Sociology 181A  
Methods of Social Inquiry  
Brandeis University  
Spring 2012  

Instructor: Wendy Cadge  
Office: Pearlman 109  
Office Hour: Friday 11:30-12:30pm and by appointment  
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Class Meetings: Tuesdays and Fridays, 9:30-10:50am, Pearlman 203  

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 January 27, due February 3)* is about how to evaluate a research paper (10 points).
   - The second assignment *(distributed February 14, due March 13)* asks you to do some participant observation and analyze what you learn (20 points).
   - The third assignment *(distributed March 13, due April 3)* asks you to do some interviews and analyze what you learn (20 points).
   - The fourth assignment *(distributed April 3, due April 27)* asks you to analyze and write about some survey data from the General Social Survey (20 points).
   - The final assignment *(distributed April 27, due May 7)* 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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<tr>
<td>94-99</td>
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<tr>
<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>80-83</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**

**January 17. Introductions**

**January 20. What is sociological research?**

**January 24, 27. How do social scientists evaluate information – “data”?**

**Tuesday:**

**Friday:**
- Walker, Alexis. 1996. “Couples Watching Television: Gender, Power and the Remote Control.” *Journal of Marriage and the Family*. 58:513-523. (We will spend much of class taking apart and analyzing this article in detail so please read it carefully!)

**Assignment 1 Distributed.**

**January 31, February 3: How do social scientists conceptualize research projects? (Or how and what do they see?)**

**Tuesday:**

Friday:

Assignment 1 Due

February 7, 10: 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/osp/irbtrainingonline1.html

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

II. Watching People: Participation Observation / Ethnography

February 14, 17: Participant Observation

Tuesday:
• Jon Lofland and Lyn Lofland. 2006. *Analyzing Social Settings*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth. (c. 1 Starting Where You Are, c. 2 Evaluating Data Sites, c.3 Getting In)

Assignment 2 Distributed

Friday:

February 21, 24: No class

February 28, March 2. Workshop on Assignment 2 and an Example from High School Wrestling

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: Brian Fair, Ph.D. Candidate, Department of Sociology, Brandeis University

III. Interviews and Analysis of Qualitative Data

March 13, 16: Interviewing

Tuesday:

Assignment 2 Due
Assignment 3 Distributed

Friday:

March 20, 23: Workshop on Assignment 3 and an Example
Tuesday:
- Workshop on Assignment 3. Bring your interview guide (see assignment 3) to class so we can work on them together before you complete all of your interviews for this assignment. Please also bring to class any questions you have about writing the paper for this assignment.

Friday:
- Guest Speaker, Casey Clevenger, PhD Candidate, Department of Sociology, Brandeis University.

March 27, 30: Coding and Analyzing Qualitative Data

Tuesday:
  OR
  AND

Friday:
- No class

IV. Surveys and Analysis of Quantitative Data

April 3: Introductions and Survey Construction

- An Introduction to the General Social Survey. Please browse: http://www.norc.org/GSS+Website/
  http://sda.berkeley.edu/archive.htm

Assignment 3 Due
Assignment 4 Distributed

April 6, 10, 13: No class

April 17, 20: An Example and Beginning Quantitative Analysis
Tuesday:
- We will work on an example analysis in class that models what you are to do for assignment 4.
- Please bring your computers to class today if possible.

Friday:
- Guest Speaker: David Cunningham, Associate Professor of Sociology
- Bring possible research questions for assignment 4 to class so we can review them together.

**April 24, 27: Analyzing Quantitative Data**

Tuesday:
- Workshop on Assignment 4. We will work on assignment 4 together in class. Please bring your questions and your computers.

Friday:
- No reading

*Assignment 4 Due*

*Assignment 5 Distributed*

**V. Evaluating What You Have Learned and Looking Forward**

May 1: Writing Research Proposals and Wrapping Up
  OR

*Assignment 5 Due to my mailbox or under my office door in Pearlman Hall by NOON on Monday May 7th.*