353 Investigating Social Life II

Kandi Stinson

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SOCI 353 – Investigating Social Life II
Tue., Thur. 1:00 p.m. – 2:15 p.m.
Conaton Learning Commons (CLC) 320

Dr. Kandi Stinson, 804 Schott, 745-4236, stinson@xavier.edu
Office hours: Monday 9:00 a.m.-11:00 a.m.; Tuesday and Thursday 8:30 a.m.-9:45 a.m.; or by appointment. Note that my office hours on Monday will be held in my office and my office hours on Tuesday and Thursday will be held on the ground floor of Smith Hall outside Coffee Emporium.

Due to burst pipes related to extreme weather conditions last week, I experienced considerable flooding and damage in my office and will be unable to work there until damaged items are removed and repairs made. This could take anywhere from a few days to a few weeks. Until I am able to move back into my office, I will hold all office hours on the ground floor of Smith Hall outside Coffee Emporium. I should receive temporary work space soon. I will let you know where and the best ways to contact me.

Ms. Michelle Early, 203 University Library, 745-4817, early@xavier.edu
Office hours: Wednesday 2:00 p.m.-6:00 p.m. at the help desk on the CLC 3rd floor; Thursday 10:00 a.m.-11:00 a.m. in McDonald 212

Introduction

This course is a continuation of SOCI 352 – Investigating Social Life I, in which many of you were enrolled last semester. The focus of that course was on the application of the scientific method to questions and issues of interest and importance to sociologists. Specifically, we focused on the quantitative method of surveys. Surveys are the most commonly used research methods used by sociologists, and quantitative methods in general are very useful for collecting specific kinds of data and answering specific kinds of research questions. However, surveys are not well suited to answer many relevant and important sociological research questions.

This semester we will complete the quantitative component of our research study and will focus on qualitative research methods, including in-depth interviews, observational techniques, content analysis, and other related research strategies. These methods are particularly useful in trying to understand how people perceive and attach meaning to activities, events, or interaction, the process by which they unfold, and the specific contexts in which they occur.

As you are likely to know, research techniques and skills are best learned by actually doing research. For this academic year we are focusing on the general topic of food insecurity and hunger in the U.S. More specifically, our focus is on food procurement and coping strategies among food insecure households in Cincinnati. During the fall semester, students in SOCI 352 designed a survey and began using it to collect data from clients of the St. Vincent DePaul Food Bank in the West End of Cincinnati. It is at this point that we will pick up this semester. We will begin by completing administration of the survey and analysis of the data. At the same time we will begin to prepare for the qualitative component of the research. If you did not take SOCI 352 in the fall, we will catch you up quickly on the work that has been done and will integrate you into the study going forward.
Course goals and objectives

Course goals and objectives are very similar, and in some cases identical to those of SOCI 352, but with the focus on qualitative research. Readings, discussions, activities, and assignments have been chosen to help you achieve the goals and objectives listed below. After completing this course you should be able to do the following:

Goal 1: Formulate qualitative sociological research questions that are feasible, socially important, and scientifically relevant.
   1. Use your sociological imagination to construct appropriate qualitative research questions.
   2. Identify the implications for research questions and methods of positivist/post-positivist and interpretivist/constructivist philosophies of research.

Goal 2: Understand the ethical issues involved in qualitative research with human subjects.
   1. Debate competing views on appropriate responses to common ethical issues encountered by sociologists conducting qualitative research.
   2. Construct appropriate strategies for addressing ethical issues in qualitative research that are likely to be of greatest concern to Institutional Review Boards (IRBs).

Goal 3: Understand the contributions of theory and previous research to sociological research.
   1. Articulate the relationship between sociological theory and research.
   2. Construct a variety of high-quality, efficient library search strategies, and utilize them across different platforms and technologies to find information relevant to your research.
   3. Examine secondary information from various sources to determine reliability, validity, accuracy, authority, and timeliness; identify the purpose and audience of the information; and recognize prejudice, deception, or manipulation in the information.
   4. Use and manage information appropriately, ethically, and legally, and integrate multiple resources into a coherent literature review relevant to a specific research question.

Goal 4: Apply the basic steps of sociological research to a relevant question.
   1. Choose an appropriate qualitative research method for a specific research question.
   2. Construct multiple valid and reliable measurement strategies for sociological concepts.
   3. Choose a sample appropriate for a specific research question and population.
   4. Conduct basic collection, coding, analysis, and interpretation of qualitative data.

Goal 5: Communicate research results to a variety of audiences.
   1. Distinguish between basic and applied sociological research.
   2. Interpret and critique sociological journal articles.
   3. Craft a research report relevant to practitioners in the field.

Academic Honesty

The Xavier University Catalog states:

*The pursuit of truth demands high standards of personal honesty. Academic and professional life requires a trust based upon integrity of the written and spoken word. Accordingly, violations of certain standards of ethical behavior will not be tolerated at Xavier University. These include theft, cheating,*
plagiarism, unauthorized assistance in assignments and tests, unauthorized copying of computer software, and the falsification of any academic record including letters of recommendation.

All work submitted for academic evaluation must be the student’s own. Certainly, the activities of other scholars will influence all students. However, the direct and unattributed use of another’s efforts is prohibited as is the use of any work untruthfully submitted as one’s own.

If you have any questions about what is considered a violation of the Academic Honesty Code in the context of this class, I strongly encourage you to discuss this with me, either individually or in class. Any assignment, project, or exam that I find to be in violation of the Honesty Code will be assigned a grade of 0 points, i.e. an “F.” Repeated violations may result in a grade of “F” for the course.

To assist you in recognizing and avoiding plagiarism, we will be using TurnItIn.com in class. We reserve the right to submit any written work produced for the class to TurnItIn.

Class Format: Our Research Project and Partners

There are several unique features of this course that will enhance your learning experience and contribute to the achievement of course goals and objectives. First, the best way to learn research methods is to do research, so we will continue the research project begun during the fall. This semester we will focus on designing, administering, and interpreting the results of a qualitative component.

Second, we will continue to work collaboratively with our community partner, the Society of St. Vincent De Paul (SVDP), a private, charitable, nonprofit organization committed to serving community members in need. The Edyth and Carl Lindner Choice Food Pantry in the West End of Cincinnati is one of their many programs and services. Our research will assist SVDP in their ongoing efforts to address hunger in Cincinnati, at the same time that it will contribute to our sociological understanding of food insecurity and hunger in the U.S.

Third, any given research project is valuable only to the extent to which it contributes to a larger body of sociological knowledge. It is critical for researchers to identify, critique, and integrate previous research on a specific sociological issue. To assist you in doing so, librarian Michelle Early will continue as a co-instructor for the course. She will be present at class meetings, teach specific course components throughout the semester, fully participate in the research project, and assist in grading relevant assignments and papers.

Personal Technology

If you own a laptop computer (tablets and smart phones will not be sufficient) you will need to bring it to class with you. If you do not own a laptop or cannot bring yours with you, please check one out at the Connection Center desk on the 3rd floor of the CLC on your way to class.

Course Requirements

- Work Outside Class

Due to the unique features of the course, you will need to spend a significant amount of time in the Cincinnati community and at St. Vincent de Paul. This is likely to include meetings with St. Vincent de
Paul staff and time spent on site collecting data. Every effort will be made to provide as much advance notice as possible of off-campus activities and to coordinate transportation. See the instructors as soon as possible if you anticipate that this will present a significant hardship. It is possible that some class meetings will be canceled to compensate for off-campus time.

In working with a community partner, it is imperative that you conduct yourself professionally in all instances. This includes, but is not limited to, dressing appropriately, respecting the staff and clients at SVDP, being on time for appointments and meetings, and completing work to meet deadlines. Not doing so will result in a reduction to your final course grade, as determined by the instructors.

- **Attendance Policy**

We expect you to attend every class while we also understand that absences are sometimes unavoidable. If you miss class, any assigned work will be accepted if submitted electronically by 1:00 p.m. on the day you are absent. If for any reason it is necessary for you to miss several classes, for example, due to extended illness or away-games for an athletic team, we will work with you to come up with an appropriate and fair solution. If religious observance will cause you to be absent from class or otherwise affect your ability to complete assignments, you must notify us in advance to make necessary arrangements to complete the work. Repeated unexcused absences will result in a reduction in your final course grade.

- **Required Reading**

The book that we will use most extensively this semester is:

*Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach (QRD), 3rd edition*, by Joseph A. Maxwell (Sage 2013)

It is available in the Xavier Bookstore or can be ordered online. We will begin using this book within a week or so, so if you have not yet gotten a copy of the book, do so as soon as possible.

At times we will make use of the other books purchased for SOCI 352:


*If you did not take SOCI 352 in the fall, you do not need to purchase these three books. We will make sure that any reading assigned in these books will be available through Library Reserves and/or electronically.*

Additional readings may be made available online or through Library Reserves.
• **Assignments and Class Activities**

The majority of our in-class time will be spent working on the research project. It is very important that you complete the reading and assignments before coming to class so that we can make the best use of our class time.

The assignments will take various forms but all will contribute to the research project and your mastery of course goals and objectives. If you miss a class, you may submit any assigned work electronically by 1:00 p.m. on the day you miss class without penalty.

The point value of the assignments will vary, depending on the time and effort required to complete them. Your final assignment grade will be the percentage of possible points that you actually earn.

**Due to the nature of the class, the centrality of group work, and the importance of the research project, it is imperative that you not only attend every class, but that you come prepared, you complete any assigned work outside of class, and you fully and actively participate in all class activities, both in class and at SVDP. Each of these will contribute to the class contribution portion of your final grade.**

• **Research Project: Preliminary Data Analysis, Interim Report, and Literature Review**

The major course requirements are significant parts of the research project. On the first day of class you will be assigned to a group of 3-4 (there is likely to be overlap with the groups used in the fall semester.) Your group is responsible for three products: (1) An approximately 10-12 page draft of a research article, similar to those found in sociological journals, (2) Part of the final report to be delivered to SVDP, and (3) Part of the presentation that will be made to SVDP on the day scheduled for the final exam. Detailed instructions for each product will be distributed later. While all three products will be due in the last few weeks of the course, we will be working on them throughout the semester to minimize the amount of last-minute work that needs to be completed.

**Grades**

The point distribution for all course requirements is:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Requirement</th>
<th>Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assignments (individual and group)</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contribution to class activities and research project (individual)</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Draft of research article (group)</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final report to SVDP (group)</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation to SVDP (group)</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>450</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Your final grade will be based on the percentage of potential points that you accumulate and will be assigned a letter grade according to the scale below:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>93-100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90-92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87-89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>83-86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>80-82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>77-79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>73-76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>70-72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>67-69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>63-66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>0-62%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Accommodations**

*Any student who feels s/he may need an accommodation based on the impact of a documented disability should contact the Learning Assistance Center (LAC) at 513-745-3280 on the 5th floor of the Conaton Learning Commons, Room 514, to coordinate reasonable accommodations.*

**Campus Canvas**

Canvas is the primary means of communicating class news and information, and disseminating the syllabus, reading and assignment schedule, assignment and project instructions, resources, additional readings, and other useful information. Access our Canvas course at [http://canvas.xavier.edu](http://canvas.xavier.edu). You should check Canvas, particularly the calendar, regularly. If you have questions about due dates, instructions, quizzes, policies on attendance or late assignments, or other routine class matters, you should first consult the materials on Canvas. If you do not find the answer to your question there, please consult with one of the instructors.

**Contacting the instructors outside of class**

Contact information for each of the instructors is at the top of the syllabus. During the indicated office hours, we will be available to answer questions, discuss course materials, continue in-class discussions, or chat with you about anything you find interesting. For class-related policy or logistical questions, please consult the syllabus first. If you find that office hours are not convenient for you, please make an appointment to meet at an alternative time.

I check and respond to email three times a day – early mornings (around 8:00-9:00 a.m.), around noon, and in the late afternoon (around 4:00-5:00). I am unlikely to check my email during the evenings or on weekends.

**Schedule of Class Activities**

Class meetings and topics, readings, assignments, and due dates will be posted on the calendar in Canvas. This information will be updated often and is subject to change so we strongly recommend that you look at the calendar daily.