

Social Research I

CSOC 301

Professor Rich Anderson-Connolly

Spring 2009
Wyatt 201
MWF 12:00-12:50

Contact Information

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Course Description

The study of social research covers several issues. Our first objective will be to explore the fundamental reasons why we do research. Such a question requires us to investigate what we mean by “explanation,” “causation,” “theory,” etc. In other words, we begin the course by looking at philosophical issues underlying social science. The next major course objective will be to move from the abstract philosophical questions to the more practical question of, How do we improve our knowledge of the social world? Topics here include general research designs, and the definition and measurement of concepts.

In Social Research I, we will focus on two means for obtaining data: Experiments (and quasi-experiments) and surveys. We will also examine the benefits that follow from random sampling.

Interspersed throughout the discussion of methods will be an exploration of techniques of data analysis. Although data analysis will involve the use of statistics, this is not intended to be a statistics course and I will not assume that you already are math experts. But you will be able to run and interpret a regression by the end of the semester.

Another major goal of this course is to develop practical skills using the computer and a statistical program, namely, SPSS. We will therefore spend considerable time on the computer becoming familiar with the capabilities of SPSS. With these computer skills, once we have covered statistical analysis in class, you will use SPSS to analyze a very large and important data set, the General Social Survey.

This is a required course for the Comparative Sociology major.

Course Materials

Schutt, Russell K. (2004) Investigating the Social World, 5th Edition

Salkind, Neil (2000) Statistics for People Who (Think They) Hate Statistics, 3rd Edition

Both books are available at the UPS Bookstore.

Assignments & Grading

	Date	Points
Midterm Exam	3/4	100
Experimental Design	3/30	100
Survey Questionnaire Project	4/27	100
Stats Exam	5/6	100
Data Analysis Project	5/13	100
Total Points		500

Assignment Descriptions

The midterm and stats exams will consist primarily of definitions and short essay questions. There will be an opportunity to review before each exam.

Instructions for the three projects follow on subsequent pages.

Note: Late projects will lose 1 grade per day (A to A-, etc.).

Behavioral Expectations

The following simple rules are designed to promote an appropriate classroom environment:

- Turn off cell phones. (Do not send text-messages.)
- Use the bathroom before or after class. Do not get up during class to use the facilities.
- No eating during class. Beverages are fine.

Experimental Design Project

You need to describe an experiment that could be conducted (but will not be). This includes, but is not necessarily limited to, a discussion of the following:

Hypothesis

It must involve sociological (or anthropological) issues. Avoid traditional psychological topics like sensation and perception.

Subjects

They must be people but describe how the subjects could be selected/recruited.

Experimental Procedure

This includes a description of the treatment variable and the measurement of the dependent variable. Identify the type of design according to the categories provided in class. Do *not* use a time series design or a static-group comparison.

Analysis

Discuss the way the data could be analyzed (in general). What results would support your hypothesis and what would hurt it?

Validity

Describe the strengths and weaknesses regarding validity. While I do not expect perfect internal and external validity (there is no such thing), an experiment that has severe problems with validity will not receive a high grade.

Miscellaneous (Optional)

Other information that you consider relevant. Your experiment may have some unusual features not covered in the previous items.

Page length is not very important but I would expect that the 4-8 page range would be adequate for most designs.

This project may be done in groups of four or less.

Do not describe an experiment that has been conducted or proposed by someone else. This would be considered plagiarism. It may be useful, however, to review some journals in psychology or social psychology to get a better understanding of what can be done in experiments.

Submit a word, .rtf, or open office version to raconnolly@ups.edu by class time on the due date.

Survey Questionnaire Project

The assignment consists of the following:

Introduction

Provided some background information and clearly state the research question.

You will be given credit for choosing interesting and complex questions. This includes selecting concepts that are difficult to conceptualize and measure.

Conceptualization

Don't worry about simple concepts like age or sex. More complex concepts should be defined by reference to the sociological literature whenever possible.

Sampling

Who are the respondents, how many will be sampled, from what population are they selected, and what technique will be used to administer the survey?

Indexes (if any)

What do the indexes measure? How will the indexes be created?

Analysis

Since you will not have actual data, the goal here is to state the techniques you would use if data were present. How would the results answer the original research question?

The Survey Questionnaire

The questionnaire is the operationalization of the nominal definitions. Follow the guidelines for question writing from lecture and in Schutt chapter 8. Pay attention both to the questions/responses and the overall layout of the questionnaire.

Other Issues:

The length will vary depending upon the topic. Some research questions will require longer questionnaires.

This project may be done in groups of four or less.

You may look at other questionnaires to get some general ideas but do not use verbatim copies of questions found elsewhere.

Submit a word, .rtf, or open office version to raconnolly@ups.edu by class time on the due date.

Data Analysis Project

Objective of the Assignment: To formulate and analyze a research question using a large data set (probably the GSS) on SPSS.

The Elements of the Assignment:

Introduction

Provided some background information and clearly state the research question.

The research question must seek to understand the relationship between at least 2 variables. That is, your research question must not be answerable by a description of 1 variable. For example, do not ask, What percentage of the population is alienated? You may, however, attempt to explain why some people are more alienated than others based upon other possible causal variables.

You will be given credit for choosing interesting and complex questions. This includes selecting concepts that are difficult to conceptualize and measure. You will also likely want to control for other variables, which will often not require conceptualization.

Conceptualization

Define the key concepts.

Measurement

Provide the questions from the GSS that you analyzed.

Reformat the questions so that they flow better with the overall assignment. That is, do not simply copy and paste the questions from the internet or the SPSS file.

Indexes (Optional)

List the questions that were combined to form the index(es). Discuss recoding (if any).

Analysis

Analyze the data in SPSS to answer your research question. This analysis will involve the univariate and multivariate statistical techniques we covered in class. You must decide which are the appropriate techniques.

Include tables formatted in word (or open office). Do not copy and paste tables from SPSS.

Discussion

Give your interpretation of the statistical output. What does the computer output mean in plain language? How do the results answer your research question?

This project may be done in groups of four or less.

Submit a word, .rtf, or open office version to raconnolly@ups.edu by class time on the due date.

Sustainability at UPS as Possible Topic for Survey and Data Analysis Projects

One possible topic for the survey assignment is an investigation of the transportation habits of the University of Puget Sound community. Students would be able to work on a project of real and immediate interest, and design a survey that could be used by the University's Transportation Taskforce.

The goal of the survey is to determine how best to reduce the number of University students, faculty, and staff who drive to work, and instead promote walking, bicycling, taking the bus, or other forms of transportation. To meet this goal, the survey would assess the current transportation habits of the University community and identify benefits and barriers to making changes. The transportation taskforce would like to know what measures would work best and what fraction of the community might change their transportation habits.

In addition to the survey project, students will have the opportunity to examine and analyze the results of two prior transportation surveys designed by the Transportation Taskforce: one given to faculty and staff, and a slightly different version given to students. As part of the analysis, the students could determine the usefulness of each question and how it could be improved in a student-designed survey.

The analysis itself would determine the best measures that could be put into place to encourage the University community to walk, bicycle, and take the bus to and from work, rather than relying on single occupancy vehicles.

Students should take into consideration the cost and feasibility of each method, its impact on the neighborhood surrounding the University, and its ability to meet the transportation needs of the University community.

For more information about this topic contact Penny Rowe at prowe@harbournet.com.

Schedule of Topics and Readings

Week	Monday	Wednesday	Friday
1		January 21 Introduction to Course	January 23 Overview of Statistics Reading: Schutt, pages 441-462
2	January 26 Framework of Science Reading: Schutt, chapter 1	January 28 Framework of Science Reading: Schutt, chapter 2	January 30 Univariate Statistics Reading: Salkind, chapters 1 & 2
3	February 2 Framework of Science Reading: Schutt, chapter 6	February 4 Framework of Science	February 6 Univariate Statistics Reading: Salkind, chapter 3 & 4
4	February 9 Research Design and Measurement Reading: Schutt, chapter 3	February 11 Research Design and Measurement	February 13 Univariate Statistics
5	February 16 Research Design and Measurement Reading: Schutt, chapter 4	February 18 Research Design and Measurement	February 20 The Normal Curve Reading: Salkind, chapter 8

6	February 23 Research Design and Measurement	February 25 Experiments	February 27 The Normal Curve
7	March 2 Catch-up & Midterm Review	March 4 Midterm Exam	March 6 Multivariate Statistics Reading: Salkind, chapter 5
8	March 9 Experiments	March 11 Experiments Reading: Schutt, chapter 7	March 13 Multivariate Statistics Reading: Schutt, pp. 462-488
Spring Break	March 16	March 18	March 20
9	March 23 Experiments	March 25 Surveys	March 27 Multivariate Statistics
10	March 30 Due: Experimental Design Surveys	April 1 Surveys	April 3 Regression Reading: Salkind, chapter 15

11	April 6 Surveys Reading: Schutt, chapter 8	April 8 Surveys	April 10 No Class – RAC at a Conference
12	April 13 Surveys Reading: Schutt, chapter 5	April 15 Content Analysis Reading: Schutt, chapter 13	April 17 Regression
13	April 20 Regression	April 22 Regression	April 24 Inferential Statistics Reading: Salkind, chapters 7 & 9
14	April 27 Inferential Stats Due: Survey Design	April 29 Inferential Statistics Reading: Salkind, chapters 10 & 12	May 1 Inferential Statistics Reading: Salkind, chapter 14
15	May 4 Stats Review	May 6 Statistics Exam	