Qualitative Research. And Methods of Experimentation

Reading Due: None

Journal Questions: None

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7/25 Tues. Guiding Question/Topic: Experiments, Evaluation, Validity and Ethics

Reading Due: Schutt, Chapter 6

Journal Questions: Conduct TV Experiment (class handout)

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7/26 Wed. Survey Research -- Design and Data Collection

Reading Due: Schutt, Chapter 7, Skim Appendix E, will use SPSS next Monday.

Journal Questions: Construct 3 survey questions that will help you address your broader research question about the WTO demonstrations. Keep in mind the features that make for a clear and meaningful survey question. List strengths and weaknesses of each type of survey (e.g., mail, phone, and in-person surveys). What does SPSS stand for?

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7/27 Thurs. Guiding Question/Topic: Tying together everything so far

Reading Due: None

Journal Questions: None

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7/28 **Guiding Question/Topic: MIDTERM**  
Fri.

Reading Due: None

Journal Questions: None

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**WEEK 4 (7/31-8/4)**

7/31 **Guiding Question/Topic: SPSS – Hands on work doing data entry and descriptives**  
Mon.

Reading Due: None

Journal Questions: None

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**IV. QUALITATIVE RESEARCH, DESIGN AND DATA COLLECTION**

8/1 **Guiding Question/Topic: Qualitative Methods – a search for meaning. Beginning with Participant**  
Tues. **Observation.**

Reading Due: Schutt, Chapter 8

Journal Questions: Go to the Hill, Pearl Street Mall, or some other public place with a relatively large number of human beings. Conduct a 30 minute observational study, taking occasional notes unobtrusively, without violating any expectations of privacy. Write up your field notes, being sure to include a description of the setting, a commentary on your own behavior and your reactions to what you observed. Conclude with a brief sociological analysis of your observations.

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8/2 **Guiding Question/Topic: Historical & Comparative Methods**  
Weds.

Reading Due: Schutt, Chapter 9 & 10

Journal Questions: Based on the reading in Schutt, name a few strengths and weaknesses in historical, comparative, and multiple methods. of the methods.

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8/3 **Guiding Question/Topic: Putting it All Together – Multiple Methods and Intro to Data Analysis**  
Thurs.

Reading Due: Schutt, Chapter 11  
Charon, Chapter 9

Journal Questions: Discuss the claim that quantitative methods and analysis turns people into numbers and makes them feel like they can do little to change injustice. In response to Charon do you believe an individual can make a difference? Why or why not? How important do you think groups are in promoting change? Do you believe that sociology helps or hinders in efforts at social change? Why or why not?

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8/4 Fri. Guiding Question/Topic: Quantitative vs. Qualitative Data Analysis  
Reading Due: Schutt, Chapter 12, skim Appendix G  
Gaile, "Agents of Ice"  
Journal Questions: What is Gaile's primary research question? What methods and types of analysis does he employ? What does he find? Do you buy his findings? Relate problems in Gaile's article to some of the discussions in Schutt, Chapter 12.

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**WEEK 5 (8/7-8/11)**

8/7 Mon. Guiding Question/Topic: Qualitative Data Analysis  
Reading Due: None  
Journal Questions: None

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8/8 Tues. Guiding Question/Topic: Proposals, Reportage, and Ethics

**PROJECT 2 DUE AT BEGINNING OF CLASS**

Reading Due: None  
Journal Questions: None

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8/9 Weds. Guiding Question/Topic: Sociology and the War Within

Reading Due: Charon, Chapter 10  
Juster, "Faintly Macabre's Story" (On Reserve).

Journal Questions: Look over the NSF (National Science Foundation) web site referred to by Schutt on p.480, Web Exercise #1. What research method seem to be the primary type supported by NSF? Why do you think this is the case? How would Princesses Rhyme and Reason from the Kingdom of Wisdom distribute research money? What kind of studies might they request? Based on Charon's reading, do you think sociology is important? Why or why not?

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8/10 Thurs. Guiding Question/Topic: Wrap it up

Reading Due: None  
Journal Questions: None

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8/11 FINAL EXAM: *Friday, 7:30-10:30 a.m. in our classroom.*

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