

McGill University  
Fall 2017

## **Sociology 580: Social Research Design & Practice** **Leacock 917, Mondays, 3:30 – 5:30**

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### **Course Description**

Whether as producers, consumers, or disseminators of sociological knowledge, professional sociologists need skills to design and evaluate research. This course is designed to develop these skills. My aim is to help you develop some of the major expertise needed to write research proposals, dissertations, and publishable journal articles and books, as well as to critically read and evaluate published sociological research. You will learn how to formulate and recognize researchable sociological questions and how to identify research designs that may be used to conduct studies that speak to these questions.

Some methods courses focus on the techniques of data collection and the measurement and analysis of the “nuts and bolts” of research. While we will touch on some of these issues, my main goal is not to walk you through the specific details of each method and make you an expert in each of them (for this there are other designated classes, which you will have a chance to take later on). Rather, you can think of this course as a course in “applied epistemology”: How do we know the things that we think we know and how can we build and test social theories? We will therefore focus on issues such as the logic of social science research, the kind of questions sociologists ask, ways for operationalizing variables, the selection and construction of cases and samples, and the different ways to think about causality.

This course cannot and will not try to teach you “all you need to know about methods.” Instead, my aim is to increase your ability to continually practice and develop your critical thinking and your informed judgment about methodology. In addition, the course is designed to help you develop your dissertation research ideas and to learn how to write solid proposals, asking for financial support from funding agencies such as SSHRC and FQRSC.

### **Readings**

This is a reading-intensive course. I expect students to complete weekly readings prior to the period for which they have been assigned, so that they are ready to participate and express their opinions in class. The required readings consist of selections from scholarly books and journal articles. To minimize copying costs, I have tried to choose publications that are available on-line. Copies of all reading material are **available as coursepacks at McGill’s bookstore, but ALSO electronically online on My Courses**. The class webpage, <https://mycourses2.mcgill.ca>, will function as a primary source of information exchange. I may assign additional readings during the semester and these will be available on the class My Courses site. Alternatively, depending on our progress, we may skip some of the readings currently on the list.

### **Course requirements and grading**

Your grade in this course will be determined based on your class participation and your performance on the different course requirements. **No extra credit will be offered**. Please also note that in the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University’s control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change. The final grade will be calculated as follows:

<b>1. Class participation</b>	<b>10%</b>
<b>2. Class presentation</b>	<b>10%</b>
<b>3. Research proposal (3 parts)</b>	<b>80%</b>

## 1. Active Class Participation

This is a small seminar, and its success depends upon students' participation. Lectures will be limited and I expect to moderate an active discussion. It is therefore essential that you complete the assigned readings before class and come prepared to discuss them in an informed way. When preparing for class, use the following questions to guide your reading and thinking:

1. What is the author's main argument? How do they support this argument? Do you find their argument persuasive? What are the main strengths and weaknesses of the paper?
2. How does this specific article tie to the other articles/book sections assigned for the week (and to articles and class discussions from previous weeks)? Do the readings present different viewpoints? Are they in conflict with one another? Which of them do you find to be most persuasive?

Make sure that you bring the assigned materials to class, so you can reference them and remind yourself of their main arguments. While we will not have time to discuss every single point of every reading, we will try to evaluate their main contributions by comparing and contrasting them with one another. It is important that we maintain an open and pleasant environment for discussion, where everyone feels comfortable expressing their opinions, asking questions, and contributing to the discussion. So remember to be respectful of others in your comments and try to keep things in perspective. At the same time, I expect you to be engaged and not to shy away from presenting your opinions. Do not accept two logically inconsistent points as "equally valid." I will often push you on your arguments and I expect you to do the same with one another.

Even if you feel uncomfortable at first, it is important that you make an effort to participate and contribute, as this is what you are expected to do as professional sociologists when engaging with students and colleagues. You may also email me comments about the readings and the discussion, or come to see me during my office hours to discuss any topics or concerns you may have. **Excessive absence from class (3 or more classes) will be penalized**, unless there is a compelling reason for which I agree to make an exception.

## 2. Class Presentation

The final two classes of the semester will be devoted to students' presentations of their proposed research. Each student will give a formal oral presentation of their research proposal and we will then discuss shortly the issues it raises and the methodological approaches it employs. Each presentation is expected to last 15 minutes: 5 minutes for the formal presentation (this simulates short conference presentations; make sure to limit yourself to this time frame) and 10 minutes for discussion. If you are not sure how to prepare your presentations, please come talk to me when the time comes to start working on these.

## 3. Research Proposal

**NOTE:** You must send your proposals to me **by email** ([eran.shor@mcgill.ca](mailto:eran.shor@mcgill.ca)). I will not accept hard copies.

Students will write a proposal for an empirical research project on a subject of their choice. This proposal can be on any sociological topic and can serve as a foundation for a conference paper, a book chapter, a journal article, or your dissertation. The proposal must include an introduction to the research problem and research question/s, a discussion of theory and prior research, and an explanation of your proposed sampling method, the data that you will use/collect, the methods you will employ, and the analyses that you plan to undertake (you will not actually conduct the research in this course). To help you develop your proposals throughout the semester, there will be **3 stages** to working on them:

### **I. Preliminary Proposals** (no longer than one page)

These proposals are due by **Thursday, October 19, at 10:00PM**. I will not grade these initial proposals. They are intended to help you begin reading the relevant literature and thinking about your project, and to allow me to give you directions and advice.

#### **The initial proposal must include the following:**

- Your proposed topic/issue, highlighting a research question and a research hypothesis
- A short explanation of why the literature leads you to believe that this topic is important/interesting and you have identified a sociological problem that merits further investigation
- An outline of your methodology (sampling, sample, method of analysis, etc.) and the empirical data that you propose to collect or use (note: your research must be feasible!)
- A short list of academic sources you anticipate building on

### **II. Developed Proposals** (follow the format of the SSHRC Graduate Scholarships)

These proposals are due by **Thursday, November 16 at 10:00PM**. You must email these to me, but also to **all of your fellow students**. These proposals will be graded, but your grade will be a temporary one and it may change when you submit your final proposal. You may wish to use former successful proposals by graduate students as a guideline here (see a few samples of proposals in the readings for Week 12)

### **III. Final Proposals** (follow the format of the SSHRC Graduate Scholarships)

These proposals are due by **Monday, December 11 at 10:00AM**. You are expected to follow the suggestions of your fellow students, as well as my own comments and revise your proposals accordingly. Make sure to **use track changes**, so I can see exactly what changes you have made from your last proposal and how you have addressed comments.

### **Academic Integrity and Misconduct**

McGill University values academic integrity. Academic misconduct (i.e. cheating, plagiarism) will not be tolerated. Suspected infractions will be forwarded to the university's academic misconduct office for review (see [www.mcgill.ca/integrity](http://www.mcgill.ca/integrity) for more information on McGill's Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures).

### **Right to submit in English or French written work that is to be graded**

In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.

## Course Outline<sup>1</sup>

Week	Date	Topic	Readings
1	Sep. 11	<b>Introduction</b> (NOTE: This is a Friday class)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* <b>Adler</b>, Patricia and Peter <b>Adler</b>. 2005. "The Identity Career of the Graduate Student: Professional Socialization to Academic Sociology." <i>The American Sociologist</i>: Summer 2005:11-27.</li> <li>* <b>Liberson</b>, Stanley. 1992. "Einstein, Renoir, and Greely: Evidence in Sociology." <i>American Sociological Review</i> 57:1-18.</li> <li>* <b>Kahneman</b>, Daniel. 2011. "Don't Blink! The Hazards of Confidence." <i>The New York Times</i>, October 19, 2011.</li> </ul>
2	Sep. 18	<b>Objectivity in research</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* <b>Weber</b>, Max. 1949. "Objectivity in Social Science." (Excerpts from his <i>The Methodologies of the Social Sciences</i>. The Free Press).</li> <li>* <b>DeVault</b>, Marjorie. 1996. "Talking Back to Sociology: Distinctive Contributions of Feminist Methodology." <i>Annual Review of Sociology</i> 22:29-50.</li> <li>* <b>Burawoy</b>, Michael. 2004. "For Public Sociology." <i>American Sociological Review</i> 70:4-28.</li> <li>* <b>van den Berg</b>, Axel. 2014. "Public Sociology, Professional Sociology and Democracy." Chapter 2 (pp. 34-61).</li> </ul>
3	Sep. 25	<b>Developing a research question</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* <b>Firebaugh</b>, Glenn. 2008. "Chapter 1: The First Rule." Pp. 1-30 In his <i>Seven Rules for Social Research</i>. Princeton: Princeton Un. Press.</li> <li>* <b>Abbott</b>, Andrew. 2004. "Chapter 7: Ideas and Puzzles." Pp. 211-248 in his <i>Methods of Discovery: Heuristics for the Social Sciences</i>. NY: W.W. Norton.</li> <li>* <b>Becker</b>, Howard. 1986. "Terrorized by the Literature." Pp. 135-149 in his <i>Writing for Social Scientists: How to Start and Finish Your Thesis, Book, or Article</i>. Chicago: Un. of Chicago Press.</li> <li>* <b>Kumar</b>, Ranjit. 2014. "Reviewing the Literature &amp; Formulating a Research Problem." Chapters 3 &amp; 4 in <i>Research Methodology: A Step-by-Step Guide for Beginners</i>. London: Sage.</li> </ul>
4	Oct. 2	<b>Causality, causal explanations and the quantitative-qualitative divide</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* <b>Abbott</b>, Andrew. 1998. "The Causal Devolution." <i>Sociological Methods &amp; Research</i> 27:148-181.</li> <li>* <b>Lieberson</b>, Stanley. 1991. "Small N's and Big Conclusions: An Examination of the Reasoning in Comparative Studies Based on a Small Number of Cases." <i>Social Forces</i> 70:307-320.</li> <li>* <b>Mahoney</b>, James. 2000. "Strategies of Causal Inference in Small-N Analysis." <i>Sociological Methods and Research</i> 28:387-424.</li> <li>* <b>Mahoney</b>, James and Gary <b>Gotez</b>. 2006. "A Tale of Two Cultures: Contrasting Quantitative and Qualitative Research." <i>Political Analysis</i> 14:227-249.</li> <li>* <b>Regnerus</b>, Mark. 2012. "Porn Use and Supporting Same-Sex Marriage." <i>The Witherspoon Institute</i>, December 20, 2012.</li> </ul>
	Oct. 9	<b>THANKSGIVING</b>	<p><b>Read the following to help you think about your proposal:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* <b>Schmitter</b>, Philippe. 2008. "The Design of Social and Political Research." Pp. 262-295 in Della Porta and Keating (eds.), <i>Approaches and Methodologies in the Social Sciences: A Pluralist Perspective</i>. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Un. Press.</li> </ul>
5	Oct. 16	<b>What is a case?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* <b>Gerring</b>, John. 2004. "What Is a Case Study and What Is It Good for?" <i>American Political Science Review</i> 98:341-354.</li> <li>* <b>Flyvbjerg</b>, Bent. 2006. "Five Misunderstandings about Case-Study Research." <i>Qualitative Inquiry</i> 12:219-245.</li> <li>* <b>Burawoy</b>, Michael. 1998. "The Extended Case Method." <i>Sociological Theory</i> 16:4-33.</li> <li>* <b>Shor</b>, Eran. 2008. "Conflict, Terrorism, and the Socialization of Human Rights Norms: The Spiral Model Revisited." <i>Social Problems</i> 55:117-138. (<i>An application of the extended case method</i>).</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> **Note:** Dates and topics are **tentative**; we may move more quickly or more slowly depending on class circumstances and may also add or skip some topics accordingly. Any changes will be announced in class.

6	Oct. 23	<b>Sampling and measurement issues</b>	<p>* <b>de Vaus</b>, David. 2014. "Finding a Sample." Ch. 6 (pp. 66-92) in <i>Surveys in Social Research</i>. New York: Routledge.</p> <p>* <b>King</b>, Gary, Robert <b>Keohane</b> and Sidney <b>Vebra</b>. 1994. "Determining What to Observe." Pp. 115-149 in <i>Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research</i>. Princeton: Princeton University Press.</p> <p>* <b>Small</b>, Mario Luis. 2009. "'How Many Cases Do I Need?'" On Science and the Logic of Case Selection in Field-Based Research." <i>Ethnography</i> 10:5-38.</p> <p>* <b>Harris</b>, David and Jeremiah <b>Sim</b>. 2002. "Who is Multiracial? Assessing the Complexity of Lived Race." <i>American Sociological Review</i> 67:614-627.</p>
7	Oct. 30	<b>Experiments, quasi-experiments, audit studies, and the logic of multiple regression</b>	<p>* <b>Zelditch</b>, Morris, Jr. 1969. "Can You Really Study an Army in the Laboratory?" Pp. 528-539 in Amitai Etzioni (Ed), <i>A Sociological Reader on Complex Organizations</i>. NY: Holt, Rinehart, &amp; Winston.</p> <p>* <b>Shor</b>, Eran and Dalit <b>Simchai</b>. Incest Avoidance, the Incest Taboo, and Social Cohesion: Revisiting Westermarck and the Case of the Israeli Kibbutzim." <i>American Journal of Sociology</i> 114:1803-1842.</p> <p>* <b>Pager</b>, Devah. 2003. "The Mark of a Criminal Record." <i>The American Journal of Sociology</i> 108: 937-975.</p> <p>* <b>Restivo</b>, Michael and Arnout <b>van de Rijt</b>. 2012. "Experimental Study of Informal Rewards in Peer Production." <i>PLoS One</i> 7:e34358.</p> <p>* <b>Remler</b>, Dahlia and Gregg <b>Van Ryzin</b>. 2014. "Using Regression to Estimate Causal Effects." Pp. 403-420 in <i>Research Methods in Practice</i> (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition). Los Angeles: Sage.</p>
8	Nov. 6	<b>Using existing data, surveys, and vignettes.</b>	<p>* <b>de Vaus</b>, David. 2014. "The Nature of Surveys" Ch. 1 (pp. 3-7) in <i>Surveys in Social Research</i>. New York: Routledge.</p> <p>* <b>de Vaus</b>, David. 2014. "Constructing and Administering Questionnaires." Ch. 7-8 (pp. 93-143) in <i>Surveys in Social Research</i>. New York: Routledge.</p> <p>* <b>Lieberman</b>, Debra and Thalma <b>Lobel</b>. 2012. "Kinship on the Kibbutz: Coresidence Duration Predicts Altruism, Sexual Aversions and Moral Attitudes." <i>Evolution and Human Behavior</i> 33: 26-34. (<i>A different approach to studying the case of Israeli Kibbutzim. Compare with Shor and Simchai (2009) from the previous week.</i>)*</p> <p>* <b>Soehl</b>, Thomas and Roger Waldinger. 2012. "Inheriting the Homeland? Intergenerational Transmission of Cross-Border in Migrant Families." <i>American Journal of Sociology</i> 118:778-813.</p>
9	Nov. 13	<b>Ethnographic methods and interviews</b>	<p>* <b>Borges</b>, Jorge Luis. 1944. Funes, the Memorious. Pp. 107-115 in his <i>Ficciones</i>. Grove Press. (<i>As you are reading, try to think: What does this reading have to do with ethnographic field research?</i>)</p> <p>* <b>Geertz</b>, Clifford. 1972. "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight." <i>Dedalus</i> 101:1-37. (<i>Skim</i>)</p> <p>* <b>Duneier</b>, Mitchell. 2011. "How Not to Lie with Ethnography." <i>Sociological Methodology</i> 41:1-11.</p> <p>* <b>Wacquant</b>, Loic. 2002. "Scrutinizing the street: Poverty, morality, and the pitfalls of urban ethnography." <i>American Journal of Sociology</i> 107:1468-1532. (<i>Focus on pages 168-1485</i>).</p> <p>* <b>Duneier</b>, Mitchell. 2002. "What Kind of Combat Sport is Sociology?" <i>American Journal of Sociology</i> 107:1551-1576.</p>
10	Nov. 20	<b>Replication, triangulation, and meta-analysis,</b>	<p>* <b>Mathison</b>, Sandra. "Why Triangulate?" <i>Educational Research</i> 17: 13-17.</p> <p>* <b>Pratt</b>, Travis and Francis <b>Cullen</b>. 2005. "Assessing Macro-Level Predictors and Theories of Crime: A Meta-Analysis." <i>Crime and Justice</i> 32:373-450. (<i>Focus on pages 373-387</i>).</p> <p>* <b>Roelfs</b>, David et al. 2013. "Meta-Analysis for Sociology: A Bottom-Up Approach." <i>Bulletin of Sociological Methodology</i> 117:75-92.</p> <p>* <b>Shor</b>, Eran and David <b>Roelfs</b>. 2013. "The Longevity Effects of Religious and Nonreligious Participation: A Meta-Analysis and Meta-Regression." <i>Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion</i> 52:120-145.</p>

11	Nov. 27	<b>The Art of Publishing and the peer review process</b>	<p>* <b>White</b>, Lynn. 2005. "Writes of Passage." <i>Journal of Marriage and the Family</i> 67:791-798.</p> <p>* <b>R&amp;R letter and reply letter</b>: An example (<i>review correspondence for the Shor and Roelfs (2013) reading from the previous week</i>).</p> <p>* <b>Bohannon</b>, John. 2013. "Who's Afraid of Peer Review?" <i>Science</i> 342:60-65</p> <p>* <b>Northey</b>, Margot, Lorne <b>Tepperman</b>, and Patrizia <b>Albanese</b>. 2012. Common Errors in Grammar and Punctuation." Ch. 12-14 (pp. 213-255) in <i>Making Sense: A student's Guide to Research and Writing</i>. Oxford: Oxford University Press.</p>
12	Dec. 4	<b>Proposals presentation and discussion</b>	<p>* <b>Przeworski</b>, Adam and Frank <b>Salomon</b>. 1995. "The Art of Writing Proposals." Social Science Research Council, New York.</p> <p>* <b>Nazif-Munoz, Waite, Neil, Henderson, and Ghazanjani: Amasyali</b> – Examples of recent successful SSHRC proposals by sociology graduate students.</p>
13	Dec. 7	<b>Proposals presentation and discussion</b>	