

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS
Department of Sociology
SOC 5200: Research Methods (Thurs, 2:00-4:50; Chilton 270)
Fall, 2007

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I. Learning Objectives:

- A. To understand the relationship between research and theory
- B. To discover and understand the various research methods that are used to conduct social research
- C. To develop the research and writing skills needed to conduct a research project and write a scholarly paper based on the findings.

II. Learning components

- A. Readings: To help meet the objectives, the following books are required reading:

REQUIRED: Babbie, E. (2004, 10th Edition). The Practice of Social Research. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Co.
Fowler, F.J. (2002). Survey Research Methods. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
Pyrzczak, F. and Bruce R.R. (2005, 5th Edition). Writing Empirical Research Reports. Glendale, CA: Pyrczak Publishing.

- B. Class time: will be focused on the objectives through lectures, class discussions, small group activities, guest speakers and conducting a major survey research project.
- C. Class Survey Research Project: Each student will be responsible for participation in a telephone survey project where he/she will choose one of three possible survey topics to study, review social science literature on the

topic, identify independent and dependent variables, help develop a survey instrument, survey UNT students randomly selected from the UNT telephone directory, analyze the data, and write a research paper that describes the findings. Steps in conducting the research project and in writing two papers is described below.

III. Course Policies

- A. Class Attendance: regular and punctual class attendance is expected. It will be difficult to master all the material if class is missed. Three unexcused absences will reduce the student's final grade one letter-grade and four absences will result in being dropped from the class.

Frequent tardiness to class and leaving class early will also affect final grades.

- B. Academic integrity: as the student guidebook points out, academic integrity is required. Plagiarism and cheating will result in failure and a report to the Dean.
- C. Special Needs: UNT's counseling center provides free career and personal counseling to UNT students (up to 8 sessions per year). Appointments can be made by calling 940-565-2741. For our class, appropriate adjustments and auxiliary aid are available for persons with disabilities. See Dr. Yeatts and/or call 817-565-2456 (TDD access 1-800-735-2989).
- D. Cell Phones: please turn off phones prior to coming to class. They should not be on during class or exams.
- E. Laptops may be used in class if they are unobtrusive. Any complaints by students will result in the laptop not being allowed.

F. Grading: final grades will be based on the following:

1. Two (2) tests will be given. The format is expected to include multiple choice, short answer and discussion questions. The tests will be focused exclusively on reading materials and class notes. A study guide for each test will be provided on Dr. Yeatts' web page. Each study guide is designed to help the student do well on the test.
2. Two (2) research papers are required. These are described in detail below.

September 27, turn in questions for survey instrument

October 4, First Paper 15%

October 11, test 1 25%

November 29, Second Paper 25%

December 13, test 2 (during final exam period) 35%

3. Class Participation: Those who contribute meaningful, thoughtful, and knowledgeable comments/ideas will receive extra points added to their final grade if their final grade is close to the next higher grade. For example, an 88 would be raised to a 90.

IV. **Topics to be Covered/Reading Assignments:**

Week 1 (August 30): Babbie, Introduction and C1 (science);
Fowler C1 and C2 (sampling)

Week 2 (September 6): Babbie, Chapter 2 (theory), Appendix A (library);
Fowler C3 (sample design)

- Lilly, a UNT librarian, will provide guidance on how/where to find appropriate research articles (see Steps for Completing Research Project below).
- Students should be examining existing research literature for interesting topics dealing with the attitudes of college students (e.g., attitudes toward legalizing marijuana, attitudes toward the legal drinking age of 21).

Week 3 (September 13): Babbie, C4 (research design); Fowler, C4 and C5 (data collection and conceptualization)

- Prior to class, each student should choose two or three articles that are of most interest; copy these articles and bring them to class; be prepared to provide an overview of these articles to the class in order to help the class decide if one or more of the articles provide interesting topics and surveys to replicate.
- Class will select three issues/topics related to college student attitudes that will be examined through a telephone survey.
- Each student will select one of these to be his/her research topic for his/her research papers.

Week 4 (September 20): Babbie, C5 (Conceptualization);

Fowler, C6 and C7 (questions and interviewing)

- Each student should continue to identify scholarly research articles and books that focus specifically on her/his research topic. Students are welcome to share resources/citations with each other as long as everyone has spent time seeking out relevant research papers.
- Identify the independent variables examined in these articles.
- Each student should determine the independent variables she/he will examine within her/his research paper.

Week 5 (September 27): Babbie, C7 (sampling);

Fowler, C8 and C9 (analysis and ethics)

- Each student should have identified telephone survey questions that have been used in prior research projects (usually provided in the scholarly publications) to measure the dependent and independent variables that will be included in his/her research paper. If the student cannot find an "existing" question for a particular variable, then the student may construct a question to be used to measure the variable.
- Each student will turn into the instructor: (1) the dependent variable that she/he will examine, (2) one or more survey questions that have been/can be used to measure the dependent variable, (3) the independent variables that she/he will examine,

and (4) for each independent variable, one or more survey questions that have been/can be used to measure it.

First Paper Due October 4

Week 6 (October 4): First Paper due

- Review draft survey instrument

Week 7 (October 11): Babbie, C6 and C9 (indexes, survey research);
Fowler, C10 and C11 (error)

- Pre-test instrument in class, revise instrument

Test 1 covering Babbie, C1, C2, C4-6, C7, C9; Fowler Book (October 18)

Week 8 (October 18): Test 1

- Receive telephone numbers and begin survey of UNT students. Each student should log his/her hours and spend a total of 5 hours calling/interviewing students over the next two weeks (the 5 hours includes all the time spent calling as well as interviewing students).

Week 9 (October 25): Babbie, Chapter 8, 14 (analysis, experiments);
Pyrchak, C1

- Turn in all the questionnaires that have been completed.
- Discuss how interviewing is going so far. What problems have been encountered? Continue interviewing over next week.
- Learn how to create a data file.

Week 10 (November 1): Babbie, Chapter 10 (qualitative);
Pyrchak, C2-4

- Each student should have completed five hours of interviewing by this date. Turn in all completed questionnaires, questionnaire phone numbers, and log of interviewing activities.
- Discuss any additional problems.
- Review some basic analysis techniques that can be used for the research paper. For example, the student may use the t-test to

examine the relationship between the dependent and independent variables or perhaps cross-tabulations.

Week 11 (November 8): Babbie, Chapter 13 (qualitative);
Pyrzczak, C5-7

- Each student will receive an email prior to class that provides a copy of the data set that includes all the students that were interviewed. Each student should bring this data set to class.
- Each student should bring to class a sheet that provides his/her dependent variable and the specific independent variables that he/she plans to examine for the research paper

Week 12 (November 15): Babbie, Chapters 11 (unobtrusive);
Pyrzczak, C8-10

- Each student should have performed some basic data analysis to examine the relationship between the selected dependent variable and the selected independent variables.
- Each student will review their initial findings for the class. Ideally, the student will have created tables that display the data analysis and will have made a copy of the table(s) to hand out to each student.

Week 13 (November 22): Babbie, Chapter 12 (evaluation); Pyrczak, C11 & C12

- No class meeting due to Thanksgiving week

Second Paper Due November 29

Week 14 (November 29): Turn in Second Final Paper

- For 3/4 of the students in the class, each student will present her/his findings and hand out any tables that were included in her/his research paper.

Week 15 (December 6): Babbie, Chapter 3 (ethics); Pyrczak, C13 & C14

- The remaining students will present their findings along with tables.

Test 2 covering Babbie, C3, C8, C10-14; Pyszczak Book (December 13)

V. Steps for Completing the Research Project:

1. Do **library search** and help the class **select two or three research topics (September 9)**. The two or three topics (dependent variables) will need to be related to college student attitudes toward an issue and need to have been studied by social scientists. That is, there should be existing articles on the topic. Each student will select a single topic for her/his research paper.
2. Do **library search (September 20)** on the specific topic chosen in order to identify social science research that has addressed the topic. Find at least five scholarly articles/books. (not web citations).
3. **Identify independent variables (September 27)** believed to affect student attitudes regarding your topic. The publications identified in step 2 will help you determine the independent variables (or factors) currently believed to affect a student's attitude regarding the topic.
4. **Variables to discuss in first paper**. The information found from steps 2 and 3 will help you to prepare your first paper described in detail below (see "Required Papers"). For example, one of the three topics that might be selected by the class is: How do college students feel about a drinking age of 21? In this case the dependent variable is "attitude toward drinking age of 21." The independent variables would be factors believed to influence a college student's attitude toward this. The library search would identify scholarly articles that have examined college student "attitudes toward a drinking age of 21" and tested the effects of various independent variables such as age, year in college, income of parents, and past experiences with alcohol.
5. **Develop survey questions** to measure the dependent and independent variables that will be described in the first paper (**September 27**). In the above example, a question(s) would be developed to determine the respondents attitude toward the death penalty as well as questions to determine the respondent's age, income, and race. Then, after the data are collected, you can examine whether our survey data support the research you found.

6. **Write the first paper** based on the literature review. This will include an introduction and literature review. How to write the first paper is described in detail below (**October 4**).
7. **Help develop a survey instrument** collectively with the rest of the class, (**October 4**). The class will not develop one survey instrument per student but, instead, a single survey instrument that includes the questions needed by all the students in class.
8. **Pre-test** the survey instrument (**October 11**).
9. **Conduct the survey** by spending 5 hours calling and interviewing students (**completed by November 1**).
10. **Analyze the data** (**November 15**). If you haven't had much statistics you can simply rely on a comparison of means that we will learn how to do in class and from the reading assignments.
11. **Write a research paper** that uses the survey data (Second paper, described in detail below (due **November 29**)).

REQUIRED PAPERS

First Paper: The first paper will include two sections: an introduction (1 or 2 pages) and a review of the literature focused on your topic (roughly 5 pages). The paper should have two main sub-headings within it--one being the "Introduction" and the other "A Review of the Literature" (they may have different titles than this but there should be two major sub-headings within the paper. You will turn the paper in to Dr. Yeatts, receive it back with comments on how to improve it, and then revise it and make it a part of your final paper (the final paper consists of an introduction and review of the literature, and also, a methods section, findings and implications section, and conclusions).

As with papers for publication or a report for a supervisor, your first paper should begin with an **INTRODUCTION** that "grabs" the reader by explaining why the topic is important and ends by stating the purpose of the research paper (1 to 2 pages for the introduction).

This is followed by a **LITERATURE REVIEW** to explain what has been found by researchers so far regarding the topic. The literature review should cite at least five scholarly research articles (no web articles unless they are copies from a journal article, no magazines such as Time or Newsweek). Scholarly research articles use the scientific method to examine an issue. In the literature review you should address: what has past research shown us to be the most important

factors affecting the college students' attitudes toward the topic. It is important that, when you report the findings from these earlier studies, they are provided in a logical way and with sub-headings. That is, the literature review should be organized into logical sub-sections with a heading for each sub-section (i.e., if you want a good grade use headings). The number of sub-sections should be determined by the number of independent variables you have identified in the literature as affecting a college student's attitudes regarding your topic. For example, if you are examining the factors affecting attitudes toward marijuana use, each sub-section of your literature review would discuss a different factor found in previous literature to be important. You might find in the literature that income of parents, high school grade point average, and experience with marijuana are factors affecting a college student's attitudes. You would then have a unique subsection (with its own heading) for each of these factors. In other words, you would review the existing literature to identify independent variables believed to affect the attitude and then review each independent variable in its own sub-section of the literature review. Within each of these sub-sections, you would review what various researchers found and the explanations they have given for their findings.

The beginning of the literature review should let the reader know what sub-sections will follow. The literature review often concludes with a summary of the important factors. In some cases, you might want to present a proposition for each of the independent variables. For example:

Proposition 1: Positive experiences with marijuana are associated with an attitude to legalize marijuana.

The propositions can be provided as a part of the literature review conclusion. Or, each proposition might come at the end of the corresponding sub-section. For example, proposition 1 above might come at the end of the sub-section titled: Experiences with Marijuana and Attitudes Towards Legalization.

Second Paper: The second paper will have five sections with the first two being the **INTRODUCTION** and **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**. These first two sections will be a revision of your first paper after obtaining comments from Dr. Yeatts.

The third section of the paper will be the **METHODS** section and will be similar to that found in published papers. It should be divided into sub-sections with each

sub-section having its own heading. The sections should include (1) the data collection procedures followed, (2) how the dependent and independent variables were measured, (3) statistical procedures used and why, and (4) limitations of the research. The first paragraph of the methods section should inform the reader of the major sub-sections to be covered.

The **FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS** section of the second paper should present the data within a table(s) and review for the reader what was found. The implications portion should relate what was found to the previous research reviewed in the literature. Does the data confirm what has been found in previous studies? How does it and how doesn't it? It would help to have a subsection (and corresponding sub-heading) for each independent variable (e.g., income, age, education) and within each subsection a discussion of how the findings relate to the past research and implications of the findings.

A **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS** section should be included. This provides an overview of how the findings have contributed to our knowledge of the subject. For example, you may have found that certain factors are not as important as perhaps another study has suggested and/or you have found several additional factors that appear to be affecting a college student's attitude but have received little attention in the literature.

