

L A K E H E A D U N I V E R S I T Y
D E P A R T M E N T O F S O C I O L O G Y

Sociology 4313FA
Problems and Issues in Methods

Fall 2015
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Office Hours: *Tuesday & Thursday: 12:00-1:00 p.m. or by appointment*

Classes: *RB2027, Tuesday & Thursday, 10:00—11:30 AM*

Course Description:

This course will examine basic issues at different research stages. These research stages include research design (elements, measurement, and sampling), data collection (experimentation, survey, field work, and available data), data analysis, and writing research reports. This course will pay specific attention to research design and data collection. Data analysis will be taught in other courses (Soci 3311 WA: Research Techniques and Data Analysis and Soci 4317 WA: Quantitative Methods). The prerequisite course is the third year research methods (Soci 3310 FA: Foundations of Social Research). Students are responsible for ensuring that they have successfully completed that course.

The course will be conducted in a seminar format, with a focus on analyzing the readings which seminar participants are expected to have read in advance of a given seminar. Students should feel free both to ask “dumb” questions that encourage understanding and to take advantage of each other’s knowledge in the subject area.

Texts:

Singleton, R.A. Jr. and Bruce C. Straits. 2010. *Approaches to Social Research (5th edition)*.
Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press.

Course requirements

The final grade will be determined as follows:

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| Class attendance | 10% |
| Class participation | 20% |
| Presentation | 40% |
| Examination (during examination period) | 30% |

Class attendance

This will be based on name tags used for each class. Full marks will be given for those who have a perfect attendance record (23 classes). Partial marks will be given for those who miss classes.

Class participation

This mark will be based on evidence of having read the readings and involving discussion in class. For each seminar, all students are expected to have read the required readings listed on the course outline. Participation includes asking questions, answering questions, discussing links to other things, and thinking about implications. It is important to come to class with some notes and reflections on the material. The objectives are summarizing readings, raising important points, synthesizing, and critically discussing the research issues of given readings. After each class, the instructor will take note of the quality and quantity of participation of each student, and the extent to which this participation is based on having done the readings in advance. These will then be assessed at the end of the course.

Presentation

Each student is asked to lead the discussion for two seminars. This may be done individually or with another student, depending on the class size. The person(s) responsible for a given seminar is asked to distribute a page of presentation outline or main issues at that specific research stage and questions that are used for the focus of class discussion.

The format of the seminar is that each class starts with student's presentation (about 45 minutes), followed by answering questions (on the presentation outline) or raising new questions from the class (20 minutes). In the last 15-20 minutes of each class, I will give a brief evaluation about the presentation by correcting the errors made in the presentation, adding important issues or points missed in the presentation, raising my questions about the research issues presented by the students, and relating the current chapter to those previous ones.

The presentation mark will be based on the quality of presentation and the discussion of the seminar and will be evaluated by students. This includes raising questions, sponsoring discussion, possibly bringing in additional material, synthesizing, and discussing the possible implications. When students work as a group, the same mark will be used for all members of the group. ***Each student is asked to email me his/her mark to the presenter(s) before the following class. Punishment might be applied if you fail to submit your marks.***

Examination

This will cover the required readings plus all the discussions that have taken place during the seminars. The exam will be close-book and essay type, with some choice. I will hand out a list of questions (one from each chapter) for the final exam in the last week of class. The final exam will include two parts. Part one includes one compulsory question (25%) which you will know in advance. Part two has 7 questions and you can choose five of them to answer (15% each).

Outline and schedule (the following schedule may be modified slightly throughout the term)

- Liu Sep. 15: Course logistics/ introduction
- Liu Sep. 17: Chapter 1 Introduction
- _____ Sep. 22: Chapter 2 The Nature of Science
- _____ Sep. 24: Chapter 3 Research Ethics
- _____ Sep. 29: Chapter 4 Elements of Research Design
Part one: from “Origins of Research Topics” to “Relationships”
- _____ Oct. 1: Chapter 4 Elements of Research Design
Part two: from “Stating Problems and Hypotheses” to “Summary”
- _____ Oct. 6: Chapter 5 Measurement
Part one: from “The Measurement Process” to “Levels of Measurement”
- _____ Oct. 8: Chapter 5 Measurement
Part two: from “Reliability and Validity” to “Summary”
- _____ Oct. 13: Chapter 6 Sampling
Part one: from “Why Sample?” to “Probability Sampling”
- _____ Oct. 15: Chapter 6 Sampling
Part two: from “Non-probability Sampling” to “Summary”
- _____ Oct. 20: Chapter 7 Experimentation
Part one: from “The Logic of Experimentation” to “Staging Experiments”
- _____ Oct. 22: Chapter 7 Experimentation
Part two: from “The Experiment as a Social Occasion”
- _____ Oct. 27: Chapter 8 Experimental Designs
Part one: from “Threats to Internal Validity” to “True Experimental Designs”
- _____ Oct. 29: Chapter 8 Experimental Designs
Part two: from “Factorial Experimental Designs” to “Summary”
- _____ Nov. 3: Chapter 9 Survey Research
Part one: from “General Features of Survey Research” to “Steps in Survey Research: Planning”
- _____ Nov. 5: No class (out of town for a conference)
- _____ Nov. 10: Chapter 9 Survey Research
Part two: from “Face-to-Face and Telephone Interviewing” to “Summary”
- _____ Nov. 12: Chapter 10 Survey Instrumentation
- _____ Nov. 19: Chapter 11 Field Research
- _____ Nov. 21: Chapter 12 Research Using Available Data
Part one: from “Sources of Available Data” to “General Methodological Issues in Available-Data Research”
- _____ Nov. 25: Chapter 12 Research Using Available Data
Part two: from “Historical Analysis” to “Summary”
- _____ Nov. 27: Chapter 13 Multiple Methods
- _____ Dec. 1: Chapter 14 Evaluation Research
- Liu Dec. 3: Chapter 17 Writing Research Reports