

Department of Sociology
Faculty of Social Sciences
South Asian University - New Delhi

Research Methods

(Compulsory Course for MA)

Total Credits: 4

Objectives of the Course

Social research is a vast and contested terrain. In this course we will focus on the techniques to contemporary social research. This course focuses on qualitative methods. But one unit offers an introduction to quantitative social research. It is expected that at the end of the semester, students will be able to develop their own research project within the areas of their interest and understand general principals and techniques of contemporary social research.

Unit I: Introduction

Unit 1 is the foundation of this course. It will concentrate on how research questions are framed; what the ideal considerations would be in framing research questions and how to formulate a draft research design in keeping with your research interests:

- Research questions vs. hypothesis
- Formulating research questions and ideal considerations in framing these questions
- The relationship between theory, methodology, methods, and research.
- How to design your own research proposal?

Readings

Bryman, Alan. *Social Research Methods* (Fourth edition). London: Oxford University Press; pp. 3-17 (Nature and Process of Social Research); pp. 44-78 (Research Designs)

Unit 2: Research Based on Written Sources

Social research depends on numerous sources of data and information. Among these are secondary sources as well as primary sources held in libraries, archives, organizations and private collections. This unit focuses on these sources to ascertain how and when such sources can be useful in research.

- What can be repositories for secondary or primary sources? Libraries, archives, organizations and private collections
- Creative writing as sources of information

Readings

Archival Research: Why Archival Research?:
<https://research.library.gsu.edu/archivalresearch>

Abbot, Andrew, 2014. *Digital Paper: A Manual for Research and Writing with Library and Internet Materials*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press (Chapters 1, 2 and 3).

Schreier, Margrit. 2012. *Qualitative Content Analysis in Practice*. London: Sage (Chapters 1 and 2)

Hill, Michael R.. 2006. 'Sociology and Poetry: An Introduction.' *Sociology Department, Faculty Publications 356*. <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/sociologyfacpub/356>

Moodie, Benjamin. 2010. 'Using Fiction Sociologically.' *UC Berkeley Recent Work*: <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5n07h3z2>

Unit 3: Research Sources Based on Images

Though images from artworks to photographs contain as much information as written and published sources, they are not considered reliable sources of information in many domains of social research. This is particularly so in sociology. In this context, this unit will focus on image-based research sources as potential repositories of information and meaning.

- Visual culture in social research
- Photography in social research

Readings

Pink, Sarah. 'Interdisciplinary agendas in visual research: resituating visual anthropology.' In, *Visual Studies*, 18:2, 179-192, 2003. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14725860310001632029>

Perera, Sasanka. 'Photography and the Ethnographic Method,' 1-19. In, *Oxford Research Encyclopedia, Education*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2019.

Unit 4: Research Based on the Spoken Word and Observation

Much of social research is based on what people tell researchers in field research conditions and what researchers see. Methods of research understood in this sense include interviews, case studies, ways of observation and so on. This unit focuses on these possibilities.

- Conducting interviews and types of interviews
- Compiling case studies
- Observation in the field

- Maintaining records (notes; audio and visual records)

Readings

Seidman, Irving. 2006. *Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences* (Third Edition); pp. 78-94 (Technique Isn't Everything, But It Is a Lot); pp. 95-111 (Interviewing as a Relationship).

Unit 5: Quantitative Research

Unit 5 will introduce students to a range of quantitative techniques that can be used for understanding social life and answering sociological questions. These lectures will cover the significance of harnessing existing secondary data sources, a discussion on research design with a focus on surveys, and a basic introduction to data analysis focusing on reading and interpreting data tables and figures.

Readings

Babbie, E. 2007. *The Practice of Social Research* (12th Edition). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Hand, D. J. 2008. *Statistics: A very Short Introduction*. Oxford: OUP.

Levin, J.A., J.A. Fox and D.R. Forde. 2014. *Elementary Statistics in Social Research*, 12th Edition, Pearson.

Putnam, Robert D. 1995. 'Tuning In, Tuning Out: The Strange Disappearance of Social Capital in America', *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 28 (4): 664-683.

Unit 6: Social Research and Writing

Ultimately, all research leads to writing, and this is particularly so with social sciences including sociology. In this unit, the focus will be on social research as the primary source from which a kind of writing will emerge, and particularly ethnographic writing. In doing so, the focus will be on the following issues:

- Writing culture debate
- The notion of partial truths
- Basics of academic writing

Readings

Clifford, James and Marcus, George. 1992. *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Introduction)

Perera, Sasanka. 'Fear of the Visual? Power of 'Writing' in Anthropology and the Eclipse of Photography,' 241-254. In, Sasanka Perera, *The Fear of the Visual? Photography, Anthropology, and the Anxieties of Seeing*. Hyderabad: Orient BlackSwan, 2020.

Poewe, Karla. 1996. 'Writing Culture and Writing Fieldwork: The Proliferation of Experimental and Experiential Ethnographies,' pp. 177-206. In, *ETHNOS* VOL. 61:3-4.

Unit 7: Ethics in Social Research

Social research necessarily implicates ethics. This is particularly so because social research that deals with the contemporary involves people. In this unit, we will discuss the general ethics that ideally should be followed in situations of social research by paying attention to bodies of ethics followed by major sociology/social anthropology associations, and also ethics that specifically deals with using images in research.

Readings

Code of Ethics of the American Anthropological Association (Approved February 2009):
<http://s3.amazonaws.com/rdcms-aaa/files/production/public/FileDownloads/pdfs/issues/policy-advocacy/upload/AAA-Ethics-Code-2009.pdf>

AAA Ethics Blog: Principles of Professional Responsibility (American Anthropological Association):
<https://archaeologicaethics.org/code-of-ethics/american-anthropological-association-aaa-ethics-blog-principles-of-professional-responsibility/#:~:text=The%20seven%20Principles%20of%20Professional,Make%20Your%20Results%20Accessible%3B%206>

Perera, Sasanka. 'Photography, Research and the Liminality of Ethics in Contemporary Times,' 199-231. In, Sasanka Perera, *The Fear of the Visual? Photography, Anthropology, and the Anxieties of Seeing*. Hyderabad: Orient BlackSwan, 2020.

Evaluation

The system of evaluation for this course involves the following three (03) components:

- 1) Midterm examination – 30/100
- 2) Assignment – 20/100
- 3) Final exam – 50/100
