

Fall, 2009

Psychology 4706: Social Psychology Research Methods: Doing It for Real

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OFFICE HOURS: by appointment
Class schedule: (one afternoon a week, 3 hour block)

Prerequisites: Open to students who have completed 3000, 3010, and one of the following: 3410, 3440, 3460, or 3420

Goals: The purpose of the class is combine hands-on experience actually conducting a study with classroom discussion of issues and methods typically used in social psychology. Rather than coming up with a practice study for the purposes of the class, students will complete actual small scale studies working with faculty in the social psychology area (and as part of the class, you will be expected to work at least 3 hours a week on the project outside of class). The methods used in these studies may cover a variety of approaches (e.g., collecting questionnaire data, coding already collected data, running participants—anything that faculty have IRB approval to do, and can be completed within the semester). Students will write up a 200 word abstract and develop a poster to be submitted for the University of Utah Undergraduate Research Symposium held in the spring.

Faculty who want to participate have provided a short summary of the proposed study, and students can choose among the possibilities which one they want to work on, in consultation with the faculty member. In class, students will work through the issues and decisions from the academic side, comparing the different projects that students are working on. For example, there will be readings and discussion on why use questionnaires versus controlled lab studies versus observations in the field, and students will identify why the particular method they are using in their study is the best one for their research. They will also identify what things need to be controlled for with different methods (with students identifying those controls within their own projects), and what set of analyses map onto the questions. At the end of the semester, there will be readings and discussion on how to present results from their studies to others. Faculty who have student(s) working on projects will help students submit the actual abstract and develop the poster to present in the University Undergraduate Research Symposium in the spring. (FYI: Working for two semesters in a lab and presenting at the undergraduate research symposium allows the student to graduate with an Undergraduate Research Scholar Designation on their transcript (<http://www.ursd.utah.edu/>.)

Students will need to access Blackboard Vista (formerly WebCT, and still labeled that way in parts) for this class. You will need to log on the WebCT system at <http://webct.utah.edu> . This class should be listed on your WebCT home page, and you can just click on that to access the class materials.

Evaluation: Final Grades (based on 100 points total)

45 points — Final research project

15 points--Abstract

- Is the purpose of the study stated?
- Does the abstract mention highlights of the research methodology (e.g., who participants are, their number; study design or what coded)
- Are the highlights of the results described clearly (e.g., what was main finding, and direction of any effects)
- If the study tied to a theory or conceptual framework, is this referred to in the abstract?
- Are there non-vague references to implications and future research directions (e.g., not just “implications are discussed”, but implications for what?)
- Overall, is the abstract effective and appropriately summing up the project?

15 points--Poster

- Is problem and research question clearly stated?
- Is there a brief description of methods that includes critical pieces of information (e.g. participants, characteristics of sample, design with operationalizations, or descriptions of coding schemes, description of measures used)
- Are the most important results presented clearly? Are the tables and figures easy to read and effective in conveying the results?
- Is there a brief discussion of what the results mean, and what the implications are?
- Overall, is the poster effective in communicating the project to others?

15 points--Final answers to set of questions about project (see next page)

- Are the final answers to the list of questions about the different aspects of the study correct?
- Is it clear that the student understands the answers, so that could answer these questions if posed by others reading poster or abstract?

30 points--Quizzes on readings.

- There will be 10 quizzes worth 3 points each, given at beginning of class period when reading is due.
- If do not get all points, can redo once and turn in before next week.

25 points--Participation

- 10 points: consistently brings in how their project addresses questions/topic for each class
- 10 points: consistently comments on other’s presentations
- 5 points: consistently goes beyond first two, commenting at higher level, or asking thoughtful question informed by readings and discussion

Questions to answer on your research project

- 1) What is the research question for your study?
- 2) What are the specific hypotheses?
- 3) Who are the participants?
- 4) Were they randomly selected from the population?
- 5) Of what population are they assumed to be representative?
- 6) What kind of method is being used in the study you are working on?

Are the data primarily descriptive? If so, what is being described?

Are the data primarily about whether one set of pre-existing variables can predict another set?

If so, were variables collected at same point in time?

Are there any variables included to “control” for influence of factor(s) that not relevant to hypothesized relationships?

Are there “treatments” or conditions?

If so, were participants randomly assigned to condition?

What is the “treatment” condition compared to?

Are there control groups? What do “control groups” control for?

- 7) What are the primary conceptual variables (or constructs)?
- 8) How are these primary conceptual variables operationalized (if independent variable) and/or measured (if predictors and/or dependent variables) in the study?
- 9) How reliable are these measures?
- 10) How are the ethical concerns for participants addressed in your study?
- 11) What statistics will best test your hypotheses?

Are you comparing group averages?

Are the groups naturally occurring (e.g., gender) or the result of experimental manipulation?

Are you predicting one set of pre-existing variables from another, without comparing groups?

Are you comparing the predicted relationships between variables found in one group to those found within another group?

Are the groups discrete (in the group or not) or relative/continuous (higher v. lower)?
Are you looking at interactions between variables (moderators) in predicting an outcome?
Are there hypothesized mediators through which effects are proposed to occur?

Given your answers, what kinds of analyses fit best?

12) Assuming that the hypotheses are supported, to what extent can you say that something caused the effects (internal validity)?

13) Assuming that the hypotheses are supported, how well do the results generalize to the real world? (external validity)

14) Assuming that the hypotheses are supported, what would be the next step?

15) What if the hypotheses are not supported? Why might that happen?

Readings: There is no required text for this class. Instead, there are weekly readings, copies of which are posted online. As noted below, the readings include individual papers and several chapters from the following three books:

Aronson, E., Ellsworth, P.C., Carlsmith, J.M., & Gonzales, M.H. (1990). *Methods of Research in Social Psychology* (2nd ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.

Sansone, C., Morf, C.C. & Panter, A.T. (Eds.). (2004). *Handbook of Methods in Social Psychology*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Rosnow, R.L., & Rosenthal, R. (2005). *Beginning Behavioral Research: A Conceptual Primer* (5th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall.

Tentative schedule and weekly assignments:

Week I. Identifying social psychological phenomena

Assignment—look over faculty list of topics, skim suggested readings

Week II. Asking social psychological research questions and generating hypotheses:

Selecting the question you will be working on in study

Reading assignment:

Sansone, C., Morf, C.C., & Panter, A.T. (2004). The research process: Of big pictures, little details, and the social psychological road in between. In Sansone, et al. (pp. 3-16)

Class discussion assignment: Bring in drafts of answers to Questions 1 and 2

Week III. Identifying about whom you're asking those questions -- (Assume true for everyone? Or systematic differences?)

Reading assignment:

Miller, J.G. (2004). Culturally sensitive research questions and methods in social psychology. In Sansone, et al. (pp. 93-116).

Class discussion assignment: Bring in drafts of answers to Questions 3- 5

Weeks IV-XIII. Identifying the “best” way to examine those research questions

Method of asking

(Week IV) Correlational and Non-experimental Methods

Reading assignment:

Aronson et al, “Alternatives to the Controlled Experiment” (Chap 5, pp. 157-182.)

Class discussion assignment: Bring in draft of answers to Question 6

(Week V) Experimental Methods

Reading assignment:

Haslam, S.A., & McGarty, C. (2004). Experimental design and causality in social psychological research. In Sansone, et al. (pp. 237-264).

Class discussion assignment: Bring in draft of answers to Question 6

Measures for asking

(Week VI) Quantitative

Reading assignment:

Aronson et al, "The Dependent Variable" (Chap. 8, pp. 240-291.)

Class discussion assignment: Bring in draft of answers to Questions 7-9

(Week VII) Qualitative

Reading assignment:

King, L.A. (2004). Measures and meanings: The use of qualitative data in social and personality psychology. In Sansone, et al. (pp. 173-194).

Class discussion assignment: Bring in draft of answers to Questions 7-9

Ethics of asking (Week VIII)

Reading assignment:

Kimmel, A.J. (2004). Ethical issues in social psychology research. In Sansone, et al. (pp. 45-70)

IRB (Institutional Review Board) proposal from study working on

Class discussion assignment: Bring in draft of answers to Question 10

Weeks IX-XI. Making sense of what you collected: What analyses match the hypotheses?

Week IX. Statistics overview

Reading assignment:

McKenna, R.J. (1995). Statistics without pain. In *The Undergraduate Researcher's Handbook: Creative Experimentation in Social Psychology*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon. (Chap 7, pp. 111-124).

Class discussion assignment: Bring in draft of answer to Question 11

Week X. Correlations v. comparing groups

Reading assignment: Review as needed—Rosenthal and Rosnow

Chap. 11 ("Quantifying and Interpreting Relationships Among Variables", pp. 272-292.)

Chap. 12 ("Statistical Significance, Effect Size and Power Analysis", pp. 293-313.)

Chap. 13 ("The Comparison of Two Conditions", pp. 314-333.)

Class discussion assignment: Bring in draft of answer to Question 11

Week XI. Interactions and mediation

Reading assignment:

Baron, R.M., & Kenny, D.A. (1986). The moderator-mediator variable distinction in social psychological research: Conceptual, strategic, and statistical considerations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 51, 1173-1182.

Review as needed--Rosnow and Rosenthal, Chap. 14 ("Comparisons on More Than Two Conditions", pp. 334-367.)

Class discussion assignment: Bring in draft of answer to Question 11

Weeks XII-XV. Communicating your results to others

Week XII. Overview

Reading assignment:

Sternberg, R.J. (1988). "Eight common misconceptions about psychology papers." In *The Psychologist's Companion* (3rd ed.). New York: Cambridge University. (Chap. 1, pp. 5-16).

Rosenthal and Rosnow. Appendix A ("Communicating Your Research Findings", pp. 384-407.)

Class discussion assignment: Bring in your drafts of answers to Questions 12-13

Week XIII. Abstract

Assignment: Present a draft of your abstract; read and critique others' abstracts

Week XIV. Poster

Assignment: Present a draft of your poster; read and critique others' posters

Week XV. Revised posters and next steps

Assignment: Present revised final poster

Class discussion assignment: Bring in draft of answers to Questions 14-15.

Finals week. On Monday of finals week, you will need to email me the final version of your answers to the set of questions about your research project.