

Sociology 271A: Sociology Research Methods
Fall 2006
Professor Irene Bloemraad

Class: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 10am-12noon, Barrows 402
Office Hours: Wednesday, 2-3:45pm in Barrows 442
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What Will You Learn?

By the end of the course you should feel comfortable evaluating and formulating various types of research designs. We will survey core methods of data collection and analysis, including interviewing, statistical analysis, ethnography, comparative/historical research, content analysis and formal social network analysis. This course is not designed to provide in-depth competence in any one area, but rather to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of various data collection and analysis choices. Through readings, seminar discussions and small projects you will explore the trade-offs between different types of data and analyses, and you will work on developing a research design appropriate for a Master's research project.

Requirements and Evaluation:

This will be a demanding class, but hopefully one of the most valuable of your graduate school career. You will be expected to do all the reading for each class session, and to participate in seminar discussion. We will try to split our two meetings so that Tuesdays are dedicated to a theoretical discussion of methodology and analysis, while Thursdays focus on applications. Since one of the best means of learning is through doing, there will be a number of hands-on assignments. As well, constant feedback and discussion invariably improve a research design. Peer-learning is an integral part of this course.

The goal of the course is to help you design your own research projects. However, I'm also asked to evaluate you in a traditional sense. See my comments at the end of the syllabus about grading. I will base your grade on:

- regular participation in seminar discussions (20%)
- one reflection paper on the weekly readings (10%)
- two short data collection assignments (15% each)
- one final detailed research proposal (5% initial outline, 35% final proposal)

Seminar participation: You are expected to be familiar with the required readings and contribute to class discussion. Everyone should join in, even those who are naturally shy. The quality of your comments is more important than the quantity.

Reflection paper: At the beginning of the semester you will sign up to be responsible for one week of readings. For this week you will write a reflection paper that should be no longer than 4 double-spaced pages. Each week of readings is accompanied by a reflection question. I expect you to integrate the week's readings in your discussion of that week's question(s). Do NOT just summarize the readings. Rather, reflect on their importance (and limitations) for sociological research. Reflection papers are due by email by 9am Monday before class and should be sent via the class bSpace website. We will use the reflection papers to start class discussion. You are encouraged to read your classmates' papers before our Tuesday seminar. No paper submitted after Sunday evening will be graded.

Data Collection Assignments: At the start of the semester you will pick a topic on which you will concentrate for the semester and about which you will generate a number of researchable questions (see "research proposal" below). At four points during the semester you will consider how to answer one of those questions using a particular type of data: interviews, statistical data sets, participant observation and documents. Prior to the Thursday class, you will need to sketch out the rough outlines of how you would collect data to answer that question. During the Thursday session you will be matched with a partner to brainstorm your proposals. In two of the four cases, you will choose to do a pilot test of your data collection strategy and hand in a 4-6 page report. I do not expect polished research, but rather a thoughtful reflection on the benefits of the research methodology, limitations, problems you encountered and a discussion of what changes you would make in a future project using this type of data. Due dates for the assignments are indicated on the syllabus. You will find further information on the Data Collection Assignments at the end of this syllabus.

Research Proposal: This may be on a topic of your choice. Normally it will be an extension of your class work and one of your data collection assignments. I will expect a polished research proposal—something you could use to win an outside research fellowship. (I will provide examples.) Early in the semester you will provide a *brief* (2-3 page) outline of the research subject, an argument for why it is worthy of study, 5-8 distinct research questions related to the topic and a short bibliography (5-15 references) relevant to the topic. I encourage you to consider research questions that require very different research designs and methods. This proposal outline is due Thursday, September 21st, in class. It is worth 5%. The final paper will (usually) focus on one research question related to your topic of study, offer a detailed plan to answer the question, including (as applicable) site/period selection, unit of analysis, sampling techniques, draft interview schedule, discussion of documents to be used, data collection strategies and tentative plan of analysis. It should be 12-18 double-spaced pages. It is due by 3:00pm, Thursday, December 14, 2006 in my mailbox, 410 Barrows Hall, and is worth 35% of your final grade. NO EXTENSIONS will be given, nor will I allow anyone, except in the most extraordinary situation, to take an incomplete.

Ethical Considerations in Sociological Research:

All social scientists must be aware of their ethical and professional obligations. We will discuss research ethics throughout the semester, since different issues arise for different types of data. All seminar participants should become familiar with the American Sociological Association's Code of Ethics (<http://www.asanet.org/ecoderev.htm>) and the regulations of Berkeley's Committee for Protection of Human Subjects (<http://cphs.berkeley.edu/>). All published or publicly presented research (including Ph.D. dissertations) must get approval of CPHS if research includes human subjects.

Books and Readings:

Please purchase the books below. Other materials are available via the library's UC-eLinks system, on the class web site or in the course reader, available at ZeeZee Copy, 2431-C Durrant Ave (Sather Lane), ph. 510-705-8411. You can use http://ucelinks.cdlib.org:8888/citation/sfx_local?genre=article as a direct means to get specific articles through eLinks.

Emerson, Robert M., Rachel I. Fretz and Linda L. Shaw. 1995. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Fink, Arlene and Jacqueline Kosecoff. 2005. *How to Conduct Surveys* (3rd edition). Sage Publications.

Ferree, Myra Marx, William Anthony Gamson, Jürgen Gerhards and Dieter Rucht. 2002. *Shaping Abortion Discourse: Democracy and the Public Sphere in Germany and the United States*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

McDermott, Monica. 2006. *Working-Class White: The Making and Unmaking of Race Relations*. University of California Press.

Waters, Mary C. 1999. *Black Identities: West Indian Immigrant Dreams and American Realities*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Weiss, Robert. 1995. *Learning from Strangers: The Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies*. New York: Free Press.

Week 1 – Introduction (Week of August 29)

Abbott, Andrew. 2004. *Methods of Discovery: Heuristics for the Social Sciences*. New York: W.W. Norton. Chapters 7.

Przeworski, Adam and Frank Salomon. 1995 (revised). "The Art of Writing Proposals: Some Candid Suggestions for Applicants to Social Science Research Council Competitions." Social Science Research Foundation. Available at: http://www.ssrc.org/fellowships/art_of_writing_proposals.page?&format=printable

Kiparsky, Michael. 2006. "How to Win a Graduate Fellowship." *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (May 11).

Available at: <http://chronicle.com/jobs/news/2006/05/2006051101c/careers.html>.

- **No Thursday class.** Get your books, start reading, make sure you have access to bSpace, and start thinking about a research topic on which you will focus for the semester.

Week 2: What is Causality? (Week of Sept. 5)

Abbott, Andrew. 2004. *Methods of Discovery: Heuristics for the Social Sciences*. New York: W.W. Norton. Chapters 1-2.

Elster, Jon. 1989. *Nuts and Bolts for the Social Sciences*. Introduction. Cambridge University Press.

Pager, Devah. 2003. The Mark of a Criminal Record. *American Journal of Sociology* 108: 937-975.

Available via UC E-Links.

Willer, Robb. 2006. Overdoing Gender. Working paper.
On class website.

Causality seems easy to understand, but philosophers and scientists spend an extraordinary amount of time thinking and worrying about causality. Why? Abbott offers an overview of key methods in the social sciences, and he makes an argument about their inner, competing logics. Does Elster's discussion fit in with Abbott's categorizations or does it challenge Abbott's typology? Why are experiments heralded as the best research method to uncover causality? If an experiment shows causality, can it understand it?

- **Thursday class:** Discussion with Robb Willer about experimental designs.

Week 3: Ways of Thinking Like a Sociologist: Deductive and Inductive Approaches (Week of Sept. 12)

Stinchcombe, Arthur. 1968. "The Logic of Scientific Inference." Pp. 15-37 in *Constructing Social Theories*. Harcourt Brace and World.

Bloemraad, Irene. 2004. "Who Claims Dual Citizenship? The Limits of Postnationalism, the Possibilities of Transnationalism, and the Persistence of Traditionalism." *International Migration Review* 38(2): 389-426.

On class website.

Dey, Ian. 1999. Introduction. In *Grounding Grounded Theory: Guidelines for Qualitative Inquiry*. Academic Press.

On class web site.

Becker, Howard S. 1953. "Becoming a Marijuana User." *American Journal of Sociology* 59(3): 235-242.

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0002-9602%28195311%2959%3A3%3C235%3ABAMU%3E2.0.CO%3B2-5>

Oktay, Julianne. 2004. "Experiences of Women Whose Mothers Had Breast Cancer." Pages 23-47 in *The Qualitative Research Experience*, Deborah K. Padgett, editor. Wadsworth.

How is Bloemraad's article an example of a deductive sociological approach? In what ways are Becker and Oktay's pieces in line with an inductive, grounded theory approach? In what ways do all three articles differ from "pure" deductive or inductive reasoning? How distinct, and in what ways, are deductive and inductive thinking in these examples of empirical analysis? What is the relationship, if any, between statistical analysis and deductive thinking, on the one hand, and qualitative research and inductive thinking, on the other? What do you think about the relationship between theory and evidence?

- **Thursday class:** Be prepared to share your research topic, thoughts on some of the literature and potential research questions with a partner. Discuss with your partner what makes a research question interesting, appropriate and answerable. Practice creativity in research design by trying to imagine how one of your research questions might be answerable using an experimental research design.

Week 4: Building an Explanation: Case Selection and Units of Analysis – Which, How Many, and How to Compare (Week of Sept. 19)

Skocpol, Theda and Margaret Somers. 1980. "The Uses of Comparative History in Macrosocial Inquiry." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 22(2): 174-97.

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0010-4175%28198004%2922%3A2%3C174%3ATUOCHI%3E2.0.CO%3B2-P>

Lieberson, Stanley. 1991. "Small N's and Big Conclusions: An Examination of the Reasoning in Comparative Studies Based on a Small Number of Cases." *Social Forces* 70: 307-320.

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0037-7732%28199112%2970%3A2%3C307%3ASNABCA%3E2.0.CO%3B2-0>

Lieberson, Stanley. 1992. "Einstein, Renoir, and Greeley: Some Thoughts about Evidence in Sociology." *American Sociological Review* 57(1): 1-15.

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0003-1224%28199202%2957%3A1%3C1%3AERAGST%3E2.0.CO%3B2-Y>

Burawoy, Michael. 1998. "The Extended Case Method." *Sociological Theory* 16(1): 4-33.

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0735-2751%28199803%2916%3A1%3C4%3ATECM%3E2.0.CO%3B2-O>

Van Hook, Jennifer, Jennifer E. Glick and Frank D. Bean. 1999. "Public Assistance Receipts Among Immigrants and Natives: How the Unit of Analysis Affects Research Findings." *Demography* 36(1): 111-120.

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0070-3370%28199902%2936%3A1%3C111%3APARAIA%3E2.0.CO%3B2-Y>

This week's readings offer dramatically different views of the relationship between the cases we choose and the way we generate explanations or draw conclusions. At one level this debate is between "large N" versus "small N" methodologies, or the choice of unit of analysis, but at another level it is about a sociologist's basic approach to knowledge. What are the authors' underlying assumptions of the social world? (You might want to think back to Elster and Abbott.) Do larger or smaller numbers of cases necessarily demand different analytical techniques? What are some of the things to keep in mind when you pick a case (or a unit of analysis), and why?

- **Thursday class:** **Research proposal outline is DUE.** With a partner, discuss your research topic and consider case selection – who or what would you study for these research questions? What are the trade-offs of choosing one over the other?

Week 5: Conceptualization, Operationalization and Measurement: Race (Week of Sept. 26)

Edmonston, Barry, Joshua Goldstein and Juanita Tamayo Lott, eds. 1996. *Spotlight on Heterogeneity: The Federal Standards for Racial and Ethnic Classification*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press. Pp. 4-34.

Harris, David and Jeremiah Joseph Sim. 2002. "Who is Multiracial? Assessing the Complexity of Lived Race." *American Sociological Review* 67(4): 614-627. Available via eLinks.

Pescosolido, Bernice A., Elizabeth Grauerholz and Melissa A. Milkie. 1997. "Culture and Conflict: The Portrayal of Blacks in U.S. Children's Picture Books Through the Mid- and Late-Twentieth Century." *American Sociological Review* 62(3): 443-464.

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0003-1224%28199706%2962%3A3%3C443%3ACACTPO%3E2.0.CO%3B2-J>

Waters, Mary C. 1999. *Black Identities: West Indian Immigrant Dreams and American Realities*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Introduction and Ch. 3.

"Public Forum" letters on California Proposition 54. *ASA Footnotes*. July/August 2003 and September/October 2003.

<http://www.asanet.org/footnotes/julyaugust03/fn8.html>

<http://www.asanet.org/footnotes/septoct03/fn14.html>

Race and ethnicity are central concepts in sociology, and are clearly important in American society, but doing research about race is hard. In what ways do these authors conceptualize, operationalize and measure race? Do you see a link between the type of data collected and the process of measurement? What are the costs and benefits of different methodologies? If race is a social construct, not a biological reality, how do we study it without reifying the concept and lending it (too much?) scientific authority?

- **Thursday class:** With a partner, brainstorm ways of conceptualizing, operationalizing and measuring the core concepts related to your research topic. Try to be as specific as possible. Critique each other's operationalizations and measurements, and offer alternative suggestions.

Week 6 – Doing Interviews (Week of Oct. 3)

Weiss, Robert. 1995. *Learning from Strangers: The Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies*. New York: Free Press. Read Chapters 1, 3-6; skim 2, 7.

Fink, Arlene and Jacqueline Kosecoff. 2005. *How to Conduct Surveys* (3rd edition). Sage Publications. Read Chapters 1-3.

Both readings are "how-to" pieces, pointing out interviewing pitfalls and offering concrete suggestions on appropriate interviewing techniques. However, methodology invariably involves some conception of how knowledge is produced. What are the underlying assumptions about interviewing as a data collection strategy held by both authors? What insights or suggestions do you find particularly helpful? Any silences that bother you?

- **Thursday class:** BEFORE class, prepare a draft interview schedule (for in-depth or survey-style interviewing) that you can use as a data collection instrument in order to answer one of your research questions. You will exchange interview schedules with a partner and provide feedback to each other.

Week 7 – More on Interviews (Week of Oct. 10)

Waters, Mary C. 1999. *Black Identities: West Indian Immigrant Dreams and American Realities*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Skim Chapter 2, read the methodological appendix and then read Chapters 4-9.

Drisko, James W. 2004. “Qualitative Data Analysis Software: A User’s Appraisal.” Pages 193-214 in *The Qualitative Research Experience*, Deborah K. Padgett, editor. Wadsworth.

Consider the methodology Waters used in her research. Why was it appropriate for her research question? (Or, why wasn’t it?) Reflecting on Weiss and Fink’s advice about interviewing, and the discussion by Drisko on analysis, how confident do you feel about Water’s data collection, data analysis and conclusions? Why do you feel this way? Is there anything you would have done to improve the research?

- **No Thursday class:** Those doing the interviewing assignment should spend time on this.

Week 8 – Who Should We Interview? The Logic of Sampling (Week of Oct. 17)

Michael, R., J. Gagnon, E. Lauman, and G. Kolata. 1994. “The Sex Survey.” Pp. 15-41 in *Sex in America*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.

Fink, Arlene and Jacqueline Kosecoff. 2005. *How to Conduct Surveys* (3rd edition). Sage Publications. Read Chapters 4 and 5.

Fowler, Floyd J. 2002. *Survey Research Methods*, 3rd Edition. Sage. Chapter 2.

Waters does not use a random sample or similar probabilistic techniques. How might her sampling methodology bias their findings? When should you use scientific sampling, and when are non-probability sampling techniques appropriate? What are the costs and benefits of each?

- **Thursday class:** Interview assignments are DUE. We will discuss interview experiences in class. Everyone should be looking for a statistical data set that can be used to answer one of their research questions. Statistical datasets may be surveys of individuals, but can also be surveys of organizations or data collected on other units (e.g., countries, wars, etc.). Pick a dataset that provides some information about data collection/sampling and information on the questions asked/variables coded.

Week 9 – The Power and Causal Limits of Statistics (Week of Oct. 24)

Fink, Arlene and Jacqueline Kosecoff. 2005. *How to Conduct Surveys* (2nd edition). Sage Publications. Read Chapters 6 and 7.

Hout, Mike and Claude Fischer. 2002. “Why More Americans Have No Religious Preference: Politics and Generations.” *American Sociological Review* 67(2): 165-90. Available via eLinks (as well as the critique below and Hout and Fischer’s response).

Marwell, Gerald and N.J. Demerath III. 2003. “‘Secularization’ By Any Other Name.” *American Sociological Review* 68(2): 314-316.

Hout, Mike and Claude Fischer. 2003. “O Be Some Other Name.” *American Sociological Review* 68(2): 316-318.

Winship, Christopher and Stephen L. Morgan. 1999. “The Estimation of Causal Effects from Observational Data.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 25: 659-706
Available via UC-eLinks.

What is the difference between “correlation” and “causation?” Why is this difference fundamental to remember when doing or evaluating statistical analyses? Why do we need to understand sampling in order to understand the underlying logic of inferential statistics? What are Winship and Morgan trying to say about causality and statistical modeling? How do Hout and Fischer use survey data and statistical techniques to support their argument? What do you think of the critique by Marwell and Demerath?

- **Thursday class:** BEFORE class, prepare a short discussion of the benefits and limits of your particular data set for your research question. Think about sampling methodology, sample size, questions asked, how data was coded, etc. With a partner, you will discuss what factors a research needs to consider in choosing a statistical data source.

Week 10 – Introduction to Ethnography and Participant Observation **(Week of Oct. 31)**

McDermott, Monica. 2006. *Working-Class White: The Making and Unmaking of Race Relations*. University of California Press.

Consider the methodology McDermott used in her research. Why was it appropriate for the research question? (Or, why wasn't it?) How confident do you feel about McDermott's data collection, data analysis and conclusions? Why do you feel this way? Is there anything you would have done to improve the research?

- **Thursday class:** Statistical data set assignments DUE. We will discuss the statistical assignments in class.

Week 11 – Doing Ethnography and Participant Observation (Week of Nov. 7)

Emerson, Robert M., Rachel I. Fretz and Linda L. Shaw. 1995. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Read Chapters 2-6, skim 1, 7 and 8.

Becker, Howard S. 2001. "The Epistemology of Qualitative Research." Pages 317-330 in *Contemporary Field Research*, second edition. Robert M. Emerson, editor. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press.

- **For Thursday:** BEFORE class, chose two potential sites for ethnographic research that you could use to answer one of your research questions. With a partner, you will each present your two options and discuss the pros and cons of your site selection. Consider, too, what sort of data you will collect: what will you be looking for? listening for? trying to experience?

Week 12– Using and Evaluating Documents: Historical Research and Content Analysis (Week of Nov. 14)

Mariampolski, Hyman and Dana C. Hughes. 1978. "The Use of Personal Documents in Historical Sociology." *American Sociologist* 13(2): 104-113.
On class web site.

Milligan, John D. 1979. "The Treatment of an Historical Source." *History and Theory* 18(2): 177-196.

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0018-2656%28197905%2918%3A2%3C177%3ATTOAHS%3E2.0.CO%3B2-P>

Ferree, Myra Marx, William Anthony Gamson, Jürgen Gerhards and Dieter Rucht. 2002. *Shaping Abortion Discourse: Democracy and the Public Sphere in Germany and the United States*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press. Chapters 1, 2 (skim), 3, 5, 6.

Instead of talking to people or observing people, Ferree and colleagues try to understand society through the analysis of documents. What are the advantages and drawbacks of doing research using documents? Why are their data and research design appropriate for their research question? (Or, why wasn't it?) How confident do you feel about their data collection, data analysis and conclusions? Why do you feel this way? Is there anything you would have done to improve the research?

- **Thursday class:** **Ethnography assignment DUE**. We will discuss them during class. Also, BEFORE class, identify at least one type of document that you could use as a data source to answer one of your research questions (e.g., newspaper articles, personal diary, government report, set of illustrations, minutes of an organization, etc.). You will discuss the benefits and limitations of this data source with a partner.

Week 13 – Macro-Comparative Methods (Week of Nov. 21)

Fourcade-Gourinchas, Marion and Sarah Babb. 2002. “The Rebirth of the Liberal Creed: Paths to Neoliberalism in Four Countries.” *American Journal of Sociology* 107(9): 533-579.
Available via UC-eLinks.

Schofer, Evan and Marion Fourcade-Gourinchas. 2001 “The Structural Contexts of Civic Engagement: Voluntary Association Membership in Comparative Perspective.” *American Sociological Review* 66(6): 806-822.
Available via UC-eLinks.

Riley, Dylan. 2005. “Civic Associations and Authoritarian Regimes in Inter-War Europe: Italy and Spain in Comparative Perspective.” *American Sociological Review* 70(2): 288-310.
Available via UC-eLinks.

Macro-comparative research is central to sociology, but also the subject of heated debate regarding its methods of analysis. (Refer back to the readings in Week 4.) Why might a sociologist focus on cross-national comparisons? How do geographic (and temporal) comparisons help us see social structures? How confident do you feel about these authors' data collection, data analysis and conclusions? Why do you feel this way? How much do you think their conclusions depend on the cases chosen? What do you see as the trade-offs between the larger N statistical comparison of Schofer and Fourcade versus the smaller N comparisons of Foucade/Babb and Riley?

- **NO Thursday class:** Those planning to do the document analysis assignment should work on it. Happy Thanksgiving!

Week 14 – Taking Stock: Bringing Together a Research Design (Week of Nov. 28)

Bloemraad, Irene. Forthcoming. “Of Puzzles and Serendipity: Doing Research with Cross-National Comparisons and Mixed Methods.” In *Research Methods Choices in Interdisciplinary Contexts: War Stories of New Scholars*, edited by Louis DeSipio, Sherrie Kossoudji, and Manuel Garcia y Griego.

On class website.

- **Thursday class:** **Documentary assignments are DUE.** We will also have Dylan Riley in to talk about historical comparative research methods.

Week 15 – Social Network Analysis (Week of Dec. 5)

Scott, John. 2000. *Social Network Analysis: A Handbook*, 2nd Ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. Chapters 1-3.

John F. Padgett; Christopher K. Ansell. 1993. Robust Action and the Rise of the Medici, 1400-1434. *American Journal of Sociology* 98(6): 1259-1319.

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0002-9602%28199305%2998%3A6%3C1259%3ARAATRO%3E2.0.CO%3B2-J>

Hedstrom, Peter, Rickard Sandell and Charlotta Stern. 2000. “Mesolevel Networks and the Diffusion of Social Movements: The Case of the Swedish Social Democratic Party.” *American Journal of Sociology* 106(1): 145-172.

Available via UC-eLinks.

To what extent is social network analysis a theory, and to what extent is it a methodology? In what sort of research is this approach particularly helpful? What are its advantages and its drawbacks, both in terms of method and theory?

- **Thursday class:** Discussion of research proposals and any other outstanding issues from the semester.

*** **FINAL Research Proposals are DUE Thursday, December 14, 2006.** ***

A Note about Grading:

I believe that grades are quite secondary in graduate school. Your goal should be your development as an independent researcher and scholar.

Nonetheless, grades matter for fellowship applications and they act as a feedback mechanism to give you a sense of your understanding and progress. In terms of the former, most graduate student grades typically fall in the A/B range. You are all very good students – the graduate admissions process made sure of that! In terms of the latter issue (grades as a feedback mechanism), I use my own idiosyncratic numerical system to give my evaluation of your thinking on reflection papers and data assignments. It reflects my (somewhat skewed) experience of grading as an undergraduate, and it might appear low. For this reason I provide “equivalents” with the regular Berkeley letter system.

Please do not concentrate on the grade itself, rather engage with my comments and the suggestions of others in the class to improve your thinking and research practice.

Numerical Evaluation (reflection papers, data assignments)	Grade Equivalent
10	A++
9	A+
8/8.5	A
7/7.5	A-
6.5	B+
6	B
5.5	B-
5	C
under 5	unacceptable

Data Collection Assignments:

Choose TWO of the following FOUR assignments.

The goal of these assignments is to do a pilot test of your data collection strategy. I do not expect polished research, but rather thoughtful preparation for data collection and reflection on the benefits and limitations of the research methodology, as well as problems you encountered. Normally, one of these “pilot tests” should work towards your final research proposal.

1. Interviewing Assignment -- DUE Thursday, October 19, 2006

You may choose one of two interviewing styles: in-depth, semi-structured interviewing or survey-based, mostly close-ended interviewing. For either, choose ONE specific research question related to your general topic of interest.

- a) *interview schedule* – Develop a short interview schedule of 10-20 questions that seeks to answer your research question. Enclose this interview schedule with your 4-6 page report. For those doing self-administered surveys, include the questionnaire given to respondents (with the layout). For those doing interviewer-directed interviews, include the questions and any probes that you may ask. Either on the interview schedule or on a separate sheet, include a rationale for *each* question. How does this help answer your research question? Why did you word it that way? For those doing in-depth interviewing, what probes might you use to redirect tangential responses? For those doing closed-ended interviews, what response categories do you supply and why did you choose them? For all interview schedules, include a paragraph discussing overall question ordering.
- b) *administering the interview* – For those doing in-depth interviewing, find two people to interview. I expect that your interviews will last 30-60 minutes. If possible, tape each interview. In addition to your 4-6 page report, *fully* transcribe ONE interview (include broken sentences, hesitations, etc.). Include at least two or three short theoretical memos (of a few sentences) to yourself in the transcript as a first step to data analysis. For those doing survey-based interviewing, find 20 respondents. Begin the coding process by providing a few tables of results for 3-4 key questions in your survey. In both cases, do not worry overly about sampling methodology, though you can address this issue in your report’s discussion. In all cases, ensure that you meet the standards of human subject protection. At a minimum, this requires informed consent and protection from harm.
- c) *writing the report* – In addition to the materials describe above, submit a 4-6 page double spaced discussion of your interview experience. Justify your use of interview methods to answer your research question. Discuss the major considerations that lead you to design the interview schedule the way you did. Discuss the actual interview experience and the rudimentary data analysis that followed. What worked well? What would you do differently? Why?

2. Statistical Data Set Evaluation – DUE Thursday, November 2, 2006

The purpose of this assignment is to find and evaluate a statistical data set for future secondary analysis. You are NOT expected to engage in statistical analysis.

- a) *survey of existing data sources* – Using the web, citations in published research, the library, the Survey Research Center UC-DATA archive, or any other source, find three quantitative data sets that might help answer ONE research question. On a sheet separate from your discussion, list these datasets, provide a *brief* description (e.g., PI, purpose, main type of data included) and evaluate access (i.e., public or restricted – how can you gain access, if restricted?).
- b) *dataset selection* – Choose one of the datasets, and on a separate piece of paper, summarize the dataset's critical features. While you only need to do this for your chosen dataset, I assume that engaging in a similar exercise with the other datasets should help you in your selection of the most appropriate one. You should consider, depending on the data: data collection strategy (e.g., telephone interviews, self-reports of business activity, government-collected statistics), sample size (N) and size of relevant sub-groups, sample population, sampling methodology, response rate, data quality, data format (e.g., how easy will it be to use), availability of code book, availability of interview schedule and any other specific factors you should consider given your research question.
- c) *dataset evaluation* – In a 4-6 page double spaced report, justify your choice of a quantitative dataset in order to answer your specific research question. Discuss the main reasons that led you to select your particular dataset out of other possible data sources. What aspects of the dataset allow you to answer your research question? In particular, what statistics might you compare, or models might you run? (This discussion need not be technical, especially for those with limited statistical background. Do, however, discuss which variables help answer specific parts of your research question.) Discuss the limitations of the dataset. What strategies could you use to overcome the limitations? Are these limitations acceptable, or would you ideally need to gather your own data to answer your research question?

3. Ethnography Assignment – DUE Thursday, November 16, 2006

You should plan on doing at least two separate “observations” (e.g., different days, different times, etc.); the total time of your observations should be at least six hours. It is up to you to decide how much you wish to participate during the fieldwork.

- a) *site selection* – Choose ONE research question and brainstorm at least three different sites where you could conduct ethnographic research. On a separate piece of paper, list the three potential sites, and *briefly* outline the advantages and disadvantages of each.
- b) *doing the observations* – Determine an entrance strategy, and engage in at least four hours of fieldwork broken into two (or more) separate observation periods. Ensure that you meet the standards of human subject protection. If possible, scribble down some key words as you are doing the fieldwork. Immediately after your observations, sit down and write up *detailed* field notes. Include your detailed notes for two observation periods with your report. (If you do more, you only need to write notes for two.) In your notes, include at least two or three theoretical memos or other comments to yourself, linking your observations to your research question.
- c) *discussion* – In a 4-6 page, double spaced report, justify the use of ethnographic methods to answer your research question. Discuss the main considerations that led you to choose your observation site. Discuss the fieldwork experience and the subsequent write up of the field notes. How prepared were you? What was especially difficult? Would you consider yourself an ‘insider’ or ‘outsider,’ and to what extent did your status (and biography) matter to your research experience? How useful did you find the observational method for your research question? What problems did you run into? Given what you know now, what would you do differently? (E.g., use a completely different methodology, choose another site, stay at the site longer, think more about building rapport, etc.)

4. Document Evaluation Assignment – DUE Thursday, November 30, 2006

You may choose documents with an eye towards quantitative content analysis or as qualitative evidence, such as often (but not exclusively) used in historical/comparative research. Consider *primary sources* such as newspapers, tax records, organizational minutes, memoirs, personal letters, political pamphlets, legislation, picture books, etc.

- a) *survey of available documents* – Using the web, citations in published research, the library, or any other source, find three documents (or document sources if you are using content analysis) that might help to answer ONE of your research questions. On a sheet separate from your discussion, list these possible documents and provide a *brief* description of each (e.g., author, purpose of document, main type of information included, source of information) and evaluate ease of access (i.e., public or restricted – how can you gain access, if restricted?).
- b) *document selection* – Choose one of the documents (or document sources), and on a separate piece of paper, write a more extended overview of the document's critical features. While you only need to do this for your chosen document, I assume that engaging in a similar exercise with the other documents should help you in your selection of the most appropriate one. You should consider: author (and potential biases), purpose of document (including audience, and how this relates to the document's construction), source of information, the degree to which the document is representative of a broader class of similar documents, methods used to collect the information contained in the document and any other considerations appropriate to your research question.
- c) *initial coding* – On a separate piece of paper, sketch out a preliminary coding scheme. For content analysis, this would entail a list of coding categories, including categorization within those codes. For those more interested in comparative/historical analysis, highlight the type of information you will be searching for and the evidence you would want to see in order to evaluate your research question. Take a portion of your document, about 1500-2500 words (4-7 pages), or take the equivalent of your class of documents (e.g., four sample newspaper articles) and do some initial coding on the (photocopied) document. You can assign codes you conceptualized before reading the document, or develop analytical codes and notes to yourself as you read through the document.
- d) *discussion* – In a 4-6 page double spaced report, justify the choice of documentary evidence to answer your specific research question. Discuss the main reasons that led you to select your particular document (or document source). What aspects of the document speak to your research question? Is the document useful as factual information, an index of institutional activities or perhaps more as a reflection of cultural outlooks? Make some preliminary reflections on how the document can be used to understand or answer your research question (that is, discuss your foray into initial coding). Discuss the limitations of the document and unforeseen problems. What strategies could you use to overcome limitations in the future?