SOC 4900 – Current Issues in Sociology Fall 2012

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As you all know, this is the "capstone class" for sociology majors. In my experience here at EIU, now approaching 26 years, this class is generally viewed by our majors as the last "hoop" that students have to jump through to graduate. I sincerely hope you will NOT view the course this way. Rather, I would like to see each and every one of you view this class as your opportunity to demonstrate how much you have learned – and retained – from **all** your class work in the Sociology & Anthropology Department, not just our core classes.

I would ask that each one of you take the following requirements seriously during our six weeks together:

BOOKS: *Declining By Degrees: Higher Education at Risk* (Hersh and Merrow) *Liberation Sociology* (Feagin and Vera) *Sick* (Cohn) – [we won't actually use this book, so don't worry about it] *Gang Leader for a Day* (Venkatesh)

ATTENDANCE: Attendance is mandatory. I do NOT expect you to miss class during this abbreviated session. We only meet for 75 minutes a day and I expect you to be here. You will receive **ONE POINT** for each day that you attend class.

BOOK REPORT: Each student must do a book report of 4 pages on *Gang Leader for a Day*. You MUST read at least ONE REVIEW of the book that is at least one full page in length. Feel free to use the review as a basis for the book report. One page of your book review can summarize the book. The remainder of your report should cover issues/concerns that are important to an understanding of the book. In specific, your book report should be written in such a way that you link aspects of the book with SPECIFIC concepts, theories, terms, or approaches that you have learned in other sociology classes. For example, there is no way that a student who has taken class work in criminology or deviance would not be able to link different parts of the book to work to which they have been exposed in Criminology (SOC 2761), The Criminal Justice System (SOC 3770), Juvenile Delinquency (SOC 4750), or Policing (SOC 3780). Likewise, material that one would learn in Social Psychology (SOC 3650) or Social Organization (SOC 3660) or Sociology of Work (SOC 4000) is highly relevant to a sociological understanding of Sudhir Vankatesh's Gang Leader for a Day. Finally, almost all of you have taken our basic general education course in Social Problems (SOC 2750), and that course would provide material one could use to "make sense" of the book. Your book report must also touch on one ETHICAL issue that confronted Vankatesh during the course of his research and discuss how he resolved that ethical dilemma.

At any rate, the review you use (and that is why multiple reviews of the book are better) can be a "springboard" for the writing and analysis of the book that you do. <u>I can't emphasize too strongly how important it is for you to find a review (I hope more than one) of the book so that you do a good job with this assignment. This assignment is worth **50 total points**. (Note:</u>

You must physically attach a copy of the actual book review that you use, irrespective of which book you choose.)

This assignment is due on **Thursday, October 25**th. I will not, under any circumstances, accept a late paper for this assignment. For those of you who need one more EWP to graduate, this paper will be acceptable since I will edit your work and return it to you. Obviously, your grade will be dependent on the copy that you submit to me on the 25th, NOT on the one I return for you to make corrections and to submit for your EWP.

FINAL EXAM: The final exam will be worth **100 total points**. The final will cover all the lecture material, video, and class discussion that we do over the course of the summer session. Multiple choice, true-false questions, a matching column and short essay/definition-type questions will all be fair game for the final. It is highly likely that there will be a writing component to the final as well. **The final exam will be on the date mandated by the University Finals Schedule**.

GROUP PROJECT: Each of you will do a group project to meet this requirement. Each of you will be expected to contribute – *in a meaningful way* – to the group effort. To ensure that this is the case each one of you in the group will RATE every other member with respect to his/her contribution to the group project. *Your group grade for this effort will suffer if I discover that anyone in the group did NOT contribute to the overall project*. I am serious about this. I used this same method when I taught Research Methods for so many years and I can only think of one or two cases in which I had to penalize a group for one person not doing what they were supposed to be doing. Your group project will be discussed in detail in class by the second week of class. You will receive a handout that day with specific directions. **The group project is worth 50 total points.** I wish to emphasize that there are NO DO-OVERS. What your group turns in is what you will be graded on, pure and simple. Thus, it is imperative that, as a group, you work together and make sure that you have – collectively – done the best job you can.

GRADING SCALE: 89 AND ABOVE = A; 79-88 = B; 69-78 = C; 59-68 = D; BELOW 59 = F

PURPOSE OF THE CLASS AND MY APPROACH TO IT: The class is seen as a vehicle for students to demonstrate their knowledge of sociological theory, basic research design/methodology, and statistical analysis. As you can see, these are 3 of the core classes in our undergraduate major and, to be sure, are generally seen as core classes in most undergraduate curricula in the sociology major. Most undergraduate departments of sociology impart the positivist, quantitative, and scientific approach to the discipline. My purpose in this class will be to encourage you to see that, while this approach is modal, it is not the *only* approach that one can employ to think sociologically or to do sociological research. In short, what I want to do is *critique* the dominant view of sociology as an overwhelmingly quantitative, scientific discipline. Indeed, as Feagin and Vera correctly emphasize, the roots of the discipline are to be found in a much different approach – qualitative, historical approaches – ones that assume a moral stance, anathema to the dominant approach to current sociological research and analysis. In that respect, the Feagin and Vera book is essential reading and you simply MUST do this reading to do well in class discussion and on your final exam.

My approach comes out of my training in the sociology of science. This began in conjunction with my graduate course work with Dr. Ted Vaughan, who became my graduate

mentor, and has continued through today. What I discovered at age 25, when I began my PhD work, is that sociological thinking is a *lifelong enterprise*, one that is not mastered simply by getting "C" or better in classes that are seen as "core." Sociological thinking, then, is critical thinking, thinking that allows us to even *subject the discipline of sociology to critical analysis*. To bring this all together: I see the class as a capstone class in the sense that it is a "sociology of sociology" class, asking you to view your discipline with the same insight and tools that you would any other feature of human behavior. And, since the course is entitled "Current Issues," we will examine, towards the end of the semester, a **current issue** in the discipline: the rise of "public sociology" and its impact on the profession.

RESOURCES: Dr. Gillespie has agreed to provide some help to us during the semester. So has Dr. Lovekamp. I would emphasize the word, "HELP." They will NOT do work for you and shouldn't be expected to. Ellen Eckert will be Dr. Gillespie's tutor for SOC 3630, as will Annie Hedger, this Fall and they are both their to assist you. Of course, I am available as well, though my knowledge of statistics is such that you would do well to consult Dr. Gillespie or Ellen/Annie first and me only as a last resort! I will probably allow for a few days during the semester for "group work" and this will mean that we will NOT hold formal class.

SOCIOLOGY 4900 - SEMESTER PROJECT

The required project combines **both** quantitative and qualitative approaches to social research and your understanding of these approaches. Pay attention to detail throughout this assignment and realize that there will be no "do overs" with respect to it. Once you submit it, that is what you are graded on. I wish to emphasize that you have done all of this before in your required Methods and Statistics classes. Notice that the final exam is worth more than this project and the book report is equal to it in point value.

- Step 1 -Think about what interests you as a group, what it is you wish to study. This will necessarily entail browsing the data set to see the kinds of variables Dr. Gillespie and I have included.
- Step 2 Once you do this, formulate a hypothesis using variables from the data set. Note: do a simple hypothesis, involving one independent variable (IV) and one dependent variable (DV).
- Step 3 Is your hypothesized relationship a positive one or an inverse one?
- Step 4 Explain how your IV and DV are operationalized.
- Step 5 What **level of measurement** is your IV? What **level of measurement** is your DV?
- Step 6 What kind of **statistical test** are you going to use to "test" your hypothesis? Why?
 - Step 7 **Interpret the results** of your statistical test. Was your hypothesis confirmed or not? (Make sure that you include your SPSS "printout.")
- Step 8 Find a **quantitative research article from a sociological journal** written in the last 5-7 years that also focuses on your topic. (Note: it may not EXACTLY mirror your research, but it must be similar to your research topic.) **Compare** that study to what you did. Specifically:
- Step 9 What was the hypothesis?
- Step 10 What was the IV? What was the DV?
- Step 11 How did they operationalize the IV and DV?
- Step12 What was the level of measurement for the IV? What was the level of measurement for the DV?
- Step 13 How do your results **compare** to the results reported in your research article? Why?

Note: YOU MUST SUBMIT THE QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH ARTICLE YOU CHOOSE WITH YOUR COMPLETED ASSIGNMENT!

Now, find a **qualitative research article from a sociological journal** written in the last 5-7 years that focuses on the topic you chose to do for the assignment above.

- Step 1 Is there a hypothesis implied? If not, what is it specifically that the researcher is studying?
- Step 2 Is a causal relationship implied? Can you discern an IV and DV from this research?
- Step 2 How does the researcher study this topic?
- Step 3 What results does the researcher report?
- Step 4 How do the results compare with the results from a) the research that your group did? and b) the results reported in your published quantitative research article?

Note: YOU MUST SUBMIT THE QUALITATIVE RESEARCH ARTICLE YOU CHOOSE WITH YOUR COMPLETED ASSIGNMENT.