

SOC.355: QUANTITATIVE METHODS OF SOCIAL RESEARCH

Spring 2011

LECTURE: PSY-236 (2:00-3:15 p.m.) Tues-Thur**LAB:** PSY-304 (3:30-4:20 p.m.) Tues-Thur

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Office Hours: PSY-134

Tues: 12:30-1:30 p.m. & 4:25-6:25 p.m.

Thurs: 12:30-1:30 p.m.

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TEXT (required): **THE PRACTICE OF SOCIAL RESEARCH**, 12th ed. (Earl Babbie) - Bundle includes the student edition of the SPSS (v.17.0) statistical package.

FLASH DRIVE (required): You will need to purchase a USB flash drive for our computer lab exercises. I would recommend that the flash drive size be no less than 1 gigabyte.

COURSE DESCRIPTION OBJECTIVES

We live in a very complex society, the patterns and trends of which cannot be readily understood at an intuitive, personal level. Similarly, most of the ideas that are of greatest interest to sociologists or other behavioral scientists are abstract concepts (e.g., attraction, inequality, prejudice and discrimination, social stratification, power, and so on), rather than specific, concrete things that can be directly observed. Quantitative research methods are essential in helping us get some sort of valid and reliable picture of how people function in collective units of all sizes. They make it possible to translate ideas into measurable data, then analyze those data in ways that will allow us to draw meaningful, practical conclusions.

All data are not equally useful. The research expression "GIGO" ("garbage in, garbage out") is true at every phase of the process. Each step, from conceptualization through literature review, research design, sampling, data collection, data analysis, and drawing conclusions must be done very carefully and systematically. There is probably no other area in sociology where a very small mistake can have such major consequences. Your best tool for evaluating research conclusions is an understanding of how the process works, and the advantages and limitations of specific approaches or techniques. And the best way to acquire this understanding in realistic, practical terms is to experience the research process first hand. This course is designed to provide you that experience. More specifically, you will have the opportunity to:

- (1) Discuss the basic approach, logic, and strategy of the research process.
- (2) Understand different approaches to conducting research, and their potential for providing answers to sociological questions.
- (3) Put your knowledge of research methods and techniques into practice in a project you conduct from design through analysis and evaluation.

If what I have described above sounds like a big job you've understood the plan for the class. On the other hand, I feel that you will probably have no more practical course during your college career. In the years to come you will be increasingly bombarded with statistics on birth, marriage, divorce, and death rates. Every week or so there will be some new finding that says you should stop eating this and start eating that if you want to live longer. At work you will see piles of tables, graphs, and charts, all of which may or may not be useful in helping you understand social life better or work more effectively. You should be in a better position to make that decision after you complete the course.

TEACHING/LEARNING PHILOSOPHY

In any class I teach I would like to create an atmosphere which allows the student to learn and retain as much of the course content and perspective as possible. I personally feel that such an atmosphere is more likely when instructor/student interaction is as informal and nonthreatening as we can make it and still meet the basic requirements I have set for the course. I also invite you to ask questions in class and/or discuss the course content and its practical implications for your life after class or whenever else we have the opportunity. If you do this I believe the course can be a more meaningful and lasting experience..

EVALUATION AND ATTENDANCE

(1) **Exams** - We will have 2 exams. Each exam will each be worth 150 points. I will provide review

materials prior to each exam. (Each exam = 24.8% of your total grade)

- (2) **Exercises** - Throughout the course we will have group discussion exercises based on the text and/or lecture material, or whatever phase of the research project is relevant at that point. We will also have a number of lab exercises. Satisfactory completion of each exercise will be worth 5 points. There will be about 21 of these. **Note:** The purpose of the exercises is to encourage you to keep up with your reading and allow you to share your information and observations with others in the class. Although some make-ups of exercises will be permitted, make-ups are strongly discouraged because they defeat both aspects of the basic objectives of the exercises. (17.4% of your total grade)
- (3) **Project Design Paper** - This is the planning phase of research project. This paper should clearly, systematically, and precisely describe what you plan to do, and why you plan to do it. After reading your Project Design paper, any competent researcher should be able to follow your step-by-step Instructions and conduct a study that would be directly comparable to yours. This paper will be worth 100 points. I will provide a detailed format sheet that identifies the areas you need to cover. (16.5% of your total grade)
- (4) **Project Execution, Analysis, and Critical Evaluation Paper** - In this paper you present your data, analysis, conclusions, and critique of your project. It will also be worth 100 points, and again I will provide a format sheet that will clarify exactly what you need to accomplish. (16.5% of your total grade)

Note: Any papers you submit in the class should be typed, double-spaced, and written at a level of competence that demonstrates "college level writing skills." That means that each paper should have a clear logical structure, precision in your choice of wording and phrasing, and careful attention to clerical and presentational details (like possible typographical errors or misspellings).

Your overall grade will depend on your ranking on a final cumulative distribution of points for all course requirements. However, so you will know where you stand at any particular point in the course, I will try to work up a running cumulative distribution of scores after each exam and paper. Cutpoints for letter grades are: A=90-100% B=80-89% C=65-79% D=50-64% F=49% and below.

You will not be graded on attendance per se. But since lectures, class discussions, and handouts which may be distributed during class will be an integral part of the course, it is your responsibility to arrange to obtain notes and course-related materials and information for any class session you have to miss. In this regard, it would be a very good idea to get to know at least one or two other students in the class and exchange phone numbers so you will know what information or materials you will be responsible for if you are absent.

EXAM MAKE-UP POLICY

For completely unavoidable situations I will try to work something out. However, as a minimum you should:

- (1) Have a very serious and valid reason for missing an exam.
- (2) Contact me (not the Sociology Department secretary) by phone before the scheduled exam. My home number is on the front sheet of this syllabus.
- (3) Make up the missed exam by our next class meeting.

PLAGIARISM AND COURSE WITHDRAWAL

Plagiarism - Any assignments you turn in for this class should be the products of your own academic efforts. Plagiarism is a serious academic offense and should not happen - ever. If you have any question about what constitutes plagiarism, see the explanation at <http://www.csulb.edu/library/subj/plagiarism/> . Also see the CSULB policy on plagiarism and cheating in the online catalog.

Withdrawal - Sometimes emergencies or other unforeseen circumstances make it necessary for you to withdraw from a course. If so, make sure you do so in a timely manner that will be the least costly to you and your academic career. Check this semester's deadlines for two particularly important deadlines: (1) the deadline to drop without receiving a "W" for the course; and the deadline to drop without the Dean's permission. Also see the full description of CSULB withdrawal policy in the online catalog.

Specific week-by-week reading assignments will be distributed separately for each exam.