INTRODUCTION TO RESEARCH METHODS

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SOC 3111
ONLINE
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COURSE DESCRIPTION & OBJECTIVES

Research Methods is an introduction to the theory and practice of social science research. The primary objectives of the course are:

♦ familiarize students with the different types of methods that are used to accumulate evidence in the social sciences;
♦ expose students to the logic of data analysis;
♦ give students an opportunity to conduct their own research and to critique existing social science research;
♦ aid students in developing their skills in formal, scientific writing and critical thinking;
♦ offer students experience in written presentation of original work.

COURSE OVERVIEW & PROJECTED OUTCOMES

Individual readings, analysis exercises, sociological research and individual essays will be used to achieve learning objectives. The course will culminate as each student will present the results of his/her own research project in essay format.

Assignments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Five Chapter Summaries (Ruane text)</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Book Analysis (Asking the Right Questions)</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Project Preliminaries</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research Project Essay</td>
<td>30%</td>
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NOTE: STUDENTS SHOULD NOT WAIT TILL THE END OF TERM TO SUBMIT WORK, BUT SHOULD KEEP ABREAST OF DUE DATES THROUGH CANVAS FOR ALL ASSIGNMENTS TO RECEIVE FULL CREDIT.

Required Texts


NOTE: The University Bookstore may offer new editions of the required texts, but students should check online booksellers for used copies that may be available for reduced prices.

Special Accommodations

The University of Utah seeks to provide equal access to its programs, services and activities for people with disabilities. If you need accommodations in the class, reasonable prior notice needs to be given to the Center for Disability Services (CDS), 162 Olpin Union Building, 581-5020 (V/TDD). CDS will work with you and the instructor to make arrangements for accommodations. All written information in this course can be made available in alternative format with prior notification to the Center for Disability Services. Please discuss any concerns with the professor as soon as possible.

Academic Misconduct

Per University of Utah regulations (Policy # 6-400). “A student who engages in academic misconduct,” as defined in Part I.B. and including, but not limited to, cheating, falsification, or plagiarism, “may be subject to academic sanctions including but not limited to a grade reduction, failing grade, probation, suspension or dismissal from the program or the University, or revocation of the student's degree or certificate. Sanctions may also include community service, a written reprimand, and/or a written statement of misconduct that can be put into an appropriate record maintained for purposes of the profession or discipline for which the student is preparing.” Please refer to the Student Code for full elaboration of student academic and behavioral misconduct policies (http://regulations.utah.edu/academics/6-400.php).
Sexual Misconduct

Title IX makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender (which includes sexual orientation and gender identity/expression) is a Civil Rights offense subject to the same kinds of accountability and the same kinds of support applied to offenses against other protected categories such as race, national origin, color, religion, age, status as a person with a disability, veteran’s status or genetic information. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, you are encouraged to report it to the Title IX Coordinator in the Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action, 135 Park Building, 801-581-8365, or the Office of the Dean of Students, 270 Union Building, 801-581-7066. For support and confidential consultation, contact the Center for Student Wellness, 426 SSB, 801-581-7776. To report to the police, contact the Department of Public Safety, 801-585-2677(COPS).

CHAPTER SUMMARIES (30% of course grade)

During the semester students will read and summarize the material from the main text: Introducing Social Research Methods: Essentials for Getting the Edge by Janet Ruane. Periodically (see due dates in Canvas) students will submit their summaries on the chapters in this sequence: 1—3, 4 & 5, 6 & 7, 8—11, and 12 & 13, for a total of 5 summaries which count 6 points each toward the course grade. Reports will be a minimum of 300 words for each chapter, double spaced, with 10 point font, and submitted through the Canvas system by the due date. Please note the total number of words in the report for each chapter essay at the conclusion of each chapter summary.

BOOK ANALYSIS (10% of course grade)

Students will read the volume Asking the Right Questions: A Guide to Critical Thinking by Browne & Keeley and write a brief essay (500 word minimum) analyzing the information. Please note the essay is NOT a regurgitation exercise, but rather an opportunity for the student to comment on the topics of interest to them contained in the book. First person, non-academic language may be utilized, and student opinion is welcome. Please use an appropriate title, 10 point font, and English/Grammar skills befitting a 3000-level course. Also, be sure to note total number of words at the end of the essay.

RESEARCH PROJECT PRELIMINARIES (30% of course grade)

The research project is an exercise that will acquaint students with many elements involved in conducting social science research from beginning to completion. As you develop the project you will go through several steps that are building blocks toward a completed essay. Each step involves a cumulative piece of the project, beginning with elementary problem identification and moving to the written report. The style guide of the American Psychological Association (APA) will be the format for this project. NOTE: You will find help on the project from the Wang & Park text, Student Research & Report Writing: From Topic Selection to the Complete Paper, required for this course.

1) Topic approval (2 points)—Submit a one paragraph statement presenting a topic of interest from the United States Census (any year or more than one, as a comparative project) as the subject of your non-reactive data research, explaining what the topic is and why it is important enough to be investigated. The topic may be approved or modified as the semester progresses.

2) Working literature review/bibliography (5 points)—Researchers always begin a study by looking at what else has been done on that subject. So, once the topic has been approved, immediately begin work finding at least six peer-reviewed social science journal articles on that subject. The list should be in a standard format for bibliographic references according to the APA Style Guide.

(3) Annotated bibliography (8 points)—After researchers find reputable references to their research, they read this information in order to learn what else is known about the subject. The annotated bibliography consists of short summaries of each of the references appearing on your working bibliography. The short summaries should not quote or paraphrase the published abstract for the article, but should include:

♦ short descriptions of the author's objectives (major question(s) the author was seeking to illuminate),
♦ a description of the nature of the data on which the conclusions were based (survey data, qualitative data, case studies, comparative historical studies, experiments, etc.);
♦ a description of how the data were gathered (face-to-face interviews, participant observation, quantitative analysis, etc.) and the nature of the cases studied, or the sample;
♦ a short summary of what the author(s) concluded.

4) Mini-proposal Outline (15 points)—Once researchers learn what is already known about their subject and create a bibliography, they write a research proposal in outline format. Proposals are used to gain clearance to proceed with research. Authorization typically issues from funding agencies, committees that safeguard human subjects, and others, such as faculty advisors. You will write a very brief version, or mini-proposal outline, and it will contain the following elements in this order:

(1) statement of the subject of the proposal, including why it is important;
(2) overview of what is known about the subject, including the literature review—based on the references;
(3) working hypotheses (both null and working) which would facilitate the investigation of this topic;
(4) listing and defining the key concepts, constructs and variables;
(5) identifying possible non-reactive data to be collected and why;
(6) likely operationalization (or measurement) of the key concepts;
(7) probable population, sample size and description;
(8) probable methods of data collection;
(9) possible ethical considerations (if any);
(10) desired results.

FINAL RESEARCH PROJECT ESSAY (30% of course grade)

Once you have determined a suitable project using census data, collected scholarly journal articles and other sources, completed an annotated bibliography & mini-proposal outline, you are ready to complete the course with the final essay in the same format as a professional journal article. Final project essays will include:

(1) descriptive title;
(2) abstract/overview of project;
(3) statement on how you propose to study the subject;
(4) hypotheses (both null and working);
(5) listing and defining the key concepts;
(6) identification of data to be collected;
(7) proposed operationalization (or measurement) of the key concepts;
(8) population to be studied;
(9) proposed sample size and description;
(10) proposed methods of data collection;
(11) ethical considerations (if any);
(12) possible results;
(13) limitations of study;
(14) future work to be done.

NOTE: Please remember that you will NOT be conducting any statistical analysis, in-person interviews or surveys, or other face-to-face research. You will be working with non-reactive United States Census data to propose a meaningful project on a topic of interest. In other words, you are constructing a kind of blueprint for a research project that would employ statistics or other forms of research if brought to its logical conclusion. Your job in this course is to learn how to conduct sociological research, and become knowledgeable in the skills and techniques necessary to finalize and present such research.

OVERVIEW OF GRADING PHILOSOPHY

In order to help students better understand how and why marks are distributed, an overview of grading philosophy is included, along with a checklist which delineates the individual aspects of consideration in all essays/projects.

A An excellent work in all or nearly all aspects of the assignment. The student exemplifies originality of ideas, superior depth of thought, and extensive grasp of topics as well as technical superiority.
B A competent work with a lapse here or there. Ideas are clear and properly expressed; the writing is technically solid. The assignment is effective in meeting all criteria but does not rise to sustained distinction.
C An adequate work, but not good. Student ideas tend to be oversimplified, reductionistic, and lack sufficient explanation or exploration. Problems may also exist with grammar, logic, or ability to express thoughts in a manner reflective of a junior level class.
D A minimal effort by the student—the work is marred by problems with almost all aspects of the assignment. This is not considered a competent performance.
E A failing mark, generally reserved for assignments which are not submitted or miss the target on virtually every criteria of the project.
+/− Plus or minus may be given in addition to each of the grade levels when deemed appropriate.
Grade Ranges:
A  96% and above;  A-  90—95.99%;  B+  85—89.99%;  B  80—84.99%;  B-  75—79.99%;  C+  70—74.99%;  C  65—69.99%;  C-  60—64.99%;  D+  55—59.99%;  D  50—54.99%;  D-  45—49.99%;  E  Below 45%.

GRADING CRITERIA CHECKLIST

Students should use the following criteria when proofreading and finalizing all essays:

- ________Abstract problems (format, length)
- ________Lack of/improper Title
- ________Weak introduction
- ________Weak conclusion
- ________Poor organization
- ________Weak levels of analysis (lower-level Bloom’s)
- ________Failure to communicate ideas clearly
- ________Superficial/Little creativity
- ________Weak English skills
- ________Poor sentence structure
- ________Poor paragraph structure/weak Links
- ________Anticipatory IT; Contractions; Rhetorical questions
- ________Non-Academic Voice/Language
- ________Excessive 1st person references
- ________Opinion/Bias rather than facts
- ________Errors in logic
- ________Sweeping generalizations (No/few Qualifiers)
- ________Poor use of italics
- ________Direct quotes instead of paraphrasing
- ________Unnecessary Subheadings
- ________inadequate length (meeting word minimum)
- ________Weak proofing/inattention to detail
- ________APA problems (citations/references page/primary sources)
- ________Incorrect format (10 pt font/double spaced lines)
- ________Late paper submittal
- ________Failure to note total number of words
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criterion</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Poor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Content and Focus</strong></td>
<td>Exceptionally clear, focused, interesting thesis.</td>
<td>Clear thesis which maintains a consistent focus from beginning to end.</td>
<td>Contains thesis but with inconsistent focus.</td>
<td>Thesis statement lacks clarity and focus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strong, rich supporting details and examples that prove thesis.</td>
<td>Specific supporting details are present.</td>
<td>Generalized supporting details that prove thesis.</td>
<td>Inadequate or missing supporting details.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A meaningful conclusion explaining the importance of the research and how it can be used.</td>
<td>A clear conclusion as to why the research is important.</td>
<td>Conclusion tends to summarize research.</td>
<td>Missing conclusion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organization</strong></td>
<td>Strong introduction and conclusion.</td>
<td>Clear introduction and conclusion.</td>
<td>Introduction and conclusion is present but not clear.</td>
<td>Unable to clearly identify introduction and conclusion. Lack of consistency and order. Shows little or no attempt of transitions between paragraphs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Consistent and coherent logical progression.</td>
<td>Illustrates some consistency and shows some logical progression.</td>
<td>Shows some attempt of consistency and order.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Uses clear and skillful transitions.</td>
<td>Uses clear transitions.</td>
<td>Essay shows attempt to create transitions between paragraphs.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Voice and paraphrasing</strong></td>
<td>Written in academic voice (no slang/contractions).</td>
<td>Majority written in formal language.</td>
<td>Informal language is dominant.</td>
<td>Paper frequently uses informal language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Elaborate and colorful language.</td>
<td>Language appropriate to topic.</td>
<td>Most language is appropriate to topic.</td>
<td>Language is not appropriate to topic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Consistently strong and varied sentence structure.</td>
<td>Words convey intended message.</td>
<td>Able to get vague idea of message.</td>
<td>Message is unclear.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No direct quotes (paraphrasing sound).</td>
<td>Direct quotes support ideas.</td>
<td>Some parts of written in student’s own words.</td>
<td>Majority of essay is plagiarized.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sources/Format</strong></td>
<td>Follows APA guidelines well.</td>
<td>Follows APA most of essay.</td>
<td>Sometimes follows APA.</td>
<td>Rarely follow APA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(For Research Essays Only)</td>
<td>Uses 5 or more cited academic sources.</td>
<td>3-4 cited sources used. Sources meet the guidelines for types of sources.</td>
<td>Less than 3 cited sources.</td>
<td>Less than 2 cited sources with little or no documentation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All documentation is APA correct.</td>
<td>Few errors noted in documentation.</td>
<td>Majority of sources done incorrectly.</td>
<td>Works Cited page partial or missing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Works Cited page is APA correct.</td>
<td>Majority of Works Cited is APA correct.</td>
<td>Random APA usage.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All research is documented.</td>
<td>Most research documented.</td>
<td>Rarely documents sources.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>APA Style</strong></td>
<td>Superior editing meeting majority of aspects correctly in Checklist.</td>
<td>Careful editing, meeting most Checklist items correctly</td>
<td>Some evidence of editing, meeting some Checklist items.</td>
<td>Poor overall editing, English and grammatical skills. Meets few aspects of Checklist correctly.</td>
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