



Graduate Research Consultant (GRC) Program Course Example

Social Sciences: Sociology

Faculty name: Dr. Charles Kurzman

Department: Sociology

Course: SOCI 119, *Sociology of Islam*

GRC: Clinton Key, Sociology

Number of students: 50

Date: Spring 2006 but taught initially in Spring 2004

Course overview:

This course is intended to achieve several goals: (1) inculcate a respectful and critical approach towards students' own and other belief systems; (2) introduce students to the importance, diversity, and recent transformations of the Islamic world; (3) introduce students to a variety of sociological fields, such as the sociology of religion, international development, the sociology of gender, and political sociology; and (4) develop research skills, including interviews, surveys, web research, and applied research.

Course research methodology: Survey and quantitative data analysis

Examples of specific student group research projects:

1. Survey building on 2004 course survey data

Overview and purpose: In Spring 2004 I worked with a GRC (Clinton Key) to assist students in conducting a survey about Americans' knowledge about and

attitudes towards Islam and Muslims, which the students then used as the basis for their term papers. I repeated that project, again using Clinton Key as the GRC and incorporating the 2004 data into the project for possible over-time comparisons.

The 2004 survey contained questions such as:

- Would you say you have a generally favorable or unfavorable opinion of Islam?
- How much do you know about Islam? [A lot, some, a little, nothing]
- What is your primary source of information about Islam? In school, from friends, in the newspaper, on the internet, on television or where?

I imagine that some or all of these questions will be included on the 2006 survey in order to allow comparison over time. Students' term papers analyzed responses to these and other questions in terms of the respondents' educational attainment, political party preference, and demographic characteristics. The sample was not fully random, so the results are not publishable, but students learned research skills through the process of developing the survey, carrying out the survey (10 respondents per student), and performing basic data analysis with the SPSS statistical software package (which the GRC will once again arrange them to have access to, through the Citrix system at OASIS).

Research skills used: survey; SPSS and data analysis

Communicating research findings:

Since the survey does not have a random sample, the results will not be publishable. However, the students will present their term-paper findings to one another in class at the end of the semester.

GRC role in the research:

The GRC collaborated with me in Spring 2004 to design the initial survey, and again participated in every phase of the research project in Spring 2006, including preparing students for the selection of survey questions (to which the whole class contributes), finalizing the survey instrument, collating the students' survey responses, and offering basic instruction in statistical analysis with SPSS.

The GRC lead class on three occasions: one class introducing survey analysis, one class developing the survey instrument, and one class introducing the SPSS statistical software package. In addition, the GRC finalized the survey instrument and distributed it

to the students, collated the completed surveys that the students conduct, and was available in office hours after the survey had been conducted to meet with students who wished to discuss their term papers analyzing the data.

GRC:

I selected Clint Key as the graduate research consultant because I had worked with him on other projects, and because he had a strong record as a teacher and researcher, with particular skills in the survey methods that the students would be using for the course.

Sources for this summary: Edited text from Dr. Charles Kurzman's GRC Proposal and interviews.