

Spring 2008 (second half)  
Mondays, 4:10 – 6:50

Professor Ben Zablocki  
B-202 Lucy Stone Hall

## **SOCIOLOGY 575: THE ART OF ASKING QUESTIONS: A HALF SEMESTER INTERVIEWING PRACTICUM**

This seven week course will provide an opportunity for students to study the methodology of designing interview protocols and carrying out interviews and will also provide the opportunity to actually practice interview skills. Students will take turns interviewing each other in the classroom setting. Using direct observation of actual interviews, students will benefit from feedback in order to hone skills in both designing and asking questions. In each of the seven class meetings, the focus will be on a specific interview skill as indicated below.

### Required Texts

Norman **Bradburn** et al. 2004. *Asking Questions*. Jossey-Bass

Seymour **Sudman** et al. 1996. *Thinking About Answers*. Jossey-Bass

Other readings to be distributed as handouts or made available on the server.

### Grades

There is no written term paper assignment for this course. Grades will be based on your demonstration of effort in developing interview design and interviewing skills. It is important to note that your grade will not in any way be dependent upon how well the in-class interviews go. You learn more from dealing with tricky situations than straightforward ones so we will be deliberately setting up interview situations that will tax your skills. Students playing the role of respondent should therefore withhold sensitive information if not skillfully elicited without fear of jeopardizing another student's grade.

March 24. **The Interview as an Exercise in the Joint Construction of Meaning**—the interview as a dialogic narrative.

Interview skill: predicting future outcomes

Interview topic: voting intentions and behavior in the 2008 elections

Reading: Bradburn chs. 1 and 4; Mishler, "The Joint Construction of Meaning" (handout); Stix, "When Markets Beat the Polls" (handout)

March 31. **Taking a Backward Walk from Data Analysis to Interview Design**—designing the interview by first imagining the completed data analysis and the finished article or book.

Interview skill: reconstructing the life course

Interview topic: alcohol and drug use; antisocial and criminal behavior

Reading: Sudman ch 7; Bradburn ch 10, 11; Kvale “The 1,000 Page Question” and “Methods of Analysis” (handout)

April 7. **The Well-Tempered Question**—clear questions, ambiguous questions, offensive questions, leading questions, loaded questions, confusing questions.

Interview skill: researching the ineffable

Interview topic: religious and spiritual experience and belief

Reading: Bradburn ch 2, 5, 12; Sudman ch 6; Payne *The Art of Asking Questions* especially ch 8-11 (whole book, available on Sakai)

April 14. **The Vulnerable Respondent**—establishing rapport; dealing with respondent meltdown; differences among the following types of interview subjects: experimental cases, respondents, informants, and spokespersons.

Interview skill: knocking on the gates of privacy

Interview topic: sexual behavior and attitudes about sexuality

Reading: Bradburn ch 3; Payne ch 7, “Still Beat Your Wife?” (on Sakai); Laumann et al *The Social Organization of Sexuality* ch 2 (handout)

April 21. **The Interviewer Role**—bias due to the interviewer effect; interviewing over the telephone; interviewing under time pressure.

Interview skill: assuring response reliability

Interview topic: quality of life

Reading: Hyman ch 1 “Interviewer Effects” (handout); Groves, “Telephone Surveys” (handout); Bailey “Effects of Interviewer Characteristics” (handout)

April 28. **Advanced Topics**—retrospective data; cross-cultural sensitivity; interviewing panels in longitudinal studies; numerical estimation; interviewing children.

Interview skill: testing hypotheses

Interview topic: ethnic identification and prejudice

Reading: Sudman ch 8 and 9; Edelbrock et al “Reliability of Interviews with Children” (handout)

May 5. **Focus Groups and Other Group Interview Situations**

Interview skill: identifying salient issues in a well-bounded community

Interview topic: the graduate school experience

Reading: Morgan, “Focus Groups” (handout)