Fall 2000

SOCIOLOGY 357
METHODS OF SOCIAL RESEARCH
9:30 - 10:45 a.m. Tuesday, Thursday 6101 Social Science

Instructor
Pamela Oliver 2452 Social Science 262-6829
Office Hours: 11-11:30 Tu, Thur and 1:00 - 2:00 Thurs or by appointment. Additional time will be announced when needed. I will maintain an online appointment scheduling system available at **www.ssc.wisc.edu/offhours/signup.html.** I am readily available by email: ***Oliver@ssc.wisc.edu*** This is an excellent way to get a quick question answered or to tell me about a problem. However, I get dozens of emails daily, and will not be able to engage in lengthy email discussions or debates with you. You are also welcome to call me at home at 829-3692, especially for those "quick questions" that can be answered in 2 minutes or if there is some kind of problem. Home calls are OK 7:00 am to 9 PM. Home life is not always interruptible; please be prepared to leave a name and number if I am not available.

Sociology 357 is a required course for sociology majors which teaches you the logic of research design and the basics of data collection. It is not a statistics course and assumes no background in methods. You will do a small amount of statistics in your projects, which will be easier if you have already had elementary statistics, but you can learn what you need to know for these projects in this course without much difficulty. My goals in teaching you methods are: (1) To spark your interest in sociology; to encourage you to see sociology as a research enterprise, as a process of learning about our social world. (2) To introduce you to the elements of research design, with a special emphasis on measurement (operationalization) and assessing relations between variables. (3) To teach you how to read a research report with a critical eye, so that you can know how to tell how trustworthy its information is. (4) To have you learn first hand about the problems of research by trying out several data collection methods on a small scale. (5) To show you that research is a personal, human activity involving both your brain and your emotions, combining brilliant insights with spectacular failures, and invoking both dramatic visions and inescapable practical limitations.

Books and Supplies

You will need to buy a Workbook packet which will be sold at the Social Science Copy Center on the 6th floor for a few dollars. This includes detailed instructions and examples for all methods projects, additional articles, and other important materials. Announcement will be made in class when the packet is ready for purchase.

The following books have been ordered at University Bookstore.

Royce Singleton, Jr. and others, Approaches to Social Research. Third Edition. A text in research methods. It is relatively sophisticated and explains the logic and significance of many important methodological practices.

Patricia Golden. The Research Experience. A collection of sociological research reports coupled with behind-the-scenes discussions of what really happened in the research. These articles are getting very old and dated, but they are still excellent learning tools, and I hope you will bear with them, because there is so far nothing available to replace them.

Paul C. Stern and Linda Kalof. Evaluating Social Science Research. Second Edition. An excellent self-teaching guide to reading research reports. Also provides another treatment of basic methods concepts.

You will also need paper or cards in the 3x5" size. This is the smallest size note card, and is also a standard size note pad. You will need about 50 of these for a semester. You may also make them yourself, or recycle cards that have been written on one side.

Requirements and Grading

The largest share of your grade is based on three major data collection projects and an article analysis. The data collection projects are a structured field observation, a field experiment, and a simple questionnaire; these are worth 20% each. A detailed analysis of a professional research article is your "final" in this class and is worth 20%. A sampling exercise is worth 4%. There will be frequent homework assignments which will be worth a total of 14%. The last 2% is based on giving daily feedback on the class sessions.

The exercises in this class are not "real" research. As you will learn, real research is much too time consuming to fit into a course. You will be doing scaled-down projects that teach you important lessons about research without taking so much time. Everything you do in this class is solely for your education. You are not part of anybody's research project.

Improving. This is a skills course, and if you work hard enough you can learn to do something you didn't get right the first time. You may redo any exercise or article analysis in an attempt to improve your work. Redoing an exercise means starting completely over and doing all new work; it is not just correcting the mistakes on the first exercise. You must do

better work to get a better grade: this is not extra credit and effort does not count. If you do more than one version of an assignment, your best grade will count. You must allow a week for the grading of any assignment. You must submit the old (graded) exercise and any grade sheets when you submit new work for regrading. I suggest that you speak with me to clarify these instructions before redoing any exercise.

Homework. Homework is counted but not graded; if you do it you get credit. If you do 90% or more of the homework, you will receive an A; if you do 50% or less, you will receive an F; totals between these extremes will receive intermediate grades. HOMEWORK MUST BE SUBMITTED ON TIME TO RECEIVE FULL CREDIT. Homework submitted by the next class session will be given half credit; after that it will not be accepted at all. Missing class is not an excuse for late homework. The only exception is illness or other circumstances beyond your control (or a religious holiday), which you should explain in writing when you submit the late homework.

The homework has two purposes. First, there are some important topics which are not "tested" in the graded exercises. Since there are no tests, the homework is the only way to expose you to these issues. Secondly, the homework gives you practice on major skills which are directly relevant to the graded exercises, particularly the article analysis. It is very important that you have read the articles we will discuss before you come to class, otherwise you will not be able to follow or benefit from the instruction in class. It is not necessary for you to write a lot: half a page is usually plenty. But you hurt your own ability to learn the course material if you "cheat" on the homework by copying someone else's without doing the reading. It is not necessary that you have studied the reading enough to master it before class. All you need to do is to have read it over so that when I start dissecting the methods in an article, you can follow what I am talking about. The written questions are a "warm up" to get you thinking. If you cannot figure out the answer to a particular question after reading an article, just say so and, if possible, say what your best guess is. You will still get credit.

Although homework is rarely assigned from it, the Singleton text contains a great deal of material which you are required to know for the graded exercises. Notations on the exercises indicate which chapters of the reading are most relevant.

Daily Reactions

At the end of each class, submit on a 3x5 card your name, the date, and at least one sentence of reaction to that day's class, indicating what you learned, or something you liked or did not like, found interesting or controversial, found clear or too simplistic, or found confusing and in need of further (or better) explanation; you may also submit comments on the course in general. You can submit a "reaction" only if you were actually in class. You cannot "make up" a reaction, but tell me (in writing) if you are forced to miss several classes due to illness or other problem, and I will make an appropriate adjustment. Grading system will be the same as for homework. I read these after each class, but do not normally return them or comment on them.

Procedural Matters

PLEASE BRING YOUR BOOK TO CLASS. Especially bring the workbook when an exercise is on the agenda, and the Golden reader when discussion of an article is on the agenda. It is also helpful to bring the methods text when it is the assigned reading of the day.

I will record attendance. You are responsible for obtaining information you miss if you are absent. We believe it is inappropriate to use office hours (or telephone calls) to compensate for instruction you missed more or less by choice, such as napping, staying warm, studying for other classes, or vacationing. But if you are attending regularly and making the effort to learn (or if your absence is for reasons beyond your control), we will do all that we can to help you.

YOUR FINAL ARTICLE ANALYSIS IS DUE AT SUMMARY PERIOD, i.e. by Wednesday, December 20 at 2 p.m. This is also the last time for submitting any re-done exercises. EARLY PAPERS WILL BE GRATEFULLY ACCEPTED AND HOPEFULLY GRADED EARLY. Please note: Instructors MUST turn in grade sheets within 96 hours after the summary period. No matter how justified your reasons, I cannot hold up a whole class's grade sheet for one person. The deadline is really the deadline. If you wish to have your article analysis returned to you via a box outside my door, please put a readily visible note to this effect on your paper.

Methods: Schedule of Topics and Readings

HOMEWORK DUE DATES GIVEN IN THE SYLLABUS ARE CORRECT, even if I do not remind you in class, unless a WRITTEN note on the blackboard or a WRITTEN schedule change sheet alters them.

S refers to readings in the methods text by Singleton et al. For example, S 7 refers to all of chapter 7; S, pp 100-105 means pages 100-105 only. Stern 1 means all of chapter 1 of Stern.

G refers to readings in the Golden reader. G, pp 130-136 refers to pages 130-136; G 251 refers to the article beginning on page 251. Always read both the research report on the personal journal which follows it. There is a lot of helpful material in the personal journals for your exercises; do not neglect them.

NOTE: A * MEANS THERE IS SOMETHING DUE THAT DAY.

Please remember that nothing is perfect, even after proofreading, and if something does not make sense, it is most likely an error. Errors may lead to *'s in the wrong places, to garbled dates, or to wrong page or chapter numbers. Look at the surrounding text if something seems wrong, or ask if you cannot figure it out.

Sep 5 T First Class. Administration, introductions.

7 R * S 1, 2 and Stern 1. Scientific knowledge and how it differs from ordinary knowledge. NOTE: If you simply substitute the phrase "empirical statement" for Stern's "fact" everywhere he uses it, including in the definition, you may find his discussion less confusing. HOMEWORK #1: a) List two or three things from the readings on sociology and science that you found especially interesting or that you disagree with or have a question about. b) Introduce yourself, and tell me what hopes or fears you have about this class. c) Do you have ready access to a computer facility with a spreadsheet program? If so, which one? Do you know how to export to or save as a tab delimited file? What kinds of files can you import? Can you import an Excel file? A tab delimited file? d) Have you done prior work on the computer with a statistical package? Which one? Do you have access to it now?

SECTION I. OBSERVATION ASSIGNMENT. The concept of measurement/operationalization of a variable. Levels of measurement. The logic of research. Assessing the quality of operationalization with inter-coder reliability tests. Introduction to sampling.

12 T * Read S 4 (all), S 5, pp. 99-113 only, and Stern 2. The elements of research: units of analysis, variables, relations, propositions, hypotheses, measurement. After reading Singleton, begin in Stern by practicing to pick out the variables and relationships in the exercises and problems. Then read the chapter on the kinds of research, but don't worry about being able to identify them in the little paragraphs in the exercises and problems; in real research reports, it is obvious what is what. HOMEWORK #2: A. For "problems" 1, 4, 5, 6, 7 on pages 56-60, ignore the given instructions and instead: 1) list the variables; 2) state the result as a proposition; 3) if causal, identify which variable is independent and which is dependent; 4) classify its method. Please note: This is not graded. Take is seriously, but do not spend large amounts of time on something you do not understand. We will go over this in class. B. Give examples of nominal, ordinal, interval, ratio levels of measurement. Write down any questions you have about this.

14 R * S 3. The logic of research. Doob and Gross, "Status of Frustrator as an Inhibitor of Horn-honking Responses," and "How W Did It," G481. HOMEWORK #3: 1) Give the major independent variable and dependent variable in the Doob and Gross article; tell how each was measured (operationalized). (2) State the major theoretical hypothesis of the research and the operational hypothesis which flows from it. (3) Jot down notes on anything in the article or personal journal that would be worthy of discussing in class. (4) In class we will construct the logical framework leading from the theory to the specific prediction. This involves the "frustration aggression hypothesis," the theoretical hypothesis, and the measurement assumptions. As a mental warm up, think about whether you know how to do this. Either jot notes, or write "I have a good idea about this" or "I don't know what this means."

19 T Observation Exercise Explained. Read Observation Assignment in Workbook packet. Read S 11, text book chapter on observation research and Stern pp. 61-88 on controlling for observation errors. Review Chapters 4 and 5 as necessary to be comfortable with the research terms used in this assignment. We will take time in class to form tentative work groups and discuss the project.

21 R Continue discussion of observation. Read S 17, writing a research report, and pp. 434-446 on statistics. (The outline for writing your report is based on this chapter.) Continue discussion of observation assignment with emphasis on how you write up a research report and how you prepare a statistical table to summarize your results.

26 T Sampling principles and terminology. Read S 6. How professional samples are done. What to look for in evaluating a sample. Sampling terminology exercise assigned and explained. (Worth 4% of your grade. Due October 10. We will be discussing sampling in every assignment from this point on.)

28 R * Observation Assignment Due. Each group should be prepared to give a 30-60 second summary of your group's findings. Continue sampling lectures.

PART II. COLLECTING DATA THROUGH ASKING QUESTIONS. Survey research and construct validity. Writing about statistical data. NOTE: The exact instructions for submitting data and receiving tables may vary, depending on what capacities you have for processing spreadsheet files.

Oct 3 T *Finish Sampling Lectures. Introduction to survey research. Types of samples. Read S 6, and S 9 on professional samples and professional survey design. HOMEWORK #4: Based on the reading in Singleton, jot down questions on things that should be clarified in class, or that are worth discussing.

5 R * READ Ransford, "Isolation, Powerlessness, and Violence," G 292 and the personal journal, and READ S 10 and S pp. 394-399. HOMEWORK #5 List the major variables and tell how at least one was measured, find the sampling details and be prepared to evaluate them in class, and list some of the results and try to find them in the tables. b) Note other concerns or questions you have from the other reading. A few minutes of class will be devoted to helping groups form and get project ideas.

10 T * Sampling Exercise Due. Questionnaire assignment explained. READ OVER the Questionnaire exercise and example in Workbook so you know what it involves. Class time will be devoted to explaining the questionnaire exercise and to a work period for groups to form. A few minutes of class will be devoted to "brainstorming" possible project topics and to letting people talk about forming groups.

12 R Class will be a workshop on writing questions. I will give some general principles. You will sit with your groups and work on questions in class. You should be ready to collect your data as soon as possible.

17 T Rubin "Measurement of Romantic Love" and journal, G 495. Homework # 6: (1) Try to explain in your own words the relation between what Rubin is doing and the ideas of validity explained in your text. (They are related, but these may be difficult ideas.) (2) List three facts which support the claim that the "love" scale is a valid measure. (3) In class we will discuss whether this kind of research is useful and whether the love scale seems to measure love. Jot down notes to remind yourself of relevant points in this article for this discussion. Again, a few minutes of class time will be devoted to helping groups get their ideas going.

19 R * Read S pp 417-425 and the detailed example of coding and data analysis in the Workbook packet. Look at the sample questionnaire and the code sheet to see their relation. Look at the tables to see the relation between the questions on the sample survey and the numbers in the report. We will discuss in class different ways to do this depending on the computer facilities you have available. HOMEWORK #7: a) Verify that you have talked with your team members and that you all know how to fill out your code sheets the same way. b) Note any questions you have to have answered about this. c) List the parts of the sample analysis you understand, and the parts you need help with. d) Determine that you know how to enter your data into a spreadsheet table in an acceptable fashion.

24 T * Submit your completed code sheets and data files today. Remember that the <u>whole team</u>'s data get analyzed together, so submit together. The whole team should be in ONE spreadsheet! Those who have it done correctly can get it checked and leave. Class time will be used to help teams who have problems. NOTE: You should tell me whether you are set up to receive your tables as a file attachment and, if so, the address to which they should be sent and the format you can handle.

26 R Class meets in Room 362 Memorial Library. Advanced lecture on social science library searches. You can use these skills to find an article for the article analysis. Locating the prior professional research on a topic is also important. Class attendance is required.

31 T You will get your computer printouts back today. I suggest you come to class with empty tables prepared for your questionnaire, so you can copy the numbers from the printout into them in class and begin to see what you have. We will begin discussing analyzing the questionnaire.

Nov 2 R Discuss analyzing questionnaire data and writing the report.

PART III. EXPERIMENTS AND THE PROBLEM OF ASSESSING INTERNAL VALIDITY. Why experiments are the best way to establish causal relations. The logic of randomization and experimental control.

7 T * Questionnaire Due. Lecture on Logic of Experiments. Read Experiment Assignment in Workbook and S 7 on experiments as soon as possible. (FYI: your assignment will use Design 5.) With experiments, you need to figure out everything in advance. Start getting ideas but do not do the experiment yet.

9 R Class will focus on the details of setting up an experiment. You should leave this class knowing how to do your data collection. The actual data collection for the experiment will not take long, but you need to allow enough time for advance planning and for writing up the report. Make sure your group has compatible plans for the timing of your work now, when you still can make other arrangements. Checklist of things you need to know that are usually not obvious: (1) what a manipulated independent variable is and how to do it; (2) what randomization is and how to do it; (3) how to measure dependent variable in a way that gives good experimental control. Do not collect your data until you know what you are doing. However, practice runs and pretests are often very useful in figuring out what to do and how to do it.

14 T Doing experiment exercise. <u>Read</u> S 7, S8, and Stern 3, especially pages 88-105. * Read S8 and Stern 3, especially pp 88-105. Threats to internal validity and how experiments control them. Today's class will stress the features of this material that are relevant to the exercise. HOMEWORK #8: Mentally work the "exercises" and check your understanding; report on which ones are OK and which are not. b) for the "briefer problems"

on pp. 113-116 and the "complete problems" on pp. 119-123, read the descriptions and figure out which ones are randomized between-subject designs.

16 R * Internal validity and the logic of experiments. Read Darley and Batson, "From Jerusalem to Jericho" G 191 and the personal journal. and Goldberg G 147 "Misogyny and the College Girl" plus the journal. Note: you can assume these are randomized experiments. Note: Even though it does not say so explicitly, you can assume this is a randomized experiment. HOMEWORK #9: For each experiment, 1) Identify the independent and dependent variables and how each was measured. 2) Summarize the key finding. Does it interest you? Why or why not? 3) In class, we will pretend we are doing the experiment exercise write-up for this article. Think about this in advance, and jot down any notes that will prepare you for this discussion. 4) Note anything else that would be worthy of discussion.

21 T * Experiment due. Be prepared to give a one minute summary of your experiment and its findings in class. Begin discussing article analysis assignment.

Thanksgiving Break

PART IV. EVALUATING PUBLISHED RESEARCH ARTICLES.

28 T * Ethics of Research. Read S 17; Humphreys, "Tearoom Trade" and "Methods" G 85; Haney, et al., "Interpersonal Dynamics in a Simulated Prison," and "The Play's The Thing" G 157. HOMEWORK #10: (1) State which ethical issues raised (or not raised) in the text most concern you; (2) briefly give your opinion of the ethics of the research in the Humphreys and Haney et al. articles. Also pay attention to what was learned from observation in each of these articles. NOTE: The Humphreys article contains some fairly explicit but not graphic descriptions of male homosexual sex. Past classroom debates about ethics have concerned the privacy issues of doing the research, and the question of whether gay men and lesbians are helped or hurt by articles like this one; there is also the concern that I am contributing to gay-bashing in assigning this kind of article in times like these. The ethical issues in the Zimbardo article are less controversial today, but are still important. I believe that vigorous discussion and debate about these issues is vital.

30 R * Participant Observation Research. Read the short handout on evaluating qualitative research at the end of this syllabus, and review S 11 (Field Research). Read Browne, "The Used Car Game" and "Fieldwork for Fun and Profit" G 60 AND Gans, "The West End" and "On the Methods" G 40. HOMEWORK #11: (1) Based on their discussions in their journals, compare the roles played and methods employed by Browne and Gans. (2) Which of Browne's "findings" do you think are most trustworthy? Why? Least trustworthy? Why? (3) Same question for Gans. (4) Comment on anything else about the content or process of these research projects. If you have not done so, consider it an emergency to get your article for review before the next class.

Dec 5 T * Analyzing articles. READ assignment in Workbook packet. Read Stern 4. Read over your own article for the first time so you know what it is about. Read Oliver "If You Don't Do it Nobody Else Will" in Workbook packet. I will do an "article analysis" of this in class. HOMEWORK #12: a) Jot down the parts of Stern 4 you do not understand, or assure me that you understand it all. b) Without writing it down, think about how you would answer the article analysis questions for this article. Jot down a few notes to show you read the article.

7 R * Read your own article twice before this class. Re-read the article analysis assignment. Detailed discussion of article analysis. Come prepared to think about how the discussion relates to your article. HOMEWORK #13: (1) List the numbers of the assignment questions you feel OK about. (2) Note the questions that you need help with; try to be as specific as you can about what you need to know. Be prepared to ask in class.

12 T * Last formal Class. Work session on article analysis and class wrap-up. HOMEWORK #14: a) Please give me your evaluation and suggestions for what was good and what was bad about the course format, readings, lectures, content, or process. b) How useful do you expect the things we have studied to be for you in the future?

14 R I will be holding office hours in #2452 from 9 am to 11:45 pm and from 12:30 pm to 2 pm to answer questions about articles. EARLY PAPERS GRATEFULLY ACCEPTED! I will try to generate final grades early for papers submitted by Friday 12/15.

18 M I will office hours (times to be announced) in #2452 to answer questions about articles.

19 T I will office hours (times to be announced) in #2452 to answer questions about articles.

20 W ARTICLE ANALYSIS DUE. Final submission date for re-done exercises. 2 pm.

Sociology 357/8. Prof. Pamela Oliver

GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR EVALUATING QUALITATIVE ARTICLES

1. Lightly skim to see generally what the article is about.

2. Read methods sections or appendices first, to see what the author actually did. (In the Golden reader, read the personal journals.) Where and how did the author observe? For how long? What role did s/he play in the setting? To whom did s/he talk?

3. Identify the important findings (things that you or the author think are significant) and the nature of the evidence supporting them. For each, read what the author says and think carefully about what you know about how the research was done, so you can answer the question: exactly what is the evidence for this finding?

a) Sometimes the evidence is the author's own direct observation. In this case, here are questions to help you evaluate the observation: Was the author actually in a position to see this behavior? Is there evidence that this observation was a usual or normal part of the situation, rather than an oddity the author just happened to see (or perhaps caused by her or his own presence?) How many times was this observed? Repeatedly, or just once? Were the circumstances of the different times this was seen different enough to support the idea that this is a general or common phenomenon? (Or is the author's point that this rare event illuminated some pattern or relationship that usually remained hidden?)

b) Sometimes the evidence is an informant's report (i.e. somebody told the author this). Here are questions to help you evaluate informant reports. Was this from a formal interview, one or more extended informal conversations, or just a casual remark? How many different people were informants on this point? Are the informants different enough from each other that they should be able to provide different perspectives that would help the author evaluate the truth of the finding? Are informants talking about themselves, about somebody else, or about events which have happened? What is the source of the informants' information? Could the informants be expected to have accurate information about this? Would the informants have any reason to distort the report, either through overt lying or through their own selective perception and misunderstanding?

c) Keep in mind that many qualitative studies combine interviews and observation, or may also use other kinds of evidence.

4. Once you know the factual basis for a finding, ask whether the author's interpretation of the finding's larger theoretical or substantive meaning seems correct. Sometimes qualitative researchers report the "facts" correctly but misunderstand what they mean in their social context. Usually (but not always), the better the evidence for a finding, the more likely it is that the author also understands how to interpret it. Evaluating an interpretation is often more subjective, because the issue partly is what your criterion is: are you concerned about a correct understanding of people's subjective understanding of their experiences, or about showing how their experiences are similar at a more abstract level to others' experiences? One way to check interpretations of subjective experiences is to ask informants if one's interpretations are correct. The ideal response is, "I never thought of it that way, but you are right." As a reader, you bring your own experiences and knowledge to bear to ask yourself whether you agree with the author's intepretations. Of course, the more foreign the subjects of the research are to your own experience, the harder it is for you to use your experiences as a basis of evaluation and the more you have to trust the author. If you have to trust the author, the best thing to look for is usually evidence that the author likes and respects the subjects. To evaluate a more abstract theoretical interpretation, you ask whether all the behavioral facts in the report are consistent with that interpretation, and whether it fits with what has been learned about other people in other circumstances.