

Soc. 351
Spring, 2018
Research Methods

Prof. Russell K. Schutt
Office: W/4/004, (617)287-6253
Hours: Tu, Th 10:00-11:00; Tu 3:00-4:00
& by appointment

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Hours: Tu 2:00-3:00 pm

METHODS OF SOCIOLOGICAL RESEARCH

Text: *Schutt, Russell K. 2017. Understanding the Social World: Research Methods for the 21st Century. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.*

Software: *Blackboard course software (UMB).
Virtual Lab (UMB lab access from off campus).
SPSS (Statistical package in UMB PC labs).*

Social science research is all around us: in textbooks and journal articles, in newspaper stories and TV talk shows, in political debates and government decision-making. Social research often involves us even more directly, as subjects in marketing surveys, public opinion polls, the decennial census, or institutional research at UMass. These days, being an informed citizen requires being a capable consumer of the results of social science research results. Achieving career success also often requires knowing how to use social science research methods to investigate social issues.

In this course, you will study the basic methods used in sociological research and learn how to interpret the findings from this research. A variety of class activities will help you to develop your methodological skills: critiquing research articles, interactive computer exercises, using the World Wide Web, analyzing social data, and research project activities.

Specific course objectives are to learn how to:

1. Formulate problems in a manner suitable for social science research;
2. Evaluate the quality of social science research;
3. Conduct sociological research projects;
4. Analyze social science data.

The substantive issues that keep us all interested in social science are never far away when we conduct social research. The reason for doing research is to learn about something, after all, not just to use some neat methodological technique. We also can't forget that *what* we study influences *how* we study it. You will find that I make this point in the text by focusing frequently on substantive issues. In the course, we will also try not to lose sight of substantive issues. The research project in the course and many in-class examples will focus on topics that are of interest to you. I think that you will learn something useful about these topics as a result of our work together.

Read carefully the next syllabus section, which describes the course requirements and grading policies. This course requires hard work, but it will also help you to make substantial advances in understanding the social world and preparing for careers or graduate school. Keep in

mind that the course is designed for you, so that you should do fine if you keep up with the reading, complete assignments, engage in the exercises, and seek help when you feel the need.

COURSE ACTIVITIES

This will be a very active class, in which students will frequently make presentations, participate in group projects, and engage in computer-based exercises. It goes without saying that you should attend each session (let me know in advance if you must miss a class and give me a written explanation after the fact if an emergency prevents you from attending). Participation in class discussion and other activities will be an important part of the learning experience. Other course activities involve reading, presentations, computer work, and hands-on research.

Readings. Read each assigned chapter before it is covered in class—and then review it after the class discussion. Also take advantage of the review materials in the text, on the course Blackboard site, and on the text study site (<https://edge.sagepub.com/schuttusw>). Try to develop the habit of thinking about the **Learning Objectives** when you start each chapter and then reviewing the **Key Terms** and **Highlights** at the end of each chapter. Test yourself by trying to answer the multiple choice questions in the chapter quiz for each chapter on the study site and by using the eFlashcards. The time you spend on end-of-chapter and quiz questions should pay off: *much of the content of exams and quizzes will be based on these questions.*

Computer and web resources. Interactive Exercises on the Study Site will help you to master the terminology of social research. Web-based exercises at the end of each chapter will help you learn how to find information and explore social issues on the Internet. ***We will meet each Thursday (after the first week) in the Green Lab (Healey Library, UL, Room 0028).*** You will be able to practice with the interactive exercises for at least part of the computer lab sessions, but you should also review the exercises outside of class. If you don't have a computer to use on your own, plan to spend extra time in a campus computer lab. They are open seven days per week, until late evening Mon.-Th. See the posted schedule outside the large lab at the back of the UL level.

Outside of class, you can continue much of the lab-based work for the course in a public lab on campus (Red Lab: Healey Library, Upper Level, Room 015) or at other campus locations https://www.umb.edu/it/getting_services/computer_labs/general_use_computer_labs. You can also do the computer work for the class from home or anywhere you have access to the internet, using the Virtual Lab: https://www.umb.edu/it/getting_services/computer_labs/virtual_computer_labs. Remember that the online material on the text study site is available to you from anywhere as long as you can connect to the internet, with its flash cards, quizzes, videos, web resources, and other tools to help you learn the course material.

Blackboard. The course Blackboard site provides all the materials you need for the course, including the syllabus and assignments (2 weeks prior to their due date) and review materials. A discussion thread on Blackboard allows you to ask questions about any course material at any time (with response guaranteed in 24 hours). You **MUST** post questions about assignments, etc. on Blackboard (not by email to me or Michelle), so that clarifications will be available for the whole class. I also expect you to contribute to a “tips and techniques” forum on Blackboard for each of the assignments. All assignments and other materials must be submitted through the Blackboard site and all course grades will be posted there. Handouts, graded assignments and exams, etc. will NOT be distributed on paper!

Assistance. Michelle Crist, my graduate teaching assistant and I will be available to help you throughout the course. Seek Michelle out whenever you need help, by email or in person. You can also post your questions on the course website (and I encourage you to do so, since then

other students can benefit from the question and response). You also are always welcome to come to my office during my office hours (see above) or by appointment at another time. We are eager to help you with course material, but you must take the initiative and ask for assistance. Support for students who need extra help is also available at the Office of Academic Support: CC-1-1300, 617-287-6550, or https://www.umb.edu/academics/vpass/academic_support. Academic Support now has special tutors assigned to work with students on statistics.

ASSIGNMENTS, EXAMS, GRADING

Assignments and Research Project. There are three assignments, each focusing on a different research method. Assignments 1, 2, and 3 will help to develop the class research project, while the research report will help you to learn data analysis skills based on the class project.

Assignment 1: Problem Formulation (Weeks 2-3)

In this assignment you will develop a research question, search the literature, propose several hypotheses, and suggest a research approach.

Assignment 2: Survey Research (Weeks 8-9)

You will write and review questions for an online survey, draft a questionnaire section, and propose a research plan.

Assignment 3: Qualitative Methods (Weeks 12-13)

You will observe a social setting. You will write up your notes before analyzing the resulting data and preparing a preliminary report..

Research Project

You will identify a survey research project that produced data that you can analyze in class. You will also write a short description of the methods used in the survey and justify the use of the specific measures for the variables in your analysis. The main part of your report will be a quantitative analysis that answers a research question that you ask. You will present some of your findings in class, during the last week. The written research project reports will be due the week after classes end.

Exams. The midterm and final exams will cover material assigned up to that point. They will contain a mixture of multiple choice, short answer, and essay questions.

Article presentations. In the list of resources for each chapter on the text study site, there are abstracts and PDFs of research articles that use methods discussed in that chapter. Choose one of these articles to present to the class. Write a five (5) minute talk about the article in which you state the research question it addressed, the methods it used, its primary findings, and its conclusions and at least one limitation. Your review of the methods used in the article must include an explanation about what this article contributes to our understanding of the methods in the chapter. You can select an article to review at any time on the Blackboard site (but only one article per student, and first come, first served). Be prepared to present this review at the start of class on Thursday of the pertinent week. You must upload your article presentation to the Blackboard site prior to the class in which you present it.

News presentations. Each chapter includes a “Research in the News” vignette that connects the methods discussed in the chapter to a newsworthy topic. You can select a news

vignette article to review at any time on the Blackboard site (but only one vignette per student, and first come, first served). Michelle will send you a copy of the full newspaper article on which the vignette is based. If you prefer, you can instead base your presentation on one of the *Pacific Standard* articles uploaded on that week's study site, in the Research/Social Impact folder. Prepare a presentation no longer than 3 minutes in which you explain to the class what this story suggests about the importance of the research methods in the pertinent chapter. Your review of the methods used in the news article must include an explanation about what this article contributes to our understanding of the methods in the chapter. Be prepared to present this review in class on Thursday of the pertinent week. You must upload your news presentation to the Blackboard site prior to the class in which you present it.

Chapter questions. The end of each chapter in the text includes a set of Chapter Questions. Choose two of these questions, write answers to both of them, and post your answers on Blackboard. If you prefer, you can post an answer to an end-of-chapter Practice Exercises instead. You can select chapter questions (or practice exercises) to answer at any point on the Blackboard site, but it is first come/first served, and only one student can answer a given question.

Course grades will be computed as follows:

Assignments 1-3	30%
Research Project	15
Research in the News	5
Article Presentation	10
Chapter Questions	5
Midterm	15
Final Exam	20
	100%

If you contribute regularly in class discussion, I will boost your final course grade up if you happen to be on the border between two grades. I will not give a grade of "incomplete" in other than the most unusual, extreme circumstances.

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY

Plagiarism occurs when someone claims someone else's work or ideas as their own. UMass Boston's policies about such academic dishonesty are spelled out at in the Code of Student Conduct: https://www.umb.edu/life_on_campus/policies/community/code (see #11-#14). The penalties are severe and infractions can lead to academic probation or expulsion. Cite all of your sources in your papers and do your own work on assignments and exams.

ACCOMMODATIONS

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1990 offers guidelines and support for curriculum modifications and adaptations for students with documented disabilities. If applicable, students may obtain adaptation recommendations from the Ross Center for Disability Services, CC-UL-0211, 617-287-7430. If

this applies to you, be sure to present these recommendations and discuss them with me within a reasonable period, presumably during the Drop/Add period (<https://www.umb.edu/academics/vpass/disability/students>).

COURSE OUTLINE

<u>Week</u>	<u>Topic/Reading/Activity</u>
1 (1/23, 1/25)	<p>THE SOCIAL SCIENCE ENTERPRISE Topics for social research; errors in reasoning; types of research; research alternatives</p> <p>Schutt: Chapter 1</p> <p>ADD/DROP ENDS 1/29</p>
2 (1/30, 2/1)	<p>THE RESEARCH PROCESS Research questions; reviewing the literature; role of theory; the research circle; deductive and inductive approaches; time order</p> <p>Schutt: Chapter 2, Appendixes A, B</p>
3 (2/6, 2/8)	<p>RESEARCH ETHICS Development of regulations; Ethical principles & dilemmas; IRB procedures</p> <p>Schutt: Chapter 3</p> <p>ASSIGNMENT 1: Problem Formulation & Reviewing the Literature</p>
4 (2/13, 2/15)	<p>CONCEPTUALIZATION AND MEASUREMENT</p> <p>Conceptualization; operationalization; measurement alternatives; levels of measurement; units of analysis; reliability and validity</p> <p>Schutt: Chapter 4, Chapter 7 (pp. 99-104)</p>
5 (2/20, 2/22)	<p>SAMPLING AND GENERALIZABILITY Generalizability; sampling terms; probability sampling; nonprobability sampling</p> <p>Schutt: Chapter 5</p>
6 (2/27, 3/1)	<p>CAUSATION AND EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN Causal criteria; true experiments; quasi-experiments; threats to validity</p> <p>Schutt: Chapter 6 Alison Moll: Internships for seniors</p>
7 (3/6, 3/8)	<p>REVIEW, MIDTERM EXAM (3/8)</p> <p>SPRING VACATION (3/11-18)</p>

- 8 (3/20, 3/22) SURVEY RESEARCH**
History of surveys; the response rate problem and other errors in survey research; question and questionnaire design; types of surveys

Schutt: Chapter 7

ASSIGNMENT 2: Survey Questions
- 9 (3/27, 3/29) UNOBTRUSIVE METHODS**
Unobtrusive measures; secondary data analysis; big data; historical and comparative research methods; content analysis

Schutt: Chapter 9
- 10 (4/3, 4/5) QUANTITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS**
Univariate distributions, graphs & statistics; intro to crosstabs

Schutt: Chapter 11
- 11 (4/10, 4/12) QUANTITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS (cont.)**
Crosstabulation; condensed displays

Schutt: Chapter 11 (cont.)
- 12 (4/17, 4/19) QUALITATIVE METHODS**
Qualitative fundamentals; participant observation; intensive interviewing; focus groups

Schutt: Chapter 8

ASSIGNMENT 3: Intensive interviewing

WITHDRAWAL, P/F DEADLINE (4/20)
- 13 (4/24, 4/26) QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS**
Basics of qualitative analysis; alternatives; visual sociology; systematic observation; participatory action research

Schutt: Chapter 12
- 14 (5/1, 5/3) REPORTING RESEARCH**
Research reviews, research proposals; research reports; writing skills

Schutt: Chapter 13

START PROJECT PRESENTATIONS
- 15 (5/8) PROJECT PRESENTATIONS AND REVIEW**
SEMESTER ENDS (5/9)

FINAL EXAM WEEK (5/12-18)