

INSTRUCTOR'S NAME:
COURSE TITLE:

Philip Howard
Research Methods in the Social and
Political Sciences
SEMESTER/YEAR: Winter 2000
CAMPUS: IIT - Main

TIME: Monday & Wednesday
TIME 9:00 – 10:30 a.m.

I. COURSE CONTENT

What are the important research tools used in contemporary social and political sciences? How do these tools differ, and what are their different advantages? Since researchers often face restrictions in time, personnel and financial resources, they must be frugal about the methods they use to pursue their research. This course has several objectives:

- to teach students about the similarities and differences between qualitative, quantitative and comparative research;
- to teach students to articulate a research question and select the research methods most likely to help answer the research question;
- to teach students how to use these methods, and then to critically evaluate the data these methods yield.

Broadly, this course will cover qualitative (participant observation, ethnography), quantitative (statistics, survey) and comparative (small set, historical, fuzzy set) methods. We will also discuss and practice the process of data collection, sampling and measurement. Research ethics will be discussed as issues emerge. If there is time we may explore experimental and quasi-experimental research design.

To enroll in this course, students must have completed a statistics course approved by the department, though the course itself has no mandatory statistical component. Students with at least one other course in political science or other research experience will be best prepared for the pace and expectations of this course.

II. TEACHING METHOD

This class will be a workshop in which the instructor, students, and occasional guest lecturer can present ideas on how and when to use different research methods. As much as this is a class in research methods, it is also an opportunity for you to chase the questions and themes you find most interesting in the social and political sciences. Although you are required to try your hand at different methods, you have wide freedom to select the topics of your research, so much of the content of this class will depend on the topics brought to the table.

Students will usually lead discussion in the second session of each week, and will finish the course with a good reference packet of notes, reviews, and other handouts. E-mail will be frequently used to conduct class business and carry on debates outside of class

time. Since irregular attendance will disrupt our learning community, unexplained absences will affect your grade.

III. METHODS OF EVALUATION

Participation (20%). Students are expected to actively participate in class discussions. Students will be expected to cooperate in preparing three short sets of research questions for the two occasions in which they will be moderating the Wednesday discussion session. Regular attendance and contributions to the discussion of assigned readings and each other's work will result in a high grade.

Short Research Assignments (20%). Students are expected to complete two short writing assignments in the first few weeks of class.

Personal Research (60%) Assignments. Each student will use three different methods in their research on any topic or topics of their choice. Three 10-page essays are to be handed in (20% each) and presented for discussion in class. The essays are due in class the week before you present, and you must bring enough copies for other members of the class. If you wish, all 3 assignments can address the same research question. However, you can also use two methods on one question and a third method on another question, or use three methods on three different questions. In each assignment, you must define a clear research topic, including a statement describing the relationship between variables. Taking these interesting variables, write about what kind of data you want to collect to address the issue, laying out the basics of the research design, discussing questions of validity, measurement and sampling, and commenting on the advantages and disadvantages of the approach you have chosen compared to other realistic possibilities.

Work must be typed, 12-point font, with numbered, double-spaced pages free of spelling mistakes. Use gender-neutral language. I will not mark for grammar but if it impedes my ability to understand your arguments your grade may suffer, so it is a good idea to have at least one other person proofread your writing. Use William Strunk, Jr., and E. B. White, *The Elements of Style* (New York: Macmillan, 1979) for writing style questions. Purdue University owl.english.purdue.edu has an excellent collection of documents about writing and research. Citations should be formatted according to the *Chicago Manual of Style*. Please refer to the "Principles Regarding Academic Integrity" for the definitions of plagiarism.

IV. COURSE MATERIAL

A. Required Readings

All texts will be available at the Bookstore and the photocopied packet will be available in the first weeks of class.

1. Books

- Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss, *Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (New York: Walter De Gruyter, 1967).
- Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).
- Charles C. Ragin, *The Comparative Method: Moving Beyond Qualitative and Quantitative Strategies* (Berkeley, Ca: University California Press, 1989).
- David A. Snow, Leon Anderson, *Down on Their Luck: A Study of Homeless Street People* (Berkeley, Ca: University of California Press, 1993).

2. Articles

See Photocopied Packet

B. Video Documentaries

Several of documentaries will be shown during class, depending on their availability.

V. LECTURE PLAN

In most weeks, Monday mornings will have a substantive lecture and Wednesday mornings will be a work session where we discuss the readings or each other's work.

Week 1 - Introduction to Course

Week 2 - Research Methods

Discussion

Glaser and Strauss, chapter 1, "The Discovery of Grounded Theory," and chapter 2, "Generating Theory."

Week 3 - Formulating a Research Question & Generating Theory

Discussion

Snow and Anderson, chapter 1, "Studying the Homeless," and chapter 2, "A Grounded Typology of Homeless Street People."

Week 4 - Qualitative Methods: Participant Observation

Assignment #1 Due

Discussion

Participant Observation Assignment 1

Snow and Anderson, chapter 3, “The Subculture of Street Life,” and chapter 4 “Wage Labor and Institutionalized Assistance.”

Week 5 - Qualitative Methods: Ethnography

Discussion

Snow and Anderson, chapter 8, chapter 9 and any one of Chapter 3-7

Week 6 - Ethics & Research

Assignment #2 Due

Discussion

Ethnography Assignment 2

Week 7 - Quantitative Methods: Statistics

Copies of Research Project #1 Due

Discussion

King, Keohane, Verba, chapter 1, “The Science in Social Science,” and chapter 4, “Determining What to Observe.”

Week 8 - Presentations I

Week 9 - Quantitative Methods: Survey

Discussion

“Survey Research” in Earl Babbie, *The Practice of Social Research*, 8th edition, (Belmont, Ca: Wadsworth Publishing Company); John Hagan, “Destiny and Drift: Subcultural Preferences, Status Attainments, and the Risks and Rewards of Youth,” *American Sociological Review* 56 pp. 567-582, 1991.

Week 10 - Comparative Methods: Small Sample

Discussion

Ragin, *Comparative Method*, Chapter 2 “Heterogeneity and Causal Complexity,” chapter 3, “Case-Oriented Comparative Methods,” and chapter 4 “The Variable Oriented Approach”; Re-Reading of your choice from any previous course in the Social and Political Sciences. Choose your favorite book or article that makes a small-set comparison, and reread with Ragin’s variable-oriented and case-oriented categories in mind.

Week 11 - Comparative Methods: Unobtrusive Research

Copies of Research Project #2 Due

Discussion

Barbara Ellen Smith, "Black Lung: The Social Production of Disease," in *The Sociology of Health and Illness*, Peter Conrad, Ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), and Babbie, Chapter 11, "Unobtrusive Research."

Week 12 - Presentations II

Week 13 - Comparative Methods: Fuzzy Sets

Discussion

Ragin, chapter 5, "Combined Versus Synthetic Comparative Strategies," and chapter 6 "A Boolean Approach to Qualitative Comparison: Basic Concepts."

Week 14 - Mixed Methods Approach

Copies of Research Project #3 Due

Discussion

Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton, chapter 2 "The Construction of the Ghetto" and chapter 3 "The Persistence of the Ghetto," in *American Apartheid* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

Week 15 - Presentations III