



**The University of Western Ontario
SOCIOLOGY 9021B**

**Qualitative Research Methods
Winter 2023**

Mondays, 9:30-12:30

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Course Description

This course introduces students to epistemological issues that distinguish qualitative from quantitative methods and provides an overview of several of the main types of qualitative research methods. It also considers ethical issues and data analysis and management challenges that are associated with qualitative research.

Learning Outcomes

- Synthesize and critically evaluate theoretical arguments and published research from a sociological perspective.
- Analyze, evaluate, and utilize a variety of methodological approaches in Sociology
- Master's: Understand and critically evaluate current research and scholarship within sociology.
- Doctoral: Critically evaluate and apply current research and scholarship within sociology and in one's area(s) of specialization.
- Master's: Demonstrate an understanding of results from qualitative research and the competent use of different qualitative research methodologies and designs.
- Doctoral: Conceptualize, design, and implement original research for the generation of new knowledge, applications, or understanding that makes a sustained, evidence-based, sociological argument and presents ideas, concepts, and results clearly.
- Apply sociological methods to understand and interpret social phenomena
- Understand and apply standards of academic integrity and appropriate guidelines and procedures for responsible conduct and presentation of research.
- Demonstrate an ability to present and discuss ideas clearly and articulately through effective oral and written communication.
- Demonstrate an awareness and appreciation of the complexity of knowledge, the potential contributions of other interpretations, methods, and disciplines, and the limitations of one's own work and of the discipline more generally.

Course Material(s)

Required textbooks:

At the Western bookstore: Van den Hoonaard, D. K. & van den Scott, L. J. (2021). *Qualitative research in action: A Canadian primer (4th ed.)*. Oxford University Press Canada.

At Western libraries ebook and print copies: Quan-Haase, A. & Sloan, L., (Eds.). (2022). *The handbook of social media research methods (2nd ed)*. London, UK: Sage.

Methods of Evaluation

Evaluation Breakdown

Requirements	Date	Proportion of Test Grade
Participation	Throughout	20%
Seminar Facilitation	TBA	20%
Method Group Exercise	Feb 13/27	20%
Final Paper (Review)	April 3	40%
Total		100%

Students are expected to do the weekly readings. The weekly readings will be the basis for class discussions. There are a total of two assignments and two class presentations.

The first assignment consists of a group exercise and presentation.

The second assignment is a review of a thesis in sociology, choose a doctoral or master's thesis (or research paper) in your area of interest.

Students are also asked to take part in a seminar facilitation. Detailed information on each of the assignments will be provided to students. The goal of the thesis review is to provide students with an introduction to the nature and scope of research in the area of sociology. The method group exercise provides students with some hands-on research experience.

SDC's Learning Skills Services, Rm 4100 WSS, www.sdc.uwo.ca/learning

LS counsellors are ready to help you improve your learning skills. We offer presentations on strategies for improving time management, multiple-choice exam preparation/writing, textbook reading, and more. Individual support is offered throughout the Fall/Winter terms in the drop-in Learning Help Centre, and year-round through individual counseling.

Participation

Participation will be evaluated based on how well-prepared students are for class, their participation in the class, and their record of attendance. Considering that discussion and critical analysis are an important part of the learning process in research methods, students are expected to participate frequently in class discussion throughout the year. Students who engage with the course material in a critical and in-depth manner will receive high participation marks. Also students are required to attend all classes. Missing 3 or more classes will lead to a very low attendance grade. Missing more than 80% of classes, will lead to a fail in this class. The exception includes circumstances that have accommodation. Please follow the procedures below for obtaining an accommodation. If you cannot attend class, please email the professor with detailed explanations. Any missed material is your responsibility. Students are expected to be on time to all classes.

Seminar Discussion Facilitation

Each student is expected to choose a method of their choice and to discuss its strengths and weaknesses. A summary of the method should be provided, including purpose, key assumptions, procedures, strengths and weaknesses, and conclusions. Students are also expected to present an exemplary use in Sociology of the chosen method. Students are responsible for facilitating the discussion and raising key points. All students are expected to participate in the discussion.

Method Exercise

This is a group exercise and should help you develop your hands-on research skills. Groups of 3-4 students will develop a research strategy to investigate a research question of their interest. Part of the assignment will be to negotiate the nature of the research question, the best method to be employed, and how to go about it. This is a first taste of the reality of conducting qualitative research and collaborating with colleagues. The project and best practices will be presented to the class. The aim of the assignment is to reflect on the experience critically.

Thesis and Method Review

This assignment consists of writing a review of a thesis in Sociology. The assignment will help you gain familiarity with various methods. Through the review you will develop skills in the critical assessment of qualitative research methods. This will provide a useful foundation for your own thesis. It also provides familiarity with the structure of a thesis and its components. MA students will review a paper and PhD students a doctoral thesis.

Plagiarism

Students are responsible for understanding the nature and avoiding the occurrence of plagiarism and other scholastic offenses. Plagiarism and cheating are considered very serious offenses because they undermine the integrity of research and education. Actions constituting a scholastic offense are described at the following link: <http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/scholoff.pdf>

(In accordance with policy at UWO):

“Students must write their assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea or a passage 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 academic offence (see Scholastic Offence Policy in the Western Academic Calendar). The University of Western Ontario uses software for plagiarism checking. Students may be required to submit their written work and programs in electronic form for plagiarism checking. (see Scholastic Offence Policy in the Western Academic Calendar).”

Students are expected to work alone unless it is specified in the assignment.

Possible penalties for a scholastic offense include failure of the assignment, failure of the course, suspension from the University, and expulsion from the University.

Plagiarism Checking

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 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>

Scholastic Offences

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/appeals_discipline/index.html

Accommodation

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.

Completion of Course Requirements

If you require an extension, please contact your professor. It is easy to get an extension for any component of the class. Do note though that everything needs to be completed by the end of semester as the student will otherwise obtain an *INCOMPLETE* (see next paragraph).

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). As this course is offered in the Winter semester, this means that all work needs to be completed by the end of April (**this is a firm deadline**). 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

Mental Health

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Health and Wellness Western for a complete list of options to obtain help: http://uwo.ca/health/mental_wellbeing/

Health and Wellness

As part of a successful graduate student experience at Western, we encourage students to make their health and wellness a priority. Students seeking help regarding mental health concerns are advised to speak to someone they feel comfortable confiding in, such as their faculty supervisor, their program director (graduate chair), or other relevant administrators in their unit. The [Wellness Education Centre](#) (lower level UCC) assists students in finding mental health and other related resources best suited to their needs: <http://se.uwo.ca/wec.html> Western's School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies' [Living](#)

[Well](http://grad.uwo.ca/current_students/living_well/index.html) website provides tips for thriving at grad school and other helpful information:

http://grad.uwo.ca/current_students/living_well/index.html

Western provides several on-campus health-related services to help you achieve optimum health and engage in healthy living while pursuing your graduate degree. For example, to support physical activity, all students, as part of their registration, receive membership in [Western's Campus Recreation Centre](http://www.westernmustangs.ca/index.aspx?path=ims#): <http://www.westernmustangs.ca/index.aspx?path=ims#> Numerous cultural events are offered throughout the year. Also, we encourage you to check out the Faculty of Music web page <http://www.music.uwo.ca/>, and our own McIntosh Gallery <http://www.mcintoshgallery.ca/>.

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>

6. A few words about the assignments and deadlines

I will not give extensions except under special circumstances. If you cannot meet the deadline, notify the instructor as soon as possible, preferably before the scheduled date and present adequate documentation. Late papers without permission are subject to a cumulative penalty of 5% points per day.

The method exercise and final paper should be submitted via OWL. Be sure to keep a copy of all work submitted in fulfilment of this class for at least 3 months after termination of the class.

“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>).”

Compassionate Grounds

Serious Illness of a Family Member: Inform your instructor as soon as possible and submit a medical certificate from the family member's physician to your home faculty's Academic Counseling office. In Case of a Death: Inform your instructor as soon as possible and submit a copy of the newspaper notice, death certificate or documentation provided by the funeral director to your home faculty's Academic Counseling office.

If you or someone you know is experiencing distress, there are several resources here at Western to assist you. Please visit: <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for more information on these resources and on mental health.

Please contact the course instructor if you require material in an alternate format or if you require any other arrangements to make this course more accessible to you. You may also wish to contact Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) at 519-661-2111 ext 82147 for any specific question regarding an accommodation.

Support 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.

Course Schedule

It is your responsibility to consult the course schedule in order to keep up with the course readings and ensure you do not miss the deadlines for the assignments. The course schedule outlines the topics to be discussed each week, the readings corresponding to the lectures, and deadlines for the assignments. Assigned readings should be completed **before** attending the class.

Being on Time and Texting/Social Media

Students are expected to be on time for class (even on Zoom). Student should be aware that being late to class or leaving class early will lead to a substantially reduced participation mark. Also, engaging in other activities online or via cell phones (such as texting, reading news, posting, etc) will impact a student's participation mark. Students at the graduate level will not receive a warning, these are the set expectations for the course!

Any missed material is your responsibility.

Class Schedule

I. ORIENTATION TO RESEARCH

1 Jan 9 Introduction to the Course: Overview of course material and assignments.

Designing and conducting quantitative and qualitative research in *Sociology*: A plurality of views.

Distinguish qualitative from quantitative methods.

Writing strategies: creativity, procrastination & speed.

Goals of the Sociology programme.

Role of research: my voice, my standpoint.

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Jan. 16 Components of the Research I.

Readings:

a) Van den Hoonaard, D. K. (2019). *Qualitative research in action: A Canadian primer* (3rd ed.). Oxford University Press Canada.

Chapters 1-3.

Introduction

Asking questions and identifying goals

Strategies for designing research

The role of theory

b) Quan-Haase, A. & Sloan, L., (Eds.). (2022). *The handbook of social media research methods* (2nd ed). London, UK: Sage.

Chapters 1 & 3.

II. DATA COLLECTION IN A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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Jan. 23 Components of the Research II.

Readings:

a) Van den Hoonaard, D. K. (2019). *Qualitative research in action: A Canadian primer* (3rd ed.). Oxford University Press Canada.

Chapter 5 and 8.

The introduction

The purpose statement

Research questions & goals

Observing social life through field research

b) Quan-Haase, A. & Sloan, L., (Eds.). (2022). *The handbook of social media research methods* (2nd ed). London, UK: Sage.

Chapters 2, 18.

Seminar 1: Unobstrusive research.

Seminar 2: Small stories research.

4 **Jan 30 Qualitative Data Collection Methods:** Interviews, Focus Groups.
Readings:

a) Van den Hoonaard, D. K. (2019). *Qualitative research in action: A Canadian primer* (3rd ed.). Oxford University Press Canada.

Chapters 6 +7.

Seminar 1: Interviews.

Seminar 2: Focus groups.

5 **Feb. 6: Social Media Qualitative Data Collection:** Instagram

Seminar: Social Media Analysis

Readings:

a) Quan-Haase, A. & Sloan, L., (Eds.). (2022). *The handbook of social media research methods* (2nd ed). London, UK: Sage.

Chapters 12, 14, 15, 16, 40.

Seminar 1: Small, thick data.

Seminar 2: Virtual ethnography.

III. METHOD EXERCICES

6 **Feb. 13** Topic: Method Exercise.

Group Presentations: Discussion of Method Exercise.

Group presentations + discussion.

Group Assignment Due: Method Exercise.

7 **Feb. 20** No class/Spring break

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Feb. 27 Topic: Method Exercise.

Group Presentations: Discussion of Method Exercise.

Group presentations + discussion.

Group Assignment Due: Method Exercise.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS IN A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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March. 6 Qualitative Data Analysis. Coding, Scheme Development, Intercoder reliability.

Readings:

a) Van den Hoonaard, D. K. (2019). *Qualitative research in action: A Canadian primer* (3rd ed.). Oxford University Press Canada.

Chapter 9.

Seminar1: Grounded Theory.

Seminar 2: Thematic Analysis.

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March 13 Memoing and field notes.

Readings:

a) Charmaz, K. (2015). Teaching theory construction with initial grounded theory tools: A reflection on lessons and learning. *Qualitative health research*, 25(12), 1610-1622. doi: 10.1177/1049732315613982

b) Brookhart, S. M. (2018). Appropriate Criteria: Key to Effective Rubrics. *Frontiers in Education*. Retrieved from <https://www.frontiersin.org/article/10.3389/educ.2018.00022>

Seminar 1: Memoing

Seminar 2: Field notes

V. WRITING UP THE STUDY/ COMMUNICATION OF RESEARCH/ETHICS

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March 20 What does a qualitative research proposal look like? A thesis? A grant application? A paper? Sections of a qualitative proposal, thesis, and grant application. Length, tone, voice... How to present data: charts, figures, images. [Tuft](#) in action.

Doing exemplary research: criteria for excellence, steps to follow, the ups and downs, creating your own path, getting it done, serendipity, creativity, work, routines, etc.

Readings:

a) Van den Hoonaard, D. K. (2019). *Qualitative research in action: A Canadian primer* (3rd ed.). Oxford University Press Canada.

Chapter 10

b) Bowen, G. A. (2005). Preparing a qualitative research-based dissertation: Lessons learned. *The qualitative report*, 10(2), 208-222.

Presentation: Writing the Proposal: Steps along the way.

Additional readings:

- a) Piantanida, Maria, and Noreen B. Garman. 2009. *The qualitative dissertation: A guide for students and faculty*. Thousand Oaks, CA.: Corwin Press. Chapters 4 & 5.
- b) Becker, H. (2007). *Writing for Social Scientists*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

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March 27 Ethical Considerations in Qualitative Research. Dealing with human subjects. Considerations needed with special populations. Research on the Internet.

a) Van den Hoonaard, D. K. (2019). *Qualitative research in action: A Canadian primer* (3rd ed.). Oxford University Press Canada.

Chapter 4

b) Quan-Haase, A. & Sloan, L., (Eds.). (2022). *The handbook of social media research methods* (2nd ed). London, UK: Sage.

Chapter 46, 48, 49

Lewis-Kraus, G. (2016, January 12). The Trials of Alice Goffman. *The New York Times Magazine*.

http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/17/magazine/the-trials-of-alice-goffman.html?_r=1

Presentation: Putting together an ethics protocol.

Additional readings:

a) UWO Ethics Guidelines.

Guidelines: https://www.uwo.ca/research/ethics/human/board_guidelines.html

b) Tri-Council Ethics:

http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/pdf/eng/tcps2/TCPS_2_FINAL_Web.pdf

c) Big data ethics:

Hollingshead, W., Quan-Haase, A. and Chen, W. (2021) 'Ethics and privacy in computational social science: A call for pedagogy', in Engel, U. et al. (eds) *The Handbook of Computational Social Science*. New York: Routledge.

Mini practice assignments (no evaluation):

- Create a letter of information for a qualitative study
- Create recruitment materials for a qualitative study

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April 3: Looking into the Future. Conferences, Papers, CVs, etc.

What does a CV look like when you apply for your first job as a qualitative researcher? How can I be building my CV along the way? How do I tailor it to an academic and industry setting as a qualitative researcher? What are methods demonstrations? How do I put one together for qualitative work?

Discussion of Final Assignments: Pros and cons of various methods chapters: How do I make decisions about what method works best? How do I present methods, what works?

Course Overview, Final Remarks.

No readings.

Assignment Due: Thesis/Paper Review.