

SOA 308: SOCIAL RESEARCH METHODS

Fall Term, 2003

(3 CREDITS)

Saturday: 9/27, 10/25, 12/6

Sunday: 9/28, 10/26, 12/7

Time: 10 AM to 6 PM

(please be prompt)

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COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES:

This course will survey various research methods and models, and provide an introduction to research design and research skills sufficient for you to move more confidently toward the completion of your required senior research project. Our primary focus will be qualitative research. The course will address both practical and theoretical concerns. You will learn how to identify and articulate a research problem, conduct a literature search, design your project, evaluate and choose applicable research methods, and write a research proposal. By the end of the course, you should be able to distinguish between traditions of social research. You should be familiar with the differences between quantitative and qualitative methods, be able to give examples of the kinds of research questions each of these methods are most likely to answer, and discuss how the two might be combined. You should be able to reflect critically about the ethics of research and the social and political dimensions of research. You should be able to define terms important to the process of social research. You should have some understanding of how particular theoretical traditions inform research methods and research design. While investigating research traditions and paradigms, we will also discuss the ethics involved in conducting social science research. Finally, you should be able to discuss the problems and promises of social research in terms of both policy decision-making and social change.

THREE REQUIRED TEXTS:

Constructing Social Research by Charles C. Ragin
(Pine Forge Press, 1994)

Learning in the Field: An Introduction to Qualitative Research by Gretchen B. Rossman and Sharon F. Rallis (Sage, 1998)

Ethnography Unbound: Power and Resistance in the Modern Metropolis by Michael Burawoy, et al. (University of California Press, 1991)

Please refer to the attached "Early Assignment, Personal Introduction, and Texts" for a discussion of each of these titles, and for a description of the early assignment.

EARLY ASSIGNMENT: The early reading and written assignment must be completed before the first class meeting (PLEASE NOTE that this class starts promptly at 10 AM each time we meet, and plan accordingly). See "Early Assignment, Personal Introduction, and Texts" at the end of this syllabus, as well as "Weekend One" under Course Outline below.

RESOURCES:

Research, and learning how to do research, doesn't have to be -- shouldn't be -- a lonely and unsupported effort. I am of course available to you through e-mail, snail mail, and by phone. If I am not home when you call, I will respond to your call promptly (leave a clear message as to when and where you can be reached). I will also encourage you to become resources and support for each other. One of my hopes for this class is that most of you will have, by the end of this course, developed helpful working group relationships that might be useful to you on an ongoing basis as you pursue and "write up" your research Spring term. Although each of you will conduct individual research projects, there is plenty of room for the sharing of literature and ideas, and the constructive critical reading and review of each other's writings. In regards to other resources, we will be spending a part of our time becoming more familiar with the library as a resource for research. Lastly, the more you refer to them, the more the required texts will provide ongoing guidance and clarification as you develop your project.

Grading:

Class participation	20%
Research portfolio	40%
Research proposal	40%

Class participation: Attendance at all sessions is mandatory. Please arrange your weekend so that you can arrive on time – class begins promptly at 10 AM. Since there are no exams, one of the ways in which I will evaluate you for a final grade will be to note your consistent attendance, and your willingness to contribute to class discussions and activities in an informed and thoughtful manner (ie., where it's clear to me and your classmates that you've done the readings, followed class discussions, and thought about the content). This is a course where in many cases there is not a clear right or wrong answer to the issue under discussion, but instead there are important distinctions to make, and the recognition of choices for researchers that follow from making these distinctions. Discussion and in-class exercises are crucial to the learning process; you cannot achieve a satisfactory grade or sufficiently prepare to research for your senior project without consistent attendance and participation.

Research Portfolio: This will be an intensively "hands on" class. You can only truly learn how to do social research by doing it. I will ask you to complete various activities, including in-class exercises and short projects, and to answer questions I will distribute addressing the readings. Written results from these, and any written reflections on course activities, readings, or discussions, will go into a loose-leaf binder, and constitute your "research portfolio". After I pass them back to you, please keep all returned assignments in your portfolio. The writings in your portfolio will help me evaluate the extent to which you've met the course objectives above. Your research portfolio will also contain your final research proposal for the study you anticipate completing Spring term.

Research Proposal: Though I expect the final draft of your research proposal to consist of only about five pages, it will count toward a large portion of your grade. I consider it in many ways the culmination of your learning and efforts in this particular class; it will of course provide the beginning point for your senior research project. You may complete several drafts of your proposal before the final draft, which is the only one I will grade. The research proposal should give evidence of: 1) the extent to which you've learned to distinguish between research methods and the appropriate application of each; 2) how well you've learned to match research questions with a research design; 3) how aware you are of the ethical dimension of your research project; 4) your ability to articulate research questions; 5) your ability to identify and discuss the theoretical and larger social concerns that inform your research project; and finally, 6) your ability to situate your research project within the scholarly dialogue concerning your topic that a thorough literature review will indicate to you. The discussions and exercises in class, your close and attentive reading of the texts, and your thoroughness in answering the questions about the readings should all prepare you to write a competent, even inspired, research proposal.

COURSE OUTLINE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS:

Though drastic changes are unlikely, the following thematic course outline is subject to change according to my own ongoing evaluations of the needs of the class, and according to scheduling conflicts (library research review and guest speakers). Given this, the development of the course will unfold as follows:

WEEKEND ONE:

* For early reading and written assignments (to be completed before the first class meeting), read the attached "Personal Introduction, Texts, and First Assignment". Review the early assignment and allow yourself sufficient time to complete the reading and type out your answers to the questions. Be thorough. Please bring completed questions with you to the first class.

SATURDAY, 9/27 -- Early assignment due. Introduction. Course requirements. Topics: What is social research? Library skills for research (required attendance at Saturday's library skills workshop in social sciences; even if you feel you know your way around the library and the Internet, you will benefit from this workshop) . Terminology. Social dimensions of social research. Brief survey of methods.

SUNDAY, 9/28 -- Topics: Formulating research questions. Theory and conceptualization. Ideas and evidence. Research design. Literature reviews. Research proposals. Qualitative and quantitative methods. Getting to know what it feels like to be a researcher. Qualitative methods and fieldwork. Introduction to research proposals. Handout of questions for our next weekend meeting (see assignment below).

WEEKEND TWO:

Saturday, 10/25 -- Reading assignment: in Constructing Social Research, all of Part 2 (pp. 78 - 166); in Learning in the Field, chapters 4, 5, and 6 (pp. 91 - 166). Chapter Thirteen, "The Extended Case Method" by Michael Burawoy, in Ethnography Unbound. Please complete this reading assignment before we meet on Saturday, and bring to class your typed answers to the questions addressing these readings (questions will have been distributed at our last meeting). Topics: Planning research. Data collection 1. Choosing methods. Sampling. Research strategies. Comparative approaches. Research proposals revisited.

SUNDAY, 10/26 -- Topics: Data collection 2. Historical approaches. Documents and photographs. Data analysis. Themes and coding. Case studies. Handout of questions for the next reading assignment (see below).

WEEKEND THREE:

12/6 -- Reading assignment: in Learning in the Field, all of chapters 7 and 8, the Epilogue, and the appendices (pp. 168 - 257). In addition, there will be reading as assigned in Ethnography Unbound. Portfolio and assignment due. Topics: "Writing up" your research. Voices and audiences. The practitioner as researcher. Evaluative and applied research. Action research. Collaborative models.

12/7 -- Topics: The futures of research. The politics of research. Preparing for Spring term.

SOA 308: SOCIAL RESEARCH METHODS -- EARLY ASSIGNMENT, PERSONAL INTRODUCTION, AND TEXTS

PERSONAL INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Fall term course in social research methods. My name is Tony Vogt (pronounced "vote"). I've taught sociology at Linfield for the last eight years (Social Problems, Race and Ethnicity, Intro to Sociology, Social Movements, Social Research Methods, and a course entitled The Body, Sexuality, and Social Theory), and I've also taught sociology as well as interdisciplinary courses (Environmental Values and World Views; Twentieth Century American Realities) at Marylhurst College, Linn-Benton Community College, Oregon State University, and the University of Oregon.

At Oregon State University (where I hold the rank of Assistant Professor), I am the Assistant Director of The Spring Creek Project for Nature, Ideas, and the Written Word. The mission of Spring Creek is to bring together the insights of the environmental sciences, the rigor of philosophical analysis, and the creative expression of the written word in order to re-imagine the relationship between humans and the rest of nature. Spring Creek sponsors speakers, organizes classes, arranges inter-disciplinary conversations, initiates conferences, and partners with other organizations in projects that

further Spring Creek's mission. For example, last year the US Forest Service asked us to bring together writers, scientists, musicians, poets, and land managers to explore ways of talking about and envisioning the landscape (seeing a forest as a "tree farm" is hugely different from seeing the same landscape as a "cathedral forest"; language shapes our stance towards landscapes and informs our actions).

Although I'm a third-generation Oregonian, my father was a career officer in the military, so I grew up here in the States (Texas, Virginia, Arizona, New Jersey, Hawaii, and Salem, Oregon) and abroad (France and Germany). I am 52 years old. Except for three years pursuing a doctoral degree at Brandeis University in the Boston area, I have lived in Oregon since 1969 (Salem, Portland, Corvallis). I hold a Ph.D. in Sociology from Brandeis University (my dissertation was on the social and political dimensions of the salmon crisis, including a case study of restoration work in a rural community). I hold an undergraduate and a graduate degree from Oregon State University. Besides social science, I have done graduate work in philosophy, literature, and comparative religions..

My interest in social research methods began when I was writing for a community newspaper over a decade ago, and started thinking about the differences and the similarities in the kinds of research journalists, novelists, historians, and social scientists do in order to produce their work. When I entered the doctoral program at Brandeis, I found debate and controversy about social research an exciting part of the program. During my last summer in Boston I joined the staff of the Oral History Center, where particular methods of social research (oral history methods) were used to recover and then present to the participants a range of silenced, forgotten, or otherwise marginalized stories that could constitute an important part of community or institutional identity. In communities, schools, and workplaces, the Center staff was invited to intervene in crisis situations. We would teach interview skills, collect stories (oral histories), facilitate the presentation of these stories (through video, theater, music, visual art, community meetings), facilitate discussion, help participants identify common themes in the stories, and support participants in constructing a new set of social relationships out of the shared understandings of conflicts and problems that would emerge from research and dialogue. This work is in the tradition of "action research", a tradition particularly useful to any of you who will be working as professionals in health, education, welfare, public or business administration, planning, community organizing, or other agency work.

Seven years ago I was asked to teach the social research methods course, and to become an advisor for the senior research projects required of social and behavioral science majors in the Adult Degree Program. I gladly accepted this challenge, and I believe the past few year's teaching and mentoring experience has strengthened my ability to promote your learning this year, and my capacity to support your own research project. Far from being dry or drab, original research will develop and call out your creativity and imagination as well as your analytical skills. The subject of your research should engage your deepest interest if not your passion -- add to this the exploration of new social spaces or potentially dramatic social issues, and even a short research project can have all the features of a true adventure.

My own continuing research into the social and political dimensions of the salmon crisis has kept me current on the subject of research methods and empathetic to those of you who are about to become involved in the process and problems of research. Because I get asked this a lot, here's the reason why at least this sociologist has an interest in the salmon crisis: a salmon traveling from the Idaho border down the Columbia to the Pacific passes through no fewer than 40 state, county, federal, tribal, and civic agencies mandated to ensure its welfare; most of the problems salmon face are generated by the political, social, and cultural relations of humans; a number of new institutions are emerging partly in response to the salmon crisis, including co-managed fisheries, watershed councils, restoration projects, and eco-literacy programs (there's a lifetime of projects here for social researchers!).

ABOUT THE TEXTS

I wanted texts that would: a) prepare you for your senior research project; b) give you a good feel for the range and variety of social research methods; c) interest you in and raise questions about larger theoretical and social concerns; and d) might be useful to you in your present and possibly future careers. After reading through a number of available texts on social research methods, I decided on texts that would work with us to do all the above within the weekend format, where we don't have weekly meetings to process our understandings. These then were my criteria, and these three texts are the result of my search. There is of course no perfect text to suit everyone: each of you will have varying affinities and concerns as you read, and your most and least favorite among the three, but given the criteria I've outlined, I think these three texts will provide you with what you need.

Please know that I am here to encourage, support, and aid your learning in any way I can, and that a primary goal for me this term will be to see each of you emerge at the end of this term with a large degree of confidence and clarity about the senior research project you will be doing Spring term. Further, I hope that you will catch some of my excitement about the potential adventure that social research can be, and the promise it can hold for communities, organizations, and individuals. I very much look forward to this course, and to working with each of you.

EARLY ASSIGNMENT: TO BE COMPLETED BY OUR FIRST MEETING

We have only a few weekends to meet, so I'm asking you to complete a significant amount of reading by our first meeting (and thereafter). Those of you who have taken courses from me before know that I routinely ask you to process what you read, and this is particularly important when you are reading in relative isolation, without the support of weekly discussions.

Your task is to: a) complete all assigned readings; b) then to process them on paper in a way that will help you identify what is most important in the reading. At the very minimum, this means answering the questions I will provide with each reading assignment. Before our first meeting, please complete all the reading described below, and type out your answers to the reading-related questions. I will collect your answers to the questions below on the first day of class. Your answers can be short, but must be long enough to address the question in a way that lets me know you've read closely and

considered thoughtfully. Please avoid quoting from the text -- try to answer in your own words. Please type all questions and your answers. Include your name at the top of the paper. Answers can be either single or double spaced, and in any font size most of us would not consider excessively large. Keep the questions and your answers in a loose-leaf binder, which will become your research portfolio. We will discuss portfolios more thoroughly on the first day of class, and I will distribute a handout about them.

READING ASSIGNMENT: Again, we have only a few weekends to cover a lot of ground, so completing this reading before we first meet is essential, even if all that you read is not crystal clear to you. While your comprehension will undoubtedly grow through class discussions and exercises, if you come unprepared to the first class you may find yourself unnecessarily lost and discouraged. Preparation can make all the difference between a positive and a miserable learning experience. Please allow yourself enough time to finish all of the following (substantial) reading assignment.

Before our first meeting, please read the preface and all of Part 1 (pp. 1 - 76) in Constructing Social Research by Ragin. Please also read all of chapters 1, 2, and 3 (pp. 1 - 90) in Learning in the Field by Rossman and Rallis. Finally, please read "Managing Without Managers" by Ann Arnett Ferguson in Ethnography Unbound (pp. 108 - 132).

WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT: After you complete the reading assignment in all three texts, please answer each of the following 20 questions briefly but succinctly in your own words (please don't quote). Please bring your typed answers to the very first class, along with the textbooks.

1. According to Ragin, what are the differences and what are the similarities between social research and other ways of representing social life? Give some examples.
2. Without quoting Ragin, define in your own words the meaning of each of the following terms: a) representation; b) variable c) covariation; d) hypothesis; e) deduction; f) induction; g) scientific method, and h) social theory. You may use dictionaries or encyclopedias to arrive at your own understanding of these terms; you may paraphrase, but again, please do not quote.
3. According to Ragin, what are some differences between quantitative and qualitative research, and how might you decide to use one or the other?
4. Summarize the four aspects of research design that Ragin considers.
5. What does Ragin mean by "giving voice"? How does this aspect of social research make it different from the models of research employed in the so-called "hard sciences"?
6. What is "evaluation research"?
7. Briefly discuss each of the seven main goals of social research.
8. What is "comparative research"?

9. Briefly discuss Ragin's "simple model of social research" in Chapter 3. What are the parts of this model, and how do they relate to each other? Please define your terms as you discuss them (for example, what does Ragin mean by "analytic frame", and how does he use the word "images"?).
10. Briefly discuss "framing by case" and "framing by aspect". Give examples of each.
11. Ragin ends Part 1 with further discussion of evidence, images, and representation. What do you consider some of the important points he makes about each?
12. According to Rossman and Rallis, what is qualitative research (again, please do not quote, but use your own words)?
13. As described in the first section of Learning in the Field (hereafter, LF), what are some ways of using research?
14. Briefly describe in your own words the three qualitative research strategies outlined in Chapter One of LF.
15. Briefly discuss what are for you some of the more important questions and issues explored in Chapter Two of LF (the reading includes an investigation into the subjectivity - objectivity continuum, the four paradigms, status quo versus radical change, the trustworthiness of research, research standards, reflexivity, etc.)? In other words, what in your opinion are the most important things you learned from reading this chapter?
16. What are some of the things Rossman and Rallis (in Chapter Three of LF) suggest you consider when putting together a research project?
17. What is a research proposal?
18. Describe the parts of a research proposal that would fall under the category of "conceptual framework".
19. Describe the parts of a research proposal that would fall under the category of "design and methodology".
20. Read "Managing Without Managers" in Ethnography Unbound as an example of a qualitative research project much like the kind you will likely be doing for your senior research project. Notice how it is written, the details she chooses to include, and how she uses theory to understand and give context to a very specific and localized story. Your senior project in the Spring must incorporate some first-hand research ("primary research" - your investigation outside the library, through methods such as participant observation and interviews).

Give it some serious thought and then write to me about what your own topic for a senior research project might be, and how you might go about conducting your investigation outside of the library. Consider the following:

Notice that Ann was interested in the idea of self-management, and then chose to do a case study of one particular place where management was democratically organized. Many of you will likely do some form of case study. Please steer clear of topics that might be dramatic and extremely significant, but would involve you in interviewing or observing particularly vulnerable people. Also please avoid formulating a project that would require clinical skills and training to complete - focus not on the psychological, but instead on the cultural, social, or political (there is another class for those interested in doing a senior project that is primarily psychological in focus). Linfield students have written senior projects on everything from the social significance of tattoos, to scuba diving clubs or female skateboarders as specific sports sub-cultures, to how therapists or police construct social boundaries to protect themselves from burnout, to the socialization of children through art, to employee participation in workplace decision making or employee responses to camera surveillance, and many other topics. Many senior projects are available for viewing at Northrup Library.

FINAL NOTE: I will be traveling from late August through most of the month of September. I will be home by September 23. Should you need to e-mail me, I will answer any e-mail you send me shortly after that. Please put "SOA 308" in the subject line of your e-mail (I get upwards of 50 e-mails a day, so it is important to signal to me that yours is related to the class if you want a timely response). I look forward to meeting you and working with you this term.