

Methods of Social Research
Sociology 401Q (Asbury 318)
TTH: 10-11:30
Fall 2017

Instructor: Dr. Matthew Oware
Office: Asbury 306
Office Hrs: TTH: 2:00-3:15
also by appointment
Email: moware@depauw.edu

Course Description

This is *the* course to take in the Sociology and Anthropology department! After taking this class, you can officially say “I know how to do basic quantitative methodological research.” Understanding (and conducting) research puts you in the driver’s seat for being able to make informed and sound judgments regarding claims made by laypeople, pollsters, as well as other social scientists in their own research. I do not want to understate the importance of this course—the skill set that you gain is essential if you plan on enrolling in graduate, professional, medical, or law school and entering the workforce (which all of you plan on doing).

Unlike other courses in the major, this is a hands-on, do-it-yourself course. You will undertake original research, that is: think of a topic; write a literature review that includes a theoretical perspective; develop testable research questions and hypotheses; gather data; analyze and assess the data, and draw conclusions based on your findings. Of course, we will discuss all of the things I have written in this paragraph in great detail over the semester.

This class is the gateway course for entering the profession of sociology. Contrary to what you may have heard in the past, this course is fun. Okay, maybe not *fun*, but *powerful* because it teaches specific techniques for how to examine our social world more analytically and systematically, as well as *necessary* in your continued development as a scholar—which you are! I underestimated the importance of methods as an undergrad but fully appreciate its potency now that I am teaching and perform research. It is my hope that through conducting your own research project you come to understand the utility of research methods.

Course Objectives

1. To obtain the knowledge to help discern erroneous and logical reasoning
2. To distinguish between deductive and inductive reasoning
3. To hone skills in locating social science literature and primary source material
4. To learn about and how to write a coherent literature review
5. To understand the role of social theory in empirical research
6. To learn the difference between quantitative research and qualitative research
7. To develop, design, and carry out the analysis of primary data
8. To learn and conduct statistical analysis of survey data using SPSS
9. To refine skills in crafting compelling arguments that build on social theory, conceptual frameworks, and empirical scholarship in sociology.

Required Readings

Schutt, Russell. 2011. *Investigating the Social World*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press, 7th edition.
ISBN-10: **1412999804**

Czaja, Ronald and Johnny Blair. 2005. *Designing Surveys: A Guide to Decisions and Procedures*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge. 2nd edition
ISBN-10: 0761927468

Nardi, Peter. 2006. *Interpreting Data: A Guide to Understanding Research*, Boston: Pearson.
ISBN-10: 0205439195

Holcomb, Zealure. *SPSS Basics: Techniques for a First Course in Statistics*. 4th Edition. Pyrczak Publishing.
ISBN: 978-1-936523-12-2

There are also several articles on Moodle that are required reading as well.

Grading Criteria

Assignments	Total number of points
Paper 1 (Research question & Literature Review)	50
Oral discussion #1	not graded
Paper 2 (Hypotheses, Definitions, Operationalization)	75
Oral discussion of research design and sampling (#2)	not graded
Paper 3 (Interview Assignment)	50
Paper 4 (Results, Data Analysis, Discussion, Limitations)	100
Oral Presentation #3 (of paper 4)	50
Participation points	15
Journal Presentation (In class)	10
TOTAL	350

Final Grade Scale

A, A-	A=350-335; A-= 334-319
B+, B, B-	B+= 318-303; B=302-287; B-= 286-271
C+, C, C-	C+=270-260; C=259-249; C-=248-238
D+, D, D-	237 and lower

What the Grades Mean

A= Work that goes beyond the requirements of the assignment by adding insight, creativity and/or particularly thoughtful analysis. Demonstrates a comprehensive command of the course material, and exceptional ability to apply concepts to the real

world, and a superior ability to organize and express ideas. The analysis is correct, and the paper is insightful.

B=Work that adequately meets the requirements of the assignment. Demonstrates a solid command of the course material, an ability to apply concepts to the real world with only minor problems, and good organization and expression of ideas. The analysis is correct, and the paper is insightful.

C= Work that partially meets the requirements of the assignment. Demonstrates acceptable command of the course material, a basic ability to apply concepts to the real world with some gaps and problems, and moderate skill in the organization and expression of ideas. The analysis is correct.

D=Work that marginally meets the requirements of the assignment. Demonstrates little command of the course material, minimal attempt to apply concepts to the real world, and limited ability to organize and express ideas. The analysis is incorrect.

F= Work that does not meet the requirements of the assignment. Demonstrates no command of the course material, unable to appropriately or consistently apply concepts to the real world, and insufficiently organizes and expresses ideas. There is no analysis of the data collected.

Class Participation

To gain a firm grasp of the material, you need to read before class and then come to class ready to critically engage and insightfully discuss what you have read. You also need to read beforehand so that you can ask questions that are unclear from the readings. Furthermore, in this course we do a lot of talking about research, you need to be engaged in this process. To this end, you will receive participation points. Realize that if you are not involved in class or are absent, then you lose participation points. **15 pts.**

Requirements for Q Certification

- 1) Design an original quantitative research project
- 2) Collect and organize data
- 3) Successfully apply the appropriate statistical test of analysis based on your hypotheses
- 4) Correctly interpret statistical results and draw appropriate theoretical conclusions

You are required to attend two computer workshops that teach you how to use the statistical software package called SPSS. We will meet twice during the semester with David Diedrich, a technical training coordinator. Your participation in the workshops is mandatory; you must attend them in order to learn how to input, manipulate and analyze the data that you collect for your research. The workshop will provide you rudimentary quantitative skills sociologists use when they organize and analyze data.

ADA Accommodations

It is the policy and practice of DePauw University to provide reasonable accommodations for students with properly documented disabilities. Written notification from Student Disability Services is required. If you are eligible to receive an accommodation and would like to request it for this course, please contact Student Disability Services. Allow one-week advance notice to ensure enough time for reasonable accommodations to be made. Otherwise, it is not guaranteed that the accommodation can be provided on a timely basis. Accommodations are not retroactive. Students who have questions about Student Disability Services or who have, or think they may have a disability (psychiatric, attentional, learning, vision, hearing, physical, medical, etc.) are invited to contact Student Disability Services for a confidential discussion in Union Building Suite 200 or by phone at 658-6267.

Please also see me if you wish to discuss accommodations specific to this course.

I reserve the right to make minor adjustments to this syllabus as needed throughout this semester. Any changes will be announced in advance.

Course Schedule:

Aug. 24:	Introduction to Course
Aug. 29:	Schutt: Science, Society and Social Research
Aug. 31:	E-Reserves: Theories and Philosophies for Social Research
Sept. 5:	Schutt: The Process and Problems of Social Research Schutt: Appendix B (Finding Information) Library Day: Performing a literature search Bring your laptop to class
Sept. 7:	Schutt: Research Design and Causation
Sept. 12:	Schutt: Appendix B: How to read a research article e-reserve: How to write a literature review Presentation of Journal Article
Sept. 14:	Schutt: Conceptualization and Measurement Presentation of Journal Article, continued Paper #1 Due by 4 o'clock
Sept. 19:	Presentation of research hypothesis, conceptualization and operationalization of research project (Oral Presentation # 1) Student Oral Presentations

- Sept. 21: Presentation of research hypothesis, conceptualization and operationalization of research project (Oral Presentation number #1)
Student Oral Presentations
- Sept. 26: Schutt: Sampling
- Sept. 28: Sampling, continued
Czaja and Blair: Chap. 7 (p.125-155), 8, and 9
- Oct. 3: Research Designs, Surveys
Schutt: Survey Research
Czaja and Blair: Chap. 4 and 5
Paper # 2 Due by 4 o'clock
- Oct. 5: Research Designs, Experiments
Schutt: Experiments
Czaja and Blair: Chap. 2 and 3
- Oct. 10:** 1st Computer Workshop
Data Analysis, Nardi: Chap 1. and Chap. 2
SPSS Basics, Chapter 1-Chapter 6
Place: Julian 278
- Oct. 12: Address questions about your particular survey
In class discuss of IRB forms for DePauw
- Oct. 24: Schutt: Qualitative Methods
e-reserve article
IRB form due to me
- Oct. 26: Qualitative Data Analysis
Speaker: Angela Castaneda
Moodle article
- Oct. 31: Discussion of Interview assignment
-interview techniques
- Nov. 2: Schutt: Historical and Comparative Research and Secondary Data and Content Analysis
Moodle article: Oware
- Nov. 7: Oral Presentation #2
Oral Presentations on research design
Paper #3 Due by 4 o'clock

- Nov. 9: Oral Presentation #2, continued
Oral Presentations on research design
- Nov. 14: Schutt: Quantitative Data Analysis
SPSS Basics, Chap. 7, 10, 12, 13, 14
- Nov. 16:** 2nd Computer Workshop
Nardi: Chap. 3 and Chap. 4
SPSS Basics, Chapter 16, 17
Presenting Quantitative Research
- Nov. 21: Lab Time,
refer to Schutt: Data Analysis and Nardi (entire book) for help
- Nov. 28: Lab Time
refer to Schutt: Data Analysis and Nardi (entire book) for help
- Nov. 30: Lab Time
refer to Schutt: Data Analysis and Nardi (entire book) for help
- Dec. 5: Oral Presentation #3,
Timed Oral Presentations of results
- Dec. 7: Oral Presentation #3, continued
Timed Oral Presentations of results
Last day of Class—What have we learned
Address questions about your specific research findings

Paper #4 Due Wednesday, Dec 13th by 4 o'clock

**Paper #1: Literature Review and Identification of Research Question (50 pts)
(8-10 pages)**

This paper presents the focus of your research and essentially lays out the format for the rest of the papers you write on your topic.

You are required to identify a sociologically relevant topic of interest to you. You can choose any topic you want, something you learned in another sociology course, something that is topical, or simply, anything that greatly interests you. It can be from any area of sociology; that is, gender, deviance, criminology, family, race and ethnicity, social movements, theory, etc. The primary requirement is that your topic is something that interests you and that you apply some sociological theory to your particular subject.

The overall goal of this paper is to identify the question or questions that your research project will address. To do this, you must first selectively review the specific peer-reviewed research and theoretical research that provides the foundation for formulating your questions. In other words, you will make a case for the importance of your research question by showing how this topic fits within the theoretical and research literature that already exists. What have other people written about your topic? Understand that you will not be able to perform an exhaustive literature review, therefore you should pick articles and books that you perceive to be particularly relevant to your topic (you might want to think about focusing on research that is more current as opposed to research from the 80s and older—although this does not mean that this literature is not important). The aim of the literature review should be a coherent weaving together of ideas and findings relevant to the main issue you are addressing. What have others written about this topic? Is there agreement or conflict among these authors? What conclusions can be drawn from research that has been done on questions related to the one you are interested in? Where are the gaps or holes in the existing literature that your research question(s) can address?

This paper should consist of more than merely describing a general topic in full detail. The literature review should result in a specific question or issue that you intend to address. It should also make a case for the sociological importance of the research question(s) to be examined. Why does this topic need to be studied and why does it matter? What will your research contribute to the overall sociological understanding of the problem? What is the potential political or social significance of research in this area?

You must also identify the theoretical slant of your study. Which sociological theory do you want to apply or test in your research (for example, conflict-theory, structural-functionalism, feminist theories, symbolic interactionism, exchange theory, constructionist theories, postmodernist theories, etc.)?

We will spend class time discussing the appropriate style of literature reviews. It would be immensely helpful to you if you saw what a literature review looks like, how they read, its structure, organization, tone, etc. Thus, I advise you to read the following journals which are available at DePauw's library, Row O. West: *American Sociological*

Review, American Journal of Sociology, Social Forces, Social Problems, Social Psychology Quarterly, Gender and Society, Sociology of Race and Ethnicity, Sociology of Education, etc.

Please read the hand-out (in e-reserves) on how to write a literature review. It will guide you in your own writing.

Paper #1 is due September 14th. There will be a 10 pt. deduction for late papers and then an additional 10 pt. deduction for each day the paper is late.

Paper #2: Presentation of Testable Research Hypotheses, Definition of Key Concepts, and Operationalization of Variables (50pts) (7-8 pages)

In paper #1 you addressed the empirical literature pertinent to your topic and identified a particular problem or question that needs to be addressed. In this paper you will bridge the gap between the research question you have identified and the more detailed research procedures you will employ to answer your question. What is your primary research plan going to be? What is the predicted relationship between important concepts? How do you intend to measure the concepts you are interested in? You must be as precise and exact as possible about how you plan on identifying or capturing the abstract concepts you talked about in the previous paper (for example, love is an abstract concept, but how would someone measure/define love—the number of times someone says “I love you,” the amount of hugs one person gives another, whether someone marries another person, etc.).

You must take the questions that you listed as the ones you want to address in paper #1 and turn them into testable research hypotheses—a set of carefully worded predictions about how you think particular variables will impact one another. Does variable A “cause” changes in variable B or vice versa? For example, does income influence education? Do people with higher incomes obtain greater levels of schooling? Or does more education create higher incomes? Are these variables (income and education) influenced by another variable that needs to be accounted for, say, motivation (however it is defined)—this would be variable C. What other variables need to be “controlled” (or taken into account) in order to accurately assess the relationship between the variables you are interested in? Does your previous literature review reveal any other factors that you should address? For each hypothesis, you must provide a reason for why you think things will turn out the way you predict (the literature frequently provides the rationale). For example, some scholars may say that higher income leads to greater levels of education, while others may say that those with higher levels of education generally obtain higher levels of income. Further still, there may be some research that says income and education must be treated as one concept—socioeconomic status—and should not be disentangled.

In presenting your hypotheses, you must identify all the relevant *independent and dependent variables* involved as well as any other outside variables you think may influence the variables you are interested in examining (again refer your literature for guidance). You must talk about the concepts that you intend to address as well as

operationalize these concepts. As stated above about love, how will you correctly measure your concept, what questions will you ask that get at it, or what specific variables will you use to get at it? In short, how could you recognize and measure this concept in the real world? This step is vital because it provides the link between abstract, theoretical ideas and concrete ways of observing these ideas.

Paper #2 is Due Oct. 3rd. There will be a 10 pt. deduction for late papers and then an additional 10 pt. deduction for each day the paper is late.

Paper #3: Interview Assignment (50 pts) (5 pages)

In this assignment I want you to perform face-to-face interviews with three individuals. The goal is to ask questions from your survey of these persons and collectively present their responses. You can interview anyone you like—a roommate, friend, or someone else—asking them questions from the survey you are creating. What were their responses to your questions? What conclusions do you find based on your interviews? Were you surprised by some of their answers? Based on your interviews do you need to change the questions that you ask on your survey? How do their responses help you think about your topic?

How long did each interview take? Do you think you got “interesting” responses? Were there things that you believe you should have asked but did not? How might interviewing individuals differ from respondents just answering survey questions? How do you think “you” impacted the conversation—sociologists and other social scientists (for example, anthropologists) contend that “reflexivity” is critically important when conducting interviews. Do you think your interview style negatively or positively impacted the interview? Did you encourage more conversation or were the answers of your respondents short and direct? What other thoughts do you have regarding the interviews?

In your paper, please address the above questions. **I do not want the paper to be simply the verbatim responses from your interviewee;** although I do want the responses from your respondents. It should be a summary and a synthesis of your interview, addressing your primary questions.

Paper #3 is Due Nov. 7th. There will be a 10 pt. deduction for late papers and then an additional 10 pt. deduction for each day the paper is late.

Paper #4: Results, Data Analysis, Discussion, and Critique (100 pts)

This paper will statistically analyze and explain the data that you collected. What did you find? Are the results what you expected (as hypothesized)? Do they differ from your hypotheses? Did you find anything unexpected? How do explain unexpected findings? Overall, what conclusions can you draw from your analyses? Are there novel and new questions raised by your research and conclusions? How does your theory connect to your findings? Did you refute or confirm your theory?

Your analyses should directly address your articulated hypotheses. I do not expect you to

perform any complex and elaborate statistical tests of significance that would require extensive mathematical knowledge. You should use the computer and SPSS to help you organize your data and present them in a clear, accessible manner. At the minimum, you *must* look at statistics to examine how one variable is associated with another (crosstabs, Pearson correlations) and whether your results are statistically significant (Chi-square), and, based on your research, comparing mean scores (T-tests) between different groups (men vs. women, Greeks vs. Non-Greeks, minority vs. majority, etc.). It should go without saying that you must determine whether your findings are consistent with your hypotheses.

In this paper, you must present your results in a clear and coherent manner and interpret them as well. Do not just submit SPSS graphs and tables. You must explain what your findings substantively mean. What conclusions can you draw from your results about the nature of social life? Please present the tables that are pertinent to each of your hypotheses. What are the larger social and policy implications of your findings? How do your results differ from, mirror, or advance the literature on your topic?

This paper requires you parse, assess, and think. You should be prepared to explain why the numbers came out the way they did. For example, if you predicted that possessing higher levels of education produces higher incomes, but this is not what your findings reveal then explain why this might be the case. If you found that going past a certain level of education reduces or stabilizes income acquisition what possible explanations could there be for this finding? Are there sociological reasons for why the relationship between income and education are curvilinear as opposed to linear? Was there something particular about the people you sampled that could explain your findings? Does the literature provide any possible explanations for your results? Anything else come to mind?

Given what you have found, what could you have done differently that would have made this a better study? For example, could you have asked different questions or used a different method to examine the problem? Could you have obtained different results with a different sample of subjects, or with a larger sample of subjects? If so, why do you think these things would have made a difference? In other words, what aspects of research design limited the credibility of the data you collected and the conclusions you have drawn from them (if you think this is the case)? What data—that you did not or could not obtain—would have been helpful in drawing more reliable conclusions? Picture yourself being an outside reader of your paper determining its weaknesses. List and discuss the ways that the paper could have been stronger.

In the critique of your work, go beyond such criticisms as “I only sampled DePauw students” and “I did not have enough time to do my work.” It is evident that these are weaknesses. What other possible weaknesses or limitations presented themselves? Could your questions have been better worded (were some people confused by your questions)? Did your questions tap into what you were trying to ask? Would face-to-face interviews have been better? Why? Go beyond a surface critique of your work.

Paper #4 Due Dec. 13th by 4 o'clock (8-10 pages) via email

Oral presentation # 1(10 minutes)

In this presentation, you will discuss your basic research plan. Tell us what the predicted relationships between your important concepts. How do you intend to measure the concepts you are interested in? You must be as precise and exact as possible about how you plan to identify or capture the abstract concepts you explore. What are your hypotheses, your independent and dependent variables? What are the indicators for your independent and dependent variables? What is the rationale for your hypotheses (that is, why did you choose these specific predictions and not others?)? What does the literature say about the variables you are addressing? You should create and distribute a handout during this presentation, listing the hypotheses, and making a chart/graph of predicted relationships (that is, how does A influence B, or vice-versa). Also, discuss any other variables that you believe are important and that may need to be accounted for.

Oral Presentation of Research Design and Sampling (Presentation # 2)

How will you collect your data to analyze and address your hypotheses and variables from paper #2? Will you perform a controlled experiment? Will you observe the behavior of others? Will you ask people questions using paper-and-pencil (or electronic) surveys or through face-to-face interviews? Will you use existing records or analyze the content of documents like magazine ads or song lyrics? What are the advantages and disadvantages of the method you have chosen? For your own sake make this part as simple as possible.

There is a good chance that you will be doing a project that requires you ask people questions or observe them doing something. If so, you must also include in this paper your testing instrument. **If you intend on asking people questions, this means including your survey questionnaire or interview script.** If you plan on observing people or using existing documents, you must include a precise description of what you will look for and how you will recognize it when you see it. There are many things to consider when designing this part of a research project (for example, wording and ordering of questions, your role as interviewer/observer, how to quantify observations, etc.). How will you conceptualize and operationalize your variables? Please be specific here. All of these aspects will be discussed in class. Please come and see me so we can discuss your approach.

You must also decide the sample of your study. Who or what will be your unit of analysis? Women? Men? Non-Greeks? Members of Greek organizations? Upperclassmen? First-year students? The *New York Times* newspaper? Why have you chosen this particular sample and not others? How will your subjects be selected? Will you use some form of systematic sampling procedure to select them? If not, why not? There may be some theoretical justification for the selection process, or it may simply be the result of practical constraints. Your selection plan should fit the requirements of the problem, the setting of the study, the resources available and the feasibility of access to the necessary data. **Please share your survey or instrument with the class when discussing your research and design.**

Oral presentation # 3 (50 pts) (10 minutes)

In this presentation, you will discuss what you found? Are the results what you expected (as hypothesized)? Do they differ from your hypotheses? Did you find anything unexpected? How do explain unexpected findings? Overall, what conclusions can you draw from your analyses? How does your theory connect to your findings? Did you refute or confirm your findings? Are there novel and new questions raised by your research and findings? What are the larger social and policy implications of your findings, if any? How do your results mirror or advance the literature on your topic? Also, discuss the limitations and weaknesses of your research. Given what you have found, what could you have done differently that would have made this a better study? Could you have obtained different results with a different sample of subjects, or with a larger sample of subjects? If so, why do you think these things would have made a difference? In other words, what aspects of research design limited the validity or reliability of the data you collected and the conclusions you have drawn from them? What data—that you did not or could not obtain—would have been helpful in drawing more reliable conclusions?

Journal Presentation (10 pts) (10 minutes)

I want you to discuss a peer-reviewed journal article that relates to your topic. The intent is to demonstrate how the various parts of this article (literature review, methods section, analysis, and conclusion) come together in a paper. The article should serve as a model for you when you are writing the different sections of your paper. Specifically, when you present the article, I want you to address these questions:

- 1) What is the piece about? What questions are the authors attempting to answer?
- 2) What does their literature review say about the topic? How do they plan on addressing their questions?
- 3) What theoretical approach do they employ?
- 4) What are their hypotheses (if applicable)? What is the rationale for their hypotheses?
- 5) What is their methodology? (face-to-face interviews, surveys, participant-observation, etc.) Why did the authors choose that method and not another one?
- 6) What were their independent and dependent variables? How did they measure them? (if applicable)
- 7) What were their findings? Did they confirm their hypotheses (if applicable)? Were they different from what the author(s) expected to find? How did they explain their findings relative to their hypotheses? How do their results fit in the overall research on their topic?
- 8) What were the limitations of the article, as articulated by the authors themselves? How did they say that they or others could improve on their weaknesses and limitations?
- 9) How does this piece help you think about your own research? What do you take away from it?

These are the questions you should ask yourself about each paper you write in this course.