SOC 300: Senior Experience in Sociology  
Monday & Wednesday 11:00-12:15  
Schroeder 214 (Mondays); Schroeder 235 Computer Lab (Wednesdays)

Instructor: Jeffrey Stokes  
Email: jestok1@ilstu.edu  
Office: Schroeder Hall 343  
Office Hours: M 12:30-2, W 10-11, or by arrangement

-Samuel Beckett

“Routine, repetition, tedium, monotony, ephemeracy, inconsequence, abstraction,  
disorder, boredom, angst, ennui — these are the true hero's enemies,  
and make no mistake, they are fearsome indeed. For they are real.”  
-David Foster Wallace, The Pale King

Introduction:  
This is a Capstone Course for Sociology majors, designed to give you hands-on experience  
conducting a sociological research project and producing its final products: A final research  
paper and an oral presentation of your project. This course will be at times challenging, tedious,  
even frustrating, but it will also be exciting, rewarding, and – hopefully – more fun than you  
epect! In this particular section of Senior Experience, you will be expected to conduct  
quantitative analysis of secondary data. That means we will use statistics (in SPSS) to analyze  
survey data that have already been collected and made available to the public for research use.

You are expected to conduct this project as a sole-author. However, under certain circumstances  
you may collaborate with one of your peers, if this occurs naturally – in such a case, ALL  
students will still be required to engage in statistical analysis in order to sharpen quantitative and  
analytical skills. This course will NOT be primarily lecture based. Instead, it will be hands-on  
and participatory. Students will discuss their projects and offer peer-feedback in class

My own expertise is in the areas of aging, families, and health. Specifically, I focus on the  
ramifications of intergenerational, marital, and social relationships for adults’ well-being across  
mid- and later-life. I also perform quantitative secondary data analysis in my work. If you are  
interested in any of these thematic areas, then you may draw on me as a resource throughout the  
semester. However, your empirical project should be on a topic of your choosing, and ideally  
that means it’s on a topic YOU are interested in! Research topics must be approved by the  
instructor, but I am open to any sociological issues for which satisfactory secondary data can be  
found.

Course Requirements:  
15pts  3%  Statement of Research Interests  
20pts  4%  Annotated Bibliography  
25pts  5%  Draft 1 (Introductory Sections)  
25pts  5%  Draft 1 Rewrite  
25pts  5%  Draft 2 (Research Proposal)
Assignments:

**Statement of Research Interests.** Identify 2-3 broad areas in sociology that you are interested in and considering using as the topic for your empirical study. These may be drawn from prior courses (Theory, Methods, etc.) or from outside your formal/sociological studies. Please write 2-3 pages on (1) why these areas are of interest to you; (2) what makes them sociological (rather than psychological, or political, or economic, etc.), that is, what would a sociological perspective on this issue offer? (3) what central research questions you might ask for each area; and (4) how you might address these research questions using quantitative/deductive analysis. Be prepared to discuss this in class.

**Annotated Bibliography.** The first step – and sometimes the most difficult and time-consuming step! – for a sociological research project is identifying and reviewing the pertinent literature on the topic. Many of you have written Literature Review or Research Proposal final papers for other course (e.g., SOC271), and these may serve as the basis for your annotated bibliography if appropriate. For this assignment, you will search for, find, read, and critically organize an annotated bibliography of at least 5 previous peer-reviewed studies that are directly relevant to ONE of the topics you are considering for your final paper. Each student will turn in a 4-5 page paper outlining: (1) the purpose of each article, its research questions / hypotheses, and how it relates to your potential research topic; (2) the methods, data, and major results of each study; (3) what implications for future research are mentioned in each article; and (4) what each article taught you specifically about your potential research topic. Be prepared to discuss at least one article in particular during class.

**Drafts of Paper Sections - NOTE:** Scholarly peer-reviewed research articles typically follow a format of (1) Introduction, Literature Review, & Theory; (2) Methods; (3) Results; and (4) Discussion & Conclusion. Different journals use slightly different formats / terminology, but
these four sections are the core of almost any scholarly empirical paper. Therefore, drafts will focus on each of these 4 sections separately, while the final paper brings them all together. A final section, References, should be included starting on a new page at the end of your drafts.

**Draft 1 (Introductory Sections).** This assignment will build off of your annotated bibliography and, if applicable, Literature Reviews / Research Proposals you’ve written in previous classes and will frame the research project you plan to embark on. This should be a 5-6 page paper (not including References) that includes: (1) a statement of your research topic, why it is important to study sociological, and what your primary research question is; (2) a review of the relevant scholarly literature, drawing from your annotated bibliography, and including a few sentences on discrepancies in findings and/or what hasn’t been addressed – this demonstrates a “need” for your study and can persuade readers & reviewers; (3) a sociological theory that will help frame and guide your research – this could be a theory used in one of the literature review articles, or it could be a general sociological theory that you apply to your specific topic, but it must be a broader conceptual framework that explains your study; and (4) a clear statement of 2-3 hypotheses for your research that draw from the literature & your theory. This is the first section of a formal academic-style paper, so please use in-text citations where appropriate, and include a References page at the end, using either ASA or APA style consistently.

**Draft 1 Rewrite.** Based on feedback from the instructor, you will submit a revised version of your Introductory Sections. You will also increase the number of peer-reviewed scholarly sources from 5 to 8. Books and non-empirical sources are acceptable, but do not count towards these requirements.

**Draft 2 (Research Proposal).** The Research Proposal draft builds upon Draft 1, and includes an additional section: Methods. In keeping with academic article style, the order of sections should be: (1) Introduction & Literature Review, (2) Theory and Hypotheses, (3) Methods, and (4) References. Sections (1), (2), and (4) should be revised following feedback on the Draft 1 rewrite, and section (3) should provide information on the Data & Sample, Measures, and Analytic Strategy you are using in your research. Be sure that your Methods match your Research Question / Hypotheses. You may use a Methods textbook as a reference, if needed. Please note that we will explore secondary data sets and methodologies in class before Draft 2 is due, and much of the information for the Methods section will be clear from the documentation for the data you use. Draft 2 should be approximately 8-10 pages, not including References.

**Data Analysis & Tables.** After deciding upon your research questions and methodological approach in Draft 2, you will explore your data set for appropriate variables and begin statistical analysis in SPSS. This assignment has 2 components: First, the SPSS analysis itself (i.e., outputs) and second, Tables and/or Graphs/Figures. Typically, there will be a Descriptives Table that offers information about the measures used (mean & standard deviation, %, etc.) and a Results Table that displays the statistical results (coefficients, p-values, etc.). These should be created in Microsoft Word, based on the information provided in SPSS outputs.

**Draft 2 Rewrite.** Revise the Methods section of the Research Proposal, both in response to feedback from the instructor as well as to reflect any changes in the analysis you are conducting. For example, you may have recoded variables, added new measures to the analysis, etc.
**Draft 3 (Results Section).** Write a brief (1-2 page) description and interpretation of the findings from your analysis. The Results section in a quantitative study is typically matter-of-fact and straightforward, as in-depth interpretation of the meaning and implications of findings is covered in the Discussion. However, additional guidance on writing a Results section will be provided in class.

**Draft 4 (Discussion & Conclusion Sections).** The Discussion & Conclusion section is where you can extrapolate on your findings – describe what they mean concretely, how they fit with previous literature (or don’t), and what implications there might be for theory. Talk about the Big Picture your study fits into, and the implications for society more broadly. You should also have a paragraph or so concerning limitations to your study, and directions for future research.

**Draft Presentation (PowerPoint).** We will go over tips for creating good PowerPoint presentations in class, and may even work on slides specifically in the computer lab. In general, the structure of a presentation follows that of a paper: Introduction (what’s the issue, and why should the audience care? This is the “hook”), Theory & Research Questions, Methods, Results, Discussion & Conclusion. You will need to practice giving your presentation before giving your final oral presentation before your peers and the faculty. Your PowerPoint slides are due 2 days prior to your presentation date.

**Draft 3 & 4 Rewrite.** You will revise the Results and Discussion & Conclusion sections of your paper, based on instructor feedback and to incorporate any changes to the models or findings since the previous drafts.

**Title Page, Abstract, & References.** We may say “don’t judge a book by its cover,” but let’s face it – articles can be judged by their titles! This is your chance to be creative and come up with a catchy title for your project. Feel free to think outside the box, but please keep titles appropriate! An abstract should be a brief (~200 words) description of your study, covering each of the major sections (Introduction, Methods, Results, Discussion). References should be in ASA or APA format, consistent with the in-text citations in your drafts.

**Draft of Complete Paper.** Compile all of the most recent revised section drafts into a cohesive paper, from Title Page to References. You should also add supplementary materials (Tables, Figures, etc.) to the draft, whether in-text or after the References. Please edit the paper for consistency, style, grammar, etc.

**Final Complete Paper.** Based on feedback from the instructor, GA, and/or peers, you will need to revise your complete paper to produce a polished finished product that is in accordance with all requirements for a scholarly paper. A comprehensive checklist will be provided ahead of time, to ensure that all requirements are met. Papers not in compliance will require additional editing; while worth only 10% of your final grade, the final complete paper is a prerequisite for completing the course.

**Oral Presentation.** Each presentation should last 15-20 minutes. Grades will be based on quality and appropriateness of visual aids (PowerPoint slides), expressing and stimulating interest in the
project, and on basic speech and presentation skills. We will try to have time reserved for Q&A for all presenters, as that is a vital component of presentation skills.

**Attendance & Participation.** This is NOT a lecture-intensive course. Rather, it is hands-on and participatory. We will be engaging in discussion, giving and receiving peer feedback, and even analyzing data in the computer lab class days. Therefore, regular attendance and participation is required, including attending your peers’ oral presentations. Additionally, students are required to attend **at least 1** research presentation outside of this course (such as attending oral presentations from a different section of Senior Experience) and write a one-page reaction to each presentation in the session, critically evaluating the studies discussed and their value to social science.

**Policies:**

**Attendance** for this class is expected of all participants, as noted above. If and when an absence is excused, please provide me with written confirmation thereof (e.g., from a coach, doctor/infirmary, or academic dean).

**Email** is usually the best form of contact for me. I will do my best to answer any questions within 24-48 hours of receipt. Please recognize, however, that response times may be delayed at high-volume periods during the semester. If you have a question for me, **do not wait until the last minute, especially before assignment deadlines.** Please read the syllabus (and any other assignment documents I have given you) before emailing. If you do NOT receive a reply from me within 48 hours, this is because you don’t need me to answer your question. Lastly, if you have an in-depth question, please come to office hours or email me to set up a meeting. I will NOT send extensive or in-depth reply emails. Email will be used for quick and simple questions only.

**Late assignments** will be marked down one letter grade for each day beyond the deadline they are submitted. That is, an assignment submitted between midnight and 11:59pm the day after the due date will receive **at best** a B grade. Do not ask me for personal extensions. If you have extenuating circumstances, please submit confirmation thereof (e.g., a note from a coach, doctor/infirmary, or academic dean).

**Academic Integrity:**
Violations of academic integrity are extremely serious offenses, and will result in automatic course failure. Presenting the work of another as your own is dishonest, wasteful, and will not be tolerated. If at any point during the semester you are having difficulty understanding or completing assignments, **please come to me** and we will discuss any issues or difficulties; do not try to take the “easy way out.” Further information on the University’s Code of Student Conduct is available here: [http://deanofstudents.illinoisstate.edu/conflict/conduct/code/](http://deanofstudents.illinoisstate.edu/conflict/conduct/code/)

**Accommodations:**
Any student needing to arrange a reasonable accommodation for a documented disability should contact Student Access and Accommodation Services at 350 Fell Hall, 309-438-5853. Website: [http://studentaccess.illinoisstate.edu/](http://studentaccess.illinoisstate.edu/) Email: [AbleISU@IllinoisState.edu](mailto:AbleISU@IllinoisState.edu). Advance notice and appropriate documentation are required for accommodations.
Required Text:

This book is a recent edition, and there are often only minor changes from one edition to another. If you decide to purchase an earlier edition of the book, make sure to 1) read the correct chapters, following the chapter titles rather than chapter numbers, and 2) access any readings unavailable in prior editions on your own, either using the reserve copy or borrowing a classmate’s book. A hard copy has been put on 2-hour reserve in Milner Library. Electronic versions of this and previous editions may be available online, as well. Students are responsible for accessing all required readings.

Recommended Text:


The Luker book is available through Milner Library as an e-book, though affordable copies are available from the bookstore as well as online vendors like Amazon. The Becker book has been put on 2-hour reserve in Milner Library, but likewise is available at the bookstore and elsewhere at an affordable price. The Luker book in particular is strongly recommended for this course.

Please note that additional required reading, accessible online, will be sent to the class via email on a week-to-week basis by the instructor. So please be sure to check your ISU email account on a regular basis!

Class Schedule:

**Week 1:** Course Overview and Introduction to Doing Research
Objectives: Introduce the course, myself, and each other. Overview of semester plans, maybe some terrible icebreakers. Welcome to the class!
Readings: Luker, Chapter 1 “Salsa Dancing? In the Social Sciences?”

**Week 2:** Research Topics
Objectives: We will brainstorm potential research topics and ideas together in class, including what types of research questions are appropriate for secondary data analysis.
Readings: Luker, Chapter 2 “What’s It All About?”
Due: Statement of Research Interests, Monday January 22

**Week 3:** Librarians Are Your Friends!
Objectives: We will get an orientation on how to search for scholarly articles and what resources are available through Milner Library. We will also discuss how to properly organize and format a bibliography/References section.
Readings: Luker, Chapter 3 “An Ode to Canonical Social Science”; Quick Tips for ASA Style; **Wednesday, January 31 – Library Training with Vanette Schwartz**

**Week 4:** Defining Your Research Question + Annotated Bibliography
Objectives: We will move from research topics to research questions, and begin identifying the most appropriate literature(s) for our projects.
Readings: Luker, Chapter 4 “What Is This a Case Of, Anyway?”; Becker, “Imagery”

**Week 5:** Introduction to SPSS and to, well, Introductions!
Objectives: We will begin identifying data sets, working with SPSS, and developing an understanding of how to write an Introduction section.
Readings: Cronk, Chapter 1 “Getting Started”; Purdue OWL guide on ASA Style and/or APA Style
Due: Annotated Bibliography, Monday February 12

**Week 6:** Research Proposal and Finding Your Data
Objectives: We will begin identifying specific variables within chosen data sets, and continue preparing our research proposals.
Readings: Cronk, Chapter 2 “Entering and Modifying Data”; Luker, Chapter 5 “Reviewing the Literature”
Due: Draft 1 (Introductory Sections), Wednesday February 21

**Week 7:** Finalizing Research Proposal + Deciding on Statistics and Data
Objectives: We will turn our focus to the analysis of our data, following the plans outlined in our research proposals.
Readings: Cronk, Chapter 3 “Descriptive Statistics”; Luker, Chapter 7 “Getting Down to the Nitty Gritty”

**Week 8:** Analyzing & Describing Data + Mid-Term Progress
Objectives: Continuing analysis and description of data; retooling analysis plans based on results and obstacles that arise; beginning to interpret findings.
Readings: Cronk, Chapter 5 “Prediction and Association” and Chapter 6 “Parametric Inferential Statistics” [Note: There is a lot of difficult material here – we will cover much of it in class, but please re-read these chapters during/after Spring Break if necessary so that these 2 chapters can be used during Weeks 10 & 11.]
Due: Draft 1 Rewrite, Wednesday March 7

**Week 9:** SPRING BREAK! NO CLASS
Objectives: Relax & recharge.
Readings: Instagram posts.

**Week 10:** Finalizing Data Analysis + Tables & Figures
Objectives: Putting our statistics into professional format; finalizing analyses and results.
Readings: Cronk, Chapter 4 “Graphing Data” and Chapter 8 “Test Construction”
Due: Draft 2 (Research Proposal), Wednesday March 21
Week 11: Analysis Paralysis? Tweaking Methods + Description of Results  
Objectives: Now that we’ve settled on our analyses, we will need to revise our Methods and write up our Results so that everything matches. Some students may need to revise their Introduction sections, as well, if research questions have changed during the analysis.

Readings: RE-READ: Cronk, Chapter 5 “Prediction and Association” and Chapter 6 “Parametric Inferential Statistics”
Due: Data Analysis & Tables, Wednesday March 28

Week 12: The Best Study is a Done Study: Finalizing Description of Latest Results  
Objectives: Finish the Results section, following from the finished tables and figures. There will still be more work to the Introduction & Discussion to follow, but getting the middle sections (the “meat” of the study) finalized will give students a foundation around which to base other sections.

Readings: Luker, Chapter 10 “Data Reduction and Analysis”; Becker, “Concepts”
Due: Draft 2 Rewrite, Wednesday April 4

Week 13: Finalize Results, Discussion, and Conclusion  
Objectives: We will solidify the end portions of the study, matching Results with Discussion and the Conclusion, focusing on implications of the findings for theory and future research. We will also develop a Limitations section, describing the shortcomings of the study and how these may be improved by future studies.

Readings: Becker, “Logic”
Due: Draft 3 (Results Section), Wednesday April 11

Week 14: Complete Draft + Preparing for Oral Presentations  
Objectives: Finish these papers! And develop ~15 minute long powerpoint presentations covering the central themes in the Introduction, Methods, Results, and Discussion (3-4min each)

Due: Draft 4 (Discussion & Conclusion Sections), Monday April 16

Week 15: Finishing Touches + Start Oral Presentations  
Objectives: Finalize written papers and oral presentations. Begin oral presentations.

Readings: Your own powerpoint slides! Check the details for a professional presentation. Practice out loud for clarity and smooth transitions (and time!)
Due: -Draft 3 & 4 Rewrite AND Title Page, Abstract, & References, Monday April 23  
-Draft Presentation (PowerPoint) is due Saturday April 21 if you are presenting on Monday April 23; due Monday April 23 if presenting Wednesday April 25  
-Draft of Complete Paper due Wednesday April 25

Week 16: Oral Presentations!  
Objectives: Present our projects in front of an audience, and be active listeners and participants for our peers’ projects. Also, attend at least 1 research presentation outside of our class.
Readings: Your own final paper, before you submit it. Proofread it! Read it out loud to catch errors. Read a friend’s paper and have him/her read yours. Whatever works!

Due:  
-Draft Presentation (PowerPoint) is due Saturday April 28 if you are presenting this week (on Monday April 30 OR Wednesday May 2)  
-Final Complete Paper is due as a hard-copy on Wednesday May 2  
-Reaction papers to outside presentations due by Friday May 4

***PLEASE NOTE: The instructor reserves the right to update the syllabus and the list of course readings at any time, provided that ample warning is given in advance. This includes exam dates, which may depend on our progress! A revised version of the syllabus will be provided if or when necessary.