Data Collection for Sociology 110 Final Project

Below are a series of data collection strategies that you might find useful for your final project.

Many topics and research questions can be studied with a variety of strategies (all the examples given below address questions involving ethnic immigration), but your group must come up with a single research design that you each will use in your own research. This means that if your group decides to conduct a survey, you will all use the same survey questions.

You can, however, apply to approach to different populations. For example, if your group decides to do an experiment, one of you could carry out the experiment you have jointly designed on students involved in Greek organizations while another does the experiment on ethnic minorities, another on parents of undergraduates, another on professors, etc. If you decide to use ethnographic methods each member of the group could select a different ethnic market to study.

Keep in mind that selection of subjects for your study is very important. If your sample is composed only of immigrants you will not be able to conclude very much about how hard it is for immigrants to get jobs (because you don’t know very much about how hard it is for non-immigrants to get jobs!).

Successful research requires careful planning, so I encourage you and your group to think carefully about how you will link your specific research question to the data you will collect. If you have expectations about what you will find, state them at the outset (and tell us why you have these expectations!) but also be sure that your research design will allow you to falsify your expectations.

Data Collection Strategies

1. **Ethnographic research**
   Careful observation of a social setting in order to understand it better. Ethnographers take extensive field notes while they are observing their setting.

   *Example of an ethnographic study:*
   Hang out at an ethnic market or restaurant for a couple of hours at many different times of the day and observe who comes in, what
they do there, the types of social interaction that take place, the
language they speak, the roles different people play, the level of
social integration, and anything else you notice about how the
place works as a social system and the extent to which it fosters or
impedes assimilation into ‘mainstream’ society.

2. **In-depth or structured interviews**
   Open-ended questions you ask of a small number of people, often
to understand their motives or personal explanations for their
behavior. Interviews often result in subjects telling their stories in
terms of ‘personal histories’ or biographies rather than in
sociological terms. It is the job of the analyst (you) to put their
stories into their social context and explain why they told their
story the way they did.

*Example of an interview question:*
“Tell me why your family moved to the United States.”

3. **Surveys**
A smaller number of discrete questions you ask a large number of
people; typically survey data is analyzed quantitatively by
transforming responses into numbers that can be summarized in
tables.

*Example of a survey question:*
“What year did your family come to the United States?”

4. **Qualitative archival research**
Diaries, court records, historical documents

*Examples of use of qualitative archival data:*
Analysis of letters written by recent immigrants when they send
money to their family at home to study the emergence of
transnational communities.

5. **Quantitative archival research**
Census data, existing survey data collected by other researchers

*Example of use of quantitative archival data:*
Statistical analysis of US Census data to study the association between country of origin and wage in each decade of the 20th century

6. **Experiment**
Controlled setting in which subjects are randomly assigned to a treatment or no treatment condition. Ideally allows researcher to isolate effect of ‘treatment’ on outcome

*Example of experiment*
Prepare two resumes that are identical except (1) the name on one is ‘obviously’ ethnic and the other sounds more-or-less white; and (2) they have different extracurricular activities (the ‘ethnic’ applicant reports being involved in ethnic-identity organizations, while the ‘white’ applicant reports being involved in a dorm-based community service group). Identify a sample of subjects and randomly split them into two groups: a ‘treatment’ group and a ‘control’ group. Ask members of the treatment group to examine the ‘ethnic’ resume, while members of the control group examine the ‘white’ resume. All subjects rate the resume they examined on qualification, competence, dedication, and overall hirability. Subjects also complete a short survey reporting their background characteristics.