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Classroom Resources

Title: Research Confidential: Solutions to Problems Most Social Scientists Pretend They Never Have

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Author Letter to Colleagues Considering Class Use:

Dear Colleague,

The dozen chapters in Research Confidential offer a realistic behind-the-scenes look at how empirical social science gets done. Bringing together vivid first-hand accounts of recently completed research projects, it introduces readers to a wide range of methods: from surveys about individual behavior to ethnographies of communities, from cross-national comparisons to archival research. Although there is no shortage of books on research methods, few of them address the day-to-day complexities of collecting and analyzing empirical evidence. As a result, new researchers are rarely given a realistic idea of what to expect when they embark on a project. By focusing attention on the concrete details seldom discussed in final project write-ups or traditional research guides, Research Confidential aims to equip new researchers with essential information that is all too often left on the cutting room floor.

The dozen chapters in this collection were specially commissioned from young scholars who recently completed successful research projects in social scientific fields including communication studies, psychology, and sociology. Each of their chapters offers a thorough account of hands-on empirical research that was conducted in the context of a specific project and each explicitly discusses hurdles that were encountered along the way and how they were negotiated. Some essays focus on the behind-the-scenes challenges of familiar research methods (e.g., interviewing, ethnographic work, and secondary data analysis) while others look at the challenges associated with cutting-edge genres of research associated with new media such as data collection online or using text messaging as well as the study of gamers and Web-based populations.

*Sincerely,
Eszter Hargittai*