

Methods of Social Research (SYA4300: 04-08)
Distance Learning Section



Course website: <http://campus.fsu.edu>

Instructor: Dr. Isaac W. Eberstein
TAs: DeAnna Gore, Orit Fisher, Heather Rubino

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CONTACT INFORMATION:

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Key points regarding communication:

- We *strongly* encourage the use of the class discussion board for posting general administrative, technical, or substantive questions or comments at any time of the day or night. As the semester gets going, these postings should be your first point of reference when you have a question or concern, since questions and answers will be open for everyone to read and archived for later reference.
- Note that we do *not* monitor the discussion board or our email 24/7. You should reasonably expect a reply to your electronic communications within 24 hours, *except for weekends and holidays*. Please include the course number in the subject line of all email messages (SYA4300).

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course covers research design, data collection, and data analysis (not statistics) in social research. There are no formal prerequisites, but some knowledge and experience with social science will be helpful. I believe very strongly in learning by doing, so the most important lessons of the class are embodied in the projects.

I will use written course documents to provide information on general methodological topics and to assist you with specific projects. Portions of the class will be fairly abstract (e.g., positivist versus interpretive approaches to social research) and other parts will be very specific (e.g., how to design a survey question). Obviously, all the material will be interrelated because specific technical procedures arise from the application of basic

methodological principles within real world constraints. My intent is that you will become skilled at both the theoretical and practical levels of methodological discourse.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

My overall goal for the class is that *after completing the course, you will be able to apply basic methodological principles to the study of human society.*

I have three specific objectives:

1. *Content/ Discipline knowledge and skills:* You will learn concepts and principles of research, and you will learn to apply these to selected problems and issues in studying human society. This objective relies on readings, exams, and projects.
2. *Communication:* You will improve your skills in written communication by satisfactorily completing assigned exercises and project reports.
3. *Critical thinking:* You will improve your critical thinking skills by evaluating the methodological strengths and weaknesses of specific studies, as well as linking these to the way in which evidence is interpreted.

REQUIRED COURSE MATERIALS:

Book: Schutt, R. K. (2006). *Investigating the social world: The process and practice of research* (5th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press. [ISBN 1-4129-2734-X (paper)]. <Note this is not the more expensive version of the text that comes bundled with SPSS student software.> The book combines an emphasis on basic conceptual principles with a real-world pragmatism that gives students effective guidance in how to create as well as how to evaluate research results. It also comes with a computer disk containing helpful exercises. Books may be ordered from the FSU bookstore, Bill’s, or elsewhere. Be sure to specify delivery before the second week of class.

Articles: There will be several required research articles. Each will be available online through the FSU Library.

Software requirements: You must be able to access the internet, read PDF documents, use basic word processing (WORD compatible) and spreadsheets (EXCEL compatible), and view streaming audio and video.

GRADING/EVALUATION:

Course grades will be based on the following weighting of course requirements:

Ten online quizzes	20%
Final Exam	5%
Survey Project (4 parts)	40%
Data Analysis Project (4 parts)	20%
Article Review	5%
Human Subjects Certificate	5%
Participation	5%

Tests. There are ten timed weekly quizzes over reading and a final exam (objective & essay). The quizzes must be completed during the week a chapter is assigned. *Eleven quizzes will be offered, so no make-ups will be allowed for missed quizzes barring major and extraordinary circumstances.* I will assess any requests in consultation with your TA. If you take all eleven, I will drop the lowest grade. The final exam must be completed no later than 11:59 pm Wednesday, April 25th (TLH time).

Survey Project. A mini survey on a topic of your choice (subject to our approval). This will be turned in and graded in four pieces: (1) Section 1 will include a literature review consisting of three to four articles and a statement of the problem. (2) Section 2 will include a statement on how you are conceptualizing your variables and your hypotheses. (3) Section 3 will consist of a questionnaire you will construct (typically one to two pages). (4) Section 4 will consist of a report of findings, conclusions, and a self-critique. You will be required to conduct ten personal face-to-face interviews for section 4.

Data Analysis Project. An introduction to secondary data analysis. This consists of using very basic statistics to analyze whether a series of hypotheses you develop receive support in a national survey (archived on the web), and what the data suggest about the general causal relationships among your several variables. The purpose of this project is to teach the logic of data analysis, not statistics. The logic here is the same as in research more generally. This project will also be turned in and graded in four pieces: (1) Section 1 will be an introduction to secondary data archives. (2) Section 2 will be an illustration of index construction. (3) Section 3 will be a basic hypothesis test. (4) Section 4 will examine the importance and interpretation of control variables.

Article Review. A logical critique and evaluation of a published research article. You will read and react to a published study, thinking logically about the methodological principles, the data, and the interpretation. You will not be evaluating the statistics.

Human Subjects Certificate. A short online training session on the protection of human subjects in research.

Participation. Timely completion of assigned postings or exercises that add to the course in various ways.

Grading will be according to a standard scale, and plus/minus grading will be used for final semester grades. FSU does not allow a final grade of "A+." Specific grade ranges:

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

COURSE POLICIES:

Submitting Assignments. Upload your work by using the link provided on each assignment. Do NOT send your work to us via email. Be sure to include the following information inside the text of all assignments that you submit:

- Name (Last name, First initial)
- FSU Email Address

You will receive assignment grades and feedback privately by email and/or be able to check your grade in the course grade book. We will return papers to the grade book. You will be able to access them through “Student tools.”

Please keep a copy of all your work. We cannot assume responsibility for lost items.

Late Work. The class is organized in weekly units, *where each week begins Wednesday morning and ends at 11:59 pm Tuesday night.* Unless otherwise specified in the particular assignment, all work is due by the end of the week it is assigned; otherwise it is considered “late.” In general, late quizzes *cannot* be made up. Other late work is subject to a late penalty of 10% per week (10% penalty within one week, 20% within two weeks, etc) to encourage punctuality. This penalty may be waived in the event of serious medical illness or verified emergencies, but I reserve the right to require documentation. Students who miss graded assignments receive a grade of zero. If you are ill or have a serious problem that prevents you from submitting an assignment on the day it is due, please contact your TA at once to arrange an alternative date. Work that is more than three weeks late will be considered “missed” and receive a grade of zero.

Revising Work. In general, students will have the option to redo inadequate or unsatisfactory work (grades of D+ or below) for a *maximum* score of the original grade plus “half the distance to 100.” That is, a grade of 60 can be redone for a maximum grade of 80, and so forth. This policy does not apply to weekly quizzes or the final exam; students are not allowed to redo these. All redone work must be turned in within one week of the date we return the graded original assignment to you.

Incomplete Grades. Missing work is insufficient reason for a grade of Incomplete (I). An incomplete will only be given under extenuating circumstances at my discretion. Note that College of Social Science guidelines require that students seeking an “I” must be passing the course.

Academic Honor Code. The Florida State University Academic Honor Policy outlines the University’s expectations for the integrity of students’ academic work, the procedures for resolving alleged violations of those expectations, and the rights and responsibilities of students and faculty members throughout the process. Students are responsible for reading the Academic Honor Policy and for living up to their pledge to “be honest and truthful and...[to] strive for personal and institutional integrity at Florida State University.” See <http://www.fsu.edu/~dof/honorpolicy.htm>.

Students must abide by the highest standards of academic integrity. Any form of academic dishonesty will result in a grade of "zero" for that particular assignment. We reserve the right to use all means at our disposal to screen for plagiarism, including electronic citation checkers (e.g., Turnitin.com). For more information on plagiarism, see <http://online.fsu.edu/learningresources/plagiarism>.

Student Conduct Code. Everyone in this class is expected to adhere to principles embodied in the FSU Student Contact Code, available at:

<http://www.fsu.edu/Books/Student-Handbook/2003codes/conduct.html>. This code essentially requires everyone to maintain the highest professional standards of conduct in this class, whether in face-to-face meetings or online. Violation of the conduct code carries a range of penalties that can range from a reduced grade to expulsion.

Americans with Disabilities Act. Students with disabilities needing academic accommodation should: (1) Register with and provide documentation to the Student Disability Resource Center; and (2) bring a letter to the instructor indicating the need for accommodation and what type. This should be done during the first week of class. This syllabus and other class materials are available in alternative format upon request. For more information about services available to FSU students with disabilities, contact the Student Disability Resource Center; 97 Woodward Avenue, South; Florida State University; Tallahassee, FL 32306-4167; (850) 644-9566 (voice); (850) 644-8504 (TDD); sdrc@admin.fsu.edu; <http://www.fsu.edu/~staffair/dean/StudentDisability/>

Syllabus change policy. This syllabus is a guide for the course and is subject to change with advanced notice. It and other class materials are available in alternative format upon request.

TENTATIVE COURSE OUTLINE

Dates, readings, and assignments are subject to change

Note that the course is organized in weekly units where the “week” begins Wednesday morning and ends at 11:59 pm Tuesday night – this will provide for less harried and stressful weekends for everyone.

<i>Semester Calendar</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Things to Do</i>	<i>Things to Turn In (Due 11:59 pm Tuesday, unless otherwise noted)</i>
Week 1 (1/8- 1/16)	Welcome to the Course: Settling in; housekeeping	Review syllabus, get book, get computer account, visit course home page, do Week 1 assignments.	Create personal web page Practice with assignment link for turning in work
Week 2 (1/17-1/23)	Introduction/ Overview: Research Process/ Key Issues; Social Science; Types of Research	Read Schutt, Ch 1 & Appendices B-C; Read & Review Article #1 Disk: Types of research	Quiz, Ch 1 Review of Article #1 (due 1/23)

Week 3 (1/24-1/30)	Process/Problems Social Research: Coming up with a Question; Theory/ Language of Science; Ethics	Read Schutt, Ch 3 Disk: Variables & Hypotheses Survey, Part 1.	Quiz, Ch 3
Week 4 (1/31-2/6)	Survey Data Collection: Strengths & Weaknesses; Methods of Survey Administration	Read Schutt, Ch 8 Disk: Survey Research	Quiz, Ch 8 Survey part 1 (due 2/6)**
Week 5 (2/7-2/13)	Measurement: Conceptualization & Operationalization; Assessing Measurement Quality; Levels of Measurement	Read Schutt, Ch 4 Read Article #2 Survey, Part 2. Disk: Valid & Reliable measures Disk: Levels of measurement	Quiz, Ch 4 Survey part 2 (due 2/13)**
Week 6 (2/14-2/20)	Questionnaire Construction: Constructing protocols; types of interviews	Re-read Schutt Ch 8 Read Article #3 Survey Part 3.	No quiz. Survey part 3 (due 2/20)**
Week 7 (2/21-2/27)	Sampling: Why Sample? Sampling Methods	Read Schutt Ch 5 Survey part 4. Disk: Identifying sampling techniques	Quiz, Ch 5 Human Subjects certificate (due 2/27)
Week 8 (2/28-3/13)	Causation & Research Design: Meaning of Cause and Effect; Research Design Implications	Read Schutt, Ch 6 Disk: Units of analysis Disk: Concerns with causal reasoning	Quiz, Ch 6 (due 3/13)
Week 9 (3/5-3/9)	Spring Break!!	Don't forget to conduct your interviews!	
Week 10 (3/14-3/20)	Experiments: Classical Experimental Design; Sociological Designs; Tradeoffs/ Validity	Read, Schutt, Ch 7 Read Article #4 Disk: Assessing generalizability	Quiz, Ch 7 Survey part 4 (due 3/20)**

		Disk: Sources of Internal Invalidity	
Week 11 (3/21-3/27)	Data Analysis: Linking ideas and data; “Control” in social research	Read Schutt, Ch 13-14 Data Analysis, Part 1. Disk: Quantitative Data Analysis	No quiz Data analysis #1 (due 3/27)
Week 12 (3/28-4/3)	Social Science Theories & Paradigms: Guides for Research	Read Schutt, Ch 2 Data Analysis, Part 2. Disk: Research Philosophies & Goals	Quiz, Ch 2 Data analysis #2 (due 4/3)**
Week 13 (4/4-4/10)	Qualitative Research: Different paradigms; Typical Methods; Participant Observation	Read Schutt, Chs 9, 10 Read Article #5 Data Analysis, Part 3. Disk: Qualitative Research Disk: Qualitative Data Analysis	Quiz, Ch 9 No quiz, Ch 10 Data analysis #3 (due 4/10)**
Week 14 (4/11-4/17)	Evaluation Research Questions; Designs	Read Schutt, Ch 11 Data Analysis, Part 4. Disk: Evaluation Research	Quiz, Ch 11 Data Analysis #4 (due 4/17)**
Week 15 (4/18-4/20) SHORT WEEK!!	Historical & Comparative Methods: Research designs; Data sources	Read Schutt, Ch 12 Disk: Historical & Comparative Methods	Quiz, Ch 12 Finish any late work (No late work accepted after Friday 4/20.)
Week 16 (4/23-4/27)	Wrap up: Multiple Methods/ Reporting Social Research	Read Schutt, Ch 15 Disk: Reviewing & Reporting Research Distribute final exam	No quiz, Ch 15 Final exam due Wednesday 4/25 – midnight.

NOTE: ** - These assignments include two required postings typically due by 11:59 pm on the Saturday and Monday preceding the due date.