

Soc. 650  
Spring, 2016  
Thurs. 4:00-6:45  
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## METHODS OF SOCIOLOGICAL RESEARCH, I

Research methods are the core of applied sociology and essential for informed public policy. Research methods are used to weigh the merits of ideas about the social world and to test the value of specific practices. Applied sociologists evaluate social programs, describe popular attitudes, and identify causes and consequences of crime, health, and community cohesion. Like every social scientist, applied sociologists and public policy experts must understand research methods to be able to use the latest research findings to guide policy-making, program implementation, and public debate.

The primary goal of this course is to help you learn how to use social science research methods to investigate the types of social issues that are of concern to applied sociologists and public policy experts. We will do this by learning how to test the implications of social theories and the efficacy of social and health programs, how to develop new ideas in the course of disciplined investigation, and how to critique research conducted by others. Specifically, the course will involve reading in the required texts, analysis of research articles, completion of individual and group hands-on exercises, use of many online resources, and preparation of a research paper. These various activities will expose you to a variety of specific methods so that you can choose those most appropriate to a specific research problem and setting and understand the advantages and disadvantages of those methods.

This syllabus outlines only the first semester of a two-semester sequence in research methods in the Applied Sociology program. The second semester (Soc. 651) focuses on quantitative data analysis (statistics).

## REQUIRED READINGS

Schutt, Russell K. 2015. *Investigating the Social World: The Process and Practice of Research*, 8<sup>th</sup> ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

<https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/investigating-the-social-world/book242232>

Schutt, Russell K. 2011. "Research Methods" (Appendix). Pp. 283-319 in *Homelessness, Housing, and Mental Illness*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. With Stephen M. Goldfinger. *On e-reserve (in IE, go to Tools, turn off pop-up blocking and turn on compatibility view to get the PDF).*

<http://www.hup.harvard.edu/catalog.php?isbn=9780674051010>

*Research That Matters, Questions That Count* (14 articles from SAGE journals).

<https://edge.sagepub.com/schutt8e>

*ISW8* is readable, engaging, comprehensive, and very popular (>). Moreover, it builds on years of experience in doing and teaching applied research as part of our graduate program and it includes, as examples, research about many of the substantive concerns of sociologists. Plan to read the assigned material before each class period. It also contains many highlights and exercises that we will rely on for focusing our discussion and hands-on learning throughout the course. Earlier editions and other adaptations (there are 8) are NOT acceptable.

The appendix to my recent book on homelessness provides focused insights into issues that arise in using social science methods to study complex social processes. I have assigned relevant pages in several weeks to enrich our discussions about some more advanced issues in applied research. You can download it from the Healey Library's e-reserve site for our course: <http://umb.docutek.com/eres/>. (In Internet Explorer, go to Tools, turn off pop-up blocking and turn on compatibility view to get the PDF.)

Each chapter of *ISW8* begins with a summary of a research article that illustrates key methods in that chapter. Each week, we will discuss this Research That Matters, Questions That Count article from the corresponding *ISW8* chapter. The PDF for each of these articles is available on the *ISW8* study site as one of the resources for the corresponding chapter (<https://edge.sagepub.com/schutt8e>), and on our Blackboard site.

You may decide during the term that you would like to become more expert in one of the particular methods that we study. If so, consider one of the books listed at the end of this syllabus. My bibliography in *Investigating the Social World* contains many other good related readings.

### **RESEARCH ACTIVITIES, ASSIGNMENTS, AND GRADING**

You will learn in this course by doing—that is, by designing and carrying out applied research activities. For each assignment, you will collaborate with several colleagues to learn about a social program with the methods we will study. For your final paper, you will write an analysis of a research question that helps to understand social processes related to that program, using mixed methods from throughout the course and data pooled among the students who have focused on the same program. Program options are some of those that Applied Sociology students have studied before; they are listed below, together with links to some background information. Another option for a program focus will be to continue to work with the Tierney Learning Center that was the focus of the Foundations class.

Our doing will always be energized by talking and informed by thinking. Class discussion about what we are researching and how we are researching it will be an important part of the class, so I expect you to come prepared to each class session and to participate actively. In addition, you will find yourself talking frequently with classmates as you complete assignments and plan project activities. In these ways, talking will be a vital part of the learning process. Of course to say that you will have to be thinking throughout the course is to state the obvious, but I mean more than simply to say that everything we do is necessarily informed by our thoughts. In order to achieve your potential as a social scientist, you must think deeply and continually about each step you take as a researcher and why you take it. Thinking in this way means posing interesting and provocative research questions, finding new insights in the literature you review, going beyond the obvious in your analysis of data, and writing up your findings in a way that will speak directly to and resonate with your intended audience—whether that audience is other scholars or policymakers, or both.

Our thinking as we learn and use research methods will be sharpened by returning throughout the course to the contrasting logics of three pairs of alternatives orientations to research that I introduce in chapter 1 of *ISW8: Use Quantitative or Qualitative Methods; Adopt a Positivist or Constructivist Philosophy; Focus on Basic Science or Applied Research*. These alternatives are neither mutually exclusive nor completely inclusive in terms of the basic decisions researchers must make, but by thinking about them at every step we will finish the course with a much deeper understanding of why researchers make particular decisions and what the consequences are.

#### *Overview of Assignments and the Final Paper*

You will begin to focus your substantive interests for the assignments and final paper when you complete Assignment 1. For this assignment, you will develop a research question(s) that is pertinent to a social program on which you will focus for most of your assignments and in the final research paper. Based on your

interests and availability, and with Manan's assistance, you will then form a team with 4-5 other students who will focus on the same program. You will prepare to investigate this program in assignments 1 and 2 and then develop measures and begin to collect data for assignments 3 and 5. Your final research paper will then include analysis of data collected by you and other members of your team. Your work throughout the course will involve sharing ideas and activities with your team, but you will write each assignment and your final paper individually.

### Assignments

Each assignment builds on material in the text chapters assigned in the weeks preceding its due date. They are each to be relatively short (4-5 pages of text). Separate handouts will be distributed with more detailed instructions for each assignment and the final paper.

#### Assignment 1: Preparing for Research

Present a research question on which to focus, review some relevant academic literature, and consider ethical issues.

#### Assignment 2: Alternatives in Research Design

Consider alternative approaches to measurement, sampling, and establishing causation in relation to your research question, evaluate their strengths and weaknesses, and develop a detailed plan reflecting your preferences and opportunities. Each student in a team should take a somewhat different approach.

#### Assignment 3: Survey Design

Design components for a structured survey related to your research question and a plan for administering it.

#### Assignment 4: Quantitative Data Analysis

Develop a brief report based on a statistical analysis of secondary survey data.

#### Assignment 5: Qualitative Methods

Develop a plan for either intensive interviews or participant observation related to your research question. Conduct a preliminary analysis of secondary qualitative interview data.

#### Final Paper: Investigating a Social Program

Your final paper will present the research question on which you have focused your assignments (with whatever changes in that question make sense after your experiences), review related literature, analyze some of the data you and your teammates have collected, and then discuss your findings and present some conclusions. You will use mixed methods for the analysis, drawing on both qualitative and quantitative data your team has collected and considering how the different methods help to inform your understanding. You will also be expected to develop some policy recommendations as well as suggest contributions to relevant scholarship.

### Article Reviews

Every class member must give a presentation and lead a discussion about a *Research That Matters* article during the course. You will be able to sign up for these presentations in advance, so that there will be a

student presentation and discussion each week. All of the articles to be reviewed are on the Study Site for my text. You can download and print the article you select or just read it on the web. In either case, you must distribute a handout to the class when you make your presentation, including at least the title page, abstract, and one or more tables from the article. The questions on which to focus when you discuss your article appear in the *Research That Matters* chapter highlight. Also focus attention on the methodological issues related to the chapter(s) assigned for the week in which you present your article review. Article review presentations should be about 5 minutes and be posted after class on our Blackboard site.

I expect you to read each of the *Research That Matters* articles before the class in which they are to be discussed. In addition to giving a presentation about one article (and posting it in Blackboard), you are required to post in Blackboard brief comments about two other articles, written as responses to the student presentation about the articles.

### Critical Questions

There are sets of questions and exercises at the end of each chapter in *ISW8* that are designed to help you master the chapter content. Review these questions and exercises after you read each assigned chapter and then after any eight of those assigned, write an answer to one of the Discussion Questions, Ethics Questions, or Web Exercises, or, alternatively, to the questions that follow that chapter's *Research in the News* vignette. You must post your answer prior to the start of class in order to receive credit and no more than two students can write an answer to any one question or exercise (*first come, first served!*).

### Course Supplementary Resources

Online resources are available to help you learn the course material and carry out the class project. Some of these are listed in this syllabus in relation to specific topics, but they are all available throughout the course.

There are many study aids available on the study site for *Investigating the Social World*: <https://edge.sagepub.com/schutt8e>. The required articles are available on this site, as are “interactive exercises” for each chapter that you can use throughout the course for review purposes. Video links provide interviews with researchers (many of our own faculty) that elaborate on topics discussed in each chapter, in the chapter-specific resource lists. The Study Site also includes flash cards, online quizzes, and other tools that you can use for review purposes. If you have problems using some of these resources in Internet Explorer, try a different browser to access them (such as Mozilla Firefox or Bing).

The Healey Library has developed a site with resources for our course, at <http://umb.libguides.com/SOCIO650Schutt>. Your work on the first assignment and whenever you must review the research literature or find relevant data will be facilitated by the resources on this site. Both during our course and throughout your graduate career, you will find it to your advantage to learn and use the SocINDEX scholarly database and the RefWorks bibliographic database system.

### Blackboard

Soc. 650 has a companion Blackboard that you can access from the UMass Boston home page (click on “Blackboard”). The course syllabus and all assignments will be available on this site and you are to submit all assignments (and final paper) by uploading them to our Blackboard site. I will return comments and also post all grades through Blackboard (which maintains confidentiality for your assignments, my comments, and the grades. You will post article reviews, comments, and answers to end-of-chapter questions in the discussion threads designated for these purposes, so that other students can read and reply to your posts. Our Blackboard site also includes discussion threads for posting general questions about the course and course material, and I

will add discussion threads to be used in organizing with your research team. Links to ancillary resources will also be available at the Blackboard site.

If you are interested in improving your mastery of computing software and other computer-based resources, our IT department offers workshops on many topics: <http://www.umb.edu/it/workshops>.

### Assistance and Grades

I will be available to help you throughout the course, as will Manan Nayak. She will organize and coordinate class research activities and is the first person you should contact when you have questions about scheduling those activities. She will also be available to discuss other course issues with you. The most efficient way to seek advice from me (and from Manan) is with the class Blackboard site. You also are always welcome to come to my office or Mann's office during office hours (see above) or by appointment at another time. (Please be forewarned: I sometimes have to attend meetings that conflict with my scheduled hours, so if you need to be sure about talking at a specific time, please confirm my availability beforehand with Genevieve Morse or Catherine Shaw.)

Course grades will be computed as follows:

Five assignments	50%
Research paper	25%
Article review & comments	10%
Critical questions	10%
Participation throughout	<u>5%</u>
	100%

The participation grade will take into account preparation for and participation in class discussion, as well as presentations on articles. Participation in research activities will be included in the grading for each assignment and the final paper.

I will not give a grade of "incomplete" except in very clearly justified and unavoidable circumstances. And be sure to review and adhere to the University's standards for academic honesty. See the official definitions relating to academic honesty and the policies about academic dishonesty in the Code of Student Conduct: [https://www.umb.edu/life\\_on\\_campus/policies/community/code](https://www.umb.edu/life_on_campus/policies/community/code).

### Accommodations

If you have a disability and feel you will need accommodations in order to complete course requirements, please contact the Ross Center (Campus Center Upper Level Room 2111) at 617-287-7430: <https://www.umb.edu/academics/vpass/disability>.

### *Social Programs*

Manan Nayak, a 3<sup>rd</sup> year sociology doctoral student, and an alumna of our MA program in applied sociology, will serve as the primary organizer of class research activities. She will be responsible for coordinating and scheduling all research activities and for connecting you to persons you need to contact in order to carry out assignments. Keep her contact information handy and check with her if you have concerns about scheduling activities or meeting deadlines. All research activities will have to conform to the guidelines approved the UMass Boston Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (to be discussed

in class). If you have not already done so (in Foundations), be sure to complete the online CITI human subjects training program within the first three weeks of the semester: <https://www.citiprogram.org/>.

Social programs (or types of program) in which staff are available for research activities in the class are listed below, together with some background information (including reports of prior research projects by Applied Sociology students).

#### Teen Empowerment

<http://www.teenempowerment.org/>

<http://www.teenempowerment.org/pdfs/Teen-Empowerment-Somerville-Evaluation-2013.pdf>

#### Homeless Services

<https://www.facebook.com/Glass-House-Shelter-Project-106592509681152/>

<http://www.pinestreetinn.org/>

<http://www.hup.harvard.edu/catalog.php?isbn=9780674051010>

#### Service Programs for Children and Youth

<http://www.nfima.org/nafinfi/>

<http://tierneylearningcenter.com/>

#### Selected prior class reports

[http://www.faculty.umb.edu/russell\\_schutt/Perspectives%20of%20DMH%20Shelter%20Staff.htm](http://www.faculty.umb.edu/russell_schutt/Perspectives%20of%20DMH%20Shelter%20Staff.htm)

[http://www.faculty.umb.edu/russell\\_schutt/Impact%20Employment%20Services.htm](http://www.faculty.umb.edu/russell_schutt/Impact%20Employment%20Services.htm)

[http://www.faculty.umb.edu/russell\\_schutt/Transitional%20Work%20Study.htm](http://www.faculty.umb.edu/russell_schutt/Transitional%20Work%20Study.htm)

[http://www.faculty.umb.edu/russell\\_schutt/Shattuck%20Shelter%20Staff.htm](http://www.faculty.umb.edu/russell_schutt/Shattuck%20Shelter%20Staff.htm)

You and your team will present to the class some of your work in your final research papers during the last two weeks of the semester.

## COURSE OUTLINE

<u>Week</u>	<u>Topic/Reading/Activity</u>
1 (1/28)	<p><b>SCIENCE, SOCIETY, AND SOCIAL RESEARCH</b>  <i>Course intro; reasoning errors; research motives, types, &amp; orientations.</i></p> <p><b>ISW8: Chapter 1</b>  <b>HHMI: Pp. 283-284</b>  <b>Article: Hampton &amp; Gupta 2008.</b></p>

2 (2/4)

**THE PROCESS AND PROBLEMS OF SOCIAL RESEARCH**

*Research questions; literature reviews; research strategy & philosophy.*

**ISW8: Chapter 2, Appendices A, B**

**HHMI: Pp. 284-285**

**Article: Exum et al. 2010.**

Guest: Stephanie Berkowitz, Teen Empowerment

3 (2/11)

**RESEARCH ETHICS**

*Research ethics in context, IRB review, research proposals.*

**ISW8: Chapter 3**

**HHMI: Pp. 314-319**

**Article: Lacey et al. 2011.**

**Assignment 1:** Problem Formulation.

4 (2/18)

**CONCEPTUALIZATION AND MEASUREMENT**

*Concepts; measurement operations & levels; reliability & validity.*

**ISW8: Chapter 4**

**HHMI: Pp. 295-307**

**Article: Webb et al. 2011.**

5 (2/25)

**SAMPLING AND GENERALIZABILITY**

*Sample types; probability & nonprobability; sampling distributions.*

**ISW8: Chapter 5**

**HHMI: Pp. 307-314**

**Article: Ferguson et al. 2012.**

6 (3/3)

**RESEARCH DESIGN AND CAUSATION**

*Causal conceptions; units of analysis; ecological fallacy; time order.*

**ISW8: Chapters 6**

**Article: Fergusson 2013.**

**Assignment 2:** Alternatives for Research Designs.

7 (3/10)

**EXPERIMENTS**

*True experiment, quasi-experiments, field experiments, validity*

**ISW8: Chapter 7**

**HHMI: Pp. 285-289**

**Article: Hoffman 2014.**

(3/17)

**SPRING BREAK**



*Design alternatives; writing and reporting.*

**ISW8: Chapter 16**

**Article: Makarios & Pratt 2012.**

*Research Presentations*

**FINAL PAPER DUE: MONDAY, MAY 16**

### **RELATED READINGS**

Bailey, Carol A. 2007. *A Guide to Qualitative Field Research*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Blair, Johnny, Ronald F. Czaja and Edward A. Blair. 2013. *Designing Surveys: A Guide to Decisions and Procedures*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Daniel, Johnnie. 2011. *Sampling Essentials: Practical Guidelines for Making Sampling Choices*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Davis, James A. and Tom W. Smith. 1991. *The NORC General Social Survey: A User's Guide*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Fowler, Floyd J., Jr. 2013. *Survey Research Methods*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Frankfort-Nachmias, Chava and Anna Leon-Guerrero. 2014. *Social Statistics for a Diverse Society*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Grinnell, Frederick. 1992. *The Scientific Attitude*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: Guilford.

Huff, Darrell. 1954. *How to Lie With Statistics*. New York: W. W. Norton.

Hunt, Morton. 1985. *Profiles of Social Research: The Scientific Study of Human Interactions*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.