

Research Methodology and Statistical Concepts (SS 385, PSYC 385) **Syllabus – Spring 2009**

Course Information

Course title: Research Methodology and Statistical Concepts
Course number: SS/PSYC 385
Credits: 3 (three)
Course discipline: Social Sciences/Psychology
Prerequisites: SS 300 is strongly recommended.

Instructor Information

Name: Alan Lamb
Email: adlamb@nic.edu
Office: FSOQ 202 NIC Campus in CDA. Mailing address is: Alan Lamb,
North Idaho College, 1000 W. Garden Ave., Coeur d'Alene, ID
83814
Office hours: TTh 8:30am-10:00am, W 1:00pm-2:00pm
Phone: 208-769-3453

Textbook

Required reading: Babbie, Earl. 2007. *The Practice of Social Research*. Belmont:
Thomson-Wadsworth.

Introduction:

This course will provide an overview on various research methods in the social and behavioral sciences (but also used in public administration, education, and similar fields). It will deal with the general ways to carry out empirical social research and with the different ways of obtaining and utilizing data. By taking this course, you will enhance your ability to understand the results of research found in professional journals and to communicate the meaning of data, research findings, and statistical data to others. This course integrates (1) analytical and evaluative thinking; (2) descriptive, explanatory and critical writing; (3) basic knowledge of research design and statistical thinking; and (4) data interpretation in simulated settings.

While taking college classes in the social and behavioral sciences, you have no doubt heard of and read about a number of research studies conducted by anthropologists, psychologists, sociologists, and/or other social scientists. If it were not for the research done by these behavioral scientists, there would be very little information or knowledge available to teach courses or write textbooks about (and you probably wouldn't be here in this class!). It is also important to keep in mind that while most students will not seek a career as a social researcher, many will often find themselves in a position where they need to make use of social research. Because of this, it is important to understand how social scientists gain their knowledge, how

they present their data, and how they arrive at their conclusions.

Despite having have learned about (and continuing to learn about) the findings or results of research, chances are you have not spent much time studying the research process itself, and you probably have had little or no experience in doing your own research. The "research" that is being referred to here is the kind that involves activities such as: conducting experiments with human subjects in a psychology laboratory, such as studying the influence of alcohol on judgment; doing a sociological survey of some group, such as a survey designed to ascertain seatbelt usage among Idaho drivers or to find out about the recycling behavior of North Idaho citizenry; or observing and making careful written records in an anthropological study of the behavior of people in natural settings, such as the Amish in their communities, the interactions of student study groups, prisoners in a prison recreation yard, or an American Indian group such as the Navajo in contemporary communities.

The purpose of this course is to change all of that. No, you will not be required to make a field trip to the Pennsylvania or Arizona, as much as you might like (or might not like) to do so. Instead, you will be expected to focus your attention on the "why's and wherefores," the "how's" and "how to's," and the "do's" and "don'ts" of research. You will develop the knowledge and skills necessary to review and critically evaluate the research of others, and you will develop a formal research proposal on a topic related to your area of interest. In the process, keep in mind that this particular course has been designed to better serve the needs of an eight week summer session, taking into account the significant time constraints many students face due to work and/or family obligations.



Research Methods Course Objectives:

The focus of this course is on the process and practice of research in the behavioral sciences. You will learn about and gain experience applying the principles and procedures that guide behavioral scientists as they conduct research, including the beliefs and assumptions they hold, the kinds of questions they ask, and the variety of decisions that they must make. You will consider and become involved with the steps or stages of the research process: (1) *Selecting a Topic for Research*; (2) *Reviewing the Related Literature*; (3) *Sharpening the Topic Focus and Formulating a Researchable Question*; (4) *Choosing an Appropriate Research Design*; (5) *Collecting Data*; (6) *Analyzing and Interpreting Data*; and (7) *Reporting the Results of Research*. In writing a research proposal you will be going into some detail on the first four steps, and even into some degree of elaboration on the other steps (which will be discussed in your proposal in the context of *How you plan to...@*). You will develop an understanding and appreciation of the unique perspectives that anthropologists, psychologists, sociologists, and other social scientists employ as they conduct research in their respective disciplines.

Additional learning objectives include:

1. Developing a foundation for thinking about social science research: where it comes from; what has it been able to accomplish; how scientific it is by understanding the perspectives, assumptions, logic, and methods of science, and how they are used by behavioral scientists to study human behavior; to recognize the purposes of research, i.e., exploration, description, and explanation; to recognize the distinction between basic and applied research, and the types of applied research (action research, impact assessment, and evaluation research).
2. Developing an understanding of the structure and types of theory, the importance of theory in suggesting topics for research, and the importance of research in testing theories and in producing findings that give rise to theories.
3. Learning to recognize and formulate testable hypotheses.
4. Learning to identify, define, and operationalize or measure independent and dependent variables.
7. Discovering how to recognize and control for common errors in causal explanation, including the ecological fallacy, the error of reductionism, tautological and teleological statements, and spuriousness.
8. Learning how to assess and improve the validity and reliability of measures.
9. Learning how to conduct research ethically.
10. Learning about the strengths & weaknesses, the processes & procedures, and the uses of the various research methods, including experiments, surveys, secondary data analysis, field studies, evaluation research, etc.
11. Developing an understanding of the processes and techniques of quantitative data analysis and interpretation, involving the uses of univariate, bivariate, and multivariate descriptive and inferential statistics, etc.
12. Enhancing your ability to analyze and critically evaluate research articles published in scholarly journals.
13. Learning how to prepare research proposals and reports.
14. Learning how to display an attitude of open-minded skepticism.
15. Discovering how to use the Internet for finding useful information relevant to research methods and design.
16. Improving your ability to write correctly, clearly, cogently, and accord with

approved academic guidelines.

17. Developing the skills on how to design and conduct your own research.

Course Requirements:

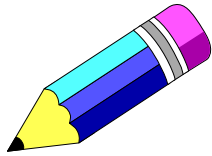
Each of these is described in more detail below:



Weekly discussions and participation.....	420 points possible
Weekly quizzes.....	330 points possible
Two exams.....	400 points possible
Research proposal.....	250 points possible
Total possible points.....	= 1400 points

Letter grades will be assigned based upon the following percentage

breakdown:



92.5-100%	= A
89.5-92.4%	= A-
87.5-89.4%	= B+
82.5-87.4%	= B
79.5-82.4%	= B-
77.5-79.4%	= C+
72.5-77.4%	= C
69.5-72.4%	= C-
67.5-69.4%	= D+
62.5-67.4%	= D
Below 59.5%	= F

Weekly Discussions and Course Participation – Up to 420 points possible (14 weeks times 30 points per week): Instead of a course where you need to attend a classroom, we will be relying on an online interactive discussion system to be part of our virtual seminar. Here, you will log on, respond to issues assigned, look at what others have written, comment if necessary, etc. You can log on and participate at any hour and any day of the week, but you will need to adhere to weekly due dates and stay on schedule. For more information and instructions on the Weekly Discussions, see the "Discussion Guidelines and Success Tips" page, accessible from your "Weekly Discussion Assignments" page.

Weekly Quizzes – Up to 330 points possible (each quiz is worth up to 30 points). There are 14 quizzes in this course of which the 3 lowest grades will be dropped. You will be able to take a particular quiz up to 3 times, improving your grade (each quiz has a finite time frame in which to do this, so it is important to not wait until the last minute to do quizzes, as you will lose the opportunity to retake a quiz, if necessary). The quizzes are primarily learning tools to keep you engaged in the material on a week-to-week basis. You will be able to use your text when taking

these quizzes and they should not prove to be too difficult providing you have read the material and allow enough time for retaking them if necessary.

Exams – Up to 400 points possible. There will be a total of 2 exams given in this course worth 200 points each (for a total of 400 points out of the 1400 points possible in this course). The final exam will not be comprehensive and will carry the same weight as the first exam. Exams will consist of a combination of multiple choice and essay questions and are timed. You will be given a study guide 1 week in advance of when exams become accessible to be taken. When exams become accessible, you will be able to take the exam during a 2-hour time block of your choice sometime during the one week period the exam is available (see the Weekly Schedule). Exams are randomly computer generated from a pool of questions covering the material...this means that each person's exam will be different, though the same material is covered. Because of this, I do not require people to come in to take proctored exams--exams can be taken from your home or wherever and are open-text (*though open-text, if you have not studied for the exam you will not do well...2 hours is not enough time to try to look up all of the answers and, unlike the quizzes, you will not be able to repeat exams for a better grade*). Please note: exam grades will not be released until after the exam period is over.

Research Proposal – – Up to 250 points possible. A handout will be posted describing in detail the requirements of the research proposal. The final product will be due no later than the end of the day on 5/7/09.

Miscellaneous Course Policies:

Academic Dishonesty: Cheating, plagiarism, or any other form of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated! Anyone caught violating this policy will receive an "F" for the course.

Unfortunately, incidences of students copying of other student's work and plagiarism from the web have increased in recent years, forcing me to adopt 2 different plagiarism detection programs for use in my classes. One of these programs checks for the copying of other student's work within my classes (from both the current semester and past semesters) and the other program checks for plagiarism using the Internet. WARNING: I will be using both of these programs in this class. To learn more about plagiarism and how to avoid it, please go to the following website: <http://www.plagiarism.org/>

Assistance: I am more than willing to help or assist students on material presented that they do not understand. If you don't feel like bringing something up in the forum for clarification I encourage you to (1) send me a private e-mail and/or (2) call me at 208-769-3453 (my office). If you plan to be in Coeur d'Alene you can also make an appointment to see me at my office, providing our schedules mesh.

Behavior: Even though we don't meet face-to-face, we still need to be aware of the feelings of others and behave in a mature, courteous manner in forums or via e-mail. Disruptive behavior will not be tolerated. .

Class Participation: Because we do not have lectures, class participation is expected--both at the level of forum discussion and through course mail.

Disabilities: In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, LCSC provides services and accommodations to students who experience barriers in the educational setting due to learning, emotional, physical, mobility, visual, or hearing disabilities. For more information please contact the Office of Disability Services at 208-792-2211.

Extra Credit: There are no extra credit opportunities available in this course, therefore it is important to keep up on the weekly discussions and quizzes and do all of the assignments.

Late work: *Weekly Discussion Assignments:* Starting with the Week 4 Forum assignment's due date, I will not accept late discussion forum work without a valid excuse being offered in a timely fashion (i.e., within a couple days of the due date/time). If you post something late, even one minute late, and don't provide a valid excuse for lateness, your late work will not be accepted and you will not earn any points for that assignment. There is a fairly large window of opportunity to complete forum assignments as, with the exception of week 1, there about 2 weeks from when forum assignments are accessible to when they are due--they become accessible on Monday the week before and are due by the end of the week they are assigned (with the participation component needing to be completed by 2 days later). Try to schedule doing your assignments at least a few days before due dates/times in order to avoid putting yourself in a situation of being late. *Quizzes:* Because you have a buffer of 3 quizzes, there are no makeup opportunities on missed quizzes (with the exception of network problems). *Exams:* Exams have a 1 week window in which you can log on and take the exam, after that the window closes and you can't take the exam.. If you cannot log on for a 2 hour block of time sometime during this week you can request an extension providing you have a compelling reason. Exam extensions will generally only be granted if you contact the instructor prior to the exam due date/time. *Research Proposals:* Generally, research proposals can only be turned in late if an extension is granted prior to the due date/time. .Extensions will only be granted with compelling reasons. ***NOTE: Students will be accommodated if they have a valid excuse for not getting their work in on time, but you need to keep the instructor informed (the key here is good and timely communication).***

Course Problems: Please feel free to express any suggestions for improvement you might have. If you have any problems with instruction please discuss with me. I am very open to discussion and I am here to help you to the best of my ability--your education is very important to me! .

The instructor reserves the right to change or amend this syllabus or the class schedule in the event of extenuating circumstances.