

**Research Methods I**  
Sociology 302-02  
Rhode Island College, Fall 2008

Mondays and Wednesdays, 10-11:50 AM, Craig Lee Hall room 151  
Prerequisite: Any 200-level sociology course

*Instructor Information*

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Office: Craig Lee Hall room 451

Office Hours: Tuesdays 3:30-5:30 PM, Wednesdays 2:30-3:30 PM, or by appointment

Course website: <http://www.ric.edu/faculty/marthur/classes.html>

*Course Description*

This course provides an introduction to social research methods, with a primary focus on conceptualizing research studies and collecting data. Students will be introduced to the relationship between theory and research, ethical and practical issues in conducting research, conceptualization and measurement, sampling, and various data collection techniques. Data analysis will not be a primary focus of this course, as that topic is covered in Research Methods II.

By the end of this course, students will be

- Developed a proposal for their own research project
- Advanced their ability to write about research and evaluate the research of others
- Gained skills in surveying, interviewing, observation, and other data analysis techniques
- Become better prepared for future coursework involving research methods, such as Research Methods II, Senior Seminar, and Independent Study, and for jobs and careers requiring research tasks

*Materials*

Adler, Emily Stier and Roger Clark. 2007. *How It's Done: An Invitation to Social Research*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing. (Available in the College Bookstore and online; costs around \$100 new, but used editions are available. You can also choose to purchase the ebook version from [ichapters.com](http://ichapters.com), which is available for around \$55.)

Supplemental readings will be assigned via ereserves, WebCT, in-class handouts, or websites.

*Requirements*

1. PARTICIPATION AND ATTENDANCE. While regular participation is important in all college courses, it is even more important in a course that meets only once a week, as this one does. Missing one class session of our course is like missing a whole week of another course. You are expected to come on time for every class meeting and let me know as soon as possible (preferably in advance) if you must miss class for a legitimate reason. Part of your attendance is the expectation that you will participate in class sessions by contributing something to our discussions. If you have significant problems speaking in class, I strongly urge you to come speak to me privately as soon as possible to develop alternative

participation mechanisms (such as private meetings or e-mail discussions) so that you can meet this requirement. Remember that there are few stupid questions, but that all questions and comments should be made in a spirit of respect for other students and their contributions to the class. (10% of final course grade)

2. WEEKLY ASSIGNMENTS. Every week, there will be one or more in-class or out-of class assignments. These might take the form of announced or unannounced quizzes, exercises at the end of textbook chapters, practical research experiences, or steps in the preparation of your research proposal paper described below. Most of these assignments can not be made up and will not be accepted late (exceptions will be announced for those assignments particularly important to the development of your paper), but there are more assignments than are necessary to earn full credit. Assignments will be graded either on a credit-no credit basis or on a check plus, check, check minus, no credit basis. (40% of final course grade)
3. RESEARCH PROPOSAL PAPER. Towards the end of the semester, you will turn in a research proposal paper. This paper will allow you to explore a topic of interest to you across the span of the entire semester and propose a project drawing on that topic taking the form of either an Honors/Independent Study project or an applied project for a agency/government client. Some of the weekly assignments will help you prepare for this paper, which will be approximately 8-12 pages in length depending on the particular project you propose. More detailed assignment guidelines will be handed out as the semester progresses. (25% of final course grade)
4. FINAL EXAM. During the final exam period, there will be an in-class final exam. This exam will be open-book; questions will take the form of short answer and short essay questions asking you to apply your research methods knowledge to particular situations. (25% of final course grade)
5. READING. You are expected to complete all assigned course readings prior to the date for which they are assigned. Remember that normal expectations for a college course are that you should do two to three hours of work outside class for every one hour in class—since you are spending four hours a week in this class, that means you should expect to work on reading, writing assignments, and studying for this class for eight to twelve hours a week outside of class. Reading assignments average 85 pages per week. You may also want to visit the companion site for the textbook, which contains quizzes, flashcards, and other study aids for each chapter, at <http://snipurl.com/2ter0> (this is on the Wadsworth site).

### Course Schedule

All readings and assignments are due at the start of the class date for which they are assigned. In the schedule below, **T** indicates readings in the textbook, **O** indicates readings available elsewhere.

September 3

### Introduction to Research Methods

#### PART I: Developing and Conceptualizing Research Ideas

September 8

### The Connection Between Theory and Research

“The Uses of Social Research,” (1-18) **T**

“The Connection Between Theory and Research,” (19-36) **T**

**Be sure to read the entire syllabus prior to this class meeting**

- September 10                    **Research Ethics**  
 “Ethics and Social Research,” (37-66) **T**  
 Human Subjects Tutorial (<http://www.nyu.edu/ucaih/s/tutorial/>)
- September 15                    **Choosing a Topic**  
 “Selecting Researchable Topics and Questions,” (67-96) **T**
- September 17                    **Conducting a Literature Review**  
 Library Instruction Session  
 “ASA Format”  
 (<http://www.calstatela.edu/library/bi/rsalina/asa.styleguide.html>)  
 “Literature Reviews” ([http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/literature\\_review.html](http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/literature_review.html))
- September 22                    **Samples and Study Designs**  
 “Sampling,” (97-126) **T**  
 “Cross-Sectional, Longitudinal, & Case Study Designs,” (157-184) **T**
- September 24                    **Measurement**  
 “Measurement,” (127-156) **T**
- September 29                    **No Class—Rosh Hashanah**  
 Schedule a short meeting with me to discuss your topic.
- October 1                         **No Class—Rosh Hashanah**
- October 6                         **Experiments**  
 “Experimental Research,” (185-214) **T**  
 \*Literature Review Due Today
- October 8                         Gerber, “Social Pressure & Voter Turnout.” *APSR* 102 (33-48) **O**  
 Pager, “The Mark of a Criminal Record.” *AJS* 108 (937-975) **O**
- October 13                        **No Class—Columbus Day**

PART II: CHOOSING METHODS OF SOCIAL RESEARCH

- October 15                        **Surveys and Censuses**  
 “Questionnaires and Structured Interviews,” (215-254) **T**  
 Census 2000 Basics, pages 1-8  
<http://www.census.gov/mso/www/c2000basics/00Basics.pdf>
- October 20                        Gross, “How Religious are America’s College & University Professors?” [http://religion.ssrc.org/reforum/Gross\\_Simmons.pdf](http://religion.ssrc.org/reforum/Gross_Simmons.pdf)  
 Brittingham, “We the People of Arab Ancestry in the US,”  
<http://www.census.gov/prod/2005pubs/censr-21.pdf>

- October 22                    **Interviews**  
 “Qualitative Interviewing,” (255-298) **T**
- October 27                    Edin, “What do Low-Income Single Mothers Say About Marriage?”  
*Social Problems* 47: (112-133) **O**
- October 29                    **Observation and Ethnography**  
 “Observational Techniques,” (297-332) **T**
- November 3                    Duneier, “A Statement on Method,” *Sidewalk* (333-358) **O**  
 Mears, “Not Just a Paper Doll,” *JCE* 34: (317-343) **O**
- November 5                    **Comparative-Historical Methods**  
 “Using Available Data,” (333-360) **T**  
 Berg, “Unobtrusive Measures in Research,” *Qualitative Research Methods* (189-209) **O**
- November 10                    Goodwin, “The Struggle Made Me a Nonracialist,” *Mobilization* 12  
 (193-203) **O**
- November 12                    **Content Analysis & Visual Sociology**  
 “Content Analysis,” (361-388) **T**  
 Do NOT read pages 379-383
- November 17                    Candy, “The Fabric of Society,” *JRO*  
<http://www.socresonline.org.uk/10/1/candy.html>
- November 19                    **Comparing Methods & Multi-Method Research**  
 “Comparing Methods” and “Multiple Methods,” (379-383) **T**  
 Read several case studies of interest from  
<http://www.orgnet.com/cases.html>
- PART III: THE USES OF RESEARCH
- November 24                    **Writing About Research and Proposing Research**  
 “Writing the Research Report,” (481-484) **T**  
 “Check List for Preparing a Research Proposal,” (487-488) **T**  
 “The Research Proposal” Cargan, *Doing Social Research* (43-53) **O**
- November 26                    **No Class—Thanksgiving**
- December 1                    **Applied Social Research**  
 “Applied Social Research,” (389-430) **T**
- December 3                    **Critiquing Research Methods**  
 Gray, “Feminist Methods,” *The Research Imagination* (211-240) **O**  
 Chapter TBA from “White Logic, White Methods” **O**

December 8	<b>Research Proposals Due In Class Today</b> Be prepared to talk for 2 minutes about your proposal
December 10	<b>Course Conclusion and Exam Review</b>
Date TBA	<b>Final Exam</b>

## Course Policies

### *Academic Honesty*

All students enrolling in this course are expected to abide by the Rhode Island College guidelines on academic honesty, which can be located in the Student Handbook and other official documents. Examples of academic dishonesty include, but are not limited to:

- Plagiarizing written work, including copying some or all of your work from a book, a website, or another student's paper. Think about how you would feel if someone passed off your hard work as their own.
- Using sources without proper attribution. Remember that all claims in a paper that did not spring fully formed from your own head need attribution, regardless of whether or not they are paraphrased, and all direct quotes should appear in quotation marks. If you are unsure how to document sources, please see me or reference my webpage on the American Sociological Association citation format, available at <http://www.ric.edu/faculty/marthur/race05/styleguide/index.html>
- Turning in research reports that are fabricates or which do not accurately represent the research activities in which you engaged.
- Turning in work completed for other classes without prior permission.
- Working together with another student on an assignment, or seeking assistance with the content of your work from professionals, parents, or peers, without prior permission. (The exception to this policy is proofreading.)
- Copying off of another student or off of materials you have brought without permission during an exam. This includes text messaging and use of the internet during exams.
- Destroying course materials or otherwise preventing other students from achieving fully in this course.

You should be aware that I have caught many students who have engaged in academic dishonesty. Cheating successfully is often harder than you think, and you might as well just put your effort into doing the assignment legitimately. The penalties for academic dishonesty are severe, and include receiving a 0 on the assignment for the first minor offense, receiving an F for the class for a repeated offense, and report to the Vice President for Academic Affairs at RIC. If you feel the urge to engage in academic dishonesty, stop and think about what you are doing, and then come see me so we can work out a plan together to ensure your success in the course.

### *Extensions, Absences, and Attendance*

You are expected to attend class regularly, but I am aware that emergencies do come up and that this class is not the only priority in your life. If you know in advance that you will be absent for a legitimate reason, please let me know via email so that you can be excused. If something unavoidable comes up, it is your responsibility to let me know as soon as possible afterwards.

Regardless, it is your responsibility to get notes from a classmate (I do not provide notes to students) and to meet with me to clarify what you have missed. If you must be late to a class or if you must leave early, you should try to let me know in advance, and you should always be sure not to disturb other students with your comings and goings. Be aware that repeated absences, even if excused, may imperil your ability to do well in the course, and that you cannot earn participation points if you are not present. During most class meetings, there will be a 5-10 minute break in the middle of class. Please return promptly from these breaks or you will be considered late; repeated lateness may impact your grade.

All assignments are due in class at the start of class. While I understand that you may occasionally experience printer problems, these are not an excuse for late work. It is my preference that all work be turned in on paper, but in unavoidable situations you may email me your work. If you must email me your work, it must be sent at least 15 minutes prior to the start of class (you may not skip class to finish your work) in \*.rtf, \*.doc, \*.docx, \*.pdf, or \*.html format (try “Save As” to select one of these formats). I will write back to you letting you know that I received and could open your work. If I do not receive it or can not open it, it does not count as having been submitted, so I encourage you to try your best to get me a paper copy. If unavoidable circumstances require you to seek an extension on your work, I am generally open to providing one. However, you will need to request the extension via email at least 24 hours prior to the due date unless the extension is due to a major emergency (health crisis, death in the family, etc.) – so plan ahead.

#### *Course Technology*

Students are expected to check their RIC email addresses frequently, at a minimum twice a week before each class meeting. If you primarily use another email account, I would suggest you arrange for your RIC email to be forwarded, as I do use email to disseminate important information about the course. Students are also responsible for being able to access the WebCT site for this course (through which you can access the course website), as course documents and information will be made available there. If you are not able to access email, WebCT, or the course website, you should seek assistance from User Support Services (<http://www.ric.edu/uss/> or x8886) right away so that you do not fall behind in the course.

#### *Students with Disabilities*

If you have a disability that might interfere with your ability to perform at your best in this course, it is your responsibility to come and speak with me as early as possible in the semester so that we can develop a plan together. All reasonable accommodations will be made. Students with disabilities should be sure that they are registered with Disability Services in order to ensure access to the full range of services available at Rhode Island College. Information about these services and about registration is available at <http://www.ric.edu/disabilityservices/>.

#### *Supplemental Services*

Writing center: <http://www.ric.edu/writingcenter/>

Academic and Study Skills: <http://www.ric.edu/oasis/>

Counseling Center: <http://www.ric.edu/counselingctr/>