

# Sociology 317M – Introduction to Social Research, Spring 2010.

UT-Austin Unique Course #46315

Class Time: Monday and Wednesday 10–11

Location: Burdine 224

Lab: Wednesday 1–3

Lab Location: Burdine 124

Instructor: Dr. Mark D. Regnerus

Burdine 572

Email: regnerus@prc.utexas.edu

Office Hours: Friday 9–11, and by appointment

Teaching Assistant: Juan Carlos Esparza (juancarlos.esparzaocha@gmail.com), Main 1710

TA office hours: Tue 1–3, Wed 3:30–4:30

## Important Course Note

All students need to receive permission to enroll in SOC 317M for a second attempt. Students are no longer allowed to enroll in SOC 317M for a third time.

## Course Description

Among family and friends, we often hear phrases like, “...I heard on the news that a study concluded that...,” or a television news anchor reporting that “Researchers have found that...” Rarely does a day go by that the news media doesn’t report about some social research findings or potential medical breakthrough. Every study involving human beings – whether social, psychological, medical, or market research – involves certain principles of research. This course serves as an introduction to how *sociological* research is conducted. Sociology is an empirical discipline – meaning it concerns arguments and conclusions drawn on the basis of observable evidence. Sociologists ask how the lives, ideals, and actions of the people we study can help us better understand human action, beliefs, cultures, and societies in general. There are different ways, however, in which we collect data about the social world. We will look at several different ways, but will pay most attention to survey research.

In the course we begin with a general overview of social research before getting specific about issues of research design, sampling, data collection, and analysis.

Consistent attendance is both important and very practical. The course will require students not simply to recall information about which they have read, but to apply skills we will develop in class and engage in higher-order learning skills of application, analysis, synthesis, evaluation, and effective communication. This is a difficult course, no matter which professor teaches it. Covering nearly the entire text, in addition to a pair of exams, three assignments, and two extensive exercises in writing will require hard work. Failure to attend class or lab is foolish. Those who do not attend fare poorly.

## Course Objectives

1. *To acquire skills in problem formulation, research design, and data analysis.* There are sociological ways of looking at the world and our lives. This course will help us analyze particular social phenomena – and their causes or associations – and do it in a systematic, scientific fashion. We should

seek to gain an appreciation for the kinds of questions sociologists ask, and the kinds of explanations they offer.

2. *To introduce students to the basic skills of quantitative research.* Sociology is an empirical (data through the senses) discipline that constructs theories and draws conclusions based on observable evidence. Students in this course will actually learn how to create and interpret social statistics, and incorporate them in written research projects.

3. *To critically assess other research studies.* The quality of much social research varies widely. Some findings and theories have stronger support than others. By way of objectives #1 and #2, we will turn our focus and skills to existing research studies and learn how to critique and suggest ways of improving them.

4. *To improve cognitive and communication skills.* This course aims, through class discussions, quizzes, assignments, and the research proposal and paper, to improve students' abilities to read, think, discuss, speak, and write thoughtfully, skillfully, and critically. In particular, since this course fulfills writing component requirements, considerable attention will be paid to the quality of the student's written expression. Each student will receive a timely and detailed critique of their written expression.

### **Contacting the instructor**

The best way to reach me is by email at [regnerus@prc.utexas.edu](mailto:regnerus@prc.utexas.edu). Use this method for easier questions. For more difficult ones, please come by during my or the TAs' office hours, or see one of us after class.

### **Course Requirements**

Final grade is determined as follows:

2 exams: Exam 1 at 25% and Exam 2 at 20% = 45%

2 assignments at 10% each = 20%

1 research proposal = 10%

1 final research paper = 25%

The two exams will consist of multiple choice, true/false, and short essay questions, and will be closed book. They are scheduled to be given *in class* on Wednesday, March 10 and Wednesday, April 21. The two assignments are designed to help the student apply the concepts and techniques learned in lectures and lab. Assignment #1 is due in lab the week of February 15, and assignment #2 is due in lab the week of March 29. No late assignments will be accepted. There is no final exam.

So while you may not wish to attend class or lab much, you will not fare well on the quizzes and in the course if you don't. An education is what you make of it. At the University of Texas at Austin, you have great resources from which to draw, but if you wish to ignore them, you can succeed in getting a poor education here. I do not give extra credit work, nor will I grant extensions or give makeup exams except in what I consider extreme circumstances.

The research proposal is due in class on Wednesday, April 7. The final research paper is to be turned in by Monday, May 10. Details for each will be outlined in separate handouts and will also be posted on the course Blackboard website. Assignments (including the research paper) that include interpreting data should include relevant output at the rear of the typed pages. For papers, you will need to use a formal citation style such as APA, Chicago, MLA, or those found in any of the sociology journals. I prefer APA. Additional guidelines for formatting papers are included with the paper instructions.

If you decide to collect your own data to analyze for the final paper—which is fine—you will need to fill out a short human subjects review form, which is located at:

[http://www.utexas.edu/research/rsc/humansubjects/forms/student\\_class\\_project\\_form.pdf](http://www.utexas.edu/research/rsc/humansubjects/forms/student_class_project_form.pdf)

The exams, assignments, and papers will often involve discussion, explanation, and interpretation. All involve writing. Because clarity of thought and clarity of writing are inseparable and important, students are advised to pay close attention to their prose. Poor grammar and writing will invariably result in a lower grade. I guarantee it.

All assignments must:

- 1) use either a Times New Roman or CG Roman font in 12pt;
- 2) be formatted with 1” margins on each side;
- 3) include the name of the student and the assignment number in the upper left-hand corner of the first page; and
- 4) be stapled.

### **Accommodations**

At the beginning of the semester, students with disabilities who need special accommodations should notify the instructor by presenting a letter prepared by the Services for Students with Disabilities Office. To ensure that the most appropriate accommodations can be provided, students should contact the SSD Office at 471-6259 or 471-4641 TTY.

### **Required Readings**

Neuman, W. Lawrence. 2009. *Understanding Research*. Pearson.

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### **Course Outline and Reading Schedule**

Wed, Jan 20	Syllabus and Course Introduction (No lab this week.)
<b>Week 1</b> Jan 25, 27	<b>Why do research?</b> Read chapter 1
<b>Week 2</b> Feb 1, 3	<b>Planning a study</b> Read chapter 2
<b>Week 3</b> Feb 8, 10	<b>Becoming an ethical researcher</b> Read chapter 3
<b>Week 4</b> Feb 15, 17	<b>Sampling</b> Read chapter 4, Assignment #1 due this week in lab
<b>Week 5</b> Feb 22, 24	<b>Measuring social life</b> Read chapter 5
<b>Week 6</b> Mar 1, 3	<b>The survey</b> Read chapter 6
<b>Week 7</b> Mar 8, 10 Mar 15-19	<b>The experiment</b> Read chapter 7; Exam #1 on Wed, Mar 10. (No lab this week.) Spring Break
<b>Week 8</b>	<b>Research with nonreactive measures</b>

Mar 22, 24	Read chapter 8
<b>Week 9</b> Mar 29, 31	<b>Observing people in their natural settings</b> Read chapter 10; Assignment #2 due this week in lab
<b>Week 10</b> Apr 5, 7	<b>Looking at the past and across cultures</b> Read chapter 11; research proposal due on Wed, Apr 7 in class
<b>Week 11</b> Apr 12, 14	<b>Making sense of the numbers</b> Read chapter 9
<b>Week 12</b> Apr 19, 21	<b>Writing a research report</b> Read chapter 12; Exam #2 on Wed, Apr 21. (No lab this week.)
<b>Week 13</b> Apr 26, 28	<b>Communicating sociological research</b> Read Zinsser chapters on Blackboard
<b>Week 14</b> May 3, 5	<b>Course conclusions</b> (on Monday, May 3; no class on Wed, May 5) No assigned readings
<b>Mon, May 10</b>	<b>Research paper due Monday, May 10, 4:00pm in Burdine 572</b>

### **Academic Integrity**

A brief note on plagiarism: Webster's II New Riverside Dictionary (1984) defines plagiarism as "1. To steal and use (the ideas and writings of another) as one's own. 2. To take passages or ideas from and use them as one's own." (p.898. Boston: The Riverside Publishing Company).

There are many activities in which you will be able, and encouraged, to note the importance of others' work. If at any time you are unsure of how to correctly recognize the input of authors, please ask. You will be required to summarize research undertaken and published by others, but it is unacceptable to cut-and-paste their words verbatim into your documents, even if you cite the authors properly. If you have any questions about when you need to cite sources or how, please ask! I would much rather spend time talking about how and when to cite sources than go to the honor court. I do expect you to cite your sources in all written work...this includes other members of your group. Not all citations in class need to be formal, for instance in essays—on quizzes and exams—the name of the author is sufficient.

Students who violate University rules on scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and/or dismissal from the University. Since such dishonesty harms the individual, all students, and the integrity of the University, policies on scholastic dishonesty will be strictly enforced. Refer to the Student Judicial Services website for official University policies and procedures on scholastic dishonesty.

**Grading Scale:** At the end of the term, you will receive a letter grade, based on the following performance levels: A (94–100), A– (90–93), B+ (87–89), B (83–86), B– (80–82), C+ (77–79), C (73–76), C– (70–72), D+ (67–69), D (63–66), D– (60–62), F (<60)