

**UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS**  
**Department of Sociology**  
**SOC 4870.002: Social Research Methods**  
**Environmental Science, Rm 115, 6:00-8:50**

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**Office Hours: T/TH: 12:30-1:30**

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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 book is required reading:

REQUIRED: Babbie, E. (2004). The Practice of Social Research. Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Co.

B. Class time: will be focused on the objectives through lectures, class discussions, small group activities, and possibly movies and guest lecturers.

C. Class Survey Research Project: Each student will be responsible for participation in a 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 5 UNT students, enter the data into electronic form (using SPSS), 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. Four absences from class will reduce the student's final grade one letter-grade. No excuses will be accepted.

Therefore, that you should make an effort to not miss any classes so that, if you are sick, you can use one of your three “free” classes. Each three-hour class missed beyond the three-class limit will reduce your final grade one letter-grade.

Frequent tardiness to class and leaving class early (3 or more times) 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: 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. No cell phones may be used or visible during tests.
- E. Grading: final grades will be based on the following:
  - 1. Three (3) tests will be given. The format is expected to include multiple choice and discussion questions. No cell phones should be turned on and they should be put away. You are responsible for using the bathroom prior to the beginning of the test.

September 23, First Paper

September 30, test 1 20%

October 28, test 2 20%

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December 9, First and Second Paper 40%

December 16, test 3 (during final exam period) 20%

- 2. 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.
- 3. No cell phones may be used during class and they should be stored away during tests.

F. How to Study for Tests:

1. Read carefully and give thought to the assigned chapters to be covered on the test.
2. Read the assignments before they are discussed in class.
3. Learn the major terms used in the chapter headings, those defined within the chapter and those listed at the end of the chapter.
4. Know the answers to any practice discussion questions you might receive from me prior to the test.

**IV. Topics to be Covered/Reading Assignments: See Web Site for changes that may occur as needed throughout the semester**

(all "Chapter" assignments refer to Babbie's text book)

Week 1 (September 2): Introduction and Chapter 1

- Choose two or three research topics

Week 2 (September 9): Chapter 2, Appendix A

- Learn how to search for scientific research papers on a topic

Week 3 (September 16): Chapter 3 and Chapter 17

Week 4 (September 23): Chapter 4, **First Paper Due**

**Test 1 on chapters 1-4 and 17, to be given at the beginning of class (September 30)**

Week 5 (September 30): Chapter 5

- In groups: identify independent variables

Week 6 (October 7): Chapters 5 and 6

- Bring questions to be included in the survey instrument (these should allow you to measure the concepts in your literature review)
- Develop survey instrument

Week 7 (October 14): Chapter 7

- Pre-test instrument in class, revise instrument

Week 8 (October 21): Chapter 8

**Test 2 on chapters 5-8, to be given at the beginning of class (October 28)**

Week 9 (October 28): after the test half the class (group 1) will attend the computing lab and the other half (group 2) will be dismissed. For those attending the lab:

- Spend time in computer lab learning how to use SPSS (Chilton Hall, Room 388)
- Since the Computer Lab has only 32 seats, half the class will meet in the lab after the exam and the other half will meet in the lab from 7:30-8:45 the following week. Please sign up for group 1 or group 2.

Week 10 (November 4): Chapter 14 and 9; computer lab for group 2

- group 2: spend time in computer lab learning how to use SPSS (Chilton Hall, Room 388) during second half of class

Week 11 (November 11): Group 1 in computer lab from 6:00-7:20 and Group 2 in computer lab from 7:20-8:45 to work on data analysis.

Week 12 (November 18): Chapters 9 and 10

Week 13 (November 25): Thanksgiving week

Week 14 (December 2): Chapters 11 and 12

Week 15 (December 9): **Turn in final paper**

- Review findings from student analyses

**Test 3 on chapters 9-12 and 14 to be given during the final exam period (December 16)**

## V. Steps for Completing Research Project:

1. Help the class **select two or three research topics (September 9)**. The two or three topics (dependent variables) will need to be related to student attitudes toward an issue and need to have been studied by social scientists. You will select one of these for the topic of your research paper. Topics that have been used in the past include: assisted suicide, affirmative action, and the death penalty. Other possible topics include, for example, legalization of marijuana and sex education in public schools.
2. Do **library search** on the specific topic you have chosen in order to identify social science research that has addressed the topic (find at least five scholarly articles/books).
3. **Identify independent variables** believed to affect student attitudes regarding your topic. The publications identified in step 2 would help you determine the independent variables (or factors) currently believed to affect a person's attitude regarding the topic. The information found would then be reviewed by you in a brief paper (First Paper, described in detail below). For example, What are the factors that influence a person's attitude for or against the death penalty? Perhaps your library search identifies articles that show that age, income, and race are key factors. The library search would be done to identify any studies that have examined your topic and from these studies you would identify the factors affecting attitudes toward the topic.
4. **Write the first paper** based on the literature review. this will include an introduction and literature review. The first paper is described in detail below (due **September 23**).
5. **Develop survey question(s)** to measure the dependent and independent variables of interest (**October 7**). 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. **Help develop a survey instrument** collectively with the rest of the class, **October 7** (not developing one survey instrument per student but, instead, a single survey instrument that includes the questions of all the students).
  7. **Pre-test** the survey instrument (**October 14**).
  8. **Conduct the survey** by having 5 students complete the questionnaire (must be completed by **November 4**).
  9. **Enter the information from your completed survey instruments into a database** (**November 4**).
- 10 **Analyze the data** (**November 11**). 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 **December, 2**).

## 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 (3-5 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 me, 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, review of the literature, methods section, findings and implications, and conclusions). As with papers for publication or a report for a supervisor, your first paper should begin with an **INTRODUCTION** which "grabs" the reader by explaining why the topic is "so very" important and states 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 (for example the American Sociological Review, The Gerontologist, Journal of Marriage and Family). In the literature review you should address: what has past research shown us to be the most important factors affecting the topic. For example, what factors affect a person's attitudes toward capital punishment?

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 heading). The number of sub-sections should be determined by the number of independent variables you have identified in the literature as affecting a person's attitudes regarding your topic. For example, if you are examining the factors affecting attitudes toward capital punishment 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, age, and education are factors affecting a person's attitude toward capital punishment. You would then have a subsection (with its own heading) discussing how income has been found to affect attitudes toward capital punishment. Another subsection (with its own heading) would review studies that have found education to be important. And there would be a third subsection for education. In other words, you would review the existing literature to identify sub-areas believed to affect the attitude and then review each of these in a separate sub-section of your literature review. You would review what various researchers found and the explanations they have given for their findings (for example, perhaps the literature has found that higher income people prefer capital punishment because they believe it makes them feel safer).

The beginning of the literature review should let the reader know what sub-sections follow. The literature review should conclude by describing how the survey will allow you to contribute to the existing body of literature on your topic (e.g. it will be used to determine the accuracy of previous research and/or identify possible new causes for the attitudes) The literature review should be around 3-5 pages.

**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 me.

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 (if any) 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 coresponding 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.

A **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS** section should be included. This discusses 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 person's attitude but have received little attention in the literature.

