

Sociology 352 (2), Spring Semester 2017

Research Methods

Tuesday and Thursday, 2:00-3:15; CCC 204

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Course Overview

Research is a systematic process based on the scientific method that facilitates the identification of relationships and determination of differences in order to answer a question. Social research, in particular, focuses on relationships and differences in the social sciences (sociology, psychology, political science, economics, anthropology, etc.). In this course, we will cover different study designs, research ethics, and the components of a research presentation in the form of a poster. Exercises and assignments will lead to the preparation of the research poster.

Course Objectives

- Evaluate the design and results of social science research studies.
- Appreciate the ethical issues involved in studying human subjects.
- Formulate empirical research questions.
- Search for and select appropriate studies for literature reviews.
- Choose appropriate, valid, and reliable measures, sampling designs, and analyses.
- Prepare an empirical research poster.

Social Work Competency

All aspects of this course help students work toward the Council on Social Work Education competency of **“practice-informed research and research-informed practice”** for accredited social work programs. The competency is:

- **Engage in practice-informed research and research-informed practice.**
Social workers understand quantitative and qualitative research methods and their respective roles in advancing a science of social work and in evaluating their practice. Social workers know the principles of logic, scientific inquiry, and culturally informed and ethical approaches to building knowledge. Social workers understand that evidence that informs practice derives from multi-disciplinary sources and multiple ways of knowing. They also understand the processes for translating research findings into effective practice.

Social workers:

- use practice experience and theory to inform scientific inquiry and research;
- apply critical thinking to engage in analysis of quantitative and qualitative research methods and research findings; and
- use and translate research evidence to inform and improve practice, policy, and service delivery.

Capstone Course

This course also satisfies the GEP Capstone requirement for sociology and social work. The goal of the capstone project is to integrate learning objectives across both majors. The capstone project is a poster presenting research results on a topic of interest to sociology and/or social work.

Upon completing this requirement you will be able to:

- Complete a project that integrates knowledge, skills, and experience related to those General Education Program Outcomes appropriate to the discipline.
- Demonstrate skills, process, and resources needed to make a successful transition from college to the world beyond.

General Education Program Outcomes for the Social Sciences:

- Explain or apply major concepts, methods, or theories used in the social sciences to investigate, analyze, or predict human behavior.
- Examine and explain how social, cultural, or political institutions influence individuals or groups.

Text

Neuman, W. Lawrence. *Basics of Social Research: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*, 3rd Edition.

The required textbook is available at the campus bookstore.

Class Participation

Countless research studies on learning have demonstrated that the best way to learn material and instruction is to actually USE it. We will be using the information we read for homework in in-class activities and exercises. I doubt you want me to lecture to you for hours on end, so I plan for input from you and group activities during class time. I will try to make the class interesting for you, but I also ask you to make it interesting for me by interacting about the material.

In-Class Exercises and Quizzes

We will have approximately **6 to 8 in-class group exercises and quizzes**. If you are present and you participate, you will receive **2 points** for each exercise. **I WILL BE OBSERVING AND RECORDING EVIDENCE OF PARTICIPATION** (e.g., sitting with the group, talking, not doing other things like texting). Collectively, participation in these exercises is worth **15%** of your final grade.

Exams

There are **two exams** in this class. Neither of these will be cumulative. They will be a mix of short answer and multiple choice exams with approximately 30 questions each and will cover material from

your text, from lectures, and from in- and out-class exercises. Each exam is worth **15%** of your final grade, for a total of **30%**.

Please look carefully at the course schedule for the dates of each exam.

There will be no make-up exams without documentation of legitimate emergency reasons for missing exam dates.

Homework Assignments

There will be about **5 assignments** for which you will USE the material we cover in class. Each assignment is worth up to **3 points** for a total of **15 points**. I ask you submit the assignments in the appropriate drop boxes in D2L. You will receive the full 3 points if your homework is **complete** (you have addressed fully all the components of the exam), **thoughtful** (you have given more than minimal effort and proofread your work) and **submitted on time**. Depending on these 3 components, you can receive between 0 and 3 points. Collectively the assignments are worth **25%** of your final grade.

Research Poster

You will also complete a research poster as an individual project. The poster is worth **25%** of your final grade. The rubric for the poster can be found at the end of this syllabus. We will talk more about the requirements in class throughout the semester. **IT IS IMPORTANT THAT YOU UNDERSTAND THAT THIS IS NOT A TERM PAPER WHERE YOU SUMMARIZE OTHERS' RESULTS IN A LITERATURE REVIEW. YOU WILL BE COLLECTING AND ANALYZING YOUR OWN DATA.**

There will be absolutely no make-ups of missed assignments.

Grading Scale

93-100	A
90-92	A-
87-89	B+
83-86	B
80-82	B-
77-79	C+
73-76	C
70-72	C-
67-79	D+
60-66	D
0-59	F

You will likely be successful in this course if you come to class prepared, participate in discussions, follow the rules for academic integrity (see below), and put thought and effort into your assignments and exams.

Important University and Course Policies and Procedures

Students with Special Need: Students with special needs as documented by the Office of Disability Services should identify themselves at the beginning of the term. The Department of Sociology and

Social Work is dedicated to providing these students with the necessary academic adjustments and auxiliary aids to facilitate their participation and performance in the classroom.

Classroom Etiquette: I ask that you arrive on time to class and turn off your cell phones (not silenced but OFF please). I reserve the right to ask anyone texting to LEAVE the classroom. I would prefer that you do not use laptops or tablets in the classroom unless it is a necessary learning tool. If you are talking while I'm talking and it is distracting to me or to your fellow students, I will stop talking until you are done talking. If you have a question, **ask me**.

Contacting Me: Please contact me using the following methods in this order of preference: 1) email; 2) cell phone; 3) office phone. I will make every effort to respond to questions that are NOT time-sensitive (e.g., about the course schedule, material, assignments, and similar) within 24 hours. Please only use my cell phone for time-sensitive issues such as last minute emergencies that interfere with your class attendance. Since I will be commuting this year from Chicago, it's unlikely that I will be in my office outside of office hours and appointments. Therefore, my office phone would be the slowest means of communication.

Academic Misconduct: Academic integrity is central to the mission of this institution. UWS 14 defines academic misconduct as any "action which a student:

1. seeks to claim credit for the work or efforts of another without authorization or citation;
2. uses unauthorized materials or fabricated data in any academic exercise;
3. forges or falsifies academic documents or records;
4. intentionally impedes or damages the academic work of others;
5. engages in conduct aimed at making false representations of a student's academic performance;
- and
6. assists other students in any of these acts."

USW 14 allows for disciplinary sanctions that range from an oral reprimand to suspension or expulsion from the University. You can obtain a copy of the full academic misconduct policy through the Student Services office.

The rules regarding academic misconduct can sometimes be confusing for students, so I encourage you to come talk to me about questionable issues regarding assignments and exams. If you have questions about a particular assignment, you should come talk to me before the assignment is due. Ignorance or misunderstanding of the UW System policy for academic misconduct is not an acceptable excuse for academic misconduct.

If I observe or suspect academic misconduct, I will request a meeting with the responsible student or students, and I will follow the procedures set out in the UWS 14 document.

Course Schedule

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Date	Topic/Activity	Assigned Readings
1/24	Social Research Defined	Chapter 1
1/26	Theory in Social Research	Chapter 2
1/31/-2/2	Research Ethics	Chapter 3
2/7-9	Literature Review	Chapter 4
2/14-16	Question, Hypothesis, Measurement	Chapter 5
2/21-23	Sampling	Chapter 6
2/28-3/2	Nonreactive and Secondary	Chapter 9
3/7-9	Survey Research	Chapter 7
3/14	Midterm Review	
3/16	Midterm	
3/21-23	Spring Break	
3/28-30	Experimental Research	Chapter 8
4/4-6	Analysis	Chapter 10
4/11-13	Field and Focus Groups	Chapter 11
4/18-20	Research Poster	
4/25-27	Poster Sessions	
5/2-4	TBA	
5/9-11	Final Review	
5/16	Final Exam	
	12:30-2:30	

I reserve the right to change the syllabus due to unforeseen scheduling issues and the pedagogical needs of the class.

Sociology 352

Research Poster Description and Rubric

You are asked to prepare a research poster that **you will have the option to present in the CLS Research Symposium in the spring 2017**. (This is a great addition to your resume.) Choose a topic that you would like to study to make the assignment more interesting to you. You will formulate a research question and hypotheses, summarize and evaluate the relevant literature on the topic, analyze data either primary (within strict boundaries) or secondary, and draw conclusions from your results.

The poster should include the following elements, in roughly this order:

1. Title and Abstract

Compose a title for your poster. This should be the first item you put down for your poster, but it can always be revised or changed as you further develop your research project. The title should be completely descriptive of the purpose and results of your study.

Also write a short abstract to summarize your research. You should briefly describe the purpose of your research, the population/phenomenon you seek to investigate, the method(s) you used to carry out the research, the results, and conclusions from your results. The abstract should be one paragraph, 150-200 words in length.

Because the abstract serves as a substantive summary of your project, it is usually written *AFTER* you finish the data analysis. In other words, the abstract should be the last item you work on for your poster.

2. Statement of the Problem

Indicate concisely what you want to study and why. What is it you wish to find out or explain? Does it have practical significance or theoretical value? Choose a topic you know something about and are interested in (e.g., something from another course, something related to your work or life experience, etc.), and keep it focused.

3. Literature Review

What have others said about this topic? You should review at least four (4) most relevant articles from peer-reviewed journals or scholarly books. First, you need to conduct literature

search to find the articles/books. You will learn how to do literature search. Then review the articles/books and discuss how they fit together and how they are related to your study. That is, how are the theories, methods, and/or findings of these studies relevant to or useful for your proposed study? In case the existing studies have limitations or flaws, how would your project advance or correct them?

DO NOT list and discuss the articles/books one after another in a mechanical, disconnected way without regard for substantive integration or development. Try to organize your review of the literature around the key ideas that are being argued and weave them organically into a consistent narrative. One effective way to do that is to make systematic comparisons among the existing studies and articulate how they are similar to or different from one another, and then state how they collectively inform your own research.

Put the references at the end of the literature review. Citations and references should be in ASA style. (Google for “ASA quick style guide” and/or consult the UWSP.edu library page). Be sure to use the proper citation every time you cite other people’s work (articles, books, news media, the Internet, etc.).

4. Hypotheses

Identify the major concepts in your research and specify the hypothesis or hypotheses that you will test in your research. These hypotheses, by definition, are concrete statements regarding some relationships among the key factors/variables in your research (e.g., “whites tend to be more likely than blacks to be homeowners”, “income can have a positive effect on homeownership”, “having children increases the chance of being a homeowner”, etc.). Despite being different, your hypotheses should revolve around the central theme of your research project (e.g., “homeownership”).

For each of your hypotheses, you also need to explain why you hypothesize that way. Usually hypotheses should be derived from your literature review in the preceding section. In other words, they are the logical extension of your literature review by applying existing knowledge from others’ work to the specific setting in your own research. This is also a practice of deductive reasoning.

5. Research Design

Choose a general method, such as secondary data analysis, content analysis, or observation, for gathering or accessing data to test your hypotheses. IT IS IMPORTANT FOR YOU TO UNDERSTAND THAT **YOU WILL BE COLLECTING DATA** NOT SUMMARIZING OTHER'S DATA IN YOUR LITERATURE REVIEW. **THIS IS NOT A TERM PAPER. IT IS A RESEARCH EXERCISE.** Discuss the more specific choices you or others made for each of the following:

5.1 Measurement: What measurement instrument(s) were used – standardized questionnaire, structured or unstructured interview, field diary, etc.? How did you or others operationalize the key concepts in your hypotheses (e.g., following the prior example of the fictional study of homeownership, how would you measure “homeownership”, “race”, “income”, and “presence of children” respectively)? Give specific examples of interview questions, scale items, response and code categories, observations to be made, etc. What validity and reliability issues did you have to contend with using these measurements?

5.2 Sampling: From what population was your sample be drawn? How was the sample drawn? Be specific about the sampling design, such as sampling frame, sample size, sampling strategy, etc. What sources of sampling error did you have to contend with? Show that your sampling design allows you to generalize to the population of interest to you.

6. Data Analysis

Present your results in tabular or graphic form. Results may include univariate (frequencies), bivariate (two-variable tables), and multivariate (elaboration using appropriate control variable(s)).

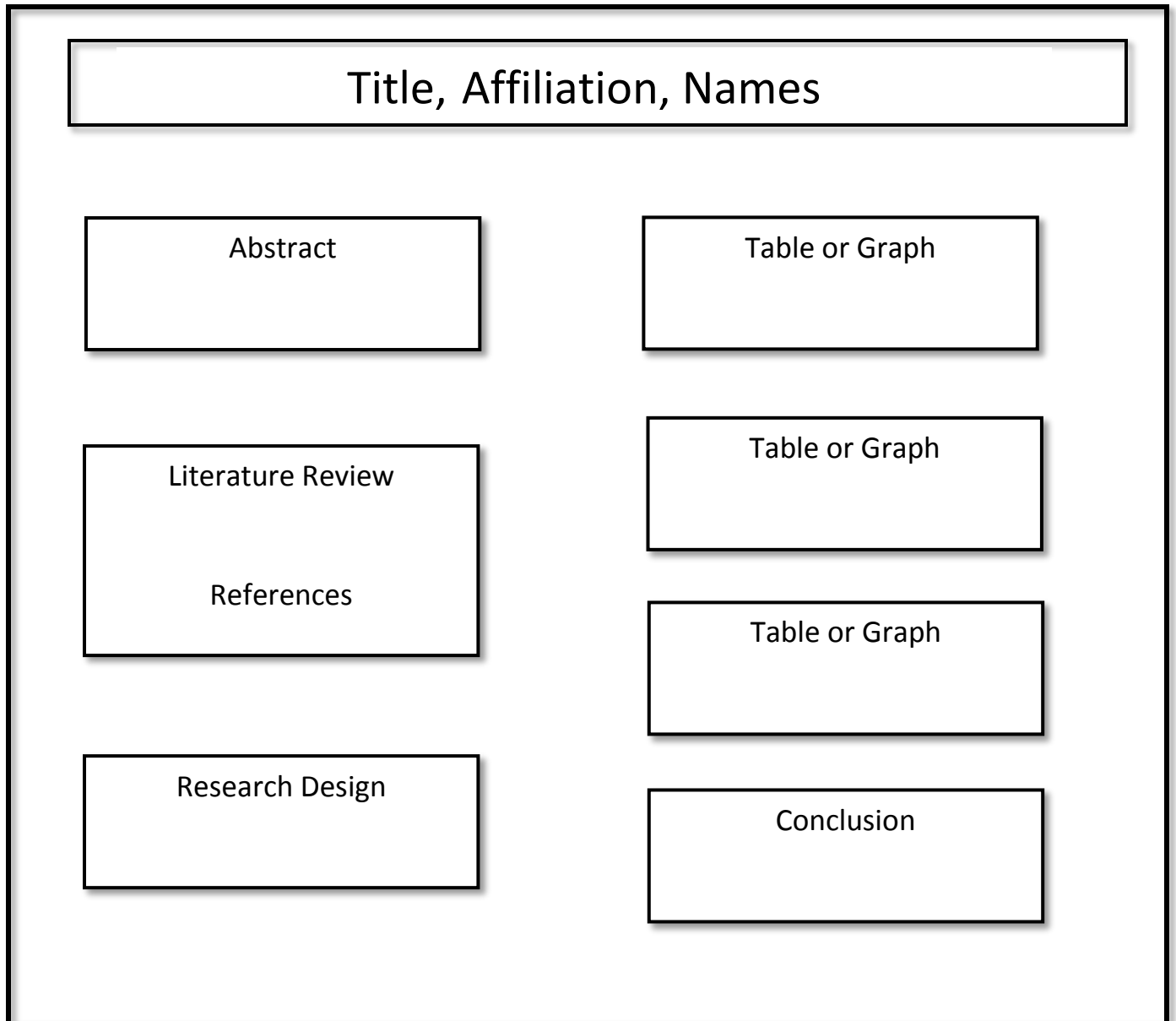
7. Conclusion

Briefly summarize your results and specify whether or not your hypotheses were supported. If one or more hypothesis is not supported, speculate why that might be the case.

Discuss the limitations in your research (e.g., limited scope of investigation, potential weakness in your methods, lack of full access to certain groups of people, etc.) and how they can be improved by future study (either by other researchers or by yourself).

End your conclusion with a discussion about the significance or implications of your results for future study or practical application.

A rough mock-up of the poster should look like this:



RESEARCH POSTER EVALUATION

Poster components to assess	Full credit
1. Title and Abstract	2 Points
2. Significance of the Problem	1 Point
3. Literature Review	3 Points
4. Hypotheses	1 Points
5. Research Design	
General discussion	2 Points
5.1 Measurement	2 Points
5.2 Sampling	2 Points
6. Data Analysis	3 Points
7. Conclusion	3 Points
8. Bibliography	1 Point
9. Editorial competency (readability of the poster, spelling, punctuation, grammar, etc.)	2 Points
Total	22 Points

For each of the above components the student will receive one of the following assessment scores:

- **“Excellent”** – made outstanding effort; demonstrated mastery of the relevant course material; showed all-round critical skills and originality; and adequately addressed the instructor’s previous questions and comments on the earlier drafts, if applicable. Students receive the full credit.
- **“Good”** – made good effort; demonstrated solid incorporation of the relevant course material; showed good critical skills and some originality, but had obvious limitations; the response to the instructor’s previous questions and comments is partially satisfactory, if applicable. Students receive 80% of the full credit.
- **“Acceptable”** – made moderate effort; showed minimum competence in applying the basic course material; lack of demonstration of good critical skills and originality; did minimum response to the instructor’s previous questions and comments on the earlier drafts, if applicable. Students receive 60% of the full credit.

- **“Poor”** – hardly made any effort; failed to apply basic course material satisfactorily; the level of writing skill is below an acceptable level for college work. Students receive 30% of the full credit purely out of the instructor’s sympathy; but for total lack of work students get no credit at all.