



**The University of Western Ontario**  
**SOCIOLOGY 9003**  
**Research Design**  
**Fall 2024**  
**Thursdays 9:30am-12:30pm in SSC 5235**

**Professor: Dr. Rachel Margolis**

Office Hours: TBA

Department of Sociology, Office: SSC 5326

Email: Rachel.margolis@uwo.ca

---

### **Enrollment Restrictions**

Enrollment in this course is restricted to graduate students in Sociology.

### **Course Description**

This course examines the design, conduct, and evaluation of research in the social sciences, with a special emphasis on topics most relevant to sociologists. The aim is to understand how research questions are developed in such a way that they can be convincingly linked to and answered by evidence.

We will discuss a variety of types of methodologies used in Sociology, with special attention paid to issues of sampling, measurement, and generalizability. In the course, we will use case studies drawn from articles published in sociology journals. These articles are creative applications of methods or principles to different theoretical frameworks, questions, and data sources. Thinking through these examples will give you tools to critically assess research done by others and to develop your own projects.

Substantial portions of the class will be devoted to evaluation, critique, and discussion. Research is never perfect. Even the best articles, chapters, and books are imperfect. Individually and as a group, we will explore the strengths and weaknesses of various studies. Through discussion, class exercises, and written assignments, members of the course will demonstrate how to evaluate the conclusions and claims of different projects in relation to the strengths and weaknesses of research design, data, measurement, and analytic approach. You will take and apply these methods to the development of a short proposal, intended to serve as your master's thesis or the start of a dissertation proposal, which will hopefully accelerate the beginning of your career engaged in the conduct and evaluation of research.

For information about course requirements, see Methods of Evaluation and Evaluation Breakdown below.

## Learning Outcomes

Students in this course will develop a sophisticated understanding of how evidence is used to answer research questions. The following items are critical to achieving this goal.

- **Motivation:** an informed perspective regarding the research motivations for engaging with different sociological methodologies.
- **Breadth:** a familiarity with numerous methodological approaches to social research that will enable participants to evaluate the appropriateness of particular approaches for given substantive inquiries.
- **Critique:** a capacity to recognize the limitations of different methodological approaches in the context of different lines of social inquiry.
- **Connections:** an understanding of how different methodological approaches relate to each other in the context of different inquiries, including as complements, substitutes, or alternatives.
- **Tradeoffs:** a recognition of the methodological compromises inherent in real-world social research and an appreciation for the ethical, moral, and legal considerations that must guide our work.
- **Horizons:** a process of identifying and appreciating new and diverse methods used in the social sciences that may address inadequacies among established and emerging empirical and theoretical challenges in social inquiry.

## Course Material(s)

There is one textbook you must get access to for the course. You can either order the hard copy or get an e-book. It is available at the bookstore or online. Please make sure that you have access to it in time for the second class.

The Art and Science of Social Research, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. 2021. By: Deborah Carr et al. W.W. Norton and Company. Website: <https://wwnorton.com/books/9780393537529>

We will also use published journal articles available on the course website. These are listed below on the course outline.

### Other Highly Recommended Resources:

- Becker, Howard. S. Writing for Social Scientists: How to start and finish your thesis, book, or article.
- Becker, Howard. S. Tricks of the Trade.
- Booth, Wayne, et al. The Craft of Research.
- Small, Mario Luis and Jessica McCrory Calarco. 2022. Qualitative Literacy: A guide to evaluating ethnographic and interview research. University of California Press.
- Miller, Jane E. 2005. *The Chicago Guide to Writing about Multivariate Statistics*.
- Finally, make sure you are familiar with: [Canadian Sociology Association's Code of Ethics](#).

## Evaluation Breakdown

Your grade in this course is determined by a weighted average of 6 elements. A brief description of each of these, and their associated weights for the final grade, are listed below. Specific details for each assignment will be distributed at the proper class time.

To pass this course, you must:

- complete all assignments
- attend a minimum of 80% of the classes
- and receive a mark of at least 60% overall

### In class presentation of existing data (15%)

Presentations will take place on the following dates: Oct 10, Oct 24, Oct 31, Nov 7, Nov 14, Nov 21.

I will provide a list of secondary data sources in sociology, and in class early in the semester, each student will choose a data set for which they will develop a short presentation. The presentation should last no more than 5 minutes and should address and answer the following topics and questions:

- An overview of the data set
- What types of methodological approaches are typically used with the data set; what types of research questions is the data set particularly well-suited to answer
- What types of research questions is the data set poorly suited to answer
- What would be an innovative use of the data set that prior people have infrequently done
- Could you potentially use this data source for your own research?

Create a presentation of 4-8 slides that covers the information above. You must have professional looking slides (this means no crazy colors, no text zooming in and out). All of the text must be legible from the back of the room.

Your mark will be based on 1) the quality of the information provided, i.e. answering the questions above correctly and thoughtfully, 2) the visual presentation itself, and 3) the quality of the oral presentation.

You must submit your presentation as a pdf file on the course website (under Assignments) by 9am on the day that you're presenting. Please name your file "LastnameFirstname.DataSet.pdf". For example, if I were to present on the Canadian Community Health Survey, the file I would submit would be called "Margolis.Rachel.CCHS.pdf".

### Research Questions and Motivation (20%) Due October 10

What research questions will you address in your research project (MRP or dissertation chapter)?

- Write out 1-3 research questions. These should be questions that end with a "?" These should be questions that you can answer well with research methods in sociology.
- Why are these questions interesting, important, and novel?
- What measures or observations will you use and how do they link to the literature?
- This one-page single spaced assignment is due via the course website before class on October 10, by 9:30am.

Formatting: Please complete this assignment one one-page, single spaced. Use size 12 Times New Roman font. Use 1-inch margins all around. Please left-align the text in your document. Submit your assignment as a Word or PDF document. Save your document with the following format "LastnameFirstname\_ResearchQuestions.pdf" or "LastnameFirstname\_ResearchQuestions.docx".

### **Sample and population (20%) Due October 24**

Building on your Research Questions and Motivation, what data and methods might you use for your research project? Apply the tools of the class to your own project. This 1-2 page single-spaced assignment is due via the course website before class, by 9:30am on October 24.

Address the following questions:

- What data will you use, and WHY are these data the best for your research questions?
- What are the strengths of the data for this project?
- What methods will you use and WHY will you use those methods? Show that you understand the strengths and weaknesses of the data set and the methods.
- If your research questions have evolved since the first assignment, please include the research questions as they stand now.

Formatting: Please complete this assignment in 1-2 pages, single spaced. Use size 12 Times New Roman font. Use 1-inch margins all around. Please left-align the text in your document. Submit your assignment as a Word or PDF document. Save your document with the following format "LastnameFirstname\_SamplePopulation.pdf" or "LastnameFirstname\_SamplePopulation.docx".

### **Interview your supervisor (10%) Due November 21**

All students should have a supervisor by the middle of the term.

You must:

- 1) Send your supervisor the first two assignments you have completed in this course.
- 2) Meet with your supervisor, interview them about their research, and discuss your plans and timeline for your research project (MRP or PhD Dissertation chapter).
- 3) Then after the meeting, write the supervisor an email summarizing your conversation. Then have the supervisor write back confirming that this meeting took place and that they saw your assignments from this course. Please submit a pdf of this email conversation to the course website by 9:30am on November 21.

Please do not cc me on the emails. Submit the pdf to this Assignments page.

### **Research Proposal (25%) Due December 5**

You will end the course with a research plan for your MRP or PhD dissertation chapter. Based on the principles of research design introduced in the course, you will make clear research questions, a motivation, choose a data source, and method to be used in this research.

Label each section of the proposal: Research Questions, Motivation, Data, Method(s). Write thoughtfully and carefully. This may take several revisions.

This assignment is due at 9:30am on December 5. Submit it to the course website and also to your supervisor via email.

Formatting: Please complete this assignment in 3-4 pages, single spaced. Use size 12 Times new roman font. Use 1-inch margins all around. Please left-align the text in your document. Submit your assignment as a Word or PDF document. Save your document with the following format "LastnameFirstname\_ResearchProposal.pdf" or "LastnameFirstname\_ResearchProposal.docx".

### **In class participation (10%)**

Class attendance and participation are expected in graduate seminars. You are expected to come to class on time, ready to participate in discussions of weekly readings and other course material, and to participate regularly for the course's duration. Actively participating entails engaging the readings, asking questions, and relating the material to your own work and the work of others. The more you participate, the more you will get from the class, grow as a scholar, and the more interesting it will be for all of us.

## **Course Schedule and Readings**

### **Week 1: September 12. Doing Sociological Research**

- What makes research interesting?
- What skills will I develop?
- Why do researchers use different methods?

Readings to complete before this class: None

### **Week 2: September 19. Data in Sociological Research**

Readings to complete before this class:

- The Art and Science of Social Research: Chapter 1.
- Burgard, S. A., & Ailshire, J. A. (2013). Gender and time for sleep among US adults. *American Sociological Review* 78(1), 51-69.

### **Week 3: September 26. From Concepts to Models: Hypotheses, Operationalization, and Measurement**

Readings to complete before this class:

- The Art and Science of Social Research: Chapters 2, 4 and 5.
- Feliciano, C. and Y. Lanuza. (2017). An Immigrant Paradox? Contextual Attainment and Intergenerational Educational Mobility. *American Sociological Review* 82(1): 211-241.

**No class. October 3**

### **Week 4: October 10. Sampling Strategies**

Readings to complete before this class:

- The Art and Science of Social Research: Chapter 6.
- Small, M.L., (2009). 'How Many Cases Do I Need?' On Science and the Logic of Case Selection in Field-Based Research." *Ethnography* 10(1):5-38.

**No class October 17. Reading Week**

### **Week 5: October 24. Communicating Research Results**

Readings to complete before this class:

- The Art and Science of Social Research: Chapters 13 and 14.
- Justice Canada. (2023). Separated and divorced parents' experiences with child support and related issues.

### **Week 6: October 31. Experimental and Pseudo-experimental designs**

Readings to complete before this class:

- The Art and Science of Social Research: Chapter 8.
- Pager, D. (2003) "The mark of a criminal record." *American Journal of Sociology* 108.5: 937-975.
- Leventhal, T., and J. Brooks-Gunn. (2003). Moving to opportunity: an experimental study of neighborhood effects on mental health. *American Journal of Public Health* 93.9: 1576-1582.

### **Week 7: November 7. Survey Research**

Readings to complete before this class:

- The Art and Science of Social Research: Chapter 7.
- Herd, P. (2010). Education and health in late-life among high school graduates: Cognitive versus psychological aspects of human capital." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 51.4: 478-496.

### **Week 8: November 14. In Depth Interviewing**

#### Readings to complete before this class:

- The Art and Science of Social Research: Chapter 11.
- Turney, Kissane and Edin. (2012). After Moving to Opportunity: How Moving to a Low-poverty Neighborhood Improves Mental Health among African American Women. *Society and Mental Health* 3(1): 1-21.

### **Week 9: November 21. Materials-Based Methods**

#### Readings to complete before this class:

- The Art and Science of Social Research: Chapter 12.
- Chakrabarti, P., & Frye, M. (2017). A mixed-methods framework for analyzing text data: Integrating computational techniques with qualitative methods in demography. *Demographic Research*, 37, 1351-1382.
- Wilkes, R., A. Duong, L. Kesler, and H. Ramos. (2017). Canadian University Acknowledgment of Indigenous Lands, Treaties, and Peoples. *Canadian Review of Sociology*. 54(1):89-120.

### **Week 10: November 28. Ethnography**

#### Readings to complete before this class:

- The Art and Science of Social Research: Chapter 10.
- Jenkins, T. (2018). Dual Autonomies, Divergent Approaches: How Stratification in Medical Education Shapes Approaches to Patient Care. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*. 59(2):268-282.

### **Week 11: December 5. Research Ethics & Hot Topics in Sociology**

#### Readings to complete before this class:

- McCormack, McCloskey, and Furlong. Getting through ethics: The fit between Research Ethics Board Assessments and Qualitative Research
- Haggarty, K. (2004). Ethics Creep: Governing Social Science Research in the Name of Ethics. *Qualitative Sociology* 27(4).
- Small, M.L., (2011). "How to conduct a mixed methods study: Recent trends in a rapidly growing literature." *Annual Review of Sociology*, 37:57-86.

## **Important Policies**

### **Policies for Assignment Deadlines**

Assignment deadlines are firm. Late assignments are not accepted. Because many of the assignments in the course build on each other, it's important to keep up with your work.

Accommodation will not be granted automatically, and if you must submit an assignment late in the case of medical illness or the death of a family member, it is your responsibility to contact me in advance to make alternate arrangements.

### **Accessible Education Western (AEW)**

Western is committed to achieving barrier-free accessibility for all its members, including graduate students. As part of this commitment, Western provides a variety of services devoted to promoting, advocating, and accommodating persons with disabilities in their respective graduate program.

Graduate students with disabilities are strongly encouraged to register with Accessible Education Western (AEW), a confidential service designed to support graduate and undergraduate students through their academic program. With the appropriate documentation, the student will work with both AEW and their graduate programs (normally their Graduate Chair and/or Course instructor) to ensure that appropriate academic accommodations to program requirements are arranged. These accommodations include individual counselling, alternative formatted literature, accessible campus transportation, learning strategy instruction, writing exams and assistive technology instruction.

\*In the context of this course, students with disabilities must have AEW contact the instructor, and the student must meet with the instructor and graduate chair if accommodation is requested.

### **Statement on Academic Offences**

Students must write their assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations.

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site:

[http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/scholastic\\_discipline\\_grad.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf)

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism-detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>).

### **Completion of Course Requirements**

Course requirements must be completed by the end of the term in which the course is offered (Fall-December 31; Winter-April 30, Summer-August 31). Only in exceptional circumstances may a student take additional time to complete the course requirements. In such a case, the student must first meet with the Graduate Chair to request permission to carry the incomplete. Medical documentation, where required, will be kept on file in the Sociology graduate program office. More details regarding

incompletes are outlined in the Graduate Handbook:

[http://www.sociology.uwo.ca/graduate\\_handbook/course\\_information.html](http://www.sociology.uwo.ca/graduate_handbook/course_information.html)

### **Standards of Professional Behaviour**

It is the responsibility of all members of the Department of Sociology to adhere to and promote standards of professional behaviour that support an effective learning environment. These include:

- **Respect for others** both in and out of the classroom through words and actions (be professional, fair, and respectful in interactions with people on-line and in-person; understand and respect differences among classmates and colleagues; avoid disrupting the learning environment; respect others' expectations of confidentiality and privacy)
- **Active engagement in learning** and commitment to quality (being prepared for classes; participating and listening actively to other; using technology and social media appropriately, striving to do your best)
- **Personal integrity** (following through on commitments; doing own work)

Students should also be aware of the **UWO Student Code of Conduct** found at

<https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/board/code.pdf>

### **Copyright and Audio/Video Recording Statement**

Course material produced by faculty is copyrighted and to reproduce this material for any purposes other than your own educational use contravenes Canadian Copyright Laws. You must always ask permission to record another individual and you should never share or distribute recordings.

### **Recording Devices**

No recording devices can be used in class. This includes recoding class Zoom discussions. If you require a recording device for medical or other reasons, please see me.

### **Lectures and Course Materials**

Instructor generated course materials are protected by law and may not be copied or distributed in any form or in any medium without explicit permission of the instructor. Note that infringement of copyright is an academic offence.

### **Health/Wellness Services**

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western

<http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

### **Statement on Gender-Based and Sexual Violence:**

Western is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence (GBSV) and providing compassionate support to anyone who is going through or has gone through these traumatic events. If you are experiencing or have experienced GBSV (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at the following website:

[https://www.uwo.ca/health/student\\_support/survivor\\_support/get-help.html](https://www.uwo.ca/health/student_support/survivor_support/get-help.html)

To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact [support@uwo.ca](mailto:support@uwo.ca).”