

SOCIOLOGY 2820
ASSIGNMENT GUIDE
FALL 2008

Part 1: Observation Project (Due 10/21 - 50 Points)

A note on written requirements and formatting:

Please follow these guidelines when formatting your type-written work:

1. Use 12 point font
 - a. Either Times New Roman or Arial
2. Margins should be 1 inch on all four sides (top, bottom, left, and right)
3. All written work should be double-spaced
 - a. The first line of page one is the first line of text
4. A **cover-page is required** that includes the following information:
 - a. Assignment number and title
 - b. Your full name
 - c. Email address
 - d. The course number
 - e. Date you are submitting the paper
 - f. For Example:

Part 1: Observation Project

Michael Gillespie
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Sociology 2820
October 21, 2008

Your participant observation paper should be *no longer than 4 pages*, double-spaced. Attach your notes to your final paper when you submit your assignment.

SOC 2820 - METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

Assignment: Observation Project

Due October 21, 2008

Participant observation: A qualitative method for gathering data where the researcher establishes and sustains a relationship with a group of people in its natural setting for the purpose of developing a social scientific understanding of that group.

It involves developing a sustained relationship with people while they go about their normal activities. By observing people in their natural environment, the social scientist maximizes the ability to understand the beliefs, interests, motives, and values that underlie the actions of the group.

The art of doing sociology is inherent in observational techniques. Taking the Adler and Adler (1998) article, you are going to use observational sociology to start your *Social Capital* project.

To observe while participating is to interact with an environment while being aware of the structure, process and gravity of the situation. As Adler and Adler write, the observer can be engaged in the situation at varying degrees (complete participant, complete observer, and degrees in between). They give different terms for the role of the participant observer: covert, overt, or a combination of the two.

You will be a balance between a covert and overt observer. As you adopt the role of participant observer, you will need to let the group leader know you are a student doing a research project, but be careful not to disrupt your setting or portray yourself as *only* a researcher; rather, you will participate fully in the setting while making observations and taking mental and material notes.

To engage your sociological imagination, you will conduct a participant observation, record your experience in field notes, and document your research in a report. Clearly you will not be conducting a large-scale, prolonged observation, rather take a couple of hours to observe your group in order to describe the group processes, build rapport with the group, identify possible interview participants, and get a general flavor for doing participant observation.

After you have done your observation, write a short (3 – 4 pages) paper that includes the following:

- A paragraph giving a description of where you did your observation and when, as well as why you selected that particular group. Answer the following questions:
 - o Who did you observe and in what setting?
 - o Why did you select this group?
 - o How did you gain entrée?
 - o What observational stance did you take? (complete observer, complete participant, or a combination)

- Write several paragraphs describing what you observed. Address the following objectives:
 - o What patterns of interaction and conversations did you notice?
 - o Were these expected or unexpected and why?
 - o Was there anything unusual about what you saw, given the setting you were in?

- Provide possible explanations for these patterns, both expected and unexpected
 - o What are some empirical generalizations you can make about your group?

- Include a final paragraph that relates what you observed to the concepts of *Social Capital* and your specific research team topic.

Some Guidelines for the Participant Observation Assignment

1. Observe a student group of which you are not a member.
2. The setting through which you will conduct your participant observation must be a setting that is available to anyone – this means that night clubs, bars, casinos, or other adult establishments **are not allowed**.
3. Avoid settings where you could be viewed as an intruder or obtrusive.
4. While you are an outsider, do not do anything that may impact your group making the actions you observe become unnatural.
5. Spend two to three hours in your setting, observing and participating in the activities of those around you. If the group meets for smaller amounts of time, try to observe at more than one meeting.
6. Document your experience in field notes, inconspicuously during your field work or as soon as possible after your observations end.
7. When writing up your results, keep in mind that the best reports of observations are rich in detail, description, and metaphor and can be written in a narrative form. **Be creative yet sociological in your analysis.**
8. **Based on your observations and your analysis, provide an inductive conceptualization that defines and summarizes your research.**

Your venue for observation **MUST** be approved by the instructor!

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Part 2: In-Depth Interview Project (Due 11/04 - 75 Points)

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4. A **cover-page is required** that includes the following information:
 - a. Assignment number and title
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 - c. Email address
 - d. The course number
 - e. Date you are submitting the paper
 - f. For Example:

Part 2: In-depth Interview Project

Michael Gillespie
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Sociology 2820
November 04, 2008

Your participant observation paper should be *no longer than 5 pages*, double-spaced. Attach your notes to your final paper when you submit your assignment.

SOC 2820 - METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

Assignment: Interview Project

Due November 04, 2008

This project is focused on an in-depth interview with a key informant as a qualitative research method and for the construction of a survey. An in-depth interview is like a conversation that is guided by open-ended questions or issues. Based on your observation project, the goal is to obtain information that will further focus the work of your research team and to allow you to develop a series of close-ended questions to operationalize the concepts in your research hypothesis.

Requirements:

- You must tape record your interview.

- Each interview session must be no shorter than 20 minutes and no longer than 30 minutes.

- Choose your participants carefully. Ideally, the interview participant will come from the group that you observed.
 - o *Do **NOT** include persons enrolled in this course. Participants should be relevant to your particular study.*
 - o If someone from the group you observed is not available, you may interview someone else – but **choose carefully**. For example, if I were studying student participation in social groups, I may choose to interview the president of a fraternity or sorority. I would not, however, choose the student who runs the information desk in the library.

- You must transcribe each interview verbatim (i.e. word for word) and turn in the typed transcript with the paper.

- Before beginning the interview, explain the consent form to your interviewees, and ask her/him to read and sign a copy. You will need to make 2 copies of the consent form and bring them to the interview). You will need to turn in a signed copy with your paper.

- Write up the results of the interview covering the following:
 - o Describe the research setting and demographically describe the participants.

 - o Discuss your findings in detail (this is the majority of your paper). Organize this section systematically covering each question/issue discussed and the responses of your participants to these issues/questions. Make sure to discuss the following:
 - What types of topics were covered?
 - What questions were asked and what responses were most relevant?
 - What issues arose from the interview?
 - How did the key issues arise?

 - o Discuss the dynamics of the interview:
 - How successful was the session?
 - What problems did you encounter and how did you handle them?
 - How comfortable were the participants during the interview?

 - o Conclude your write-up by discussing the following:
 - What did you learn about your research question from having completed the in-depth interview?

- Did your participant conceptualize your research question the same way you did?
- Should you include additional dimensions to your study based on what you found?
- Should you contract the scope of your research question based on the responses of the interview?
- How will your in-depth interview help you to develop questions for your questionnaire?
 - What questions arise for further study?

SOC 2820 - METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

Survey Project Explanation

Each student in the research team is to develop and state one research hypothesis related to the team's theme and research question. These should state a relationship between a particular demographic characteristic (e.g. age, race, sex, etc), or other independent variable of interest, and the attitude or other variable you are studying (dependent variable). Some examples might include:

African-Americans are more likely to be involved in religious groups than Whites.

Students majoring in engineering or the physical sciences are less likely to be involved in extracurricular activities than other students.

Female students are less likely to be involved in political activities than male students.

Female students are more likely to be involved in volunteer work than male students.

Designing the Questionnaire

Individual Students

1. Develop close-ended questions for the demographic characteristics in your hypotheses.
2. Develop on contingency question with a filtering/screening question related to your hypotheses.
3. Develop a matrix format set of questions to measure the dependent variable(s) in your research hypotheses. You should have a minimum of 3 questions in the matrix.
4. Other questions that you would like to ask your respondents related to your research question, either close-ended or open-ended.
5. Assign numbers (codes) to the response categories for each question.
6. Be sure to follow the guidelines for writing questions as discusses in lecture and in the text.

Research Team

1. Develop an introductory paragraph that includes the purpose of the survey, how the respondent was selected, and a statement asking him or her to take the survey. An example of an introductory paragraph is provided on Vista.
2. Develop an informed consent document, have it approved by the Instructor, and then have it approved and registered by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board Office, 240W Walwood Hall
 - a. Make enough consent documents for your research team to provide one to each respondent and to keep one on file for each respondent.
3. Develop your questionnaire using the questions developed by each group member. If more than one person has hypotheses related to the same demographic characteristic, make sure to have only one question for that characteristic. Also, if more than one person has the same response categories for the matrix set of questions, combine them into one matrix.

4. Be sure to follow the guidelines for question ordering and formatting as discussed in lecture and the text.
5. Make 10 copies of the survey for each student in the research team.

Sampling

In selecting your respondents, keep your hypotheses in mind. If anyone in the group has a hypothesis on race, for example, be sure to include persons from all races in your sample. This will take coordination of your group members, so keep each other informed as to who you have had fill out questionnaires. If you do not have respondents from all the categories in your demographic variables, you will not be able to meet the required test of your hypotheses.

Administration of the Questionnaire

Each student will obtain 10 completed questionnaires from individuals in their population (e.g. WMU students). Be sure to have your respondents sign the consent document before they complete the questionnaire. See above on who to include in your *convenience sample*.

**SOCIOLOGY 2820
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Fall 2008**

Part 3: Survey Project Analysis (Due 11/25 - 75 Points)

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5. A **cover-page is required** that includes the following information:
 - a. Assignment number and title
 - b. Your full name
 - c. Email address
 - d. The course number
 - e. Date you are submitting the paper
 - f. For Example:

Part 3: Survey Project Analysis
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Sociology 2820
November 25, 2008

Your survey analysis paper should be *no longer than 5 pages*, double-spaced.

FORMAT FOR INDIVIDUAL REPORTS AND GROUP PRESENTATIONS

Table and Write Up the Results of your Research; Due November 25th, 2008

EACH STUDENT REPORT WILL INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

1. A clear statement of your hypothesis
 - a. State your hypothesis
 - b. Discuss how your variables are operationalized in your survey
2. For your variables of interest:
 - a. Tally the results from your questions on the questionnaire. We will go over how to do this in class, but the ways to do this include:
 - i. Entering all the data into Excel or another spreadsheet program;
 - ii. Entering all of the data into SPSS;
 - iii. Or, tally the results by hand.
 - b. Table the frequency distributions for each demographic variable and the questions used to test your hypotheses.
3. Create contingency tables to test your hypotheses. We will go over how to do this in class.
4. Write a paragraph about each of the tables in #2 and #3.
5. Write a concluding paragraph that summarizes your results.
 - a. Do your results support your hypothesis?
 - i. If yes, discuss the meaning of your results in light of your research question
 - ii. If not, can you speculate as to why? What could have caused your results to not confirm your hypothesis?

Research Team Presentation; Due the Day Your Team is Assigned to Present

THE RESEARCH TEAM WILL DO THE FOLLOWING:

1. Combine the individual member reports in to one research team presentation.
 - a. Provide an introduction to the research team's topic and how your team approached/interpreted the topic.
 - i. Make sure to use Putnam's text.
 - b. Each member will briefly discuss their hypothesis and results
 - i. Everyone must talk.
 - c. Write a conclusion about the team's topic and any results that may or may not transcend the individual hypotheses.
 - d. You can create and use PowerPoint – but it must be inclusive of your entire team's content.
 - e. You should provide a one-page handout to the class on the content of your presentation.
 - i. Classmates will be assessing your presentation and providing feedback and "grades".