

Fall, 2007

**Department of Sociology
Eastern Illinois University
Sociology 4900
Capstone Issues in Sociology**

Sociology Under Foot: A Sociological Analysis of Cemeteries

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office hours: 12:30-1:30, M-F or by appointment

Prerequisites: 1. Sociology Major
2. Sociology 3250, 3610 and 3620 COMPLETED

Course Introduction

This course will give brief consideration to the social history of cemeteries, review all sociological literature addressing/using cemeteries data and address the social and demographic variables universal to cemeteries and their sociological analysis. While many sociology courses are centered around unique or particular social problems, this course is oriented around a sociological problem - sociologically, what can be made of, or derived from cemetery data. In this regard, the course becomes an exercise in “forensic sociology.”

Purposes

The purposes of this topic are fourfold. First, cemeteries are of particular interest to me. With academic backgrounds in archaeology, folklore/folklife and sociology, a sociology of cemeteries combines and unifies my seemingly diverse backgrounds. Second, a sociology of cemeteries demonstrates the utility of sociology. If sociology can be applied to cemeteries, sociology can be applied to anything. Third, a sociology of cemeteries provides the intellectual challenge and context for thinking critically. With data from cemeteries limited, you must think openly and critically, “outside the box,” to use the data to their fullest. Finally, a sociology of cemeteries is an instructive area to immerse students fully into sociological research, given the following advantages: no human subjects approval is necessary; data are limited and readily collected from gravestones or are already available from transcription projects, both published and on the internet.

Course Objectives

- Experience empirical sociological research using primary data.
- Engage data management, including data collection and coding.
- Involvement in data analysis and interpretation.
- Formulate reasoned hypotheses.
- Explain and ground findings theoretically.

Course Activities/Requirements

Lecture: Approximately the first half of the semester will be devoted to lecture, taken substantially for the sociological literature (which is asterisked (*) in the attached bibliography). The lectures are intended to offer an overview of the sociology of cemeteries and to suggest the range of research possibilities.

Readings: The sociological literature is limited and you are encouraged to read the material within the first four or five weeks of class, but certainly prior to the midterm exam. Reading the material early will enable you to engage the lectures with questions and will also enable you to start your research project in a timely manner, which is necessary for presentations.

Midterm: The midterm will be the only exam. It will consist of objective questions and perhaps short-answer essay questions, depending upon course enrollment. Exam questions come exclusively from the lectures and the readings. Explicit information will be announced about a week prior to the exam.

Midterm will likely be Tuesday, October 16

Research Project: Everyone must complete an original, independent research project employing empirical data, and consisting of both a presentation and a research paper. The research project must include the following components:

A. Project Requirements:

1. Primary data collected from cemeteries or taken from cemetery transcription projects (of historical/genealogical societies available at local libraries or through the internet) or from obituaries.
2. Approximately 100 cases (burials).
3. Utilization of SPSS for coding and analysis.
4. Hypotheses (plural) developed and tested (tests of significance; correlations).
5. Inclusion of theory
6. Paper must be at least 12 pages in length, fully and appropriately referenced (see the Departmental Research Paper Writing Guide). One of the most consistent mistakes students make is under-referencing the paper and using too few sources.
7. Research (findings) must be presented during a poster session near the end of the term. The number of poster sessions will depend upon enrollment. See the handout on posters for more information.

B. I do not offer suggestions for research topics because they ultimately stifle student creativity and imagination. The range of possibilities is nearly endless. What do you find interesting? What would you like to know? Think “outside the box.” Run your ideas by others to see what they think. Run your ideas by me.

Post Midterm: Following the midterm, the class will be divided in half. The first half of the class will have exclusive use of the computer lab during class time on Tuesdays and the second half will have exclusive use of the computer lab during class time on Thursdays. This time is set aside in order for you to work on your research and receive assistance with your research. I will be available in the lab every day at those times. It is therefore critical that you begin your research well before midterm in order for you to enter the lab following midterm with a research thesis and a data set in hand or near completion. During these lab sessions, we will engage in group talk about your research project, your progress, and any problems that you are encountering. You do not want to appear ill-prepared or embarrassingly behind. It is not likely that this lab time alone will be sufficient for you to complete your research. If you do not take advantage of my assistance early in the second half of the semester, do not come to me late in the semester, looking to catch up. It is more than likely you will be mostly on your own.

Research paper is due Friday, November 16

Attendance

Because no texts have been adopted for this course, attendance becomes even more critical. Hence, regular attendance is demanded and roll will be taken daily. Moreover, since everyone will informally discuss their research, such efforts deserve your attendance as a matter of courtesy.

Grade Determination

Your final grade will be determined solely from the following:

Midterm	-	50%
Paper	-	50%

You have been apprized of the two activities that will determine your final grade. Knowing that, take both seriously. Not unlike the professional world, there are no second chances. You know what the task at hand is.

Semester point totals will be converted as follows:

A = 90-100% B = 80-89% C = 70-79% D = 60-69% F = <60%

DISABILITIES STATEMENT

Students with documented disabilities are encouraged to contact the Office of Disability Services (581-6583) if they wish to discuss any necessary academic accommodations.

MEDICAL EMERGENCY STATEMENT

For medical emergencies, go to the nearest phone and call 911. All faculty offices have telephones and during normal business hours (8-12 and 1-4:30), the Sociology Office (Blair 3170) is open. Be sure to state the floor and room number of the emergency to the 911 operator. If possible, someone should go to the central entrance of Blair Hall to direct EMS personnel to the medical emergency scene. If the medical emergency is on the second or third floor, someone else should hold the elevator on the first floor for EMS use.

TORNADO STATEMENT

In case of a tornado warning, proceed to the center of the hallway on the first floor, near the posted severe weather signs. Under no circumstances should you attempt to leave the building.

BUILDING FIRE STATEMENT

In case of fire, activate the fire alarm and exit the building. When a fire alarm sounds, everyone must exit the building and cannot re-enter the building until allowed by the building coordinator or fire department official. Fire alarms are located at the north and south ends of the corridors just inside the fire doors. The closes exits for all classrooms in Blair are on the north and south ends of the building. Under no circumstance should the elevator be used. Group assembly areas for all classes in Blair are either on the patio area between Blair and Old Main or on the southeast corner of the North Quad. As you exit the building, continue moving well away from the exits so that you do not impede the egress of other students or the work of fire officials. Move a safe distance away from the building.