SSC 251S: Research Methods for Social Science (Directed Study)

Westminster College, Spring 2018

**Instructor:** Dr. Kristin Park  
**Office:** 301 Patterson Hall  
**Email:** kpark@westminster.edu

**Room:** PH 333  
**Meeting Time:** R 9-10:30  
**Office Hours:** MWF 2-3 and by appointment

**Course Description:** This course is intended to familiarize students with the nature of the research process, including the value choices that have to be made when conducting research. Particular attention is given to the basic building blocks of the research process: knowing how to ask researchable questions, how to design a project, how to collect and analyze data and how to critique one’s own research efforts. By course’s end you will have become better able to analyze other people’s research and you will know more about how to design your own Capstone project.

**Course Learning Objectives:**
- develop skills necessary to conduct several different methods of research
- analyze the strengths, weaknesses and assumptions of different methods of social science research
- demonstrate the ability to analyze existing social science research and assess the extent to which the conclusions therein are supported by data
- develop testable hypotheses and identify independent, dependent and intervening variables
- turn a concept into a variable and develop valid and reliable measures for that variable
- link research questions with appropriate research methods
- critique both journalistic and scholarly articles in the social sciences
- create a proposal for your capstone research

**Classroom Expectations & Environment:** It is the expectation of the instructor that students are here to learn, will attend all classes, will complete all assigned readings on time, will contribute to discussions, and will turn in class assignments on time. I look more favorably on borderline grades when students regularly attend and actively participate in class.
Late assignments will be penalized 5 points per 24 hours and assignments will not be accepted more than a week past the due date. If you need more time on an assignment I encourage you to discuss this with me.

**Academic Integrity:** “Central to the purpose and pursuit of any academic community is academic integrity. All members of the Westminster community, including students, faculty, staff, and administrators, are expected to maintain the highest standards of honesty and integrity, in keeping with the philosophy and mission of the College.” It is expected that students turn in original academic work and cite all sources. If work is plagiarized or students are found to be cheating on an exam they will be assigned a zero on the corresponding assignment and the Academic Dean will be notified. For more details please go to the following website:

http://www.westminster.edu/staff/corsokf/SPE_111/Documents/academic%20integrity_student_handbook_FL07.pdf

If a student is caught cheating on an exam or plagiarizing a paper, the student will receive a zero on that assignment and the instructor will notify the Academic Dean, as per the student handbook policy.

**Individuals with Disabilities:** Westminster College actively strives for the full inclusion of all our students. Students with disabilities who require access solutions for environmental or curricular barriers should contact Faith Craig, Director of the Office of Disability Resources, located in 209 Thompson-Clark Hall. phone: 724-946-7192 e-mail: craigfa@westminster.edu.

**Available Support Services:** Westminster College has a variety of support services. Some of them are:

- Library Instruction: Reference Librarian, Ms. Eloise Stevens (x-7325)
- Learning and Writing Services: Director, Ms. Jamie Kohler (x-6703)

**Email Policy:** Emails will be responded to in a timely manner, but do not expect email responses in the evenings or over the weekend unless specifically discussed with the instructor. In addition, many questions can be answered by reading over the syllabus or talking with peers. I encourage you to utilize office hours for questions about course work and the research process as depth of response will increase in person.

**Course Materials:**

D2L Library Course page for Research Methods.

*All other course readings can be found online on our course website on D2L. I reserve the right to add or remove readings throughout the semester.

**Grading Scale:**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>94-100</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90-93</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>68-69</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>0-59</td>
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</tbody>
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**Assignments & Grading:**

Short research practice assignments: Survey, participant observation and interviewing (14%): You will conduct two mini-assignments in which you try out survey research and participant observation/indepth interviewing. 7% each, for a total of 14% of your grade. The assignment will be given to you a minimum of one week in advance of the due date and is designed for you to try out different methods for your Capstone project.

Capstone proposal:

- **Preliminary research proposal (3%)**
- **Draft literature review (14%)**
- **Draft research design (9%)**
- **Final proposal (15%)**
- **Final proposal presentation (5%)**

**Exams (30%):** Two exams will be given over the course of the semester. Each exam is worth 15% of your final grade. Exams will consist of multiple choice, definitions, short answer, and essay questions. You will be provided study guides to assist in your study efforts.

**Class Participation and Attendance (10%):** Welcome to one of the pinnacles of your major course work. This course will be run as a seminar, which means that I will interactively lecture for short periods of time and we will have significant discussion of the day’s readings and topic. Outside of the class period, class participation can include
emailing me questions and comments that you either did not think of in class or did not feel comfortable saying/asking, visiting me in office hours to discuss the course material and the research process, and making connections between our course materials and the outside world. Be certain to ground participation in our course readings/material. You are expected to attend all classes.

**Tentative Course Schedule:**

R Jan 18  
Introduction to Course  
Ways of Knowing, including the social sciences  

**Reading:** Neuman, Ch. 1

**Social Scientific Inquiry**

R 25  
Steps of the Research Process  

Purposes of, and uses of time in, research  
Objectivity and value-freedom  

**Reading:** Neuman, (skim Ch. 1 if needed); Ch. 2; pp. 570-1; Stevenson, “Is Scientific Research Value-Neutral?” (D2L)

**The Meanings of Methodology: Positivism, Interpretivism, the Critical Approach, Feminism and Postmodernism**

R Feb 1  
Review course library research page  
Neuman, Chapter 4  

*Submit preliminary proposal for Capstone research (see guidelines) at beginning of class*

**Research Ethics**

R 8  
Neuman, Ch. 5 to pp. 143-160  
Peruse ASA Code of Ethics (D2L)

**Watch the Milgram Obedience Experiment before class and come prepared to discuss in class**  
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wdUu39Web4

**Quantitative Research Design**

R 15  
Writing a Literature Review  
Quantitative Research Design  
--Asking Research Questions  
--Variables and Hypotheses  
--Correlation and Causation
Reading: Neuman, Ch. 5, pp. 124-43. Also Ch. 6, except pp. 174-8
R 22 Quantitative Measurement
--Conceptualization and Operationalization
--Validity and Reliability
--Levels of Measurement
--Indexes and Scales

Reading: Neuman Ch. 7 to p. 214, except pp. 205-07; pp. 217 to end of chapter

**Submit 6-10 journal article sources for draft literature review, using ASA format

Receive take-home exam 1

R Mar 1 Journal article reviews on quantitative research in your area of interest (for lit review inclusion). Submit your two articles for discussion to me by noon on Wed Feb. 28. Bring notes on two articles, addressing "questions to guide reading of journal articles" sheet.

Also, review Neuman pp. 217 to end of chapter on quantitative data analysis

Submit Exam 1 as take-home exam by class time on Thurs. Mar. 1

NO CLASS ON THURS MAR 8 ... SPRING BREAK

R 15 The Logic of Sampling
--Populations and Samples
--Major sample types
--Generalization issues

In-class activity: M and M candies exercise

Reading: Neuman, Ch. 8

R 22 Survey Research
--Questionnaires and Interviews:
--Designs, Asking questions,
Interpreting results

Reading: Neuman Ch. 10 (Skim or skip history of survey research)

**Submit your draft literature review (using 10 academic sources)

Thursday March 29: No class... enjoy your Easter break!
R Apr 5  No class during class period, but complete and submit miniature survey project at class time

**Required attendance, Thurs Apr 5, 7 pm, Wallace Chapel, Dr. Arlie Russell Hochschild on Strangers in their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right

R 12  Discussion of Hochschild lecture
Nonreactive Research
--Content analysis

Reading: Neuman Ch. 11 through p. 368. Calasanti article on anti-aging web advertisements, or substitute for your topic (D2L)

*Submit your draft research design at beginning of class period

**Receive take-home exam 2

ATTEND URAC ON WED APRIL 18 AND COMPLETE BRIEF ASSIGNMENT

Qualitative Research Design

R 19  Discussion of URAC
Overview of Qualitative Methods
--Characteristics, and contrasts with quantitative approaches
--Field Research/Participant Observation

Reading: Neuman, Ch. 6, pp. 174-8; Ch. 13 to pp. 449

Submit Exam 2 by class time on R Apr 19

R 26  Participant observation
Indepth interviewing

Complete your participant-observation and interviewing mini-assignments and bring to class

Reading: Solot and Arluke, Learning the Scientists’ Role (D2L), or topic related to your research

R May 3  Submit your final Capstone proposal and present it, orally, to me, during the class period