Sociology 181A
Methods of Social Inquiry
Brandeis University
Fall 2013

Instructor: Wendy Cadge
Office: Rabb 120
Office Hour: Tuesday and Friday 2-3pm and by appointment
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Class Meetings: Tuesdays and Fridays, 12:30-1:50pm

Course Description

This course introduces you to the basic tools and methods of sociological research. We focus on three research methods used regularly by sociologists – participant observation, interviews, and surveys / quantitative analysis. By reading about these methods, seeing examples of how sociologists use them, and doing each yourself, you will develop the skills required to both evaluate and do sociological research. At the center of this course is a pilot research project you will design and conduct about a topic of your choice. You will gather and analyze the data for this project through participant observation, interviews, and a quantitative data analysis exercise. The final assignment asks you to propose a full research project based on what you learned in your pilot project this semester.

By the end of the semester you will be able to:

• Assess how sociologists ask questions, design research projects, gather data, analyze data, and make arguments
• Collect some data through participant observation, record and begin to interpret that information, and critically reflect on your experience in light of class readings and discussions.
• Write an interview guide, conduct a semi-structured interview, and analyze your experiences in light of class readings
• Conduct basic analyses of quantitative data that include indentifying independent and dependent variables, making one two by two table, making one three way table, and answering a basic research question based on these analyses.
• Describe the strengths and weaknesses of each of the three research tools you learn about this semester
• Write a short proposal for a thesis / independent study / research project based on what you learned in your pilot project this spring. Have the basic knowledge of research methods required to complete that project.

This class is a joint seminar that includes undergraduates and graduate students. We are all at different points in our educations. I ask all of us to respect where others are, try to
meet them there so we can learn together, and encourage each other with constructive feedback throughout the semester. This is usually a fun collaborative course!

Course Readings

The following required books are available in the bookstore.

Required:

These books are also on reserve in the library. All other course readings on the syllabus are available via Latte.

A few additional books are also on reserve in the library as background for those of you who have not taken a sociology course recently:

Course Requirements

1. **Attendance** is required. Please be on time out of respect for me and your fellow classmates. Your class attendance counts as 5 points towards your final grade. If you miss zero or one class, you will receive 5 points. If you miss 2 classes, you will receive 4 points. If you miss 3 classes, you will receive 3 points. If you miss 4 classes, you will receive 2 points. If you miss 5 classes, you will receive 1 point. If you miss more than 5 classes, you will receive 0 points. The only absences that will not influence your grade are those for religious holidays that you email me about at least one week in advance.

2. **Reading** is required. All course readings must be done for Tuesday of each week unless otherwise noted in the syllabus.

3. **Class participation** is required. You will get out of this class what you put in, and the course will be more enjoyable for all of us if you are actively engaged. You will receive 5 points if you are regularly engaged in class throughout the
semester. Feel free to check with me at any point if you are concerned about this part of your grade.

4. **Written Assignments.** There are a number of written assignments in this course that are worth 90 points total.
   - The first assignment (*distributed September 13, due September 27*) is about how to evaluate a research paper (10 points).
   - The second assignment (*distributed October 1, due October 15*) asks you to do some participant observation and analyze what you learn (20 points).
   - The third assignment (*distributed October 15, due November 8*) asks you to do some interviews and analyze what you learn (20 points).
   - The fourth assignment (*distributed November 8, due November 26*) asks you to analyze and write about some survey data (20 points).
   - The final assignment (*distributed September 3, due December 13*) allows you to summarize what you learned in your pilot research project this semester and propose a future study (like for a thesis, independent study, MA paper, etc.) on the topic. (20 points).

Assignments are due at the beginning of class on each of these due dates. You will lose 2 points for each 24 hours after the due date the assignment is turned in (i.e. if you would have received 14 points but your paper is turned in within the first 24 hours after it is due, you will receive 12 points, etc.). Please properly cite and reference any articles you refer to when completing these assignments. We will talk in detail about this when the first assignment is distributed. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask.

5. **Final Grades** are based on your class attendance (5 points), your active class participation (5 points), assignment 1 (10 points), assignment 2 (20 points), assignment 3 (20 points), assignment 4 (20 points) and the final assignment (20 points). Final grades will be calculated using the following point distribution:

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<th>Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>94-99</td>
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<td>90-93</td>
<td>A-</td>
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<td>87-89</td>
<td>B+</td>
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<td>84-86</td>
<td>B</td>
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<td>60-63</td>
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**All written work must be completed to receive a passing grade in this class**

6. **University Policy on Academic Accommodations:** If you are a student who has academic accommodations because of a documented disability, please contact me and give me a copy of your letter of accommodation in the first two weeks of the semester. If you have questions about documenting a disability, please contact Beth Rodgers-Kay in the Undergraduate Academic Affairs Office (x63470, brodgers@brandeis.edu). Accommodations cannot be granted retroactively.
7. **University Policy on Academic Integrity**: You are expected to be familiar with and to follow the University’s policies on academic integrity (see http://www.brandeis.edu/studentlife/sdc/ai). I will refer any suspected instances of alleged dishonesty to the Office of Student Development and Conduct. Instances of academic dishonesty may result in sanctions including but not limited to, failing grades being issued, educational programs, and other consequences.

**Course Outline**

**I. Asking Questions and Evaluating Information**

**August 30. Introductions**

**September 3. What is sociological research?**

**Final Assignment Distributed**

**September 10, 13. How do social scientists evaluate information – “data”?**

**Tuesday:**

**Friday:**
- Bernstein, Mary and Paul Swartwout. 2012. “Gay Officers In Their Midst: Heterosexual Police Employees’ Anticipation of the Consequences for Coworkers Who Come Out.” *Journal of Homosexuality* 55: 1145-1166. Please read this article carefully – we will spend most of our time together in class today taking it apart.
Assignment 1 Distributed.

September 20: How do social scientists conceptualize research projects?


September 24, 27: How do social scientists deal with the ethical issues involved in their research?

Tuesday:
- Code of Ethics of the American Sociological Association: http://www2.asanet.org/members/ecoderev.html

OR
- If you anticipate doing any research at Brandeis that requires you to get permission from the Institutional Review Board, read and do their required training instead of the readings above. It takes a little time to go through but will save you time later!
  http://www.brandeis.edu/ora/RCR/index.html

Friday:
- Review
- Talking about your research topics for the rest of the semester

Assignment 1 Due

II. Watching People: Participation Observation / Ethnography

October 1, 4: Participant Observation

Tuesday:

Assignment 2 Distributed

Friday:

October 8, 11. Workshop on Assignment 2 and an Example of Religious Globalization

Tuesday:
• Workshop on Assignment 2. Please complete your participant observation for assignment 2 by today and bring your fieldnotes to class. We will share parts of these notes with each other (make sure at least some portion is legible) and then talk together about what we learned and how we can write about that in our assignments.

Friday:
• Guest Speaker: Casey Clevenger, Ph.D. Candidate, Department of Sociology, Brandeis University

III. Interviews and Analysis of Qualitative Data

October 15: Interviewing

Tuesday:
• Guest speaker Linda Callahan, Callahan and Associates

Assignment 2 Due
Assignment 3 Distributed

Friday:
• No class (I will be giving a talk in New Mexico)

October 22, 25: Writing a Guide

Tuesday:

Friday
• Please do your first informal interview for assignment 2 before coming to class today.
October 29, November 1. Workshop on Assignment 3 and an Example of Jewish-Buddhist Relations

Tuesday:

- Workshop on Assignment 3. Bring your interview guide and notes to class so we can work on these materials together. Please also bring to class any questions you have about writing the paper for this assignment.

Friday:

- Guest Speaker, Emily Sigalow, PhD Candidate, Departments of Sociology and Near Eastern and Judaic Studies, Brandeis University.

November 5, 8: Coding and Analyzing Qualitative Data

Tuesday:

- Babbie, Earl. 2014. The Basics of Social Research. Wadsworth Publishing. (c. 13 Qualitative Data Analysis)
  OR

Friday:


Assignment 3 Due
Assignment 4 Distributed

IV. Surveys and Analysis of Quantitative Data

November 12 and 15: Constructing a Survey and Thinking about Uni- and Bivariate Analysis

Tuesday:

- Babbie, Earl. 2011. The Basics of Social Research. Wadsworth Publishing. (c. 7 The Logic of Sampling, c. 9 Survey Research)
- An Introduction to the General Social Survey. Please browse: http://www3.norc.org/gss+website/

Friday:

Guest Speaker, Margarita Corral, LTS Postdoctoral Associate for Data Analysis, Brandeis University (mcorral@brandeis.edu)

November 19 and 22: An Example and Trying Some Analysis

Tuesday:
• We will work through an example analysis in class that models what you are to do for Assignment 4.

Friday:
• We will work together in class on Assignment 4. Margarita will be in class with us both days this week.

November 26: Basic Multivariate Analysis and Reading Tables

Tuesday:

Assignment 4 Due

V. Evaluating What You Have Learned and Looking Forward

December 3 and 6: Writing Research Proposals and Wrapping Up


OR


Final Due to my mailbox or under my office door (Rabb 120) by noon on Friday December 13th.