

## **Introduction to Social Research**

01:920:311:05, 06

Mondays and Thursday, 12:35PM -1:55PM

Rm. 206, Ruth Adams Building

Instructor - Thomas K. Rudel

Office: 214 Cook Office Building

Office Hours: Mondays, 10:00 – 11:30AM and by appointment

telephone: 848-932-9238

email: [rudel@aesop.rutgers.edu](mailto:rudel@aesop.rutgers.edu)

Course Website: <https://sakai.rutgers.edu/portal/>

Introduction to Social Research is quite different from other courses that you will take in your major here at Rutgers. Most other courses are organized around a substantive body of knowledge in a specific field of study like Social Movements or Crime. This course does not have a specific substantive focus. Instead it looks at the procedures for gathering and assessing information about how humans interact with each other. We will teach you how to design studies, collect data, and assess the quality of information collected by other researchers. If we are successful, you will acquire a set of practical research skills which, among other things, should be useful to you when you look for employment.

I have always learned new research methods most easily when I had to use them and when I had someone to whom I could turn for help. I suspect that we are similar in this respect, so I have structured this course so that you get lots of practice at specific tasks and lots of help when you need it. To this end, please do not hesitate to ask for help when you become confused about how to do something.

Communications: You can reach me at the above phone number or email address. I have also created a website for the course on sakai that will be available at the url listed above. I will post the syllabus, assignments, some readings, and important announcements on that site. There will also be a chat room which should prove useful when assignments are due. It will be important to check the site regularly for updates. I will also post the powerpoints for each class in the resources section of the website before each class. If you print out the powerpoint before class and annotate it during class, it will be easier for you to capture all that is being said.

Required Readings (to be purchased at New Jersey books on Easton Avenue)

Daniel Chambliss and Russell Schutt, *Making Sense of the Social World: Methods of Investigation*. Second, Third, or Fourth edition. 2011. Pine Forge Press.

Steven Johnson, *The Ghost Map: the Story of London's Most Terrifying Epidemic and How it Changed Science, Cities, and the Modern World*. 2006. Riverhead Books.

On Electronic Reserve

Stephen Jay Gould, *The Message is not the Median*.

Charles Ragin, *The Comparative Method: Moving beyond Qualitative and Quantitative Strategies*. Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press.  
Timothy Schwartz, *First, Call a Taxi*.  
Carol Warren and Tracy Karner, *Discovering Qualitative Methods: Field Research, Interviews, and Analysis*.

### Course Requirements

To receive credit for this course, you will have to complete four assignments and take two exams. The weights for each exercise in the computation of final grades are listed in the parentheses below. I will give you more specific instructions for each assignment as the due date approaches. In brief they are as follows.

Field Research: Do a piece of field research and report your findings. Observe or interview a sample of people, record your observations or their statements, and write up a report of your findings. Anticipated length: 3 pages (10%). Due February 14th.

### A Survey Research Proposal:

I would like you to go to the following website:

<http://sda.berkeley.edu/cgi-bin/hsda?harclda+gss08>. It contains archives of data from the General Social Survey of Americans from 1972 to 2008. From the lists of variables select several that you would like to investigate, explain why you find the relationship between these variables interesting, and outline a hypothesis that you would expect to see in the data. Anticipated length: 2-3 pages (10%). Due March 7th.

A Sampling Exercise: Describe in an exhaustive way all of the litter that you can find on several plots of land on the Cook-Douglass campus and then use your findings to generalize about litter on the entire Cook-Douglass campus. Anticipated length: 1-2 pages (10%). Due April 14th.

Term paper: Carry out the research outlined in your February research proposal using the data and the simplest statistical programs (tabular analysis and frequency distributions) available on the Berkeley GSS website (the url is listed above). The first segments of the paper should be drawn from the research proposal that you submitted earlier in the semester. The paper should then include the findings from your analysis of the Berkeley data and your explanation for the findings. Expected length: 6-8 pages (including tables) (20%). Due April 22nd.

A Mid-term Exam (25%) (March)

A Final Exam (25%) (May)

Class participation will count. If students who participate extensively in class are close to the dividing line between two grades, they will be given the higher grade. It is also important to note that students who participate actively in class discussions and ask questions tend to do better on graded assignments.

### Other Class Policies

We will not give out grades over the phone or via email. You must come to class or go to the website for the course to pick up graded assignments. Make-up exams will only be permitted in situations where the student notifies me at least 24 hours before the exam that s/he can not take the exam during the scheduled period. Late papers and exercises will be assigned a penalty. There will not be any extra-credit assignments, so, if you do poorly on a particular assignment, the best strategy is to try and do well on subsequent assignments. Students are expected to uphold the highest standards of academic integrity. For details on the Rutgers Policy on Academic Integrity, please consult the following website: <http://teachx.rutgers.edu/integrity/policy.html>. Finally, the use of cell phones to text or otherwise during class is prohibited. Believe me, the material that we cover in this course is hard enough as it is without the unwarranted distraction of cell phones. If you are using a phone in class, I will ask you to leave the room.

### Useful Practices

It is important to note that the readings, class discussions, and the posted powerpoints are not substitutes for one another. It is important to do the assigned reading before you come to class in order to master the skills that we will be discussing and practicing in class. The powerpoints only really become useful if you take notes on them as we discuss the slides in class. If you miss a class, you will need to get the notes and handouts from others in the class or from me. If you miss many classes, you will probably get a low grade in the course. The material is just too difficult to master the night before a deadline or an exam.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Reading/Homework</u>
Thursday, Jan. 23	Introduction and Overview of the Course	Johnson, start
Monday, Jan. 27	Research Odysseys	Johnson, finish
Thursday, Jan. 30	Scientific Evidence or Unsupported Assertions?	Chambliss, Chap. 1
Recitation: Pragmatic versus semantic programs of research		
Monday, Feb. 3rd	Theory and Method: What Connects Them?	Chambliss Chap. 1, continued
Thursday, Feb 6th	Research Designs	
Recitation: How do you choose the right method to go with your theory?		
Monday, Feb. 10th	Field Methods and the Case Study	Warren and Karner, pp. 62-63, Box 3-1

Thursday, Feb 13th	Experimental and Quasi-experimental Designs (taste tests)	Chambliss, Chapter 5 or 6, the experiments chapter
--------------------	---	---

Recitation: What kind of study is it?

**Friday, February 14<sup>th</sup> - Observation study due**

Monday, Feb 17th	Conceptualization and Measurement	Chambliss, Chapter 3 or 4, the conceptualization and measurement chapter
------------------	-----------------------------------	--

Thursday, February 20	No class
-----------------------	----------

Recitation: Experimental and Quasi-experimental Designs

Monday, February 24 <sup>th</sup>	Bias, error, and operational definitions	Chambliss, Chapter 3 or 4 continued
-----------------------------------	--	--

Thursday, February 27th	No class
-------------------------	----------

Recitation: Operational Definitions

Monday, March 3rd	Surveys	Chambliss, Chapter 6 or 7, the survey chapter
-------------------	---------	--

Thursday, March 6th	Crafting a Survey Research Proposal
---------------------	-------------------------------------

Recitation: Survey Research Proposals – Trouble shooting

**Friday March 7<sup>th</sup> - Research Proposals Due**

Monday, March 10 <sup>th</sup>	Review
--------------------------------	--------

Thursday, March 13th	<b>Mid-term Exam</b>
----------------------	----------------------

Monday, March 24 <sup>th</sup>	Observation	Chambliss, Chapter 7 or 9, the qualitative methods chapter
--------------------------------	-------------	---

Thursday March 27th	Interviews	Warren, pp. pp. 126-150
---------------------	------------	----------------------------

Recitations: Practice Interviews

Monday, March 31 <sup>th</sup>	Comparative Historical Methods	Ragin
Thursday, April 3 <sup>rd</sup>	Unobtrusive Measures and Archival Research	Chambliss, Chapter 7 or 9 (again)
	Recitation: Cases and Comparisons	
Monday, April 7 <sup>th</sup>	Sampling, I	Chambliss, chapter 4 or 5 The sampling chapter
Thursday, April 10 <sup>th</sup>	Sampling, II	
	Recitation: Sampling exercises	
Monday, April 14 <sup>th</sup>	Data Analysis, Quantitative I	Gould; Chambliss Chapter 8 or 9 – the quantitative chapter
<b>Monday, April 14<sup>th</sup> -Sampling exercise due</b>		
Thursday, April 17 <sup>th</sup>	Data Analysis: Quantitative, II	
	Recitation: Data analysis – trouble shooting	
Monday, April 21 <sup>st</sup>	Writing up your Results	Chambliss, Chapter 10 or 12, the reporting chapter
<b>Tuesday, April 22<sup>th</sup>: Survey Research Paper due</b>		
Thursday, April 24 <sup>th</sup>	The Politics and Ethics of Social Research	Chambliss, Chapters 2 or 3, the ‘ethics’ chapter
	Recitation: Ethical issues in studying crime	
Monday, April 28 <sup>th</sup>	Secondary Data: Potential and Pitfalls	
Thursday, May 1 <sup>st</sup>	Rapid Appraisal Techniques: Field Methods and the Internet	Schwartz
	Recitation: The search for secondary data	
Monday, May 5 <sup>th</sup>	Review	