

SOC 320 WA L: SOCIOLOGICAL RESEARCH METHODS SPRING 2019*On-line course*

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REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS

(WSP) The Sociology Writing Group. *A Guide to Writing Sociology Papers (7th edition)* MacMillan Learning. (ISBN: 978-1-4292-3479-5). (6th edition is fine as well)

(BSR): Babbie, Earl. 2011. *The Basics of Social Research* (5th edition). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth / Thompson Learning. (ISBN: 9780495812241).

OR

Babbie, Earl. 2017. *The Basics of Social Research* (7th edition). Boston, MA: Cengage Learning. (ISBN: 9781305503076).

INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE

There is a good chance that this course is going to be different than many other courses that you have taken thus far in your academic career. Most courses that you have taken provide you with information that has been gathered and created by scientists and other academics. These courses required you to demonstrate an understanding of the material that you were reading. You were fulfilling the role of knowledge consumer. This course has an added requirement because you will be required to learn how to become a knowledge producer and social researcher. You will be asked to apply the abstract concepts that we consider in this course as you conduct research on topics that you find interesting within your life and the social world.

The first step in becoming a knowledge producer entails understanding what those before you have written on the subject of inquiry that you find interesting. Which theories did previous researchers consider? Which research methods did they employ? These are two main questions that scientists consider as they read each others' work. A course about the methodology of sociological research is much more than training in the tools and techniques of social scientific research because these tools and techniques also provide the limits and possibilities for interpretation and theory. It is somewhat arbitrary to separate research methods and theory into separate courses since they depend upon each other. Theory construction affects how variables are measured and which types of research methods one employs. The research results, especially unforeseen ones, often affect further revisions to theory. Since theory is so intertwined with methods, a course about sociological research methodology considers not only the tools but also many of the theories that sociologists employ as well. There are a wide range of theories and methods within the field of sociology, and they are used to study a wide range of facets of the social world. This course covers the range of sociological inquiry, from field research and participant observation to statistical analyses of large datasets.

Success at research methodology requires a high level of creativity and precision. The first requirement for doing social research is the ability to be intrigued by everyday life. A large portion of your grade depends upon how well you relate these research techniques and concepts to topics that you find interesting. You who excel at research design have a strong desire to understand the patterns in the social world around them. This course will also demand precision in your thinking and writing. As you will see through the course material, this precision is necessary because there are many ways that the validity and reliability of research data can be compromised.

This course provides you with a basic knowledge of the tools and techniques of sociological research. Through using these tools, you will also consider the relationship between research, theory, and interpretation. Other course objectives include a consideration of:

- the use of the scientific method in the social sciences.
- scientific research design as a creative process.
- the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods for collecting data.
- the use of statistics in multivariate causal analyses.
- the difficult ethical questions and dilemmas practitioners of the social sciences confront.
- further enhancing the sociological way of understanding our selves, our lives, and the world around us.

GRADING

Your grades are based on two projects, study guide assignments/exercises, and one exam. The weighting for each of these grading elements is listed below:

FP:	10%	(Field Project)
RDP:	20%	(Research Design Project)
Assignments:	60%	(includes discussion board posts)
Final Exam:	10%	

A	90-100
B	80-89
C	70-79
D	60-69
F	0-59

Note: The MBC Honor Code Policy concerning cheating and plagiarism will be strictly followed. Any assignment will receive an automatic “0” (zero) and an “F” will be recorded for the course grade should a student be caught plagiarizing. This type of offense demonstrates a disregard for the very foundations of academic thought and the learning process itself.

Since the majority of this course is run as an independent study, I expect that most of our correspondence will be via email. All of the documents and assignments that you will need are available on Blackboard. After you look through the materials, please send me an introductory email and include any questions or comments that you have about the course in general or any assignments in particular. Since we do not spend time meeting in class, you are expected to read all of the assigned material closely, answer all questions as fully as possible, and apply examples throughout your answers. I cannot stress enough that thoughtful written communication is critical for your success. Take extra time to read over and edit all of your essays. Make sure that you have written down what you know about the subject and that your words accurately convey the meaning you wish to express. You will be graded on your attention to detail, because a methods course in any science demands a strict attention to the details. Take the time to be precise with your writing, because that's the only way that I have to assess your grasp of the material.

This course is divided into four parts. The first part of the course focuses on the basics of social science research. The second part offers you the opportunity to apply what you learned in part one of this course by engaging in a qualitative research project and completing some exercises about statistical analyses as well. The qualitative project involves observing how strangers interact within a public space. The work in this part of the course will require you to develop hypotheses, interpret data, and write a formal report of the findings. The third part of the course focuses on research design. In the fourth part of the course, in addition to the final exam, you will apply all the knowledge you have learned throughout the course to create your own *Research Design Project* (RDP).

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

You are expected to turn in numerous **assignments**, create **two “projects,”** and complete a final exam in the course. The **assignments** portion of the grade is simply the average score of the graded essays and exercises that are due throughout all 4 parts of the course. The assignments will include Blackboard posts.

The **first project** is “Field Project” (FP). This project allows you to directly observe social behavior – at the “point of it all.” The project will require you to observe and report how strangers interact in a public setting of your choice. The FP is due during Part Two of the course.

The **second project** is the “Research Design Project” (RDP). This project is the heart of the course, because you will utilize much of what you learn throughout the course to design a social research project of your own, complete with a questionnaire. You will write a review of literature (complete with references), create a research question(s), write hypotheses that focus this research question, and then write a survey to operationalize variables and test hypotheses. Since it demands a comprehensive knowledge of all of the course material, this last project is the subject of Part Four of the course. (Though you will be asked to begin on work on the review of literature in part one of the course).

The **final** exam is comprehensive. Since the course is cumulative in nature and later sections build on earlier sections, you should take the **final** only after completing all of the other work in the course. The comprehensive final exam requires the demonstration of a well-integrated grasp of the body of knowledge rather than a disparate set of facts. You will be expected to demonstrate a grasp of all of the methodological tools used to learn about the social world, the strengths and weaknesses of various methods of data collection and analysis, and how all of the concepts of the course relate to one another.

There are 3 books required for the course. The core text for this course is Babbie’s *The Basics of Social Research* (BSR or “text”), one of the most popular and best methodology texts in the field of sociology. Babbie is very thorough, clear, and has a sense of humor. Refer to the *Glossary* of terms at the end of his text whenever you are unfamiliar with a core concept or term, because it is a great resource.

The *Study Guide* (SG) by Wagenaar and Babbie compliments the text with practical exercises and questions. **The Chapters for the Study Guide are posted in the Blackboard Shell, so you do NOT need to purchase the Study Guide.** Each chapter in the SG corresponds to a chapter in the text and begins with a discussion of objectives and important themes from the corresponding chapter in the text followed by “matching” questions, “review questions” (multiple-choice), “discussion questions,” and “exercises.” After reading the text, you should also read the summary in the SG and work through the matching and review questions. Then refer to the back of the SG and correct your mistakes, making sure that you understand why your answers were right or wrong. Finally, complete the assigned Discussion questions and Exercises for each “Topic” (see below), and then send your work to me via e-mail. Please submit all assignments in *Word*. Be sure to write your name and the topic number on every submission for all work done in this course. In addition, you are required to keep copies of all of your work until your FINAL grade is posted.

The Sociology Writing Group. *A Guide to Writing Sociology Papers (WSP)* is required for all upper level sociology classes and provides important information and suggestions on how to write papers when sociologists are your audience.

COURSE SCHEDULING

This course is very time demanding and has deadlines throughout the semester. I strongly advise that you turn in assignments on time. I will give you the opportunity to revise and resubmit any assignment that you turn in on or before the deadline; however, you will *not* have the opportunity to revise any assignments that are first submitted after the deadline. Because of the heavy workload of this course, you need to be productive throughout the semester in order to complete the course and do their best work. Understanding the material for this course also may take extra study time since some of the material is abstract and intellectually demanding. Another reason for the deadlines is organizational. I can get more thorough feedback to you sooner if you turn in your work sooner.

For these reasons, please allow yourself plenty of time to complete the work. It is especially important to maintain a steady and consistent output of graded assignments and projects. It may be helpful to establish a reasonable schedule and stick to it. Whatever your strategy, please be careful to not fall very far behind, as there is probably little chance that you will be able to catch up, and if you do manage to complete the work, you will probably not be doing your best work.

Please send me an email from your Mary Baldwin email account after you have signed up for the class and have reviewed this syllabus. This way we can become acquainted, and I can answer your initial questions. Also, if you ever have a question or comment that you want to bring to my attention at any time during the semester, please do not hesitate to do so. I will be glad to answer any questions that come up for you while you trek through the readings and assignments for this course. You can expect that I will respond to your emails within two days and that I will return comments to your assignments within one to two weeks. To get started on your coursework, you may begin working on the Part One readings and assignments. If you do not have access to these documents through blackboard for any reason, send me an email, and I will get the documents you need to you as soon as possible.

I also want to stress that you should contact me if you have not heard back from me within a week of when you submit an assignment or within 2 days if it is a simple question about some aspect of the class. There is a good chance I have missed your email, so please be persistent.

COURSE DEADLINES

<u>First Blackboard Post due:</u>	January 14th
<u>Assignments from Part One due:</u>	February 4th
<u>Assignments from Part Two due:</u>	February 25th
<u>Assignments from Part Three due:</u>	March 15th
<u>Assignments from Part Four due:</u>	April 8th
<u>FINAL EXAM due:</u>	April 22nd

Policy on “Extensions”:

Should you find that you cannot complete all of the work for the course, you may take an **ET** for the course ***ONLY IF you have a documented medical excuse and/or have completed the material from Part One and Part Two of the course by the ADP deadline for all semester coursework.***