



Western University
SOCIOLOGY 9003
Research Design
Fall 2026

Enrollment Restrictions

Enrollment in this course is restricted to graduate students in Sociology, as well as any student that has obtained special permission to enroll in this course from the course instructor as well as the Graduate Chair (or equivalent) from the student's home program.

Instructor Information

See above

Course Description

This course examines research design in the social sciences, with special emphasis on topics most relevant to sociologists. The aim is to understand the research process from start to finish and to help students think through their own projects. We will explore how to develop research questions, evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of different research designs, design projects that produce robust evidence, and disseminate and publish results. Each meeting, the first ninety minutes will offer a short introduction to the week's topic and a case that illustrates the issues at stake; in the second ninety minutes, students will workshop their own projects in light of that week's material.

Course Organization and Graduate Course Level Learning Outcomes/Objectives

The course aims to introduce students to research design and the develop a systematic research process to complete projects. Some specific learning objectives:

- Develop clear and researchable questions;
- Connect theory and concepts to measures and design;
- Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of different research designs;
- Assess the relationship between samples and populations;
- Understand the basic logic and practical considerations underlying quantitative, computational, comparative-historical, and qualitative approaches;
- Navigate research ethics and Tri-Council policies;
- Design a project that produces robust evidence and write it up as a proposal;
- Manage time and meet deadlines.

Course Materials

All course material is available through the live links provided in this course outline. Each week there is one or two assigned articles, a case article, and optional articles. You are expected to read the materials assigned and focus on the methods and result sections of the case article. Optional articles are optional.

Some additional practical resources to learn more about research design:

Becker, Howard. 1998. Tricks of the Trade: how to think about your research while you're doing it

Sage little blue books series- Qualitative Research Methods
<https://methods.sagepub.com/books-and-reference>

Sage little green books series- Quantitative Applications in the Social Sciences
<https://methods.sagepub.com/books-and-reference>

Salkind, Neil J., ed. Encyclopedia of research design. Vol. 1. sage, 2010.
<https://methods.sagepub.com/ency/edvol/encyc-of-research-design/toc>

Methods of Evaluation

The course will consist of five modes of evaluation:

- Weekly reflections written and in-class - 20% | due 24 hours before each class
- Analytical plan with supervisor feedback -20% | due before class, week 3
- Research proposal paper -20% | due before class, week 11
- Research proposal presentation -20% | due before class, weeks 12 or 13 sign up
- Peer feedback -20% | due before class, week 12 and 13

Additional assignment details will be provided by email or through the class Brightspace page.

There will be no make-up assignments offered if an assignment deadline is missed. Only documented absences will be considered for accommodation; undocumented absences will be marked as zero.

Important Policies

Statement on Academic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the [Scholastic Offences policy](#), specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence.

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>).

Health/Wellness Services

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to [Mental Health Support at Western](#) for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

Accessible Education Western (AE)

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.

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. To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact support@uwo.ca.

Statement on the Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Permitted for the use of study and copyediting. It is the responsibility of students to assure that assignments have no AI hallucinations and information is accurate. For this reason, it is not recommended for the purpose of writing assignments.

Course Timeline and Format:

1. Ways of practicing sociology

MATERIALS:

Burawoy, Michael. 2005. "For public sociology." *American sociological review* 70(1): 4-28.
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/000312240507000102>

Case reading:

Landry, Julien. 2015. "Disciplinary Practices As Social Manoeuvres: A Field Theory Alternative To Michael Burawoy's Typology Of Knowledge." *Canadian Journal of Sociology* 40(4): 445-476.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/canajsocietahican.40.4.445.pdf>

WORKSHOP QUESTIONS:

What are your ordering principles? How do they relate to your sociological practice?

2. Research goals and developing researchable questions

MATERIALS:

Evans, James, Casey Petroff, and Gary King. 2026. "Advancing science by designing for surprise." *Science* 393(6808): eaej4257.
<https://www.science.org/doi/full/10.1126/science.aej4257>

Case reading:

Bryman, Alan. "The research question in social research: what is its role?." *International journal of social research methodology* 10.1 (2007): 5-20.
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13645570600655282>

Optional:

Kalleberg, Ragnvald. "Question-driven sociology and methodological contextualism." *Theory in action*. Brill, 2017. 89-107.
<https://brill.com/downloadpdf/display/book/9789004314184/B9789004314184-s007.pdf>

Watts, Duncan J. "Should social science be more solution-oriented?." *Nature Human Behaviour* 1.1 (2017): 0015.
https://idp.nature.com/authorize/casa?redirect_uri=https://www.nature.com/articles/s41562-016-0015

WORKSHOP QUESTIONS:

What is your research question? What motivates your question? What constraints affect answering the question? What impact will your answer have?

3. From theories and concepts to models, measurements, and types of design

MATERIALS:

DeForge, Bruce R. "Research design principles." *Encyclopedia of research design* 3 (2010): 1252-1259.
<https://methods.sagepub.com/ency/edvol/encyc-of-research-design/chpt/research-design-principles>

Case reading:

Bauer, Greta R., Siobhan M. Churchill, Mayuri Mahendran, Chantel Walwyn, Daniel Lizotte, and Alma Angelica Villa-Rueda. "Intersectionality in quantitative research: A systematic review of its emergence and applications of theory and methods." *SSM-population health* 14 (2021): 100798.

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2352827321000732>

Optional:

Lundberg, Ian, Rebecca Johnson, and Brandon M. Stewart. "What is your estimand? Defining the target quantity connects statistical evidence to theory." *American Sociological Review* 86.3 (2021): 532-565.

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/00031224211004187>

Swedberg, Richard. "Theorizing in sociological research: A new perspective, a new departure?." *Annual review of sociology* 43.1 (2017): 189-206.

<https://www.annualreviews.org/content/journals/10.1146/annurev-soc-060116-053604>

WORKSHOP QUESTIONS:

What is the link between what the literature says and your research question? What is the link between literature what you will measure? What is link between literature and how you will design your work?

4. Samples and populations

MATERIALS:

Berk, Richard A. "An introduction to sample selection bias in sociological data." *American sociological review* (1983): 386-398.

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/2095230>

Small, Mario Luis. "How many cases do I need?" *On science and the logic of case selection in field-based research.* *Ethnography* 10.1 (2009): 5-38.

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1466138108099586>

Case reading:

Schieman, Scott, and Marisa Young. "Who engages in work–family multitasking? A study of Canadian and American workers." *Social Indicators Research* 120.3 (2015): 741-767.

<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11205-014-0609-7>

Optional:

Berk, Richard A., Bruce Western, and Robert E. Weiss. "Statistical inference for apparent populations." *Sociological methodology* (1995): 421-458.

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/271073>

WORKSHOP QUESTIONS:

What population are you analyzing? How will you get a sample? Will the sample represent the population? If not, why should the sample be examined and what can be said from it?

5. Quantitative and survey methods

MATERIALS:

Schutt, Russell K. "Quantitative methods." *The Wiley Blackwell companion to sociology* (2019): 39-56.

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/9781119429333.ch3>

Case reading:

Weisshaar, Katherine, Koji Chavez, and Tania Hutt. "Hiring discrimination under pressures to diversify: Gender, race, and diversity commodification across job transitions in software engineering." *American Sociological Review* 89.3 (2024): 584-613.

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/00031224241245706>

Optional:

Raftery, Adrian E. "Statistics in sociology, 1950–2000: a selective review." *Sociological Methodology* 31.1 (2001): 1-45.

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/0081-1750.00088>

WORKSHOP QUESTIONS:

What datasets exist on your topic? Where can you find data? What does existing data measure? Are the variables proxies of the concepts you want to examine? What techniques are needed to answer your questions? If you aim to administer your own survey, why and what additional considerations do you need to make?

6. Reading Week -October 10 to 18

7. Computational methods

MATERIALS:

Mario Molina & Filiz Garip (2019), "Machine Learning for Sociology," *Annual Review of Sociology* 45: 27–45

<https://www.annualreviews.org/content/journals/10.1146/annurev-soc-073117-041106>

Case reading:

Manzi, James. 2026. "The ideological orientation of academic social science research 1960–2024." *Theory and Society* 55(2): 25.

<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11186-026-09690-2>

Optional:

Achim Edelmann, Tom Wolff, Danielle Montagne & Christopher A. Bail (2020), "Computational Social Science and Sociology," *Annual Review of Sociology* 46: 61–81

<https://www.annualreviews.org/content/journals/10.1146/annurev-soc-121919-054621>

Desai, Meera, Dallas Card, and Abigail Z. Jacobs. "Validating LLMs in social science: Epistemic threats and emerging norms." *arXiv preprint arXiv:2607.07915* (2026).

<https://arxiv.org/abs/2607.07915>

Jennie E. Brand, Xiang Zhou & Yu Xie (2023), "Recent Developments in Causal Inference and Machine Learning," *Annual Review of Sociology* 49: 81–110

<https://www.annualreviews.org/content/journals/10.1146/annurev-soc-030420-015345>

Silver, Dan. 2026. Sociology's Evolving Discourse: A computational look at how sociology's topics rise, fall, persist, and recur. Substack. <https://thesilverlining3.substack.com/p/sociologys-evolving-discourse>

WORKSHOP QUESTIONS:

What computational or digital-trace data are relevant to your question? What platforms or mediums will you analyze? How would you obtain your data? Do you need permissions? What do the data represent? Which technique best fits your question?

8. Research ethics

MATERIALS:

Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans – TCPS 2 (2022) https://ethics.gc.ca/eng/policy-politique_tcps2-eptc2_2022.html

TCPS: CORE-2022 (Course on Research Ethics) <https://tcps2core.ca/welcome>

Case reading:

Goffman, Alice. "On the run: Wanted men in a Philadelphia ghetto." *American sociological review* 74.3 (2009): 339-357. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/000312240907400301>

Optional:

Beuvig, J. J. "Problems of Evidence in Ethnography: A Methodological Reflection on the Goffman/Mead Controversies (with a proposal for rules of thumb)." (2021). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/symbinte.39.1.143.pdf>

Haggerty, Kevin D. "Ethics creep: Governing social science research in the name of ethics." *Qualitative sociology* 27.4 (2004): 391-414. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1023/b:quas.0000049239.15922.a3>

Taylor, Judith, and Matthew Patterson. "Autonomy and compliance: How qualitative sociologists respond to institutional ethical oversight." *Qualitative Sociology* 33.2 (2010): 161-183. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11133-010-9148-y>

WORKSHOP QUESTIONS:

Are your methods subject to REB review? Does REB review affect the feasibility of your research? What are the harms versus wrongs that participants will face? What are the costs and benefits of participating in your research?

9. Comparative and historical methods

MATERIALS:

Ermakoff, Ivan. "Causality and history: Modes of causal investigation in historical social sciences." *Annual Review of Sociology* 45.1 (2019): 581-606. <https://www.annualreviews.org/content/journals/10.1146/annurev-soc-073117-041140>

Case reading:

Zubrzycki, Geneviève. "Aesthetic revolt and the remaking of national identity in Québec, 1960–1969." *Theory and society* 42.5 (2013): 423-475.
<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11186-013-9199-7>

Optional:

Abbott, Andrew. "History and sociology: The lost synthesis." *Social Science History* 15.2 (1991): 201-238.
<https://www.cambridge.org/core/services/aop-cambridge-core/content/view/67037B9E5ECCFD49371D898112C31314/S014555320002109Xa.pdf/div-class-title-history-and-sociology-the-lost-synthesis-div.pdf>

Mahoney, James. "Comparative-historical methodology." *Annu. Rev. Sociol.* 30.1 (2004): 81-101.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/29737686>

Ragin, Charles, and David Zaret. "Theory and method in comparative research: Two strategies." *Social forces* 61.3 (1983): 731-754.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/2578132.pdf>

WORKSHOP QUESTIONS:

What case(s) will you use? What timeframe will be analyzed? What information will be gathered? How will information be processed into data? What points of comparison will be used in the analysis?

10. Interviews, focus groups, and other qualitative methods

MATERIALS:

Duneier, Mitchell "Qualitative methods." *The Wiley Blackwell companion to sociology* (2019): 57-65.
<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/chapter-epub/10.1002/9781119429333.ch4>

Case reading:

Hogan, Beverly, and Patricia Drentea. "Secondary emotional labor: How female nurses respond to the contradictions of caring." *Health* 27.6 (2023): 924-940.
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/13634593221075952>

Optional:

Jerolmack, Colin, and Shamus Khan. "Talk is cheap: Ethnography and the attitudinal fallacy." *Sociological methods & research* 43.2 (2014): 178-209.
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0049124114523396>

Lamont, Michèle, and Ann Swidler. "Methodological pluralism and the possibilities and limits of interviewing." *Qualitative sociology* 37.2 (2014): 153-171.
<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11133-014-9274-z>

WORKSHOP QUESTIONS:

What datasets exist on your topic? Where can you find data? If you need to collect data: how will you obtain a sample? What is the timeline for the project? How will data be captured and

recorded? How will data be analyzed? How will ongoing consent and trust be established and maintained?

11. Publishing and knowledge translation and mobilization

MATERIALS

Lebo, Matthew J. "Managing your research pipeline." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 49.2 (2016): 259-264.

<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/ps-political-science-and-politics/article/managing-your-research-pipeline/E75F5F84AAD505EE6E66155EB8E9A81F>

Optional:

Savage, William E., and Anthony J. Olejniczak. "More journal articles and fewer books: Publication practices in the social sciences in the 2010's." *Plos one* 17.2 (2022): e0263410.

<https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0263410>

Hartmann, Douglas, Christopher Uggen, and Mahala Miller. "There's Research on That: Translating and Sharing Sociology for Public Audiences." *Sociological Forum*. Vol. 38. 2023.

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/socf.12909>

WORKSHOP QUESTIONS:

Who is your audience? What are your publication and dissemination goals? What venue(s) will you try to publish in and why? What conferences will you present to? Will you engage participants and the general public?

12. Proposal presentations and peer-feedback

13. Proposal presentations and peer-feedback