

Methods of Social Research

Fall 2005
Dan Ryan
Tu-Th 9:30-10:45 CPM 206
Lab Tu 6:30-9:00 STR 14 ECLC

Overview

This is a first course in how social scientists “find out” – that is, study the world around us empirically. We will begin simultaneously on two fronts (which some see as contradictory): the “science” in social science and “ethnographic” field work. This is partly to reflect the multidisciplinary nature of the course and partly to emphasize the complementarity of diverse methods.

From these beginnings we will visit several methods of data collection – interviews, questionnaires, surveys – and build our sophistication in making sense of collected data by learning how to clean and code our data, how to analyze it univariately (if that’s really an adverb), and how to analyze it multivariately (*sic*, again). Somewhat later in the process than is conventional we will consider the problem of sampling and its importance in social research and techniques for measuring latent constructs. If there is still time in the semester we will turn our attention to the analysis of cultural domains.

This approach omits a large amount of what falls under the category of “introductory research methods.” Some of what is left out you can get in a introductory statistics course. Some may appear in other social sciences courses. The omissions, however, are both unavoidable and deliberate. Our goal here is not to be exhaustive but to lay a strong foundation in the basics and to emphasize the learning to do “methods” rather than the learning about them. To this end, the course includes a lab in which we will conduct several small research projects. To a large degree, these projects will form the basis of the term time and final exams.

Numerous class sessions in the latter part of the course are left “TBA” (to be announced). In my experience, the interests of the class often lead to advantageous pedagogical improvisation for which these open slots leave us room.

Texts

Bernard, H. R.	<i>Research Methods in Anthropology: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches</i>	~\$50
Julia G. Crane, Michael V. Angrosino	<i>Field Projects in Anthropology: A Student Handbook</i>	~\$15
Sociology Writing Group	<i>Guide to Writing Sociology Papers</i>	~\$30
Robert M. Emerson, et al.	<i>Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes</i>	~\$

Requirements

Maintain a bound research notebook in which you enter fieldnotes, jottings, working drawings, etc. and a binder of current drafts of all work. Assume that either can be requested for examination at any time.

Take several ungraded quizzes

3-6 lab exercises

2-4 labs – design, data collection, analysis, writeup

Three exams (including final)

Course Schedule

Week 1

Th 25 August

1. Course Introduction, First field assignment

Sociology and anthropology as Science, Philosophy of Science, Why do research? Finding out. Research ethics – get it right. Matching method to question not ideology. From topic to questions to problems. Books. Requirements. Labs. The syllabus. The instructor.

Lazarsfeld "Interpretation of Statistical Relations as a Research Operation," excerpt from P F Lazarsfeld & M Rosenberg, *The Language of Social Research*

Field Work Begins 25-29 Aug

1. Read Crane & Angrosino: "Introduction" and "Beginning Fieldwork" (pp. 1-22)
2. Read Emerson et al. Preface and Ch. 1: "Fieldnotes in Ethnographic Research"
3. Select a field site using criteria described in class (safe, accessible, active, etc.)
4. **HAND IN** (Tuesday 9:30) : 500 words describing field site, pros/cons, initial observations (from field notes) plus photocopy of what you've written in your notebook so far.

Week 2

Tu 30 August

2. The Ethics of Getting It Right: Anthropology and Sociology as Science

Being scientific. Social science & politics. Rationality. Why should anyone believe you?

Bernard: Ch 1 "Anthropology and the Social Sciences" (26). Read 1-10 lightly, 11-26 intensely.

LAB I: The Computer as Your Tool

internet, directories, filenames, templates, styles, excel basics, excel2word, Element K, information literacy, drawing diagrams in Word

Field Work 30 Aug-5 Sept

1. Read Crane & Angrosino: "Project One: Proxemics" and "Project Two: Making Maps"
2. Read Emerson et al., Ch. 2: In the Field: Participating, Observing, and Jotting Notes
3. Adapt the project suggestions of either project one or project two in C&A to your field site. Record field notes in lab book.

Th 1 September

3. The Language of Social Research

Variables, measurement, concepts, operationalization, units of analysis, levels of analysis, validity, research topics and research questions.

Bernard: Ch 2 "The Foundations of Social Research" (38)

Week 3

Tu 6 September

4. Field work I

Observer as instrument, systematic observation, observations vs. interpretations, field notes

Bernard, Ch 13 "Participant Observation" (42)

Crane & Angrosino, Project 5 "Participant Observation"

Bernard, Ch 14 "Field Notes: How to Take, Code, and Manage Them" (24)

LAB II: Writing Up Notes, Coding Observations

From rough notes to writeups. Coding. Extracting concepts. Planning Systematic Observation.

Field Work 30 Aug-5 Sept

1. Based on lab session work, make plans to revisit your field site and observe something repeatedly. Aim for 20 to 30 repetitions and observe at least two distinct features of each.

Th 8 September

5. Field work II

Participant Observation, Field Notes, Is there a research question in there somewhere?

Emerson et al. Ch. 3: Writing Up Fieldnotes I: From Field to Desk (39-65)
Emerson et al. Ch. 4: Writing Up Fieldnotes II: Creating Scenes on the Page (66-107)
Sociology Writing Group "The Ethnographic Field Research Paper"

Week 4

Tu 13 September

6. Using Library, databases, etc. for background, lit review, etc.

The research process (ideal and real). Motivation. Research questions. Goals. Practicality. Ethics. Connecting research to big questions. Types of research. Exploring the literature. Building a lit review narrative. Writing non-boring lit reviews.

Bernard ch 4 "The Literature Search" (14)

LAB III: From Observations to Tables to "Findings"

How to tally and make basic tables. Interpreting tables. Writing up results.

Th 15 September

7. Writing an Empirical Research Paper

Selections from *A Guide to Writing Sociology Papers*

Field Work Report Due 9 a.m. 18 September

Week 5

Tu 20 September

8. Talking to People I

Bernard ch 8 "Nonprobability Sampling and Informants" (21) Focus on pp 180-193 on informants
Crane & Angrosino, Project 4 "Interviewing Informants"

Take a look at Bernard ch 9 "Interviewing: Unstructured and Semi-structured" (36)

LAB IV: Interviewing Informants

Field work to be done outside of class

Th 22 September

9. Talking to People II

Review Bernard pp. 32-57.

Bernard ch 10 "Structured Interviewing: Questionnaires" (39)

Week 6

Tu 27 September

10. Variables, Distributions, and Descriptive Statistics

Crane & Angrosino, Ch. 3 Charting Kinship

Univariate Bernard ch 19 "Univariate Analysis" (44)

Rossi, A. 1965. "Naming Children in Middle-Class Families," *Am Soc Rev*, Vol. 30, No. 4, pp. 499-513

Lieberson, S., Commentary on Rossi's paper (p26 handout)

LAB IV: Beginning the baby naming project

Naming Data. Archival. Interview scripts. Learning about kinship.

Baby Naming Lab

By ___ you should interview/survey ten people about the sources of baby names in their families.
Data should be recorded in Excel and contributed to the class.

11. Univariate continued

Week 7

Tu 4 October

12. , Univariate continued

LAB V: Using Excel to Produce Frequency Distributions

Bernard pp 517-528 on codebooks and frequency distributions

Th 6 October

13. , TBA

Week 8

Tu 11 October

14. Exam on Univariate Analysis

No Lab

Th 13 October

15. Bivariate Analysis – Uncovering Relationships

Bivariate Bernard ch 20 "Bivariate Analysis: Testing Relations" (53)

Week 9

Tu 18 October

16. Tables, Relationships, and Bivariate Statistics

The table elaboration method. Controlling for a third variable. How independent variables interact.

LAB VI: Bivariate Tables

Th 20 October

17. Bivariate continued

Week 10

Tu 25 October

18. Bivariate continued

LAB VII: Bivariate charts and graphs

Th 27 October

19. Bivariate Exam

Week 11

Tu 1 November

20. Sampling: Why a small taste of Phishfood ® Won't Do

Sampling as the most important invention of the last few centuries. Populations and universes. Probabilistic vs. Non-probabilistic Sampling. Sampling distributions.

Bernard ch 6 "Sampling" (21)

LAB VIII: Sampling Lab

Th 3 November

21. Sampling continued

Week 12

Tu 8 November

22. Measurement: Scales and Scaling

Bernard ch 12 "Scales and Scaling" (24) and re-read pp 517-28

Mazur "Signs of Status in Bridal Portraits," *Sociological Forum*, Vol. 8, No. 2. (Jun., 1993), pp. 273-283.

LAB IX: Scaling actual class

Th 10 November

23. TBA

Week 13

Tu 15 November

24. TBA

LAB X: An Online Survey for Bridal Portraits

Crane & Angrosino, Ch. 11 "Designing a Survey"

Th 17 November

25. Interlude: Is There a Feminist Approach to Method?

Sandra Harding, "Is There is a Feminist Method?"

Devault, Marjorie L. 1990. Talking and Listening from Women's Standpoint: Feminist Strategies for Interviewing and Analysis. *Social Problems* 37: 96-116

Further Reading

http://research.umbc.edu/~korenman/wmst/fem_epistemology2.html

<http://www.unb.ca/PAR-L/femresbiblio.htm>

Week 14

Tu 22 November

26. Studying Cultural Domains and Networks

Crane & Angrosino, Ch. 10 "Doing Ethnosemantic Research"

Bernard ch 11 "Structured Interviewing: Cultural Domain Analysis" (17)

LAB TBA

Week 15

Tu 29 November

27. TBA

LAB XII: TBA

Th 1 December

28. TBA