

Department of Sociology & Anthropology, Illinois State University
SOA 372, Special Topics: Applying Sociology for Undergraduates

Fall 2017

Meets T/Th. 12:35-1:50

Classroom: Schroeder Hall 206

Office hours: Mon. 3-4; Tues. 2-3 & by appt.

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Course Description

This section of SOC 372 (Special Topics in Sociology) will focus on applied sociology for undergraduate students. “Applied” research is that which uses the array of theories, methods, and approaches in social science research in order to address practical/policy questions and, ideally, advance social welfare. Questions of particular relevance for us arise in a range of public settings such as non-profit organizations, human service agencies, or voluntary organizations in the community. The same techniques are often used in corporate or governmental settings. Applied researchers use and develop theory from the disciplines, but the goals are more practical and the process is more collaborative, with those (“stakeholders”) who need answers to questions or may benefit from the research. We regard applied research both as a professional career path in the social sciences and, more broadly, as a conscious awareness of the connections between social inquiry and social action and reform.

Course Overview

Our goals and agenda in this course will be for students to: 1) understand the nature and variety of applied research that sociologists carry out; 2) know in general terms the history and development of these approaches in American sociology; 3) refine students’ grasp of how methodological approaches (both qualitative and quantitative) are adapted for use in applied research; and 4) apply and enhance students’ research skills. This last goal we will achieve through manageable partnerships in which we will work with local agencies to address questions of importance and relevance to them. It is *highly recommended* that members have completed SOC 271 prior to enrollment. I will assume students to have a basic conceptual understanding of research paradigms (qualitative and quantitative), and a command of terminology and concepts such as are covered in a course in research methods (SOC 271 at ISU). Students lacking this background knowledge will struggle to benefit from the course or contribute to discussion.

While applied sociology refers to a professional/career niche within the field, the perspective and skills we will develop are relevant for any/all students of the social sciences—including for those in related fields such as anthropology, social work, or education. The *sociological imagination* of which C. W. Mills wrote requires that we seek to understand connections between biography and history; this awareness is as relevant for our “local” experiences in school, work, and community, as for large-scale social settings. Indeed, a major goal for members is to sharpen your ability to apply a sociological perspective to settings and roles in your personal lives. Such awareness will enhance your professional, as well as intellectual, development.

Reading Assignments

There is no single text that meets our needs, and I am mindful of the high cost of books. Therefore, I have compiled a set of readings that borrows from several relevant sources. I will convert these sources into *pdf* files that will be available through our Reggie Net site. Inasmuch as I have used the instructors' folders on the C.A.S. website in the past, to house readings, the new arrangement will be new for me. For this reason, in our first weeks I may distribute readings as email attachments. Reading assignments will be essential for your learning; I will assign a manageable amount of reading, and you will take seriously your obligation to keep up. In order to encourage and reward this practice, we will have an objective/multiple-choice exam roughly a month into the semester, to gauge your comprehension and retention of the material. Moreover, you will cite relevant sources in your written work throughout the semester.

Teaching Format

This will be a seminar, more than a conventional lecture course. This format implies and requires *sustained active participation* among members, and assumption of responsibility for our collective learning. Also, it is an advanced seminar, which implies that students arrive with strong skills in reading, writing, and discussion—skills that you have cultivated across the curriculum. The nature of our seminar, centered on applying sociological perspectives to particular settings, will require extensive discussion in which we develop examples and integrate details about policies and processes in a range of public settings.

Assignments, Exams, and Grading

Our seminar objectives are diverse, and any/all modes of assessing students' learning are partial and imperfect. Thus, our ways of evaluating your work will also vary. An early emphasis on understanding the history of, and conceptual approaches to, applied research, will be followed by more substantive readings that illustrate the possibilities and benefits of the practice. In later weeks, you will focus on substantive topics that are personally relevant to you (whether in terms of your intellectual interests or professional/career development). This phase of the course will require that you complete a limited but strong literature review, reflecting the nature and development of important questions and findings in your area of interest. In the final weeks, you will take steps toward using your knowledge in order to identify and address questions that are relevant to others in the community (partnerships that will vary across seminar members).

Students can earn up to **100 available points** through the following assignments:

- 1 in-class exam, consisting of multiple-choice questions, based on lecture and readings=20pts.
 - 2 short (4-5 page DS) essays, drawing from personal experience, lecture and readings=20pts.
 - 1 annotated bibliography/literature review (integrating 6-8 sources) on your chosen topic=20pts.
 - 1 longer (12-15 DS) paper reflecting a gap in knowledge, and/or insights from informants=25pts.
 - Contributions to class discussion, email correspondence, and community collaborations=15pts.
- *The grading scale will be conventional; 90 points and above earn an A; 80 and above a B, etc.

[All written work is to be either typed or word-processed. **NO LATE WORK WILL BE ACCEPTED, UNLESS DISCUSSED AND PERMISSION GRANTED IN ADVANCE.** In formatting papers, please double-space, use one-inch margins and 10-12-point type, with either Times-Roman or Courier fonts preferred. Clarity, spelling, punctuation, word-usage, and continuity—all are essential for college writing, and for full credit in this course. *All written work should be original and stated in your own words; any language drawn from other sources must be appropriately noted, and paraphrased material properly noted. **The use of any material without citation, from printed, video, or internet sources, constitutes academic dishonesty and will result in zero-credit for the assignment and, if flagrant,, in formal sanctions against the student.** See the ISU policy on plagiarism for clarification of responsibilities and regulations.]*

Class Schedule and Assignments

<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Readings/Tasks</u>
<u>Week 1</u>		
8/22	Course introduction/instructor bio.	None
8/24	Member introductions, learning goals	Mills, Ragin
<u>Week 2</u>		
8/29	History & development of applied sociology	Dentler
8/31	The Chicago School and Urban Life	Bulmer
<u>Week 3</u>		
9/5	Applied research as a part of “public sociology”	Burawoy?
9/7	Examples of <i>public sociology</i>	TBA
<u>Week 4</u>		
9/12	Narratives of scholars/teachers who seek applied roles	Stall; Marris
9/14	Overview of applied sociology and employment	ASA?
<u>Week 5</u>		
9/19	Evaluation and participatory action research	Dentler; Singleton&Straits
9/21	Ethics and IRBs: Navigating access to collaboration	ISU Webforms
<u>Week 6</u>		
9/26	Defining questions in the action research paradigm	Stringer & Dwyer
9/28	Conducting a critical/focused literature review	Hart; Lab meeting
<u>Week 7</u>		
10/3	Meta-analysis of findings: the case of “welfare reform”	Danziger
10/5	Meta-analysis: qualitative research on paid caregiving	Wellin
<u>Week 8</u>		
10/10	Guest speakers: reflections on careers in applied research	TBA
10/12	“” “”	TBA

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<u>Week 9</u>		
10/17	Participatory action research	McIntyre
10/19	Exemplary reading	Stoller, et al.
<u>Week 10</u>		
10/24	Service learning and research partnerships	Blau; Ostrow, Strand
10/26	Guest speaker(s) on campus/community ties	TBA
<u>Week 11</u>		
10/31	Issues involving student-veterans	DeRamio, et al.
11/2	Policy research on student veterans/GI Bill	TBA
<u>Week 12</u>		
11/7	Applied research as multi-vocal	George, et al.
11/9	Focus groups in applied/policy studies	TBA
<u>Week 13</u>		
11/14	Conceptual/policy critique in applied work	Wellin (“Scrutinizing...”)
11/16	Social problems and typification	Best
<u>Week 14</u>		
11/21		
11/23	<i>No class: Thanksgiving Break</i>	
<u>Week 15</u>		
11/28	<i>The remaining open sessions are devoted to student-led presentations, based on your literature reviews/policy analyses, for comment and revision.</i>	
11/30		
<u>Week 16</u>		
12/5		
12/7		
<u>Week 17</u>		
<i>Final papers due (date TBA)</i>		