Our goal in this course is to help the participants learn to exploit the wealth of information that is available in public-access data archives and that constitutes evidence bearing on questions of both general public interest and scientific interest to psychologists.

Huge amounts of information are collected by government agencies, private polling firms, and social scientists, and are then analyzed with respect to a small number of questions of focal interest to the original data collectors. Funding agencies and other interested parties are increasingly aware that such data bases, which were often collected at great expense, are underexploited, that is, that they can be used to address many additional questions besides those that motivated the original data collection. Accordingly, these data bases are increasingly being made available to other researchers, including student researchers.

The first project will be an individual one. Each student will locate public access data of relevance to some question of interest to psychological scientists, and will present some of those data descriptively in a brief classroom report and a short paper. Data analysis for this first project (worth 30 % of your course grade) will probably consist of nothing more complicated than cross-tabulations and perhaps a chi-square test.

Students will then work on major projects (worth 60 % of your course grade) in groups of 3 or 4. Each group will identify a problem domain for which relevant public access data archives are available, will formulate some feasible research questions, and will analyze the data in such a way as to address those questions; this is likely to involve combining information from multiple sources, and the use of more advanced statistical methods such as multiple regression and factor analysis. Group presentations of the fruits of these inquiries will take place in November, and individual written papers based on these projects will be due by the end of classes.

The remaining 10 % will be awarded for participation in class when your colleagues make their presentations.