

## **Sociology 363: Methods of Social Research Spring Quarter 2017**

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### **Course Description:**

Sociology is a social science. For the purposes of this course, the emphasis is on science. Sociologists employ a broad range of research methods to gather factual information about the social world, analyze that information, and report the findings of their research to various publics. This is the research process through which sociologists generate valid and reliable knowledge about our very diverse social world. Standards of ethics and scientific rigor guide the research process: we strive to conduct our research in an ethical manner, and generate knowledge that is socially useful and scientifically relevant. This course provides an introduction to the sociological research process as a whole, and the most important specific methods used to conduct empirical sociological research. The strengths, weaknesses, and ethical issues associated with each of these methods are also reviewed. Most sociology courses provide an introduction to the main questions, theories, puzzles and findings in a specific thematic subarea within the discipline of sociology, such as social inequality, political sociology, organizational sociology, or some other sociological subfield. In contrast, this course provides an introduction to the research methods used to generate the sociological knowledge that forms the subject matter of those thematic courses.

### **Course Goals:**

More specifically, the main goals of the course are, for students to:

- Develop an understanding of the fact that sociological knowledge is based on research that is conducted according to rigorous methodological principles;
- gain an introduction to the main ethical issues related to sociological research, and learn the discipline's current standards of ethical sociological research
- become familiar with the main goals of sociological research, and the main categories of methods used in sociological research;
- become acquainted with the most important specific methods used in sociological research (e.g. surveys, observation, experiments, etc.), including the main principles, issues, strengths and weaknesses related to each of these methods;
- improve skills in critically reviewing other characterizations of the social world (such as sociological journal articles, reports from non-profit organizations, etc.)
- learn the principles and basic steps of constructing a research proposal;

### **Course Requirements and Policies:**

- **Overview:** Course requirements (see below) include attentive reading of the assigned texts, regular, active and constructive participation in Canvas discussion boards, and completion of other written assignments (exams and research paper).
- **Readings & participation:** Complete the assigned readings listed for the readings in this syllabus. Participate regularly in discussion boards a constructive and informed manner (i.e. based on attentive reading of the assigned chapters and attention to preceding discussion).

- **Assignment due dates:**
  - **Quizzes:** The weekly quizzes open on Friday afternoon of each week, and remain open until 11:59 pm on June 9<sup>th</sup>. The quizzes cover the chapters listed for that week in which they open.
  - **The final proposal** is due by 11:59 pm on Friday, June 9<sup>th</sup>.
  - **All other assignments** are due by 11:59 pm on the Sunday of the week in which they are listed in the schedule below.
  - **Late assignments:** 1 point will be deducted for each 24 hour period that begins after due date but before assignment is submitted.
- Unless otherwise announced, all assignments except quizzes and the final research proposal, are due by 11:59 pm on Sunday of the week in which they are listed in the syllabus schedule below.
- **Content application assignments (10 %):** there are 5 content application assignments – most of these take the form of discussion board (DB) assignments. Assignment instructions are posted at the beginning (Monday) of the week in which they are due.
- **Quizzes (50 %):** There are ten quizzes in this course, one per week. The quizzes are not explicitly cumulative – each quiz covers the chapters assigned that week, but some chapters build on material from previous chapters, so it is not desirable or possible to eliminate all references to earlier chapters covered in previous quizzes. More details about the format and precise dates/times for the exams will be posted to the course blackboard. The quizzes open Friday afternoon/evening of each week, and then remain available throughout the rest of the quarter. All quizzes close at 11:59 pm on Friday, June 9.
- **Research Proposal (35 %):** Over the quarter, course participants will develop a **research proposal**. The research proposal assignment is broken up into 3 parts, which are due at different points throughout the quarter. More detailed instructions and guidelines for the various parts of the assignment will be published in the “Proposal Assignment” module, in advance of the due dates for the proposal assignments. The research proposal assignment is different from a typical course paper assignment – there are very specific requirements regarding the structure and content, so it is important that you read and follow the directions for each of the 3 parts of the assignment. It is also extremely important that you read the general introduction to the research proposal assignment – it is posted in the “miscellaneous” folder.
- **Literature Research Posts (5 %):** There are 5 Literature Research Post (LRP) assignments – these are discussion board assignments, due roughly on a bi-weekly basis. They are linked to your research proposal assignment. For these assignments you must find a recent, empirical, peer-reviewed sociological research article that pertains to your IV or DV, and post the article, along with a brief statement, to the discussion board. It is important to read, understand, and follow the guidelines for these assignments.
- **Extra Credit Policy:** There are no extra credit opportunities in this class. Please do not make individual requests for extra credit.
- **Policies regarding academic integrity (plagiarism):** Students will be held to Central Washington University’s standards of scholarly integrity (see CWU Student Code). In particular, all written work submitted in this class (including discussion board posts, exams, and papers) must be done independently. Furthermore, in all written assignments, including discussion board assignments, sources must be indicated for all ideas, language or content drawn from external sources of any kind (including but not limited to: the course textbook, articles or books, movies/videos, my lecture notes, other classes, “the internet”, etc.). **Sources** must be listed to avoid plagiarism, which is a violation of the CWU Student Code.
  - Any written work, **including Blackboard discussion board posts**, which uses external sources but does not properly identify those sources, will be treated as an

attempt to plagiarize, and will result in serious sanctions (zero grade on assignment or failing grade in the course, depending on my assessment of the seriousness of the violation of the CWU student code; in any case: involvement of CWU Office of Student Affairs). Since it is impossible to determine when someone “just forgot” to identify external sources, and when someone intended to deceive, I treat all cases in which external sources are used but not cited as cases of intentional plagiarism.

- If you are unsure about whether / how to correctly cite external sources, do not hesitate to seek advice from the CWU writing center, or contact me directly, either by email or in person (during office hours or by appointment).
- When in doubt, include the reference to the source.
- Regarding format, any standard format (such as Chicago Manual of Style, or American Journal of Sociology format) is fine. These can be found online.
- **I have a zero-tolerance policy on plagiarism and other violations of academic integrity. This statement constitutes the only “warning” I will give – the first violation of this policy will result in sanctions.**

- **Grading and Grade Point Distribution:**

- There are 101 % possible in this class. The grade distribution is roughly as follows:

▪ 90-101 %	=	A range (e.g. 91 = A-, etc.)
▪ 80-89 %	=	B range
▪ 70-79 %	=	C range
▪ 60-69 %	=	D range
▪ < 60 %	=	Failing grade

- **Final Grade Calculation 99 % total:**

- 10 quizzes @ 5% each: 50%
- 1 research proposal in 3 parts: 35%
  - Part 1: Candidate research questions: 5%
  - Part 2: Research question, in context 10%
  - Part 3: Final proposal: 20%
- 5 content application assignments @ 2 % each: 10%
- 5 Literature research posts (LRPs) @ 1% each: 5%

**Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:** Any student who feels s/he may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the Office for Disability Services (see their website: <http://www.cwu.edu/~dss/cms/>) to coordinate documentation and accommodations. It is the student’s responsibility to also contact me in a timely manner regarding accommodations.

**Required Text/Readings (available through CWU bookstore):**

- Babbie, Earl 2017. The Basics of Social Research. 7<sup>th</sup> edition. Cengage.

## Schedule of Readings, Quizzes & Assignments

### Week 1: March 28 – April 2

- Introduction to the Class
- Readings:
  - Ch. 1. Human Inquiry and Science
- Assignments, etc.
  - Introductions Discussion Board: (not graded)
  - Proposal part 1: Propose 2 “candidate” research questions
  - Quiz 1 opens Friday afternoon

### Week 2: April 3 – 9

- Readings:
  - Ch. 2. Paradigms, Theory, and Research
  - Ch. 3. The Ethics and Politics of Social Research.
- Assignments, etc.
  - Application Assignment 1: Training in the Responsible Conduct of Research; post Certification of Completion of Training
  - Quiz 2 opens Friday afternoon

### Week 3: April 10 – 16

- Readings
  - Ch. 4. Research Design.
  - Ch. 5. Conceptualization, Operationalization, and Measurement.
- Assignments, etc.
  - Application Assignment 2: discussion board on conceptualization, operationalization and measurement of independent and dependent variables
  - LRP 1: IV
  - Quiz 3 opens Friday afternoon

### Week 4: April 17 – 23

- Readings
  - Ch. 7. The Logic of Sampling
- Assignments, etc.
  - LRP 2: DV
  - Application Assignment 3: discussion board on sampling
  - Quiz 4 opens Friday afternoon

### Week 5: April 24 – April 30

- Readings
  - Ch. 8. Experiments
- Assignments, etc.
  - Proposal Part 2: Research question in context, discussion of IV & DV, Sampling;
  - Application Assignment 4a: discussion board on experimental design
  - Quiz 5 opens Friday afternoon

**Week 6: May 1 – 7**

- Readings
  - Ch. 6. Indexes, Scales, and Typologies
  - Ch. 9. Survey Research
- Assignments, etc.
  - Application Assignment 4b: discussion board on indexes, scales, typologies and survey questions
  - LRP 3: IV
  - Quiz 6 opens Friday afternoon

**Week 7: May 8 – 14**

- Readings
  - Ch. 10. Qualitative Field Research.
  - Ch. 11. Unobtrusive Research
- Assignments, etc.
  - Application assignment 5a: discussion board on qualitative research design
  - Quiz 7 opens Friday afternoon

**Week 8: May 15 – 21**

- Readings
  - Ch. 12. Evaluation Research.
- Assignments, etc.
  - LRP 4: DV
  - Quiz 8 opens Friday afternoon

**Week 9: May 22 – 28**

- Readings
  - Ch. 13. Qualitative Data Analysis.
- Assignments, etc.
  - Application assignment 5b: discussion board on qualitative data analysis
  - Quiz 9 opens Friday afternoon

**Week 10: May 29 – June 4**

- Readings
  - Ch. 14. Quantitative Data Analysis.
  - Ch. 15. Reading and Writing Social Research
- Assignments, etc.
  - LRP 5: your choice – IV or DV
  - Quiz 10 opens Friday afternoon

**Week 11: June 6 – 9: Finals**

- Assignments, etc.
  - Final proposal **due by midnight Friday night, June 9)**