RESEARCH METHODS

SYA 3300-U01
Fall Semester 2011
MWF 10-10:50 AM
Room: 271A Graham Center

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“You have been told to go grubbing in the library, thereby accumulating a mass of notes and liberal coating of grime. You have been told to choose problems wherever you can find musty stacks of routine records based on trivial schedules prepared by tired bureaucrats and filled out by reluctant applicants for fussy do-gooders or indifferent clerks. This is called ‘getting your hands dirty in real research.’ Those who counsel you are wise and honorable; the reasons they offer are of great value. But one more thing is needful: first hand observation. Go and sit in the lounges of the luxury hotels and on the doorsteps of flophouses; sit on the Gold Coast settees and the slum shakedowns; sit in the orchestra hall and in the Star and Garter burlesque. In short, gentlemen (sic),
go get the seat of your pants dirty in real research.”

(A1920s quote from Robert Park, a founder of the ‘Chicago School of Sociology’)

Course Description and Objectives
This course provides an introduction to a range of research methods widely used by sociologists, anthropologists, geographers, and other social scientists. It is required for GSS majors (anthropology, geography, and sociology) and prepares all students to conduct original research. In this class, you will be actively engaged in the logic and practice of conceptualizing, proposing, conducting, reporting, and evaluating social science research. The prime objective of social science research is to identify, describe, and explain general patterns of social behavior. You will work very hard in this course, but when you are finished, you should excel in any original research project and graduate from FIU with skills that will make you marketable for many jobs in community organizations, private companies, and government. You will be able to conduct research and analyze data; however, you will not be able to do all types of data collection and analysis. That is
too much for one course. I do not expect students to know any statistics or have had any previous research methods courses although both are a plus. You will be exposed to some statistical concepts but mostly you will learn to plot and graph data to understand these concepts. You will learn to find, read, interpret and evaluate information about patterns in people’s behavior and thoughts whether collected by you or by others. You will also learn the relationship between theorizing about why people do what they do and collecting data (or using others’ data) to test these theories against empirical realities.

Specific Course Objectives:

• Students will know what social science is and the relationship between theory and empirical research.
• Students will be able to conceptualize and design research.
• Students will be able to write a literature review.
• Students will be able to design data collection protocols and collect good data from people using at least two different data collection strategies (surveys and interviews).
• Students will be able to process and analyze the data they collect and present their research findings.
• Students will be able to assess hypotheses.
• Students will be able to relate research findings to theory.
• Students will be able to evaluate empirical research.
• By the end of the course students will have knowledge of social science research methods, data analysis, and theory development sufficient to be able to conduct well-designed and valid research projects (1) for original research in our department, in other courses, and graduate school, and (2) at their jobs.

Required Text (available at the bookstore)

Software You Will Need to Use and Probably Download (for free)
(1) Moodle (log on at https://ecampus.fiu.edu/).
(2) For viewing streaming video from Moodle: Download and install Quicktime player or you can download the videos to an iPod as they are in mp4 format (see instructions in Blackboard)
(3) For tape recording using a computer: http://audacity.sourceforge.net/
(4) For helping transcribe your tape recordings using a computer:
   http://trans.sourceforge.net/en/presentation.php (Wait until instructed to download)
(5) For data analysis (Wait until instructed to download this software): www.atlasti.com, or www.maxqda.com

Additional Readings: Non-text required readings and other materials such as on-line lectures, digitized videos and audio files will be available through Moodle. Find the correct module for each class and go through the entire list of readings, videos to watch, etc. before coming to the first class of the week so you have a good idea of what we will be working with in class.

Class Structure
This is not a traditional lecture-style course. This course utilizes Team-Based Learning (TBL). Most likely you have never been in a course using TBL so read carefully. TBL is a teaching and learning strategy that maximizes class time for students to apply their new knowledge to do in-class team
projects. Don’t confuse teams with groups—teams work in a much more intense and cooperative manner. You will learn the difference so please do not think this will be a class with group projects in the traditional sense. Rather, you will be expected to do most of the learning of the course content prior to class, will be quizzed on your understanding of this content in class, and most of class time otherwise will be dedicated to applying this information. So many classes will involve short tests (readiness assurance tests, called RATs) at the beginning to assess your understanding followed by assignments you’ll complete in class with your team members and present your findings to the whole class at the end.

You must learn much of the course content prior to class. Most of the content (except the required text book readings) has been placed into on-line (on Moodle). So, you will go to our Moodle site and look up what is expected of you for each week of class. You must make sure you complete all that is asked of you prior to class (except the first week’s content). In addition to chapters from the text, there will sometimes be other readings, video and audio clips to watch, tutorials to do, and on-line lectures (OLL, these are most often in text format) to read. All of this material will be housed in and available to you via Moodle. Material should be covered in the order presented. If I feel you will best understand the other material in a particular order, I will put it in that order in the week’s module. If you have any problems with Moodle, contact the support service (305-348-2814 or resource center in GL 150). The idea of having all this material available to you 24/7 is so that you can go at your own pace. If you do not understand something then read it again, view the video again, or review the on-line lecture. You are responsible for learning the content prior to class so that we can use class time primarily to apply it. If you still do not understand the material you can (1) get assistance from your team members and (2) get assistance from me and from your TA during office hours or by appointment. We want you to understand this material so you have it all available to you. No excuses! If you understand and can apply this material, you will be very marketable in the real world…

**Contacting Instructor/TA**

Please use the Moodle email tool for most correspondence with the instructor and TA. Only in dire circumstances where you need immediate response (less than 24 hours) should you email us using our regular emails (above).

**Requirements**

You are expected to come to every class, arrive on time and arrive having learned the material for the week by the first class meeting (Monday). Additionally, you must participate in class and in your team. You cannot be a slacker; if you try, your grade will clearly suffer. As an FIU student, you are always expected to abide by the university’s policies particularly those governing academic honesty and plagiarism as they appear in the FIU Student Handbook. If you are not familiar with how to avoid plagiarism, you will find links to the FIU library tutorials and information in week one of the on-line materials. Additionally, should anything you/your team produces cite any data, research or information that you have not generated and which is not general knowledge then you must cite it appropriately following one of the disciplinary conventions of the academic disciplines represented in our department and depending on your disciplinary preference, e.g., American Sociological Association for sociologists or American Anthropologist for anthropologists and The Professional Geographer for geographers. Please become completely familiar with bibliographic styles and citation conventions. If you do not cite others’ work adequately you can be accused of plagiarism and FIU takes these accusations very seriously. I will use turnitin.com to check your work.
Research Project and Presentation:
You will collect data together as a class and you, with your team, will do data analysis and write up based on the entire class’s data. (If you have heard of previous students’ experiences in this course and think you’ll do your own research, you will be wrong. The reason why I have everyone do the same project is (1) so you pay more attention to the methods than the project itself and (2) so you can compare your data analysis against that of other teams).

Final projects and presentations. Each team will write up its analysis of the research done in semester and will also present this analysis to the whole class. There will be more details regarding this project later when the assignment is given out. However, to give you some idea of what will be expected, the write-up and presentation must include the team’s hypotheses about what you expect to find in the data, where you obtain these hypotheses (some of this must involve library research), how data were collected, what your data analysis results are and how you interpret the results. These projects require you to synthesize and apply all the content learned in the class. Thus, they are a large proportion of your final grade.

Grading
There are different measures of your performance in this course, some of them individual and some of them team-based. Here are the different measures. Read carefully.

- **Individual Readiness Assurance Tests (iRATs) and individual assignments:** You will take the iRATs individually to assess how well you have studied and learned a major content area of the class. RAT dates will be announced ahead of time, but will normally be on Mondays. You receive an individual grade for each iRAT. These grades are averaged so you end up with a final grade for your iRAT performance. Miss an iRAT and you cannot get a make-up. However, I will drop every student’s lowest iRAT score of the semester, so if you miss one and get a zero, it will be dropped. Miss more than one and your iRAT score will drop.

  There will also be several other individual assignments that will factor into your individual/iRAT grade including data collection activities, data analysis assignments, etc.

- **Team Readiness Assurance Tests (tRATs) and team assignments:** tRATs involve the same questions you take with the iRATs. Immediately after the iRAT, in the same class meeting, you re-do the same questions with your team. Unlike with the iRAT, you must discuss your answers with your teammates during and make team decisions about answers. These are graded separately from the iRATs; you receive a team grade for each tRAT. Miss a tRAT and you cannot get a make-up—your grade for that tRAT will be zero. Each student’s lowest tRAT score will be dropped. You will also have a few team assignments that will factor into your team grade.

  For both iRATs and tRATs, questions will be worth points. Unlike most quizzes you have taken in the past, however, you will have the opportunity to spread these points across different answers. So, let’s say each question is worth five points. If you are totally sure about your answer, you can put all five of your points on that answer. If you get it right you get five points. If you get it wrong you get zero points. But let’s say you are not sure which is the right answer. You can then take those five points and distribute them across answers – putting one point for each answer or three points on one answer and two on another, etc. After the first time or two, you will get very used to this different system.
- **Team Performance on Projects:** There will be many short projects done by teams in class, usually on Friday. These will be assessed by your instructor and/or TA and, potentially, by other teams. Every student in the team receives the same grade. For the final project, your team will receive one grade for its final written project and another for the team’s oral presentation to the class.

- **Assessment of Your Team Members:** At the end of the semester, you will be given an assessment form to evaluate the performance of the other team members. You will have on average 10 points to give to each of them, but you cannot give anyone the same number of points. That is, similar to the i/tRATs, you must vary your evaluation based on how well each member of the team did his/her job. This assessment, then, is a peer evaluation. Teams, like all teams in real life, should work to resolve any issues they have amongst themselves, especially “slacker” team members. If you cannot, however, you may raise your issue with your TA or myself. Do not wait until the end of the semester for the final project as by then it is too late to change team dynamics.

So, there are really three different types of assessments in this course: (1) your individual performance on iRATs and assignments, (2) your team performance on tRATs and projects and (3) the average of your peer evaluations from your team members. Each of these is important but not necessarily equally important.

Grade breakdown:

1. iRATs and individual assignments  
   Percentage of total grade: 25%
2. tRATs  
   “  
   15
3. Team In-class Projects  
   “  
   10
4. Peer Evaluations of Team Members  
   “  
   10
5. Team Final Paper  
   “  
   25
6. Team Final Presentations  
   “  
   15

**TOTAL**  
100%

**Class Attendance, Sickness, Tardiness of Assignments, Students with Disabilities, etc:** This class follows standard FIU policy regarding student absence for sickness, religious observations, etc. Additionally, given that this course utilizes Team-Based Learning (TBL) individual student absences will likely affect team performance. One effect of absences is that neither iRATs nor tRATs will have make-ups. If you or your whole team is absent a day these are given, you will not be given a make-up and receive a grade of zero. Only for students who are absent due to a medical professional-substantiated condition (you bring in a doctor’s note) or who are absent for religious observations condoned by FIU policy, will I exclude the lost grade from your final average for the iRATs and tRATs. Students with disabilities who require individualized testing or other accommodations should identify themselves to the instructor and express their needs. Where the disability is not immediately apparent, verification will be required.

**Technology Assessment:** In place of the former senior capstone course, GSS is now assessing its majors in technology via research methods courses. Therefore, there will be an individual assignment using computer software to analyze data. Senior GSS majors may have their papers selected for assessment.
Course Schedule

Note that dates are for the Monday of each week but that we will be having class on Wednesday and Friday as well. Also, check Moodle regularly for all additional, readings, assignments, etc. for each week.

Aug. 22 (Week 1)  **Course Introduction** (Text, Ch. 1; self-introduction on Moodle due Aug. 24, human subjects certification due Aug. 29; in-class practice RAT on Aug. 26)

Aug. 29 (Week 2)  **Research Design (the 5 W’s) and Ethics** (Text, Ch. 2-3; RAT #1 on Aug. 29; in-class team project on Sept. 2)

*Sept. 5, Labor Day, NO CLASS!!!*

Sept. 7 (Week 3)  **Literature Review** (Text, Ch. 12, Appendix A; RAT #2 on Sept. 7; meet in GL280 for library session on Sept. 9; literature review assigned)

Sept. 12 (Week 4)  **Applied Research** (Text, Ch. 11; RAT #3 on Sept. 12; in-class team project on Sept. 16; literature review due Sept. 16)

Sept. 19 (Week 5)  **Conceptualization** (Text, Ch. 4; RAT #4 on Sept. 19; individual assignment due Sept. 24; in-class team project on Sept. 24)

Sept. 26 (Week 6)  **Sampling, Causation, and Experimental Design** (Text, Chs. 5, 6; RAT #5 on Sept. 26; in-class team project on Sept. 30)

Oct. 3 (Week 7)  **Qualitative Data Collection** (Text, Ch. 9; RAT #6 on Oct. 3; individual assignment due Oct. 7; in-class team project on Oct. 7)

Oct. 10 (Week 8)  **Quantitative Data Collection** (Text, Ch. 7; RAT #7 on Oct. 10; in-class team project on Oct. 14; data collection assigned)

Oct. 17 (Week 9)  **Quantitative Data Analysis I** (Text, Ch. 8; RAT #8 on Oct. 17; in-class team project on Oct. 21)

Oct. 24 (Week 10)  **Quantitative Data Analysis II** (readings on Moodle; in-class team project on Oct. 28)

Oct. 31 (Week 11)  **Qualitative Data Analysis I** (Text, Ch. 10; RAT #9 on Oct. 31; in-class team project on Nov. 4)

Nov. 7 (Week 12)  **Qualitative Data Analysis II** (readings on Moodle; in-class team project on Nov. 9; data collection due on Nov. 11);

*Nov. 11, Veteran’s Day, NO CLASS!!!*

Nov. 14 (Week 13)  In-Class Work on Final Project

Nov. 21 (Week 14)  In-Class Work on Final Project

*Nov. 25, day after Thanksgiving, NO CLASS!!!*

Nov. 28 (Week 15)  Team Presentations of Final Projects

Dec. 12 (finals week)  Papers Due