

# SSC107 Research Methods in Social Sciences

## Lecturer

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## Mode of Tuition

2-hour lecture and 1-hour tutorial per week

## Brief Course Description

This course surveys, on an introductory level, the process and structure of research in social sciences. It deals with the general logic of scientific inquiry, research design, sampling, measurement and data collection. Various theoretical and methodological principles, modes of research (e.g. experiment, survey, and field research), strategies and techniques employed in the research process will be examined. It will give equal focuses on quantitative and qualitative study, and introduce example studies from different disciplines in social sciences.

The course provides hands-on practices in study design and data collection. Students will collaborate in small groups to design a mini questionnaire, to conduct mock interview, and to formulate a research proposal. Issues of scientific inquiry, theoretical principles, quantitative and qualitative research, research design, sampling, measurement, and data analysis will be covered.

## Aims

This course aims to introduce students to the essential principles of scientific research, and demonstrate how those principles are reflected in the established techniques for conducting quantitative and qualitative research. Students will know the general process of doing research, and they will learn the theoretical assumptions and practical approaches of disciplinarily typical types of research methods. Students will better consume academic readings, and design small research projects by themselves.

## Learning Outcomes

By the completion of this course, students are not expected to become expert social scientists, but they are expected to:

1. Be able to understand the essential principles of scientific research, and see how various research methods can be applied to address key social science questions.
2. Be able to conceptualize a research problem and develop a number of complementary designs to bring evidence to bear on the problem.
3. Be able to propose a small-scale research project.
4. Be able to evaluate the reliability and validity of research information that appears in the media, market reports, policy studies, and opinion polls.
5. Be able to understand issues that may constrain or limit the quality of the research that was done.

## **Indicative Content**

1. Introduction
  - a. The nature and purpose of scientific inquiry
  - b. A flowchart of scientific research
  - c. Ethics & Politics of social research
2. Identification of research problem
  - a. The formation of research problems and research questions
  - b. The role and significance of literature review
3. Conceptualization & Operationalization
  - a. Theoretical definitions and clarification of major variables
  - b. Theoretical explanation and the construction of theoretical framework
  - c. Operational definitions of major variables
  - d. Selection of indicators
  - e. Construction of scale and index
4. Sampling methods
  - a. Basic concepts (e.g., population, sample, sampling frame)
  - b. Sampling practices in quantitative and qualitative research
5. Modes of research
  - a. Experiment and quasi-experiment
  - b. Survey
  - c. Interview
  - c. Observation
  - e. Qualitative and quantitative research: differences and similarities
6. Analysis of Data
  - a. Qualitative data processing
  - b. Quantitative data processing
7. Writing up your research finding (writing research proposals and reports)
  - a. Major components of a research proposal and report
  - b. Citation styles

## **Course Assessment**

- Article summary and discussion: 40% (10% for each)
- Mini projects (group work): 20% (10% for each)
- Research proposal (group work): 15% (5% presentation, 10% written proposal)
- Final examination: 40%
- Absence: unlimited (5% will be deducted for each tutorial absence)

## **Required Reading**

Babbie, E. (2007). *The Practice of Social Research*. 11<sup>th</sup> ed., Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

## **Recommended/Supplementary Readings**

### General Methodology Books:

- Blaikie, N. (2000) *Designing Social Research*, Cambridge: Polity.
- Cole, S. (1992) *Making Science: between Nature and Society*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Neuman, W. L. (1997) *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed, Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Firebaugh, G. (2008). *Seven Rules for Social Research*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Gregory, R. J. (2007). *Psychological Testing: History, Principles, and Applications*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed., Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Pelham, B. W., & Blanton, H. (2007). *Conducting Research in Psychology: Measuring the Weight of Smoke*, 3rd ed., Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning.

### Experiment Studies:

- Aserinsky, E., & Kleitman, N. (1953). Regularly Occurring Periods of Eye Motility and Concomitant Phenomena during Sleep. *Science*, *118*, 273-274.
- Chen, Y. F., Lu, J. F., Tjosvold, D., & Lin, C. T. (2008). Effects of Team Goal Interdependence on Newcomer Socialization: An Experiment in China. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, *38*, 198-214.
- Seligman, M. E. P., & Maier, S. F. (1967). Failure to escape traumatic shock. *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, *74*, 1-9.
- LaPiere, R. T. (1934). Attitudes vs. Actions. *Social Forces*, *13*(2), 230-237.
- Loftus, E. F. (1975). Leading Questions and the Eyewitness Report. *Cognitive Psychology*, *7*, 560-572.

### Survey Studies:

- Cheung, F. M., Leung, K., Zhang, J. X., Gan, Y. Q., Song, W. Z., & Dong, X. (2001). Indigenous Chinese Personality Constructs: Is the Five-Factor Model Complete? *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, *32*, 407-433.
- Ennett, S. T., Bailey, S. L., & Federman, E. B. (1999). Social Network Characteristics Associated with Risky Behaviors among Runaway and Homeless Youth. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, *40*(1), 63-78.
- Farh, J. L., Earley, P. C., & Lin, S. C. (1997). Impetus for Action: A Cultural Analysis of Justice and Organizational Citizenship Behavior in Chinese Society. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *42*(3), 421-444.
- Fox, S., & Spector, P. E. (2000). Relations of Emotional Intelligence, Practical Intelligence, General Intelligence, and Trait Affectivity with Interview Outcomes: It's Not All Just 'G'. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, *21*, 203-220.

- Lu, J. F., Siu, O. L., Spector, P., & Shi, K. (in press). Antecedents and Outcomes of a Four-Fold Taxonomy of Work-Family Balance in Employed Parents. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*.
- Mayer, W. G. (2001). Trends: American Attitudes toward Cuba. *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 65, 585-606.
- Miller, P. J. E., Caughlin, J. P., & Huston, T. L. (2003). Trait expressiveness and marital satisfaction: The role of idealization processes. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 65, 978-995.
- Morland, J. K. (1969). Racial awareness among American and Hong Kong Chinese children. *American Journal of Sociology*, 75, 560-374.

Qualitative Studies:

- Ambert, A. M. (1994). A Qualitative Study of Peer Abuse and Its Effects: Theoretical and Empirical Implications. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 56(1), 119-130.
- Ambert, A. M., Adler, P. A., Adler, P., & Detzner, D. F. (1995). Understanding and Evaluating Qualitative Research. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 57(4), 879-893.
- Anderson, E. A., Kohler, J. K., & Letiecq, B. L. (2002). Low-Income Fathers and "Responsible Fatherhood" Programs: A Qualitative Investigation of Participants' Experiences. *Family Relations*, 51(2), 148-155.
- Ashcraft, K. L. (1999). Managing Maternity Leave: A Qualitative Analysis of Temporary Executive Succession. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 44(2), 240-280.
- Blecke, J. (1990). Exploration of Children's Health and Self-Care Behavior within a Family Context through Qualitative Research. *Family Relations*, 39(3), 284-291.
- Daly, K. J. (1996). Spending Time with the Kids: Meanings of Family Time for Fathers. *Family Relations*, 45(4), 466-476.
- Farnsworth, E. B., & Allen, K. R. (1996). Mothers' Bereavement: Experiences of Marginalization, Stories of Change. *Family Relations*, 45(4), 360-367.
- Morgan, G., & Smircich, L. (1980). The Case for Qualitative Research. *The Academy of Management Review*, 5(4), 491-500.
- Perry, B. G. F. (2000). Beginning Anew: Doing Qualitative Research. *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, 25(1), 97-107.
- Pun, Ngai (2005). *Made in China: Women Factory Workers in a Global Workplace*, Durham: Duke University Press/Hong Kong University Press.
- Quinn, P., & Allen, K. R. (1989). Facing Challenges and Making Compromises: How Single Mothers Endure. *Family Relations*, 38(4), 390-395.
- Sandberg, J. G., Miller, R. B., & Harper, J. M. (2002). A Qualitative Study of Marital

Process and Depression in Older Couples. *Family Relations*, 51(3), 256-264.  
 Whyte, W. F. (1949). The Social Structure of the Restaurant. *The American Journal of Sociology*, 54(4), 302-310.

**Lecture outline**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Content</b>	<b>Reading</b>
25 Jan	Introduction and housekeeping	---
Feb 6	An introduction to inquiry Organizing a review of the literature	Ch. 1 Ch. 17
Feb 13	Research design The logic of sampling	Ch. 4 Ch. 7
Feb 20	Conceptualization, operationalization and measurement	Ch. 5
Feb 27	Index, scales, and Typologies	Ch. 6
Mar 6	Survey Research	Ch. 9
Mar 13	Experiments	Ch. 8
Mar 20	Field research, case studies and interviewing	Ch 10
Mar 27	Unobtrusive research	Ch 11
Apr 3	Qualitative data processing	Ch 13
Apr 17	Quantitative data processing	Ch 14
Apr 24	Writing social research Ethics and Politics of doing research	Ch.17 Ch.3

**Tutorial Outline**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Activities</b>
Feb 5	Introduction and Housekeeping
Feb 12	Library workshop led by Ms. Ivy Kan <i>at SO202</i>
Feb 19	Discussion of experiment studies (article summary, 10')
Feb 26	Discussion of survey studies (article summary, 10')
Mar 5	Presentation of designed questionnaires (group work, 10')
Mar 12	Discussion of qualitative studies (article summary 3, 10')
Mar 19	Discussion of qualitative studies (article summary 4, 10')
Mar 26	Mock interviews (group work, 10')
Apr 9	Consultation
Apr 16	Proposal presentations (3 groups)

### **Guidelines for submission of course work**

1. **Article summary**. There are four article summaries in total, each will be examined and marked before discussing relevant articles.
2. **Mini questionnaire**. Bring three hard copies of questionnaires to the tutorial on March 5<sup>th</sup>, one for the instructor, two for the other two groups. Send a soft copy of revised questionnaire to the instructor via email\* by March 6<sup>th</sup>.
3. **Mock interview**. Bring three hard copies of interview plan to the tutorial on March 26<sup>th</sup>, one for the instructor, two for the other two groups. Send a soft copy of revised questionnaire to the instructor via email\* by March 27<sup>th</sup>.
4. **Proposal**. Bring three hard copies of proposal outlines to the tutorial on April 16<sup>th</sup>, one for the instructor, two for the other two groups. Send a soft copy of the final proposal to the instructor via email\* by April 23<sup>rd</sup>.

*\*Note: Send a copy (cc) to all the groupmates at the same time, otherwise the submission will not be considered as successful.*

#### **Lingnan University Regulation against Plagiarism**

- **With regard to your coursework in particular, you are reminded:** You must note the sources of quotations, data and general information in all the submitted course work. These sources/references should appear in alphabetical order in your list of references/bibliography.
- According to Lingnan University and Social Sciences Programme policy, plagiarism is "**presentation of another person's work without proper acknowledgment of the source**". **Plagiarism** (unattributed copying) will be heavily penalised and may attract a zero mark and disciplinary action.