

**Sociology 008: Marriage and Family Spring 2007 Instructor: Natasha Sarkisian
Research Project Guidelines**

For this project, students will join a research group of four or five people. Students can constitute their own group, or ask me to place them in a group. This group should be different from your debate team!

Each research group will select one of the broader topics outlined by the syllabus, and identify a controversy in that area. Try to select a controversy where you are unsure what position you would take. This controversy should concern the facts of actual family life rather than the normative ideas about it (i.e. how things are rather than how they should be). Again, this controversy should not coincide with the one that you are addressing in your debate. You should state this controversy as one sentence (similar to those used as headlines for your debates).

The goal of the group project is to reach a judgment on that controversy. Based on all the information you collect, you should come down on one side of the issue. In making this judgment, the group must (1) thoroughly research the literature on the controversy, (2) identify and interview 8-10 people whose family experiences make them valuable informants on this controversy. Your interviewees should not be your own family members. If your group wants to supplement these with some additional research (e.g. observation, survey, focus groups) and obtain extra credit points, discuss this option with me.

After the groups are finalized, sometimes you will break into those groups in class to discuss your group's progress. I will meet with groups to offer advice, give suggestions, and help you find resources for your projects. Groups are also encouraged to meet with me during office hours to seek additional assistance.

Each group will submit their completed research project on May 8th. No late projects will be accepted. There will be also two preliminary drafts of the projects, as described below. All drafts and the final paper should be submitted electronically; I encourage you to use Google Docs to facilitate collaborative writing: <http://docs.google.com/> but you can also submit Word files by email.

The 1st draft of the project will be due February 20, 2007. It will be worth 20% of your grade for this assignment (i.e., 6% of your total final grade). This draft should be app. 2-3 pages which includes:

1. Introduction. Here, you should provide:
 - A. Clear definition of the controversial issue
 - B. Clear delineation of the sides of the controversy (pros and cons)
 - C. Clearly identify the main antagonists and protagonists (i.e., who is making the arguments on both sides of the debate)

2. Methods of research. Here, you will describe your plan of data collection for this project:
 - A. Specify the characteristics and family experiences that the respondents for your interviews should possess
 - B. State how you are planning to locate the respondents and approach them
 - C. Develop a set of questions for your interviews and organize them

The 2nd draft of the project will be due April 19, 2007. It will be also worth 20% of your grade for this assignment (i.e., 6% of your total final grade). This will be the preliminary draft of your research report. It should be approximately 7-10 pages and include the following sections:

1. Introduction (see above).
2. Literature review: This section should describe the prior research that has been done on the issue. Here, you need to specify:
 - A. What research has been done on the issue? Describe and cite the literature.
 - B. Do the research findings tend to come down on one side of the issue, i.e. tend to support one side over the other side?
 - C. What are the potential sources of bias here (e.g., how could the theories that researchers hold, their methods, and their values affect their findings)?
3. Methods of research (see above).
4. Interview results: Here you describe the findings of your study.
 - A. Describe *in detail* what you found. Cite respondents' own words – that makes your argument more convincing.
 - B. Specify what answers to your research questions your study provided. Make a decision whether your interviewees seem to agree with each other's views of whether they differ.
 - C. Connect your interviews with the literature you reviewed.
5. Conclusion:
 - A. Summarize your findings and your argument. Make sure that you clearly come down on one side of the controversy and reiterate why.
 - B. Describe the limitations of your study: How could it have been done better? What problems did you experience?
 - C. Explain what you learned from your study.

The final draft of the research project will be due May 8, 2007. It will be worth 60% of your grade for this assignment (18% of your total grade for the course). At this point, you should submit:

- (1) The final draft of your research report (7-10pp) that follows the outline described above and incorporates the feedback that I will provide on your preliminary draft.
- (2) A creative presentation of your results. Here, you should present your findings for a non-academic audience. Creativity is the most important component here. Present your material creatively: Does an oral presentation help? Does a poster help? Photographs? Film or video? All is fair game if it helps you get your group's point across. Remember that your creative presentation should make it clear that you come down on one side of the controversy!