Course Description
SOC 590 is the first course on research methods for first-year sociology Master’s students. This course is designed to help you develop the tools to be a professional sociologist and the skills you will need to design and conduct research for your master’s thesis. We will explore various research methods in sociology including surveys, content analysis, secondary data, and various qualitative methods (e.g., interviews and participant observation). As you are already familiar with the basics of research methods from your undergraduate coursework (in fact, this course assumes that students have already taken lower-level courses in research methods and basic statistics), in this course you will be (1) reading, understanding, and evaluating PSU sociology faculty’s research, and (2) designing your own research project. While doing so, you will deepen your understanding of general methodological issues such as validity, reliability, correlation, causation, concepts, indicators, sampling, and representativeness.

Learning Goals
• To continue the long process of thinking, writing, and speaking like a social science researcher.
• To understand and critically evaluate social science research.
• To design a research project.
• To become familiar with PSU sociology faculty’s research.

Readings
• Constructing Social Research, by Charles C. Ragin (Pine Forge Press, second edition). Available at the PSU Bookstore. FYI: You may be able to obtain this book via the Internet or from second-year graduate students (who used the same book last year).
• You will need access to a sociology research methods textbook to review basic concepts throughout the term. A textbook that you used in an undergraduate social science course is fine.
• PSU sociology faculty’s research will be sent by the instructor.
• Other readings may be assigned throughout the term.

Class Requirements
Requirements include but are not limited to readings, class attendance/participation, individual assignments, and a final paper and oral presentation. There also may be opportunities for you to attend lectures and Master’s defenses that use empirical research.

○ Attendance/Participation: Graduate seminars are not lecture classes. Students are expected to read the course material and do the weekly assignments before class so that they are ready and able to discuss the topic of the week in class. Students are expected to attend all of the class sessions (unless they are sick). As a part of participation, students may be asked to prepare and lead discussion in a particular class.
○ Assignments: There will be weekly assignments that will involve reading and writing.
○ Final Paper and Oral Presentation: Students will ask a research question(s) and detail a research design to collect data in order to answer that question. Since it is an introductory course, however, students will not conduct the research that they design. We may meet two times during Week 10 to accommodate all of the oral presentations. The final paper is due during exam week.
PART I: EXPLORING DIFFERENT METHODOLOGIES & YOUR RESEARCH INTERESTS

Week 1, September 24
- Complete assignment 1 before class on September 24 and bring to class, including reading Ragin’s Preface, Chapter 1, and Chapter 2.
- Introductions, syllabus, set up small groups, and discuss and work on final project.
- Hand out oral presentation and final paper guidelines.

Week 2, October 1 [Qualitative 1]
- Read Ragin Ch. 5 and article for Week 2.
- Discuss completed homework assignment(s) and readings. [I introduce Randy Blazak and lead Q&A]

Week 3, October 8 [Qualitative 2]
- Discuss completed homework assignment(s) and readings for Week 3. [Some students introduce guest and lead Q&A]

Week 4, October 15 [Comparative]
- Read Ragin Ch. 6, p. 135-151, and article(s) for Week 4.
- Discuss completed homework assignment(s) and readings. [Some students introduce Bob Liebman at 3:30 and lead Q&A]
- Directions from Social Science Librarian, Kim Pendell, on how to get secondary data set. Then assignment there is an assignment regarding how to find survey/codebook (and relevant survey questions) for Week 5.

Week 5, October 22 [Quantitative: Surveys]
- Read Ragin Chapter 7, pages 163-182 and article for Week 5.
- Discuss completed homework assignment and readings. [Some students introduce guest and lead Q&A]
- DUE: survey question/codebook assignment.

Week 6, October 29 [Quantitative and Qualitative: Content Analysis]
- Read article for Week 6.
- Discuss completed homework assignment(s) and readings. [Some students introduce Maura Kelly and lead Q&A]

PART II: FOCUSING ON YOUR FINAL RESEARCH PROJECT

Week 7, November 5 [Work on Final Project]
- Begin working on your Final Project.
- Note: We may meet as a whole group, in small groups, or individually. This will be determined as the course progresses.
Week 8, November 12 [NO CLASS due to observance of Veterans Day]
  • **Due:** First draft of oral presentation, including the notes section. (Put paper copy in Daniel’s box by Tuesday 2 p.m., November 13 – include notes section.)
  • **Due:** Self-assessment document of first five assignments.

Week 9, November 19
  • Some students’ oral presentations and a discussion of how to use Daniel’s NSF proposal to help write your final paper.

Week 10, November 26
  • The remaining students’ oral presentations.

Exam Week
  • **Due:** Final Written Paper and Self-Evaluation due on December 5, 2012 at 10 a.m.