Course Objectives

The objective of this course is to introduce students to some of the issues and problems in doing sociological research. The course is intended to provide the student with a knowledge and an understanding of the range and diversity of sociological research. Particular attention will be paid to the way the field of sociological knowledge and research has developed to the present day.

We will explore and discuss fundamental issues such as: Is sociology a science? How can we analyse and describe the social world? How do we know if what we say is valuable and reliable? Must research be value free? How do researchers fit into the power relations of the society they study? What is the relation between social research and the formulation and implementation of policy? Where does theory fit into research?

One of the main aims in exploring and discussing these issues is to enable the student to assess the quality of research material and to carry out his/her research in a sociologically competent manner.

Each lecture is followed by a seminar where specific items of research are discussed. This provides a framework whereby more general ideas that are raised in the lecturers can be discussed in relation to particular studies.

There is no one textbook but you may find this book useful for the early section of the course: J. Hughes,(1990) The Philosophy of Social Research. London, Longman.

There are also a number of additional readings that accompany each lecture. These are seen very much as essential readings.

Students are also required to read two articles based on specific research studies in advance of the seminar. During these sessions, individual students will introduce a short critique of the two pieces of research for that week and others will be expected to contribute to the discussion.
Assessment

Students are required to hand in one piece of assessment on the sixth week of the course and a further piece of assessment on the 12th week of the course.

The first piece should be a short critique of no more than 750 words of one of the research articles that are discussed in the relevant part of the course.

The second piece will be a 2,000 word essay dealing with one of the wider topics in the relevant part of the course.

**NOTE:** A central feature of the assessment of this course will be that students adhere rigorously to the cannons of social scientific research writing and referencing. Any piece of work that is found to have three major referencing errors will be returned to the student for correction. Errors remaining after re-submission will lead to heavy loss of grades.

Organisation of the Course

This is a highly participative course and so you need to read a number of comparatively short articles each week.

You will find the **Required Readings** – which forms the background material for the lectures – either on Blackboard or in the Students Union. The Students Union Photocopying Office will copy the articles I have left in for a small fee. You may wish to get them all together or pick them up as you approach individual lectures. Alternatively, you will also find most of this material in the library.

The package of **Research Studies** are all on Blackboard. I shall also leave hard copies into the Students Union so that you may also get them photocopies for a small fee. You will need to volunteer to introduce one of the studies to the wider group.

**COURSE OUTLINE:**

**Lecture 1: Introduction**


Lecture 2: DECIPHERING SOCIOLOGICAL RESEARCH

Required Reading

Research Studies

Lecture 3: SCIENCE, PROGRESS AND POSTMODERNISM

Required Reading:

Research Studies:

Lecture 4: POSITIVISM AND QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

Required Reading


Research Studies
Lecture 5: NATURALISM AND THE REVOLT AGAINST POSITIVISM

Required Reading


Research Studies


Lecture 6: Foucault, Power-Knowledge and Research

Required Reading


Research Studies


Lecture 7: CRITICAL THEORY IN RESEARCH

Required Reading

Merton, R. (1968) *Social Theory and Social Structure*, New York, Free Press, Chaps 4 and 5. (In Students’ Union)

**Research Studies**


Gibbon, P. (1974) 'Arensberg and Kimball revisited' in *Economy and Society* vol 2 no 4

**Lecture 8: POWER, FEMINISM AND RESEARCH**

**Required Reading**


**Research Studies**


**Lecture 9: RESEARCH, OFFICIAL DATA AND THE STATE**

**Required Reading**


Research Studies


Lecture 10: THE RESEARCHER’S PERSPECTIVE AND VALUE FREE RESEARCH

Required Reading:


Research Studies


Lecture 11: RESEARCH, REDUCTIONISM AND DETERMINISM

Required Reading


Research Studies

Lecture 12: RESEARCH ON ELITES

Required Reading:


Critique of Official Reports

Student Presentations