



The University of Western Ontario
SOCIOLOGY 9003A
Research Design
Fall 2022
Tuesdays 9:30am-12:30pm SSC 5230

Professor: Dr. Rachel Margolis

Office Hours: Tuesdays 1:30-3pm
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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.

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 Materials

There is only one book you should acquire for the course. You can either order the hard copy or get an e-book. They are available at the bookstore or online. Please make sure that you have access to these books in time for the second class.

The Art and Science of Social Research, 2nd 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 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*. <http://www.csa-scs.ca/code-of-ethics>

Communication

When you have questions about the course, please check the course outline and OWL course site first, before emailing with questions. When I do get an email, I aim to respond to emails within 48 hours.

Be sure to check the course OWL site regularly for course updates, changes, and course-related information. You are also expected to read emails I send to your Western email account. Please be sure that you can receive and access emails from this account.

Methods of Evaluation

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.

Evaluation Breakdown

In class presentation of existing data (15%)

Presentations will take place on the following dates: Oct 11, Oct 18, Oct 25, Nov 8, Nov 15

I will provide a list of secondary data sources in sociology. Each student will choose a data set for which they will develop a short presentation, lasting 5 minutes that addresses and answers 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?

Research Questions and Motivation (20%) Due October 11

What research questions will you address? Write out 1-3 research questions. 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 October 11.

Sample and population (20%) Due October 25

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 October 25.

Interview your supervisor (10%) Due November 22

All students should have a supervisor by the middle of the term. You must meet with your supervisor, interview them about their research, and discuss your plans and timeline for your research project (MRP or PhD Dissertation chapter). Send them the previous assignments you have completed in this course. 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 OWL by November 22.

Research Proposal (25%) Due December 6

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. You will write up this plan 3-4 pages single spaced and submit it to me and your supervisor by December 6.

In class participation (10%)

Class attendance is 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 13. 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 20. Data in Sociology 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 27. From Concepts to Models: Hypotheses, Operationalization, and Measurement (class on zoom this week)

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.

Week 4: October 4. Research Ethics (Guest Prof: Professor Lehmann)

Readings to complete before this class:

- TBD

Week 5: October 11. 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.

Week 6: October 18. 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: October 25. 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.
- Couper, M. (2017). New Developments in Survey Data Collection. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 43:121-145.

No class November 1. Reading Week

Week 8: November 8. 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 15. 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 22. 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: November 29. Communicating Research Results

Readings to complete before this class:

- The Art and Science of Social Research: Chapters 13 and 14.
- TBD

Week 12: December 6. Current Debates in Sociology

Readings to complete before this class:

- 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.
- Lazer, D. and J. Radford. (2017). Data ex Machina: Introduction to Big Data. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 43:19-39.
- Freese, J. and D. Peterson. (2017). Replication in Social Science. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 43:147-165.

Important Policies

Policies for Assignment Deadlines

To receive full credit, all assignments must be submitted on the date they are due. 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.

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. Plagiarism is a major scholastic offence (the Scholastic Offence Policy can be viewed in the Western Academic Calendar).

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

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 infringements of copyright is an academic offence.

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>

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 (for example, chronic illnesses, mental health conditions, mobility impairments) 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.

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.