

Research Methods I
Rhode Island College, Fall 2011

Soc 302-01

Tuesdays and Thursdays 4:00-4:50 PM
Craig-Lee Hall Room 203



Soc 302-02

Tuesdays and Thursdays 10:00-11:50 AM
Craig-Lee Hall Room 206

Prerequisite: Any 200-level sociology course

Instructor Information

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Office: Craig Lee Hall room 451

Office Hours: Mondays and Tuesdays 2:30-3:30 pm and immediately after class meetings on Tuesdays, or by appointment

This course uses the Blackboard course management system.

Course Description

This course provides an introduction to social research methods, with a primary focus on conceptualizing research studies and collecting data. Students will be introduced to the relationship between theory and research, ethical and practical issues in conducting research, conceptualization and measurement, sampling, and various data collection techniques. Data analysis will not be a primary focus of this course, as that topic is covered in Research Methods II.

By the end of this course, students will be

- Developed a proposal for their own research project
- Advanced their ability to write about research and evaluate the research of others
- Gained skills in surveying, interviewing, observation, and other data analysis techniques
- Become better prepared for future coursework involving research methods, such as Research Methods II, Senior Seminar, and Independent Study, and for jobs and careers requiring research tasks

Materials

Adler, Emily Stier and Roger Clark. **2011.** *An Invitation to Social Research: How It's Done*, 4th edition. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth. ISBN 0-49-581329-X. (List price about \$130 new, but used editions are available and Amazon.com sells the book for about \$85. An e-book version is available for \$70.99 and a rental for around \$60 at <http://www.cengagebrain.com/shop/isbn/9780495813293>). The book is also available on reserve in Adams Library.

Additional reading materials will be made available through Blackboard.

Requirements

1. **PARTICIPATION AND ATTENDANCE.** You are expected to come on time for every class meeting and let me know as soon as possible (preferably in advance) if you must miss class for a legitimate reason. Part of your attendance is the expectation that you will participate in class sessions by contributing something to our discussions. If you have significant problems speaking in class, I strongly urge you to come speak to me privately as soon as possible to develop alternative participation mechanisms (such as private meetings or e-mail discussions) so that you can meet this requirement. Remember that there are few stupid questions, but that all questions and comments should be made in a spirit of respect for other students and their contributions to the class. (5% of final course grade)
2. **ASSIGNMENTS.** Over the course of the semester, you will complete three types of small assignments. Together, these will account for **50%** of your grade.
 - a. A *research blog* in Blackboard, requiring short posts approximately 15 times during the semester in which you reflect on the research process and discuss assigned course readings. More details on the blog criteria will be available in Blackboard—**20%**.
 - b. *Individual homework assignments*, most of which are indicated in the class schedule. These include the literature review, practice with some of the methods we learn about, a meeting with me to discuss your paper, your presentation, and an in-class midterm quiz—**15%**.
 - c. *In-class group assignments* will occur every week; about half of these will be collected and graded. These are not announced, so you should be in class regularly—**15%**.There is a factor built into the grading to allow you to miss one or two assignments without penalty, as these generally cannot be made up.
3. **RESEARCH PROPOSAL PAPER.** Towards the end of the semester, you will turn in a research proposal paper. This paper will allow you to explore a topic of interest to you across the span of the entire semester and propose a project drawing on that topic taking the form of either an Honors/Independent Study project or an applied project for an agency/government client. Some of the course assignments will help you prepare for this paper, which will be approximately 8-12 pages in length depending on the particular project you propose. More detailed assignment guidelines will be handed out as the semester progresses, and many of the smaller assignments during the semester will help you to prepare for this paper. (**30%** of final course grade)
4. **FINAL EXAM.** During the final exam period, students will take a cumulative take-home final exam. This exam will be open-book and open-note; questions will take the form of short answer and short essay questions asking you to apply your research methods knowledge to particular situations. (**20%** of final course grade)
5. **READING.** You are expected to complete all assigned course readings prior to the date for which they are assigned. Remember that normal expectations for a college course are that you should do two to three hours of work outside class for every one hour in class—since you are spending four hours a week in this class, that means you should expect to work on reading, writing assignments, and studying for this class for eight to twelve hours a week outside of class. Reading assignments average approximately 85 pages per week. You may also want to visit the companion site for the textbook, which contains review and study materials; you can access it through Blackboard.

Course Schedule

All readings and assignments are due at the start of the class date for which they are assigned. In the schedule below, **T** indicates readings in the textbook, **O** indicates readings available online via Blackboard.

Tuesday, August 30

Introduction to Research Methods

PART I: Developing and Conceptualizing Research Ideas

Thursday, September 1

The Connection Between Theory and Research

- ▶ “The Uses of Social Research,” (1-18) **T**
- ▶ “Theory and Research,” (19-38) **T**
- Be sure to read the entire syllabus prior to this class meeting**
- ▶ Blackboard survey due

Tuesday, September 6

Research Ethics

- ▶ “Ethics and Social Research,” (39-70) **T**
- ▶ CITI human subjects training (<http://www.citiprogram.org>) (detailed instructions available on Blackboard)
- *Email or hand in your passing results of the training prior to the start of class*

Thursday, September 8

Choosing a Topic

- ▶ “Selecting Researchable Topics and Questions,” (71-98) **T**

Tuesday, September 13

How to Read—and Use—Prior Research

- ▶ Damaske, “Brown Suits Need Not Apply,” *Sociological Forum* 24:2, (402-24) **O**
- *Print out this article and bring it to class with you today.* Be sure you have read it completely.
- ▶ Blog Post Due
- ***Last day for dropping this course

Thursday, September 15

Conducting a Literature Review/Library Instruction Session

- ▶ RIC Sociology Department Term Paper Guide (<http://www.ric.edu/sociology/termpaperguide.php>) **O**
- ▶ Sample Literature Reviews, as posted in Blackboard **O**
- BRING A ONE-SENTENCE SUMMARY OF YOUR TOPIC TO CLASS TODAY.
- *Today’s class will meet in the library instruction facility on level 3 of Adams Library.*

Tuesday, September 20

Individual Meetings

- Class is cancelled for today. Please be sure to sign up for a 10-minute meeting with me this week. You must bring your literature review chart with you to the meeting so that we can discuss your progress.
- ▶ Blog Post Due

- Thursday, September 22 **Samples & Study Design**
▶ “Sampling,” (99-128) **T**
▶ “Crosssectional, Longitudinal, & Case Study Designs” (157-184) **T**
→ Bring textbook to class today!
- Tuesday, September 27 **More on Measurement**
▶ “Measurement,” (129-156) **T**
- Thursday, September 29 **No Class Meeting—Rosh Hashanah**
Work on literature reviews
▶ Literature Review Table Due
▶ Blog Post Due

PART II: CHOOSING METHODS OF SOCIAL RESEARCH

- Tuesday, October 4 **Experiments**
▶ “Experimental Research,” (185-210) **T**
→ Literature Review Due
- Thursday, October 6 ▶ Gerber, “Social Pressure & Voter Turnout.” *APSR* 102 (33-48) **O**
▶ Pager, “The Mark of a Criminal Record.” *AJS* 108 (937-975) **O**
→ Use the reading handout to study these articles and bring your work to class
▶ Blog Post Due
- Tuesday, October 11 **No Class—Monday Classes Meet**
- Thursday, October 13 **Surveys and Censuses**
▶ “Questionnaires and Structured Interviews,” (211-250) **T**
▶ Census 2010, <http://2010.census.gov/2010census/about/> (explore the links, don’t just read the main page) **O**
- Tuesday, October 18 ▶ Gross, “How Religious are America’s College & University Professors?” http://religion.ssrc.org/reforum/Gross_Simmons.pdf
▶ Brittingham, “We the People of Arab Ancestry in the US,” <http://www.census.gov/prod/2005pubs/censr-21.pdf> **O**
→ Use the reading handout to study these articles and bring your work to class
▶ Blog Post Due
- Thursday, October 20 **Interviews**
▶ “Qualitative Interviewing,” (251-290) **T**
▶ Healey-Etten, “Interviewing Tips,” *Teaching Sociology* (162-4) **O**

- Tuesday, October 25
- ▶ Edin, “What do Low-Income Single Mothers Say About Marriage?” *Social Problems* 47: (112-133) **O**
 - Use the reading handout to study this article and bring your work to class
 - ▶ Blog Post Due
- Thursday, October 27
- Observation and Ethnography**
- ▶ “Observational Techniques,” (291-326) **T**
 - ▶ Survey assignment due today
 - ▶ Blog Post Due
- Tuesday, November 1
- ▶ Duneier, “A Statement on Method,” *Sidewalk* (333-358) **O**
 - ▶ Mears, “Not Just a Paper Doll,” *JCE* 34 (317-343) **O**
 - Use the reading handout to study these articles and bring your work to class
 - ▶ Blog Post Due
- Thursday, November 3
- Comparative-Historical Methods**
- ▶ “Using Available Data,” (327-356) **T**
 - ▶ Arthur, “The Neglected Virtues of Comparative-Historical Methods,” Zake & Decesare, *New Directions in Sociology* 172-92 **O**
 - ▶ Interview assignment due today
 - ▶ Blog Post Due
- ***Withdrawal deadline
- Tuesday, November 8
- ▶ Shon and Roberts, “An Archival Exploration of Homicide,” *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology* 54 (43-60) **O**
 - Use the reading handout to study this article and bring your work to class
 - ▶ Blog Post Due
- Thursday, November 10
- Content Analysis & Visual Sociology**
- ▶ “Content Analysis,” (357-380) **T**
- Tuesday, November 15
- ▶ Oware, “A ‘Man’s Woman’? Contradictory Messages in the Songs of Female Rappers, 1992-2000.” *J of Black Studies* 39:5 (786-802) **O**
 - Use the reading handout to study this article and bring your work to class
 - ▶ Observation assignment due today
 - ▶ 2 Blog Posts Due
- Thursday, November 17
- Comparing Methods & Multi-Method Research**
- ▶ “Comparing Methods” and “Multiple Methods” (467-472) **T**
 - ▶ Read three case studies of interest from <http://www.orgnet.com/cases.html> **O**
 - ▶ Comparing methods chart due in class today
 - ▶ Blog Post Due

PART III: THE USES OF RESEARCH

- Tuesday, November 22 **Applied Social Research**
▶ “Applied Social Research,” (381-410) **T**
→ Bring your textbook to today’s class
- Thursday, November 24 **No Class—Thanksgiving**
- Tuesday, November 29 **Writing About Research and Proposing Research**
▶ “Writing the Research Report,” (473-476) **T**
▶ “Check List for Preparing a Research Proposal,” (477-478) **T**
▶ “The Research Proposal” Cargan, *Doing Social Research* (43-53) **O**
▶ Blog Post Due
- Thursday, December 1 **Course Review/Exam Prep**
▶ Blog Post Due
- Tuesday, December 6 **Individual Meetings**
Class is cancelled for today; I’ll hold small-group meetings to prepare for final paper submission instead.
- Thursday, December 8 **Course Conclusion**
Research Proposals Due In Class Today
→ Five-minute informal presentations on proposals in class
→ Final exam will be available after 6 pm tonight

Take-Home Final Exam Due by 11:59 pm, Thursday December 15th

Course Policies

Academic Integrity

All students enrolling in this course are expected to abide by the Rhode Island College guidelines on academic honesty. More information about academic integrity and avoiding plagiarism, as well as RIC policies, can be found at <http://ric.libguides.com/integrity>. Examples of academic dishonesty include, but are not limited to:

- Plagiarizing written work, including copying some or all of your work from a book, a website, or another student's paper. Think about how you would feel if someone passed off your hard work as their own.
- Using sources without proper attribution. Remember that all claims in a paper that did not spring fully formed from your own head need attribution, regardless of whether or not they are paraphrased, and all direct quotes should appear in quotation marks. If you are unsure how to document sources, please see me or reference the RIC Sociology Term Paper Guide at <http://www.ric.edu/sociology/termpaperguide.php>.
- Turning in research reports that are fabricates or which do not accurately represent the research activities in which you engaged.
- Turning in work completed for other classes without prior permission.
- Working together with another student on an assignment, or seeking assistance with the content of your work from professionals, parents, or peers, without prior permission. (The exception to this policy is proofreading.)
- Copying off of another student or off of materials you have brought without permission during an exam. This includes text messaging and use of the internet during exams.
- Destroying course materials or otherwise preventing other students from achieving fully in this course.

You should be aware that I have caught many students who have engaged in academic dishonesty. Cheating successfully is often harder than you think, and you might as well just put your effort into doing the assignment legitimately. The penalties for academic dishonesty are severe, and include receiving a 0 on the assignment for the first minor offense, receiving an F for the class for a repeated offense, and report to the Vice President for Academic Affairs at RIC for all offenses. If you feel the urge to engage in academic dishonesty, stop and think about what you are doing, and then come see me so we can work out a plan together to ensure your success in the course.

Extensions, Absences, and Attendance

You are expected to attend class regularly, but I am aware that emergencies do come up and that this class is not the only priority in your life. If you know in advance that you will be absent for a legitimate reason, please let me know via email so that you can be excused. If something unavoidable comes up, it is your responsibility to let me know as soon as possible afterwards. Regardless, it is your responsibility to get notes from a classmate (I do not provide notes to students) and to meet with me to clarify what you have missed. If you must be late to a class or if you must leave early, you should try to let me know in advance, and you should always be sure not to disturb other students with your comings and goings. Be aware that repeated absences, even if excused, may imperil your ability to do well in the course, and that you cannot earn participation points if you are not present.

Most assignments¹ are due in Blackboard and must be submitted at least 15 minute prior to the start of class (you may not skip class to finish your work). Assignments that are not posted directly to a Blackboard application must be saved in *.rtf, *.doc, *.docx (preferred), *.pdf, or *.html format (try “Save As” to select one of these formats). Blackboard does log your submissions; you can return to an assignment yourself to see if you have submitted it correctly, and I am happy to show you how to do this so that you will not need to email me to see if I have received your work. If unavoidable circumstances require you to seek an extension on your work, I am generally open to providing one. However, you will need to request the extension via email at least 24 hours prior to the due date unless the extension is due to a major emergency (health crisis, death in the family, etc.)—so plan ahead.

Course Technology

Students are expected to check their RIC email addresses and Blackboard frequently, at a minimum twice a week before each class meeting. If you primarily use another email account, I would suggest you arrange for your RIC email to be forwarded, as I do use email to disseminate important information about the course. Students are also responsible for being able to access Blackboard. If you are not able to access email or Blackboard, you should seek assistance from User Support Services (<http://www.ric.edu/uss/> or x8886) right away so that you do not fall behind in the course.

Students with Disabilities

If you have a disability that might interfere with your ability to perform at your best in this course, it is your responsibility to come and speak with me as early as possible in the semester so that we can develop a plan together. All reasonable accommodations will be made. Students with disabilities should be sure that they are registered with Disability Services in order to ensure access to the full range of services available at Rhode Island College. Information about these services and about registration is available at <http://www.ric.edu/disabilityservices/>

Supplemental Services

Writing center: <http://www.ric.edu/writingcenter/>

Academic and Study Skills: <http://www.ric.edu/oasis/>

Counseling Center: <http://www.ric.edu/counselingctr/>

Course Learning Outcomes

This course is designed to meet learning outcomes of the Sociology and Justice Studies programs²:

- ▶ An understanding of the relations between theory and research.
- ▶ An appreciation of the research process.
- ▶ An ability to do sociological research.
- ▶ An ability to articulate sociological analyses in oral and written form.
- ▶ To emphasize the relevance of literature and research to practice in the field.
- ▶ To advance knowledge about the design, evolution, operation, and maintenance of justice system.
- ▶ To orient students toward a systematic perspective of the criminal justice system.
- ▶ To prepare future leaders both in the academic and applied setting.

¹ Except those which you needed to complete on paper, such as the surveys and the methods comparison chart. Students may at their own option turn in the literature review table, the interview notes, and the observation notes on paper.

² See <http://www.ric.edu/sociology/degreeList.php> and <http://www.ric.edu/sociology/programJSTD.php>.