

# EVST 399 / SOAN 300: Research Methods and Design

University of Redlands  
Spring Semester, 2019



Welcome to EVST 399 / SOAN 300! This course teaches you how to design research for your Senior Capstone, Honors Project, or Masters.

Research is a complicated enterprise, but not as complicated as many think. Designing research projects can be broken down into **6 key steps**. Each of these involves several decisions, both practical and theoretical. This course covers the basics, at a level suitable for undergraduate majors in environmental studies, sociology, and anthropology. From the rudiments of epistemology to the practice of research design, it introduces the choices you have to make, as you seek to learn systematically about our world..

We will consider the following topics, among others:

- the difference between a research topic and a research question, and how to develop your topic into a good question (step 1);

- how to choose a logical structure for your research (step 2);
- the relationship between research questions and the types of data that can answer them (step 3);
- the kinds of data-gathering methods suitable for capturing particular types of data (step 4);
- the proper choice of research sites or samples for answering your research question (step 5);
- ways to analyze the data that these methods produce (step 6).

By the end of the course, students should know a good deal more about research than they do at the beginning. They will also learn a good deal more about scholarship!

## Overview

We will spend the first several weeks of the semester focusing on research design principles. We will spend the central part of the semester exploring various data-gathering methods and learning to analyze the data that results. As we become familiar with the strengths and weaknesses of these various methods, each student will then prepare a formal research proposal, outlining a self-designed research project. After critique, students will revise these proposals for public presentation. *This course fulfills several of the University's general education requirements: LAF: WB; LAI: SS, IMLA, WD*

## Major assignments

*We will engage in a series of activities, each designed to help you learn.*

- A six-step process to lead you from a possible research topic to a fully designed research proposal.
- Nine exercises to familiarize you with professional literature in your fields.
- Six exercises that show you how to collect and analyze data.
- Special training in research ethics, that allows you to submit research proposals to the Redlands IRB.
- Two midterm exams.
- Training for giving stellar public presentations.
- **As a summative exercise, a finished research proposal that (if done well) you can use for your Senior Capstone or Honors Research**



**Jim Spickard**  
Professor of Sociology  
Office: Larsen 232  
Hours: MW 3-5  
Make appt at  
[https://calendly.com/jim\\_spickard](https://calendly.com/jim_spickard)

**Class Meetings**  
MW 9:30-10:50am  
Larsen 224

This course introduces Environmental Studies and Sociology/Anthropology majors to the basic elements of research design and to several of the data gathering and data analysis methods that are used in their disciplines. If all goes well, by the end of the course students will have a draft research design for their Senior Projects.

**Full Online Syllabus  
& Website at:**

**<http://EVST399.coolsociology.net>**  
or  
**<http://SOAN300.coolsociology.net>**



*Research lets us understand the world we live in -- and also change it for the good of all.*

## Schedule:

### Topic #1: Research Design

1/14: Introduction to research design  
 1/16: Step 1: Finding a research question  
 1/21: Step 2: Choosing a logical structure  
 1/23: Step 3: Identifying your type of data  
 1/28: Searching the Literature  
 1/30: Step 3: (continued)  
 2/3-5: Step 4: Choosing a data-collection method  
 2/11: Step 5: Choosing a data-collection site  
 2/13: Step 6: Choosing a method of data analysis  
 2/18: MIDTERM EXAM I

### Topic #2: Collecting and Analyzing Data

2/20-25 : Working with Data Collected from Groups  
 2/27: Working with Data Collected from Individuals I  
 ----- Spring Break -----  
 3/11: Working with Data Collected from Individuals II  
 3/13: Finding Group Differences  
 3/18 Advanced Data Techniques  
 3/20: Interviewing  
 3/25: MIDTERM EXAM 2  
 3/27: Constructing an Interview Protocol  
 4/1: Ethnography  
 4/3: Coding Qualitative Data  
 4/8: The Real Thing  
 4/10: Action research

### Topic #3: Your Proposal

4/15: Reporting Research  
 4/17: Improving Your Draft Proposal  
 (Finals Week): PROPOSAL PRESENTATIONS



## Research Design Project

### Steps:

#### 1. Three Topic Ideas: (due 1/21)

- Identify three possible research topics that you would find interesting
- Outline each in about a page of text (250 words each; 750 words in all)
- Over the following couple of weeks, you will then negotiate with me to choose a project that is appropriate for senior-level undergraduate research

#### 2. Research Question: (due 2/11)

#### 3. Concept Paper: (due 2/25)

- A 1-2 page outline of your project. See the guide at the course website. (500 wds)

#### 4. Extended Design Outline (3/18):

- An extended outline of your chosen project. (About 1000 words: 4 typed pages).

#### 4. Proposal Draft: (due 4/10)

- This draft should be as complete as you can make it, and of the quality that you typically turn in as a final project for other classes. The instructors and a student partner will read it, giving you feedback. (Expect this to be about 10 pages long: 2500 words)

#### 5. Your Comments on Another Student's Draft (due 4/15)

- (2-3 pages; 500-750 words)

#### 6. Final Proposal: (oral & written) (due at the time of the scheduled Final Exam)

- This is an extensive, professional-level revision of your draft. Typical proposals require major rewrites for clarity. (About 1250 additional words, assuming that you salvage about half of your previous draft's language.)
- Present your project to the public as a **Meso-PechaKucha Presentation**

### Books: (Required)

- J. Spickard: *Research Basics: From Design to Data Analysis in Six Steps* (Sage)
- Ryan Winter: *A Crash Course in Statistics* (Sage)

### Library Reserve:

- L. Davidman: *Motherless* (chapter 1 plus any one chapter 3-7 of your choice)
- C. Smith: *Soul Searching*: — chapter 2, and the Methodological Appendix
- J. Spickard: "Microqualitative Approaches to the Sociology of Religion" (2007)
- J. Spickard: selected chapters from *Personal Knowledge & Beyond*
- W.F. Whyte et al: "Participatory Action Research".
- Others TBA



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## Help & Resources

*If you are feeling lost or overwhelmed...*

### 1. Make an appointment with us

You are welcome to email either of the instructors or make an appointment to meet, ideally during office hours. Many questions and issues can be easily resolved this way.

### 2. Use online resources

On the website, We've posted a series of guides to our assignments, links to useful information, and information about books you can read. Check it out!

### 3. Get to know the Reference Desk

Our library staff is eager to help guide your research and to orient you to our library's paper and online resources.

### 4. Use the Writing Center

The Writing Center is a free resource at any stage of the writing process, from getting started to revising drafts to polishing a final essay. You can make an appointment online at <https://reclands.mywconline.com/>

### 5. Visit the Academic Success Center

In some cases, students benefit from tutoring or one-on-one intervention. The Academic Success Center offers (free) tutoring in many subjects, and can also help you with general study, note-taking, or textbook reading strategies. They are located in Student Development Center the lower floor of the Armacost Library.

## Expectations, Grades, and Other Matters

**Regarding plagiarism:** The short version is: **Do your own work.** You may borrow ideas from others, so long as you cite them properly and then extend or evaluate their analysis. You cannot clip and past text from the Internet into your papers and pass it off as your own. You cannot turn in a paper that someone else has written. Plagiarized work or exam cheating will automatically get a zero on the assignment and may cause you to fail the class. The University has an Academic Honesty Policy, which you can find in the latest **University Catalog.**

**Technology Use in Class:** Research has demonstrated convincingly that students who try to take notes electronically learn much less than do those who take notes by hand. Therefore, unless you have a documented accommodation, **do not use laptops, tablets, phones, etc. for note-taking.** *Bring a paper notebook, have it on the desk in front of you, and use it.* You may bring your other equipment, but leave it in your book bag under the table. *Exception: a tablet, if you purchased an electronic textbook.* Unless you are a parent who needs to be available to small children, turn off your cell phone.

### Grading Standards:

- A – (4.0)** You did everything we could possibly ask of you, and you did it extremely well. You worked very hard, learned a great deal, and showed conspicuous intelligence. The quality of your work was outstanding.
- B – (3.0)** You did all the work, and you did it well. You worked hard and learned a good deal. The quality of your work was good.
- C – (2.0)** You did all or almost all of the work. It is clear that you learned a number of things, though those things may not hang together in a systematic and critical understanding of the course material. The quality of your work was adequate.
- D – (1.0)** You did most of the work. You may have learned some things, but it is not clear that you learned anything important. The quality of your work was less than adequate.
- F – (0.0)** You did not complete the course requirements at the level expected of college students in this subject area.

*(Grades of x.3 and x.7 demonstrate levels of work between these major standards.)*

### For More Information:

**Visit the Course Website at:**

<http://evst399.coolsociology.net>

or

<http://soan300.coolsociology.net>

## Accommodations

If you have a documented learning (or other) issue, and you need a reasonable accommodation so you can learn effectively, please talk to me at the beginning of the semester. In almost every case, we can design something that will work.