

St. Francis Xavier University
Department of Sociology
Sociology 202 – Research Principles and Practices

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Office Hours ~ Fall term: Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays, 1:00-3:00

Winter term: Mondays and Wednesdays, 1:00-3:00; Fridays, 10:00-12:00

Course Description

This course provides students with an introduction to empirical research design principles, how research is grounded in the theoretical literature, and various methods of collecting and recording data, assessing reliability and validity, and conducting data analysis.

Course Format

Students will demonstrate their learning of research methods by conducting a content analysis of material freely available in the public domain. The lectures and in-class tutorials are designed to guide students through the research process and toward the completion of a research report. The research project is broken down into three related assignments.

Midterm tests and progression in the course

Progression in the course requires your participation in tutorials, group work, and class. Tests are unscheduled; test mark will be based on the best 2 out of 3 test results. All tests are cumulative and include assigned readings, lectures, and skills reinforced through the project work (e.g., how to calculate a mean, how to test null hypothesis). If you know that you cannot attend *all* class, see me to discuss your options. The rules are in place to facilitate your progress in the course.

Course textbook

Jackson, Winston and Norine Verberg. 2007. Methods: Doing Social Research, 4th Ed.
Toronto: Prentice Hall.

Evaluation and due dates

	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Due Dates</u>
Tests (best 2 out of 3)	30%	unscheduled; come prepared
Participation	10%	maintain group record sheets
Assignment #1	10%	October 1, beginning of class
Assignment #2	10%	October 29, beginning of class
Assignment #3.....	10%	November 19, beginning of class
Final examination	30%	

Policies on laptops, tablets and phones

These devices will be allowed during classes and tutorials, however, should I find that students are misusing them (e.g., for non-course-based activities), we will discuss how to proceed. Participation marks may be impacted by such disruptions.

Schedule of readings: Complete readings by Tuesday class

Week One (September 6)

Course introduction, orientation and examples of research projects. See Box 3.5 (p.80), Box 3.6 (p.82), Box 5.2 (p.129). Students will be assigned a partner and provided with instructions to collect data at the mall by September 10.

Week Two (September 10/13) Chapters 1 and 2

Approaches to research; levels in the research process, types of variables, explaining. Choosing a group; Begin planning a project involving a field experiment (pp. 78-91), naturalistic observation (pp.130-133) or content analysis (pp. 332-340); pp. 418-423

Week Three (September 17/20) Chapter 3 and 5; pp. 281-288 in Chapter 10

Experiments and quasi-experiments; nonreactive research; bias in data collection

Week Four (September 24/27) Chapter 4 and 14

Survey and questionnaire development

Week Five and Six (October 1/4/8/11) Chapter 8 and Sections A-D of Chapter 9

Basic descriptive statistics, examining relationships; tests of significance, testing hypotheses (research and null), analyzing data

Week Seven (October 15/18) Chapter 15

Sampling

Week Eight (October 22/25) Chapter 6

Qualitative research strategies, data collection and data analysis

Week Nine (October 29/November 1) Chapter 7

Critical approaches: action and feminist research

Week Ten (November 5-- **no class Nov. 8**) Read Chapter 18

Writing a research report; hints for writing the final report; sampling

Week Eleven (November 12/15) Read Chapter 13

Measurement, validity, reliability, levels of measurement, indexes

Week Twelve (November 19/22) Chapters 10 & 11

Source and types of research bias; Approaches to research ethics; Presentations of research reports (Nov. 22)

Week Thirteen (November 26/29)

Presentations of research reports

Course Assignments: Research project involving content analysis

1. Research Design Proposal – worth 10%

Your group will choose a topic that you can study doing content analysis of material available in the public domain (e.g., books, magazines, television ads or programs, Facebook, government or non-governmental documents, etc) or, with permission, naturalistic observation. This submission includes: (a) a one paragraph introduction describing the problem to be examined; (b) a few statements identify the dependent and independent variables that will be measured; (c) a statement of the research hypothesis to be examined; (d) a statement of type and approximate number of observations will be made; (e) the “rules of observation”; (f) a copy of a proposed tally sheet for recording the data; (g) an operational definition of each variable and (h) efforts taken to prevent researcher bias. The quality of the writing is important. Due **October 1**

2. Literature Review Table –worth 10%

Your group will meet with the Sociology Reference Librarian to discuss how to use the library services to execute a successful literature review. You will search for research on your topic (same dependent and primary independent variable). What did previous researchers learn about your topic and how did they explain it. You will be given information on how to construct and integrate results from a “literature review table’ into the assignment (see page 338 – see Table 12). Your grade will reflect 1) the appropriateness and cohesiveness of your selection of 6 social science articles, 2) the organization and presentation of the reviewed material, 3) and how your literature review influences your study design (i.e., do you feel you should change your project somewhat? If so, how?). ASA formatting is required. Due **October 29**

3. Research report – worth 10%

The final research report is a complete summary of your research activity, using ASA formatting. All of the assignments, tutorials, and your reading of the text have been directed toward the completion of an excellent research report, using ASA formatting. It represents the culmination of what you have done and learned. Each group will complete an Abstract, and Introduction, a (revised) Literature Review (taking into account comments on Assignment 2), a Methods section (where they describe the data collection and data analysis); a Findings section to report results, and a Conclusion and Discussion section. Further guidelines for the final paper and presentation will be provided in class. Due **November 22**

The grade for your paper will be based on an evaluation of each of the following:

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| (1) proper footnoting and referencing | 10% |
| (2) appropriate summary tables and formatting of tables | 10% |
| (3) organization and quality of writing | 30% |
| (4) substance, quality of project, appropriate treatment of issues, originality.. | 50% |

GROUND RULES FOR GROUP WORK: All group members must participate in all three assignments. Your group is required to maintain “minutes” in which you document attendance at meetings and how data collection and academic work was shared. The dates of all meetings and project work related to data collection, library work, data analysis and writing is required. You are required to bring the journal to class. Failure to submit the journal when I ask for it will result in a grade penalty. If you know you cannot work in a group, see me at the end of the first class.

Ground rules regarding the preparation and submission of Assignment

1) Late papers and presentation dates

You will have ample time to prepare and submit your assignments. Late papers will be docked 1 mark per day. Late papers must be signed and dated by me. Normally I do not give extensions, but please see me if you believe your circumstances warrant an extension. Presentations will be scheduled for the last three classes.

2) Respecting essay conventions

Please respect proper essay conventions (i.e., title page, page numbers, proper grammar and spelling) when writing your final report. It must be typed or printed, with adequate print quality.

3) Avoiding plagiarism

If you do not document the words or ideas of writers and speakers, you represent them as your own. This is called *plagiarism*, and it is an academic offense. It includes passing off someone else's sentence(s), paragraph(s), or entire essay as *your* work, regardless of whether the true author was another student or a published author. It is important that you know about plagiarism. Documenting source material in scholarly papers is imperative, not only to avoid plagiarism, but to show the reader how other writers have influenced your ideas or analysis, or to simply guide the reader to the material referenced in your paper. Students may unintentionally plagiarize because they do not know how extensively they should document the source material. For instance, students almost always reference passages that are quoted word for word, but they often neglect to reference facts or opinions drawn from the same source. Proper referencing styles clearly outlined in reference books and online resources. For this course, you will use American Sociological Association (ASA) style.

Class attendance and participation

Lectures, tutorials and exams will be conducted during class. As such, class attendance is required. The Dean's Office will be notified each time a student misses three classes. Please make the most of our time together. Doing research possess many challenges, but it can also be great fun! Please feel free to ask questions about the assignments or the course material. If you must miss a class, it is up to you to find out what you missed. There will be 3 quizzes. Your grade will be based on the best 2 out of 3. If you miss one or more quiz, your grade will be based on the two you wrote. Only in exceptional cases, and in consultation with the Dean's Office, will a student receive permission to write a make-up quiz.