

Sociology 318.1&2
SOCIAL SCIENCE METHODS
Fall, 2009

Read this carefully – Only some of it will be covered in class!

Instructor

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Office hours: Tuesday 10:10-12:00 & 1:10-4:00; Wednesday 3:10-4:00; Thursday 10:10-12:00 & 1:10-3:00,
or by appointment

Preceptors

Section 1 – Mike King, 406 396-5605, michaell.king@umontana.edu (email preferred). Office hours: SS 326, Monday, Wednesday & Friday 12-1

Section 2 – Shelly Scotti, 406 961-4496, michele.scotti@umt.edu. Office Hours: SS 326, Monday, Wednesday Friday, 10-11

The preceptors are undergraduate teaching assistants who did excellent work in this class last year. Besides attending class every day, they will conduct review sessions before each exam and be available during office hours to go over exams and answer questions about lectures and readings. They also will supervise your research project.

Course Description

The course will familiarize you with the basic principles and techniques of social science research. We will examine the most commonly used data collection methods, measurement techniques, and sampling procedures, as well as basic methods for analyzing data. Methods to be covered include questionnaire and interview surveys, laboratory and field experiments, alternatives to experimentation, and field research. However, the course is less about techniques than the logic of social scientific research: what science is, how the scientific method is used to study social behavior, the interplay between theory and data, and the special problems faced by social scientists, especially the ethical issues involved in studying people. Even if you never do any actual research after this class, the course should improve your ability to evaluate the research of others, whether in textbooks, professional journals, your classes, or media reports about the latest findings on the topic of the day. To provide first-hand experience with the research process, you will be expected to carry out an original study applying principles and techniques described in lectures and readings.

Required Reading

Chambliss, Daniel F. and Russell K. Schutt. 2010. *Making Sense of the Social World: Methods of Investigation*, 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge.

Electronic reserve

The following articles and chapters are on electronic reserve (eres) through the Mansfield Library. To access eres go to <http://eres.lib.umt.edu> or go to the UM home page & use the A-Z index for the Mansfield Library. Once you're at the Library page, click on Course Reserves & ERes, and then search for Soc 318 under Course Reserves (ERes). Password is Balch. The readings are listed in the order they will be covered after the course

outline below.

1. *Example of a good research report*

King, Mike. 2008. "Living Situation and Healthy Lifestyles Among University of Montana Students." Unpublished term paper, Soc 201. (excellent study illustrating proper format for research reports)

2. *Using inductive reasoning to develop theory (which is tested in the next article)*

Malinowski, Bronislaw. 1993 (orig. 1948). "Rational Mastery by Man of His Natural Surroundings." Pp. 270-275 in *Magic, Witchcraft, and Religion* (3rd ed.) Edited by Arthur C. Lehmann and James E. Myers. Mountain View, CA: Mayfield.

3. *Using deductive reasoning to test Malinowski's theory*

Gmelch, George. 1971. "Baseball Magic." *Society* 8:39,42,54.

4. *Testing the validity of self-report data*

Barker, Kathleen, *et al.* 2002. "Comparison of Self-Reported Recycling Attitudes and Behaviors with Actual Behavior." Pp. 48-54 in *Extreme Methods: Innovative Approaches to Social Science Research* edited by J. Mitchell Miller and Richard Tewksbury. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

5. *Commonly used measurement techniques suitable for surveys*

Neuman, Lawrence W. 2007. "Index Construction" and "Scales." Pp. 126-183 in Newman, *Basics of Social Research* (2nd ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

6. *Using field experiments to test the controversial "broken windows" theory*

Deizer, Kees, Siegwart Lindenberg, and Linda Steg. 2008. "The Spreading of Disorder." *Science* 322:1681-1685.

7. *Quasi-experimental designs commonly used in evaluation research*

Babbie, Earl. 2002. "Quasi-Experimental Designs." Pp. 348-351 in *The Basics of Social Research*, 2nd ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

8. *OPTIONAL – but excellent capsule summary of the course – useful throughout and especially for the final exam*

Aronson, Elliot, Timothy D. Wilson, and Robin M. Akert. 2007. "Methodology: How Social Psychologists Do Research." Pp. 29-55 in *Social Psychology*, 6th ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall.

Exams

There will be three midterms and a comprehensive final, each consisting of multiple-choice, fill-in, short answer, and essay, questions. Each midterm is worth 15% of your grade, and the final counts 20%. Together the exams are worth 65% of your final grade. The remaining 35% of your grade will be based on the project.

Before each exam I will give you a study guide and the preceptors will conduct a review session. Your answer sheets will be returned in class and you should keep them until the end of the term. However, the multiple-choice questions will not be returned. You should come in after each exam to review the questions with me or your preceptor because the final is comprehensive. The questions will be different but the material will be the same so it is important to find out what you missed and why you missed it. You may reschedule an exam if you have good excuse, but you must contact me *before* the exam date or *five* percentage points will be deducted from your score.

Attendance

To do well on the exams it is important to attend class every day. Although the class material will correspond closely with the readings, I will use different examples and occasionally cover material that is altogether different. *You are allowed 5 free absences*, and I reserve the right to count you absent if you sleep through class or are excessively late. *Six to 10 absences will result in five percentage points being deducted from the average of your test scores*. More than 10 will cost you an entire grade. This rule applies to any and all absences regardless of the reason. If you exceed the five-absence limit, you may regain your lost points by submitting written work pertaining to the material you missed. If you don't think you can meet this requirement, you should not take this class.

Term project

The project is worth 35 percent of your grade. You and one or two others (your choice or assigned by me) will conduct an original questionnaire survey using a sample of UM students for subjects. This will entail choosing a topic, reviewing relevant literature, developing hypotheses to be tested, deciding how to measure your variables, designing a questionnaire, analyzing your data, and submitting a final report using the format followed by professional journals in your field. You should submit one paper for your group, but individual papers may be allowed (or required) under exceptional circumstances.

The project is divided into stages, and your group will be expected to check in with myself or one of the preceptors on a regular basis to get your work approved. *One percentage point will be deducted from your project grade for every deadline your group misses*. Specific guidelines will be posted on the Sociology website.

Even if you and your partner haven't been equally involved in every aspect of the project, you need to be familiar with the entire study because the final exam will include an essay and/or short-answer questions about what you did and found.

At the end of the semester you will be required to describe and evaluate your own participation as well as your partner's performance. These evaluations, along with assessments made by the preceptors and myself, may affect your grade. In other words, members of the same group will not automatically receive the same grade, whether you submit a group paper or individual papers. In addition, the final exam may include specific questions about your project.

You must keep all of your data until you have received your final grade because I may want to see it after reading your term paper. If you cannot produce the information, you will receive a grade of F on the project. Each member of your team should also keep a back-up copy of the final paper.

Grading

Scores on the exams and the project will be reported as percentages, and final grades will be based on the following cutting points: 90-100% = A, 80-89% = B, etc. I do not use the plus/minus system. The exams and the project will be weighted accordingly: each midterm = 15%, final = 20%, project = 35%. If your final

score is on the borderline between two letter grades, I may take other factors into consideration such as class participation, meeting with the preceptors to review your exams, preceptor assessments of your progress, and improvements in your scores over the course of the semester.

Because Soc 318 is a core course, Sociology majors must enroll for a grade and earn a C or better. By University policy you may request an incomplete *only* if you are 1) attending class regularly, 2) receiving a passing grade, and 3) unable to complete the course for reasons beyond your control. Doing poorly on exams and losing financial aid are *not* acceptable reasons.

Failure to return borrowed materials will result in an incomplete for the course that will turn to an F if the materials are not returned by the end of the next semester.

Cheating

Cheating of any kind, including plagiarism, will result in an F for the course. If you text message during an exam I will assume you are cheating. For more information see the Student Conduct Code at <http://www.umt.edu/SA/VPSA/index.cfm/page/1321>.

Tentative Course Outline

Readings pertaining to each topic are in parentheses. C&S refers to Chambliss and Schutt. Eres readings are by authors' names. Eres #8 by Aronson et al. is optional but a great summary of the course. I recommend that you read it at the very beginning of the course to get oriented, and again at the end to prepare for the final. Project deadlines are in **bold**.

Introduction

Aug. 31 Overview and course requirements (C&S ch. 1)

The research cycle

- Sept. 2 Overview of term project (C&S 1; King–eres #1)
- 4 Are religious people more honest? (C&S 2, Appendix A)
- 7 Labor Day – no class
- 9 Deduction & theory testing (C&S 2; Gmelch–eres #3)
- 11 Measurement & data collection (C&S 2) – **Partner assignments; turn in UM ethics certificates**
- 14 Results & how to report them (C&S 12, King)
- 16 Induction – generating theory from data (C&S 2; Malinowski–eres 2)
- 18 Ethical considerations (C&S 3)

- 21 **EXAM #1** – C&S 1-3, 12, Appendix A; eres 1-3, King, Malinowski, Gmelch

Measurement

- Sept. 23 Measurement & measurement error: Garbage in/garbage out (C&S 4, 7)
- 25 Constructing reality through measurement (C&S 4, 7; eres 4–Barker et al.) **Approval of topic & tentative hypotheses**
- 28 Testing the social disorganization theory of crime (C&S 4, 7)
- 30 Measuring social disorganization & crime (C&S 4, 7)
- Oct. 2 Measuring neighborhood solidarity (eres 5--Neuman) **Approval of lit review & final hypotheses**
- 5 Index construction: Face & content validity (eres 5)
- 7 Using correlation to create new constructs
- 9 false positives & the ethics of measurement (C&S 4)

12 Assessing validity (C&S, 4; eres 4)

Sampling

- Oct. 14 Why sampling is important (C&S 5)
16 Random sampling & why it doesn't always work (C&S 5) **Approval of measurement techniques**
19 **EXAM #2** – C&S 4, 5, 7; eres 4 & 5, Barker & Neuman

Experiments and causation

- Oct. 21 What you need to show that X causes Y (C&S 6)
23 Laboratory experiments: Experimental & mundane realism (C&S 6) **Questionnaire approval**
26 Field experiments: Testing the broken windows theory of crime (eres 6–Kees, et al.)
28 Statistical significance & probability theory (C&S 6; eres 6)
30 Using nonequivalent control designs to evaluation correctional programs (C&S 6 & 11; eres 7--Babbie) **OK from instructor to administer questionnaire**
Nov. 1 Before-after studies without controls (C&S 6; eres 7)
4 The Montana Meth Project: Does it really work? (eres 7)

Quantitative data analysis

- Nov. 6 Correlation & bivariate tables (C&S 8)
9 Misinterpreting correlations to make your point
11 Veterans' Day – no class
13 Causal analysis with survey data (C&S 8)
16 Checking for spurious correlations in contingency tables (C&S 8)
18 Interaction effects: When the effect of X on Y depends on other variables (C&S 8)
20 **EXAM #3** – (C&S 6, 8, 11; eres 6 & 7, Kees & Babbie) **Approval of plan for analysis**

Fieldwork and qualitative analysis

- Nov. 23 How fieldwork is similar to, but different from, other methods (C&S 9 & 10)
25 Thanksgiving vacation begins!
30 Pros & cons of covert observation: Is it ever justified? (C&S 9)
Dec. 2 Participant-observation & key informants (C&S 9 & 10)
4 Systematic observation & comparative research (C&S 9 & 10)
7 Studying white separatists
9 Who's side are you on?: The politics of research
11 Moral dilemmas **Submit final paper**

FINAL EXAM – C&S 9 & 10, plus review of previous material

- Section 1 Tuesday, Dec. 15, 8:00-10:00 a.m.
Section 2 Monday, Dec. 14, 1:10-3:10 p.m.

You may take the exam at either time, but *I will need to know when no later than Friday, December 4*, because it may be necessary to get a larger room for one of the exams.