

Introduction to Research Methods

Course Syllabus, Fall 2011

Lecturer: Aida Bekturova
MSc Development Studies with a major in Sociology,
Lund University, Sweden
Department of Sociology, AUCA

Office hour: Tue; Thu 15:35-16:35
Office Tel: 66-10-92
Email: bekturova_a@mail.auca.kg

Introduction:

Social research is a way of finding answers to questions about the world around us. It involves a variety of methods and techniques to produce knowledge. This course is a general introduction to research methods and will cover three broad topics: the structure of social research, data collection, and data analysis.

Program Goals:

In this course, students will develop the skills needed to:

1. understand methods and techniques used in social science;
2. formulate research questions and design appropriate research;
3. collect data using a variety of methods;
4. develop ability to interpret research findings, and
5. coherently describe conclusions in written and oral forms.

Readings:

Required texts:

1. Babbie, Earl. 2001. *The Practice of the Social Research* (9th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing.
2. Berg B.L. 2001. *Qualitative Research Methods: For Social Sciences*, Boston: Allyn and Bacon

Supplementary texts:

1. Burns, Robert. 2000. *Introduction to Research Methods* (4th ed). London: SAGE Publications
2. Baker, Therese L. 1999. *Doing Social Research* (3rd ed.). Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill
3. Fowler, Floyd J. 1993. *Survey Research Methods* (2nd ed). Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publications
4. Rea, Loius M. and Richard A. Parker. 1997. *Designing and Conducting Survey Research*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers
5. Wesberg, Herbert F., Jon A. Krosnick, and Bruce D. Bowen.1996. *An Introduction to Survey Research, Polling, and Data Analysis* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publication.

Additionally, students will receive handouts and other small reading assignments on occasion. Assigned readings are subject to change with a prior notice.

Class participation and effort (10% of final grade)

Learning is an active process, so the classroom should likewise be active: questions and comments are actively welcomed so long as they are on-topic. Students will be held accountable for all class material on the exam and on the assignments.

Students have the option to make up for two missed classes with a prior notice by turning in a reflection essay of 400 words before the next class. The essay should be based on the course literature for the missed class.

Citations: It is crucial that you use proper citation style in your papers. Please use <http://www.easybib.com/>
Points will be decreased from your reflection and final papers if proper citations are not used.

Assignments (3*10=30% of the final grade)

There will be three home assignments throughout the semester. Unless otherwise stated, homework assignments are to be done by students individually. All assignments are due at the beginning of the classes on the day it is due (to be indicated later). Assignments will lose one letter grade for every day they are turned late.

Assignment 1.

Instructions for Assignment 1 will be distributed two weeks before the due date.

Assignment 2.

1. Write out your research question in one sentence, and elaborate on it in one paragraph. List three reasons why it is a good research question for you to investigate.
2. Find at least 3 academic articles related to your research project. Summarize each of the articles and demonstrate the relevance of the articles to your research questions.

Assignment 3.

Provide preliminary draft of the questionnaire that will be used to collect the data for the final research paper. The questionnaire should not exceed 4 pages.

Midterm and final exams (2*15 = 30% of final grade)

There will be two in-class, closed-book exams during the semester (see schedule below). A list of 10 questions will be disseminated one week prior to the exam. Out of 10 questions 3 will be randomly selected for the examinations. Each exam will contribute 15% to students' total grade. Final exam is cumulative. Exams will cover all material covered in lectures and in textbook.

Missed exams can be re-taken under following conditions:

1. students inform the instructor before the exam except the case of an illness;
2. students must have written documentation for the absence; and
3. the instructor determines when the make-up is taken and the format of the exam.

Written research project (Includes Assignment 4 and Assignment 5, 15% each = 30% of final grade)

Students will conduct a research project on the topic of their own choosing. Students will define the study problems and propose methods to address these problems, carry out data collection and analysis.

Assignment 4 should identify the research topic, key research questions (hypotheses) as well as present the related literature review. **Assignment 5 (final paper)** should include the revised Assignment 4, research methods section and preliminary analysis of data collected. The deadlines for the papers are indicated in the schedule. Further information on the research paper will be distributed later in the semester.

Grades will be assigned based on the following ranges:

Grade	Percent	Grade	Percent
A	93% and more	C	73 – 76%
A-	90 – 92%	C-	70 – 72%
B+	87 – 89%	D+	67 – 69%
B	83 – 86%	D	63 – 66%
B-	80 – 82%	D-	60 – 62%
C+	77 – 79%	F	59% and less

Grading Guidelines for Seminar and Lecture Participation

Active participation means that students are ready to articulate and explain their ideas, and listen and respond to others' ideas.

'A' – Students attend each lecture and seminar with questions about the lectures and readings. In engaged dialogues, they raise these questions for other students to discuss, and listen to contrary opinions. They initiate and develop critical issues concerning the seminar activities. They are well-structured and well-organised for the completion of their research projects.

'B' – Students complete their readings, but do not always reflect on the questions and issues raised during the lectures and seminars. Though they articulate their own views, they passively wait for others to initiate interesting issues. They are reasonably well organised for their own projects.

'C' – Students attend, prepare and listen attentively, but rarely enter into discussions. They are adequately prepared for their own projects.

'D' – Students are inconsistent in their attendance and preparations. They do not respect others' contributions. They are also poorly prepared for their own projects.

'F' – Students are consistently ill-prepared and have poor attendance. They are rude and disruptive. They also fail to show any signs of organising their own projects.

Please note that we reserve the right to change the schedule of the meetings and topics as and when necessary. Additional course information will be given during the semester.

Penalties for Plagiarism

First offence, minor (a few unconnected sentences). The lecturer will confront the student with the evidence and if an adequate explanation is not forthcoming they will deduct some marks (to be decided by the lecturer but normally up to 10% overall) from the piece of work in question and a note will be put on the student's file recording they have been caught plagiarising.

First offence, major (substantial plagiarism of more than a few isolated sentences). The lecturer will confront the student with the evidence and if an adequate explanation is not forthcoming the matter will be referred to the Head of Department for action. This will normally result in the piece of work in question being given a mark of zero. A note will be put on the student's file explaining the actions taken and the reasons for them.

Second or further offence. Once evidence has been presented the matter will be referred to the Head of Department for disciplinary action to be taken under University Rules.

1. Review of syllabus and introduction to social research

The problem: the heart of social research

Readings: Babbie, Chapters 1 and 2

2. Ethics in social research

Readings: Babbie, Chapter 18

3. Causation in social sciences. Research design

Readings: Babbie, Chapter 3 and 4

4. Conceptualization and measurement

Readings: Babbie, Chapter 5

5. Sampling theory. Sampling size and sampling methods.

Readings: Babbie, Chapter 8

NOTE: Assignment 1 is due on the seminar day at the beginning of the class

6. Research methods: Qualitative interviews.

Readings: Berg, Chapter 4

NOTE: Assignment 2 is due on the seminar day at the beginning of the class

7. Research methods: Qualitative interviews continued

NOTE: Midterm exam is scheduled for the seminar day. Paper 1 is due on the seminar day at the beginning of the class

8. FALL BREAK

9. Research methods: Content analysis

Readings: Babbie, Chapter 12

10. Research methods: Ethnographic research

Readings: Berg, Chapter 6

NOTE: Assignment 3 is due on the seminar day at the beginning of the class

11. Research methods: Survey Research. Developing effective questionnaires

Readings: Babbie, Chapter 7

12. Indexing and scaling. Administering the questionnaires

Readings: Babbie, Chapter 10

13. Data processing: coding, data entry.

Readings: Babbie, Chapter 14

NOTE: Assignment 4 is due on the seminar day at the beginning of the class

14. Data analysis: frequency table and graphing techniques

Readings: Babbie, Chapter 15

15. Data analysis: measures of central tendency and association

Readings: Babbie, Chapter 17

16. Course review

NOTE: Final exam is scheduled for the seminar day

17. Final paper (Assignment 5) is due in Week 17, on the day of the seminar, before 12 pm (noon... daytime)

Guide to essay and examination marking

Below you will find our guidelines for evaluating essays and examinations. Please note that these are *guidelines*. No two essay questions, let alone two essay answers, are the same. In addition, students are expected to improve across their years of study.

Students are encouraged to submit draft essays for instructor's comments (with a note Draft visibly on top page), re-worked essays can be submitted as final for grading.

Statement of Plagiarism

Plagiarism is a very serious offence and is considered as cheating under University rules. Plagiarism includes the following:

- Submission of work that is identical or substantially similar for assessment in more than one course, whether in the same department or in other departments.
- Passing off work as yours that is really the work of others (whether other students, text from a web page you have found or from a published source).
- Duplicating sentences or paragraphs from other works in whole or in part without accurate citation of the text being quoted and proper referencing of the source in the bibliography.

In other words, the only time you should use the words of somebody else in your work is in the form of a direct quote. This should be either indented or should clearly be in quotation marks and should include a direct reference immediately after the quote ends (name, date: page number) e.g. (Harvey, 1989: 64). Direct quotes are accepted academic practice but should be used sparingly in your work. The reference from which the quote comes should then appear in your bibliography. e.g.

Harvey, D. (1989) *The Condition of Postmodernity*, Oxford, Blackwell.

Plagiarism does not include:

- Summarising the arguments of someone else in your own words and citing them as a reference
- Using published academic work to help you develop your own argument

In each case, though, you should still include a reference in your text to the things that you have read at the end of the relevant sentence or paragraph if you are referring directly to their work e.g. (Harvey, 1989).

Poor (F)

Inadequate work in most relevant respects, with many very serious weaknesses.

- the essay has a weak introduction, if any, providing little or no frame for the essay as a whole;
- there is little mention or understanding of relevant approaches so that they are presented in a highly restricted and unclear manner and/or with no sense of context;
- the relevant arguments and evidence are scarcely related together, and there is no proper synthesis;
- the essay lacks structure, is too short, is unclear, and conclusions are lacking or inadequate and ungrounded;
- no data, irrelevant data, or otherwise flawed data with inadequate rationales, if any, for data selection and overall methodology (applies where empirical analysis is required);
- the bibliography is non-existent or minimal and/or entirely unclear and inadequately presented.

Marginal / bare pass (D-)

EITHER generally unsatisfactory, inadequately planned and presented, with no or poor understanding but with some redeeming features. OR properly organised but more or less wholly irrelevant. In the former case, the work would have the following features

- the introduction is very weak, barely providing a frame for the essay as a whole;
- there is some mention of relevant literatures or approaches, but this outline is very patchy, unclear, and/or very inadequately placed in context with the result that the essays reveals little or no knowledge of their significance and fails to engage in critical discussion;
- the relevant arguments and evidence are not properly related together, resulting in an unsystematic approach, significant weaknesses in understanding and rigour, and no attempt at synthesis;
- the essay is poorly organised, with little or no structure, serious weaknesses in clarity, and little or no attempt to draw conclusions;
- limited ability to gather and summarise relevant data and other material or to interpret it (applies where empirical analysis is involved);
- the bibliography is very limited and/or unclear and poorly presented.

Not very satisfactory (D and D+)

Limited work in most relevant respects, with several significant weaknesses.

- the introduction is weak, providing only a limited frame for the essay as a whole;
- some relevant literatures are outlined, but this is limited, patchy, unclear, and/or not adequately contextualised so that, although some major points are brought out, there are significant gaps, misunderstandings, and/or little grasp of detail or subtlety;
- the relevant arguments and evidence are related together in a weak manner and thus the essay conveys neither a critical understanding nor a reasonable synthesis;

- the essay is poorly organised, with a poor balance between context, literatures, discussion, and synthesis but some attempt is made to draw conclusions ;
- there are significant problems with methodology for gathering material and its interpretation (applies where empirical analysis is required);
- the bibliography is limited and/or unclear and poorly presented.

Satisfactory (C- to C+)

A competent essay that shows understanding of material and presents it satisfactorily. There is a coherent argument throughout and an adequate conclusion. In short, acceptable work in most relevant respects, but with some significant weaknesses.

- the introduction is adequate, providing a reasonable frame for the essay as a whole;
- the major approaches are outlined and adequately contextualised so that the major points are reasonably brought out and interrelated to reveal an adequate grasp of the topic but with a relatively unsystematic approach and some weaknesses in understanding and rigour;
- the relevant arguments and evidence are related together adequately, there is some attempt at synthesis but no originality, and there are some weaknesses in terms of the clarity of argument;
- the essay is adequately organised, achieving some balance between context, literatures, discussion, and synthesis, with broadly satisfactory conclusions;
- weak rationale for gathering data and materials, some problems with actual data and other material collection and its interpretation (where empirical analysis is required)
- the bibliography is adequate, reasonably clear, and well-presented.

Good (B- to B+)

Shows a firm grasp of material and contextualises it, has good research and presentation skills, argues well and effectively, is able to criticise and evaluate material convincingly and appropriately. In short, good to very good work in most relevant respects, with few weaknesses.

- the introduction is good, clearly and appropriately framing the essay as a whole;
- the most important literatures are outlined and soundly located in an appropriate context with few serious omissions so that the essay presents a sound critical discussion of the topic based on a good overall grasp of the chosen readings;
- the relevant arguments and evidence are related together in a clear manner that achieves a good overall synthesis without being original;
- the essay is well organised, achieving a good balance between context, literatures, discussion, and synthesis with valid conclusions grounded in evidence;
- generally competent rationale and use of data collection methodology and good use of data, including specialised resources and/or some original data (empirical analysis is required);
- the bibliography is quite extensive and well presented.

Very Good (A-)

Very good understanding of material and contextualises it well; shows facility in the handling of ideas/theories/concepts/data; communicates clearly and effectively; shows insight and perceptiveness, a well-developed critical faculty and good judgement. A fresh and original, unusual or substantial contribution to the debate. Therefore, excellent work in all relevant respects, with only marginal weaknesses.

- the introduction is excellent, clearly and appropriately framing the essay as a whole;
- extensive and relevant readings are identified, outlined and located in an appropriate context with no serious omissions so that the essential points are identified and interrelated in a very good overall grasp of the topic in question and very good command of both the detail and the subtlety of the arguments;
- the relevant arguments and evidence are related together in a clear and critical manner that achieves a convincing overall synthesis, and also reveals elements of originality;
- the essay is very well organised, achieving an excellent balance between context, literatures, discussion, and synthesis, with convincing and well-argued conclusions;
- sound rationale for collecting data and other material, including use of specialised resources and/or gathering of original data; very good use of the data and material (where empirical analysis is required);
- the bibliography is extensive and well-presented.

Outstanding (A)

- A mark in this range is given for an accomplished piece of work that offers a thorough, imaginative or highly original but appropriate answer to the question;
- Reading is demonstrated to be comprehensive and going beyond standard course material, bibliography is comprehensive;
- The essay is written in faultless prose with a convincing argument, structure and synthesis;
- A high degree of originality is shown in argument, methodology or presentation of data;
- The answer is imaginative and offers a novel and effective interpretation of the question;
- In rare cases where an essay makes an original contribution to sociological knowledge and is written to a publishable standard, a recognition of outstanding distinction will be given.