

**Sociology 8**  
**Sense and Nonsense in Social Research**

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Fall 1999

This course fulfills the critical thinking requirement in the Basic Subjects category of the General Education program introduced in the fall of 1983. As such, it is skill-oriented rather than exclusively content-oriented. Students will learn basic information about the research process, but emphasis in classroom time and grading will be on the development and application of critical thinking skills. Since practice is essential to the improvement of any skill, students should find that regular attendance and active participation in class discussion are particularly helpful.

In addition to its general education function, this course would also be appropriate for any student who anticipates using research in the course of a professional career in business or public administration, social work, medicine, journalism, social science, education or engineering. Finally, "Sense and Nonsense in Social Research" can serve as an introductory research methods course for students majoring in the social sciences.

Goals of the Course

The overall goal of the course is to provide students with the skills to evaluate research and weigh its implications for decision-making. The research may be reported in the newspaper and refer to consumer, health, or political issues (Should I support nuclear power? Does marijuana use constitute a health hazard? Is there any real difference between brands of toothpaste or makes of refrigerators?) It may be cited in television advertising, or it may appear in professional journals, which address policy issues in education, engineering, medicine, etc. As citizen, consumer, or professional, we are frequently required to decide upon and justify a course of action. The quality of our decision depends upon our ability to gather and evaluate appropriate information and to distinguish opinions from facts, beliefs from knowledge.

Intermediate steps in the achievement of this goal include:

--Learning what distinguishes research, as a scientific approach to learning about the world, from other forms of "knowing".

--Becoming acquainted with the basic steps in the research process and learning to recognize good qualities and common errors in non-technical examples of research efforts from various applied fields.

--Learning to develop testable research questions, design experiments, define variables and sample appropriately.

In short, we will be learning what research is all about, analyzing what's good and bad about published examples of research, and constructing improved research designs as a test of our understanding.

## COURSE OUTLINE

### I. Data Collection

Introduction (Week 1)

Ch.6. Survey research (Week 1,2)

Ch.8. Field Research (Week 2,3)

Ch.7. Experiments (Week 3)

Ch.5. Sampling (Week 4)

-----Exam 1 (Chs 5-8): Sept 27 -----

### II. The Design of Research Projects

Ch.1. Informal Fallacy (Week 5)

Ch.2. The logic of social research (Week 6)

Ch.3. Research design (Week 6,7)

Ch.4. Measurement (Week 7,8)

-----Exam 2 (Chs 1-4): Oct 25 -----

### III. Data Analysis and Evaluation

Ch. 9. The analysis of existing data (Week 9)

Ch.10. Evaluation research (Week 10)

Ch.11. Descriptive Statistics (Week 10,11)

Appendix B: Elaboration (Week 11,12)

Oral Reports (Week 13-15)

-----Exam 3 (Chs 9-11): Nov 22-----

#### Readings:

Required: Earl B. Babbie, Social Research for Consumers,  
Wadsworth (Bookstore)

Recommended: Josephson's Institute, Ethics of American Youth,  
(Reserve Book Room, Library)

Office Hours: To be announced in class. Amador Hall 453A  
Tel 278-7577

## Requirements:

1. Three exams 60%
2. Research paper 30% (written and oral)  
(Due Dec 13, at least 8 pages per person. Keep your own copy because papers will not be returned)
3. Participation, exercises, quiz, etc. 20%

No make-up exam will be given except for compelling reasons such as medical problems. Verification is needed such as a doctor's note.

## Research Paper Guidelines:

The research is basically an individual project, although data collection may be made in collaboration with others. A group should not have more than four members. Findings are to be reported orally to the class as well as in a written form.

The oral presentation may be made as a group or on an individual basis.

The written report, if by a group, should consist of (1) reports prepared by individuals (names attached) and (2) an overall summary prepared by the group as a whole.

The written report should include:

1. Statement of the problem
2. Summary of previous research
3. Hypotheses
4. Methodology
5. Findings
6. Validity and reliability
7. difficulties encountered
8. Modification for further research

Keep one copy **for yourself**.

## Computer Research

### 1. WebQuest

Visit the website:

[www.csus.edu/indiv/m/maykovichm](http://www.csus.edu/indiv/m/maykovichm)

Go to Sociology 166

Select Syllabus

Read Assignment details

You are expected to select a topic in the field of the family and visit websites to collect information. For the selected topic, produce a written and oral reports.

Go through Unit1 through Unit8

To obtain web resources for your assignment

### 2. COW (Conference on Web)

A separate COW account will be issued via E-mail after you have given me your SACLINK account.

To start COW, enter the following URL:

<http://cow.csus.edu>

Click Enter COW

User name:

Pass word:

Click Sociology 166

Click Topic you want for participation

Click Conversation you want to read and respond to

Type your response and Click "**Submit Response**"

Visit COW at least once a week and participate in discussion.