

SOC 350-003Topics in Sociology: **Practicing Sociology**

Fall 2011

Dr. James Hougland

Patterson Office Tower 1565

Phone (859) 257-4417

e-mail: jghoug2@email.uky.edu

Office Hours: Tuesday 2:30-4:00

(subject to cancellation)

Appointments Welcome

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This “special topics” focuses on the processes involved in conducting sociological research and in using sociological insights to contribute to the solution of problems in the larger society. Typically, course titles focus on nouns (e.g., “Theory,” “Methods,” “Families,” “Crime”) and adjectives (e.g., “Classical,” “Political,” “Environmental”), but the key word in the title of this course (“*Practicing*”) is a present-continuous **verb**. Once you think about the implications of this word choice, you should have a good idea of the nature of this course.

- Rather than focusing on an accumulated body of knowledge, it explores the ways in which sociological research and perspectives can be used to improve the process and outcomes of communities, families, organizations, and other social entities.
- Rather than focusing on a particular area of specialization within sociology, it focuses on the ways in which sociologists go about making decisions as they engage in their work.
- Rather than looking at sociologists as isolated occupants of a mythical “ivory tower,” it focuses on the struggles that sociologists are likely to encounter as they seek to develop understandings with clients, participants in their research, and a variety of other social actors.

In broad summary, the focus of this course is on the dynamic *processes* rather than the static *outcomes* of sociological research.

Much of the course will examine the work of sociologists who are engaged in “sociological practice”—a broad term that one practitioner described as “the utilization of sociological knowledge to benefit society and social life through research, action, or administration” (Olsen, 1992: p. 50). Within the large territory identified by “sociological practice,” you can find sociologists who are engaged in “applied social research,” “clinical sociology,” and “public sociology.” “**Applied social research**”¹ often occurs in the context of a contractual relationship through which research questions are formulated in cooperation with a client (typically a government agency or a private entity) that needs to draw on sociological research skills to answer information needs. Applied social research requires that sociologists devote their professional knowledge to (a) formulating good questions, (b) conducting appropriate research, often within a very limited period of time, and (c) communicating the research findings and any resulting recommendations in terms that will be understandable and useful to the client. “**Clinical sociology**” involves interventions that are developed with a goal of altering problematic social relationships in social settings (e.g., families, organizations, communities). A “**public sociologist**” has been defined by Herbert Gans as a publicly visible scholar “who applies sociological ideas and findings to social issues about which sociology has something to say.” Most public sociologists define their work as being done for the purpose of improving the quality of social life by working toward viable solutions. The readings in this course will speak primarily to **applied social research** and **clinical**

¹ I am using “applied social research” rather than the more common but more ambiguous term “applied sociology.” Definitions of “applied sociology” vary, but most emphasize the use of sociological insights or methods for the solution of social problems. Research often is a component of applied sociology, but it is not in all cases.

sociology.² You also will be involved in a major project that will be an example of applied social research.

Toward the end of the course, we will look at “practice” in a broader sense by examining the “hidden realities” confronted by sociological researchers as they apply their methodological ideas to “real world” situations. As we read about researchers telling how they *really* conducted their research in view of unanticipated problems and opportunities, we will see that the *practice* of sociology (or any discipline) can be messier or more challenging than one would guess from reading even the most sophisticated methodology textbooks.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

- By the end of this course:
 - You should be able to demonstrate your understanding of sociological practice, including applied social research and clinical sociology.
 - You should be able to articulate the kinds of decisions that sociologists must make in the course of conducting a research project.
 - You also should demonstrate an understanding of the special responsibilities that are involved in conducting client-oriented research.
- As you work on your group projects, you should demonstrate an ability to generate and to communicate knowledge that will be useful to a client. As a special benefit of your group research project, you also should gain an understanding of issues associated with sustainability in contemporary society.
- As you fulfill course requirements related to papers and discussion leadership, you should demonstrate your ability to provide effective oral and written communication of sociological ideas and their applications.

WORKLOAD AND TIME COMMITMENT

While the material in this course is not necessarily difficult, it does require a disciplined approach on your part. This is particularly true because you will have responsibilities to other students who are working with you in assigned groups. In addition, this course will have a “client” who will be counting on you to provide information that will enhance the effectiveness of his office and its very important activities.

Because this course deals with *practicing* sociology, that is precisely what you will be doing. After some introductory lectures, the course will be driven almost entirely by individual and group work on the part of you and other students. For this reason, it is very important that you attend class on a regular basis and that you pay careful attention to deadlines for individual and group work.

² Another section of SOC 350 (001) is focusing on Public Sociology this semester.

REQUIRED READINGS

The following books (listed in the order in which they will receive major use) are required:

Dentler, Robert A. *Practicing Sociology: Selected Fields*. Praeger, 2002. ISBN 0-275-97516-9.

Price, Jammie, Roger A. Straus, and Jeffrey R. Breese (eds.). *Doing Sociology: Case Studies in Sociological Practice*. Lexington Books (Rowman & Littlefield), 2009. ISBN 978-0-7391-3395-8.

Fenstermaker, Sarah, and Nikki Jones (eds.). *Sociologists Backstage: Answers to 10 Questions about What They Do*. Routledge, 2011. ISBN 978-0-415-87093-1.

Additional materials may be assigned during the semester.

GRADING PROCEDURE

This course will not include any exams.

Your course grade will be determined by the following factors:

Individual Papers. You will be asked to submit three papers during the semester. Each paper will focus on a specific set of readings and class discussions. (The third paper will require some reading that goes beyond class assignments.) More detailed information for each paper will be posted in the “Assignments” section of Blackboard at least ten days before the paper is due. (Instructions for the third paper will be posted before the end of October.) You should submit your papers as WORD documents. If at all possible, please submit your papers through Blackboard. Each paper will have a specific due date. Late submissions will be accepted for the first and second paper, but they will be penalized at the rate of one letter grade per day unless you satisfy the official criteria for an excused absence on the due date. (In the case of an excused absence, the penalty will become effective on the first day that you no longer meet the criteria.) Late submissions will **not** be accepted for the third paper unless you have documented proof of a severe medical or family emergency. In evaluating papers, I will consider your apparent understanding of the material you are discussing as well as your success in communicating your points in clear, readable prose that is not marred by grammatical or spelling errors. I anticipate that the average length of each paper will be about ten pages (typed, double-spaced).

Please Note: To receive a passing grade in the course, you must submit all three Individual Papers.

Applied Social Research Groups. Early in the semester, you will be assigned to a group that will be responsible for planning, conducting, and communicating the results of an applied social research project regarding some aspect (chosen by the group and approved by the instructor) of **sustainability** at the University of Kentucky. *Classes on September 13 and 15 will be essential for understanding sustainability and its applications at the University of Kentucky.* Each group will be responsible for:

Choosing a research topic and plans for conducting the research. Each group’s plans will be communicated by an oral presentation to the class and a written research proposal. Your group’s proposal need not be long, but it should provide a clear idea of what research question

you will be addressing and what methods you will use to address it. Many methods, including (but not limited to) literature reviews, observations of behavior in public settings, analyses of publicly available documents, individual interviews, focus groups, and surveys of samples of large populations) may be used (alone or in combination) in conducting research.

Conducting the research. You and other members of your group will be responsible for organizing your research activities and insuring that they will be finished in time to satisfy requirements for your oral presentations and paper.

Communicating the results of the research in (a) an oral presentation to the class, (b) a poster or short oral presentation at a departmental event [see Sociology Service Showcase, discussed below], and (c) a paper submitted by the group.

I anticipate that each member of a given group will receive identical grades for any given requirement, but I will introduce a mechanism for group members to request that an individual's grade be adjusted up or down because of exceptional contributions (or a lack of acceptable effort).

Groups for Leadership of Discussion. Groups will be assigned to lead discussions of specific readings on predetermined days. Each group should initiate the discussion with a short summary of the assigned readings. This should be followed by questions addressed to the class as a whole. Group members should be prepared to respond to questions and comments that are raised by others in the class. Although PowerPoint and handouts are not required, they may prove helpful in facilitating discussion.

Groups will be evaluated on the helpfulness and clarity of their presentation, their success in encouraging participation from other class members, and their success in responding appropriately to questions and comments that are raised.

I anticipate that each member of a given group will receive identical grades for any given requirement, but I will introduce a mechanism for group members to request that an individual's grade be adjusted up or down because of exceptional contributions (or a lack of acceptable effort).

Individual Attendance and Participation. This class will be successful only to the extent that all of us maintain an active level of engagement throughout the semester. Thus, attendance is required and participation—both in class discussions and group activities—is expected. At the end of the semester, I will use my judgment as well as feedback from the class to assign a grade for attendance and participation. While I recognize that some students are more eager to participate in class than others, grades in this category will be low for anyone who habitually misses class, arrives late, leaves early, or fails to contribute responsibly to group activities.

One event for which your attendance and participation are particularly important is a **Sociology Service Showcase**, scheduled for **Wednesday, Dec. 7, 5:00-7:00 p.m., location TBA**. In the Showcase, you will be joined by students from at least two other classes that are engaged in work that is designed to be useful to entities outside the class. The Showcase will be attended by Sociology faculty members and representatives of the agencies for which students have performed research or provided other assistance. Others from the University or the community may be invited as well. Each of this class's research groups will be asked to prepare a poster (adhering to some standard guidelines) for the Showcase. Short oral presentations may also be a part of the event. All students in this class are expected to attend the event. If commitments involving another class or other compelling obligations

prevent you from attending, you will need to contact me (with appropriate documentation) *no later than November 15*.

The foregoing requirements will contribute to your overall course grade as follows:

| | |
|---|-------------|
| Individual Papers: | |
| First Paper: | 14% |
| Second Paper: | 14% |
| Third Paper: | 19% |
| Individual Paper Total: | 47% |
| Applied Social Research Groups | |
| Research Proposal (oral and written) | 7% |
| Group Presentation of Research Results and Recommendations (in-class and Sociology Service Showcase) | 18% |
| Group Paper presenting Research Results and Recommendations | 16% |
| Applied Social Research Groups Total: | 41% |
| Groups for Leadership of Discussion: | 6% |
| Individual Attendance and Participation: | 6% |
| Total: | 100% |

Course Grades will be assigned according to a ten-point scale:

| | |
|---------------|---|
| 90-100% = | A |
| 80-89% = | B |
| 70-79% = | C |
| 60-69% = | D |
| 59% or less = | E |

Please Note: As noted above, you must submit all three Individual Papers to receive a passing grade in the course.

Additional Points of Importance:

Classroom Decorum and Civility. Because intelligent people disagree on some of the points discussed in this class, you should expect to be exposed to ideas that differ from your own. When we are exposed to differing ideas, all of us should be prepared to admit to the possibility that our previous ideas need to be revised. Such decisions should be based on the logic and evidence presented rather than the volume or aggressiveness with which ideas are expressed. All students who voice opinions or ask challenging questions should be treated with respect, and they should be free to voice their opinions in the spirit of debate. At the same time, those who disagree with a statement should feel free to say so.

I also expect you observe proper classroom etiquette. Please be aware that late arrivals and early departures are distracting. Cell phones must be turned off during class. You are allowed to bring a computer to class, but checking e-mail, messaging, and surfing the web (except for a search that is directly

related to a topic being discussed in class and that has the potential to contribute to class discussion) are not allowed during class meetings.

Incompletes. A grade of Incomplete (I) will be given only if a genuine emergency prevents you from completing the course.

Accommodations due to Disability. If you have a documented disability that requires academic accommodations, please see me as soon as possible during scheduled office hours. In order to receive accommodations in this course, you must provide me with a Letter of Accommodation from the Disability Resource Center (Room 2, Alumni Gym, 257-2754, e-mail address jkarnes@email.uky.edu) for coordination of campus disability services available to students with disabilities.

University Policies. Policies regarding excused absences, cheating/plagiarism, withdrawal, and related matters can be found in your copy of *Student Rights and Responsibilities*. As students and faculty of the University of Kentucky, we are all responsible for adhering to these policies. A departmental statement on cheating and plagiarism is appended to this syllabus.

Given that attendance is required in this class, you should avoid any unexcused absence. Acceptable reasons for excused absences include: (a) serious illness, (b) illness or death of a family member, (c) university-related trips (provided advance notice has been given), (d) major religious holidays (provided advance notice has been given), or (e) other reasons approved *in advance* by the instructor. Except in the case of last-minute emergencies, you must provide advance notice of excused absences and make arrangements for fulfilling any missed assignments.

THE ROLE OF “BLACKBOARD”

Blackboard will be used for several purposes:

Announcements will be posted from time to time. Announcements of a time-sensitive nature also will be distributed through Blackboard to your e-mail address (as registered in your University records).

Grades will be posted (sometimes with a bit of delay) in Blackboard, which also will maintain a running total of your grade.

Many PowerPoint slides will be posted after they have been presented in class. However, PowerPoint slides that are protected by copyright will not be posted. Handouts will continue to be distributed in class if necessary for teaching purposes, but some documents that would have been handouts prior to the advent of Blackboard will be made available only via Blackboard. PowerPoint slides and handouts will be available in the “Course Content” section of Blackboard.

While you may send papers and assignments to my e-mail address, I prefer that you submit them through the “Assignments” section of Blackboard.

I may introduce threaded discussion topics into Blackboard. If a topic is introduced, you are invited to comment on it as you see fit. Comments that you post will be available to everyone in the course, and you should remember that they will not be anonymous. Comments posted to threaded discussions will not be graded, though students who post useful comments may be rewarded with an increased “attendance and participation” grade.

Summary of Dates with Required Papers or Activities (subject to change)

| | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Tuesday, September 20 | First Individual Paper Due |
| Tuesday, October 4 | Oral Reports from Research Groups on Sustainability Research Plans |
| Tuesday, October 11 | Written Research Proposals due from groups |
| Tuesday, November 1 | Second Individual Paper Due |
| Thursday, December 1 | Group Presentations of Research Results and Recommendations |
| Saturday, December 3 | Group Papers Due |
| Tuesday, December 6 | Spillover Day for Group Presentations |
| Wednesday, December 7 (5:00-7:00) | Sociology Service Showcase |
| Friday, December 16 | Third Individual Paper Due by 10:30 a.m. |

COURSE SCHEDULE (Specific dates are subject to change.)

| | |
|--------------|---|
| August 25 | Introduction to the Course |
| August 30 | What does “Practicing Sociology” Mean? <i>Doing Sociology</i> , chapter 1 (Steele & Breese) Dentler, chapter 1 |
| September 1 | The Role of Theory in Practicing Sociology: The Importance of Symbolic Interactionism Dentler, chapter 2 (pp.37-57) <i>Doing Sociology</i> , chapter 4 (Glass) |
| September 6 | Action-Focused Participatory Research in Contemporary Sociological Practice Dentler, chapter 2 (pp. 57-71) |
| September 8 | Ethics and Values in Sociological Practice <i>Doing Sociology</i> , chapter 14 (Perlstadt) |
| September 13 | An Introduction to Sustainability Yanarella et al., “Green vs. Sustainability: From Semantics to Enlightenment” Accessible through http://www.sustainability.uky.edu/files/pdf/greenvssustainability.pdf |

- September 15 Sustainability Efforts at the University of Kentucky—Shane Tedder (UK Office of Sustainability). Please explore the office’s web site:
<http://www.sustainability.uky.edu/home>
- September 20 **First Individual Paper Due.**
Research Group Discussions of Sustainability Research Possibilities
- September 22 Practicing Sociology in Education
Dentler, chapter 5
- September 27 Practicing Sociology in Evaluation
Dentler, chapter 6
- September 29 Practicing Sociology in the Future
Dentler, chapter 7
Some class time will be reserved for Research Group Discussions.
- October 4 **Oral Reports from Research Groups on Sustainability Research Plans**
- October 6 Introduction to Practitioners’ Accounts of their Work
Doing Sociology, Preface (Straus)
Community Policing
Doing Sociology, chapter 5 (Ballard & Prine)
- October 11 **Written Research Proposals Due from Groups**
Community Policing (continued)
- October 13 Evaluation of an Education Program
Doing Sociology, chapter 7 (Hougland)
- October 18 **Feedback to Groups on Research Proposals**
- October 20 *Group Led: Community Research on Inner City Neighborhoods*
Doing Sociology, chapter 8 (Will et al.)
- October 25 *Group Led: Built Environments for an Aging Population*
Doing Sociology, chapter 9 (Quartaroli & Hirsch)
- October 27 *Group Led: Practicing Sociology Outside the Establishment*
Doing Sociology, chapter 10 (Spraggins et al.)
- November 1 **Second Individual Paper Due**
- November 3 Begin *Sociologists Backstage*.
Exact assignments and schedule to be circulated on or before November 3.
All or most discussions will be led by student groups.

November 8,10,15,17 *Sociologists Backstage* discussions. *(All or most will be led by groups.)*

November 22 Voluntary consultations on research projects

November 24 No class. *Happy Thanksgiving!*

November 29 Wrap-Up on *Sociologists Backstage*.
Some class time will be reserved for Research Group Discussions.

December 1 **Group Presentations of Research Results and Recommendations**

December 3 (Saturday) **Group Papers Due.** Submit papers through Blackboard by 6:00 p.m.

December 6 **Spillover Day for Group Presentations**

December 7 (Wed.) **Sociology Service Showcase** (5:00-7:00; locationTBA)

December 8 Voluntary consultations on third individual paper

December 16 (Friday) **Third Individual Paper Due on or before 10:30 a.m.**

Departmental Statement on Cheating and Plagiarism. The Department of Sociology takes plagiarism and cheating seriously. All suspected cases of plagiarism and cheating will be reported to the Department Chair. Penalties for these academic offenses could include an E in the course or suspension/expulsion from U.K.

Plagiarism

All academic work, written or otherwise, submitted by students to their instructors or other academic supervisors, is expected to be the result of their own thought, research, or self-expression. In cases where students feel unsure about a question of plagiarism involving their work, they are obliged to consult their instructors on the matter before submission.

When students submit work purporting to be their own, but which in any way borrows ideas, organization, wording or anything else from another source without appropriate acknowledgment of the fact, the students are guilty of plagiarism.

Plagiarism includes reproducing someone else's work, whether it be published article, chapter of a book, a paper from a friend or some file, or whatever. Plagiarism also includes the practice of employing or allowing another person to alter or revise the work which a student submits as his/her own, whoever that other person may be. Students may discuss assignments among themselves [unless prohibited by the course instructor] or with an instructor or tutor, but when the actual work is done, it must be done by the student, and the student alone.

When a student's assignment involves research in outside sources or information, the student must carefully acknowledge exactly what, where and how he/she has employed them. If the words of someone else are used, the student must put quotation marks around the passage in question and add an appropriate indication of its origin. Making simple changes while leaving the organization, content and phraseology intact is plagiaristic. However, nothing in these *Rules* shall apply to those ideas which are so generally and freely circulated as to be a part of the public domain.

Cheating

Cheating is defined by its general usage. It includes, but is not limited to, the wrongfully giving, taking, or presenting any information or material by a student with the intent of aiding himself/herself or another on any academic work which is considered in any way in the determination of the final grade. The fact that a student could not have benefited from an action is not by itself proof that the action does not constitute cheating. Any question of definition shall be referred to the University Appeals Board. [US: 12/12/05]