

**Sociology 303-01**  
**Introduction to Research Design**  
Spring 2006

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### **I. Course Description**

This course is intended to provide students with a practical understanding of research methods currently employed by social scientists. While many students may not become social scientists themselves, such an understanding will help them to interpret the kinds of data, such as information in polls and information collected through market research, that surround them and influence every aspect of modern life. On the principle that we learn best by doing, the course will incorporate several hands-on exercises to provide insight into designing and conducting social research.

This is a Blackboard course. Assignments, class documents, informational memos and reminders, as well as grades will be posted through Blackboard. All registered students should have automatic access to the course website; if you do not, it is your responsibility to take care of the problem by calling the University help desk at 862-8888. The link to Blackboard is: <http://bb.tulane.edu>

### **II. Texts**

1. R. Stark and L. Roberts. *Contemporary Social Research Methods*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Wadsworth, 2002) and M. Corbett and L. Roberts. *A MicroCase Workbook for Social Research*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Wadsworth, 2002). (Note: these are companion volumes, packaged together)
2. Mitchell Duneier. *Slim's Table* (University of Chicago, 1992).
3. Occasional assigned articles on electronic reserve are available at: <http://eres.library.tulane.edu/> (password: whyte)

The text book for this course is slender and to the point. It promotes a narrowly “scientific” view of sociology and social science methodologies. To broaden our perspective and to beef up the intellectual substance for the course, I’ve assigned a “recent classic” in urban ethnography (Duneier), as well as an assortment of short readings that are intended to encourage critical thinking about various epistemological positions and methodological issues. The latter will serve as the basis for quizzes and class discussion.

### III. Grading

Course grades will be based on a combination of class participation (15%), five assignments (25%), and three exams (60%).

**Class participation** will be based on attendance and quiz grades (weighted equally). I will take attendance each class period. More than two unexcused absences will count against your final grade. Legitimate excuses include situations that are practically beyond your control, for example, illness, family medical emergency, or job interview. Personal travel plans are *not* legitimate reasons for missing class. Scheduled quizzes will be based on ERes readings. We will go over answers immediately after taking the quizzes as a springboard into discussion on various topics. There are no make-ups for missed quizzes, but I will drop the two lowest quiz grades.

**Assignments** will be geared toward specific methodological requirements or approaches and are designed to give students practical experience in navigating research contexts and troubleshooting data collection obstacles. The format of the assignments will vary. Details will be provided in class.

**Exams** are designed to test students' comprehension of text, workbook, and lecture material primarily. Each in-class exam will count for 20% of your course grade and will consist of a combination of definitions, multiple choice, short answer and essay questions. Exams are not explicitly cumulative, but material in later exams will assume prior knowledge.

Note: Your textbook is paired with a workbook containing a series of data-driven exercises. I will not collect or grade these exercises, but I will use them to formulate exam questions. I strongly encourage students to work through ALL exercises on your own on a regular basis. Answers for the workbook exercises will be posted to blackboard.

### IV. Policy

Students are expected to take active responsibility for their learning. This means regularly attending class, arriving prepared, sharing your thoughts, and respecting the rights and opinions of others even when you may disagree with them.

Disagreements about grades and grading occasionally arise. I do not discuss grade disagreements immediately before, immediately after, or during class or through e-mail. Students who wish to discuss their grades with me may do so in person during office hours or by appointment.

I do not offer make-up exams for non-emergencies or incompletes without prior, written approval. Late assignments will only be considered and accepted under emergency situations. Computer hardware or software failures *do not* constitute emergencies: prepare ahead!

Honor code: Academic honesty is expected of all students at Tulane University. Your responsibilities as a Tulane student include being familiar with the honor code and the plagiarism policy of the university. Cases of cheating or plagiarism will be reported to the Honor Board and

may result in a failing grade for the class, academic probation, or expulsion.

Students with disabilities: Students with disabilities should talk to me and the Office of Disability Services (865-5113) *within the first two weeks of class* so that we can establish guidelines and make arrangements for test taking and other assignments.

## **V. Optional Service Learning Credit**

This course provides an opportunity for students to earn an extra fourth credit through the Office of Service Learning. Details will be provided in class.

## **VI. Topics, Assignments, and Readings**

Below is a tentative schedule that I may change to better serve class needs. Any changes will be made in advance and announced in class. In general, I will devote most Tuesdays to lecture and most Thursdays to discussion and other in-class activities. Unless otherwise noted, students should read textbook chapters and do corresponding workbook exercises for Tuesday classes and ERes articles for Thursday classes.

### **Week 1 (1/17-19) Introduction to Course**

Reading: pp. vii-xvi and do the exploratory exercise (pp.1-18) in Corbett

### **Week 2 (1/24-26) Concepts, Theories, Epistemologies**

Reading: Stark, Ch. 1; Durkheim; Feyerabend (quiz)

### **Week 3 (1/31-2/2) Politics of/Ethics in Research**

Reading: Stark, Ch. 2 in Stark; Back and Solomos; Hamman (quiz)

### **Week 4 (2/7-9) Measurement**

Reading: Stark, Ch. 3; Gouldner; Harding (quiz)  
**Assignment #1 due February 9**

### **Week 5 (2/14-16) Sampling**

Reading: Stark, Ch. 4

### **Week 6 (2/21-23)**

No reading this week  
**Assignment #2 due February 21**  
**First Exam: February 23**

**Week 7 (2/28-3/2) Mardi Gras/Spring Break NO CLASS**

**Week 8 (3/7-9) Causes and Causality**

Reading: Stark, Ch. 5; Oakley; Hacking (quiz)

**Week 9 (3/14-16) Causal Modeling**

Reading: Stark, Ch. 6

**Week 10 (3/21-23) Survey Research**

Reading: Stark, Ch. 7; Lewontin; Roth (quiz)

**Assignment #3 due March 23**

**Week 11 (3/28-30) Comparative and Historical Research**

Reading: Stark, Ch. 8

**Second Exam: March 30**

**Week 12 (4/4-6) Field Research**

Reading: Stark, Ch. 9; Geertz; Plummer (quiz)

**Assignment #4 due April 13**

**Week 13 (4/11-13) Field Research**

Reading: Duneier, *Slim's Table*

**Week 14 (4/18-20) Content Analysis**

Reading: Stark, Ch. 11; Richardson; Brewer (quiz)

**Week 15 (4/25-27) Wrap Up**

**Assignment #5 due April 25**

**Third Exam: April 27**