

Sociology 612: Research Methods

9-11:50 Thursdays, 714 PLC

Ryan Light

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Office Hours: Thursday, 1:00-3:00, Zoom or In-Person via Calendly

(<https://calendly.com/light-sociology/15min>). Please confirm in-person via email.

*But statistics are just fish sticks
Without their human faces
How can I empathize with all the lives
That each number embraces*
-Darren Hanlon

Course Description: Sociology can be exceedingly hard to define. The proverbial person on the street seems just as likely to equate sociology with social work as with the study of society. The phrase “the study of society” is itself unsatisfactory being too vague and more often than not resulting in tautology: After all, what is society, but the amorphous thing sociologists study. Abbott (2004) defines sociology by the areas of analysis inequality, race, class, and so forth that bound sociological work. In other words, sociology is what sociologists do. This seems more to the point, but is still too vague. Sociology in my conceptualization is a specific collection of methods and theories extending from the macro-micro, the positivist-interpretivist and so on. Here, sociology is both a practice (the sociological labor described by Abbott) and an object (the product of this labor).

In this course we will study the methods that form the core of sociology and hopefully learn a little more about ourselves as sociologists. This is not an easy task. Unlike some disciplines there is not a discrete set of tools employed by most practitioners. Rather, sociology consists of a range of tools that have very different assumptions. While we are likely to only use a handful of the tools available to us, having a working understanding of the toolkit as a whole helps our own more specialized work. To understand the strengths and weaknesses of these tools, we must develop an understanding of the logic of research and think through some of the fundamental principles of research, such as what makes a good research question, what is explanation, and what are the constraints of particular methods. We will also spend some time thinking about the practical side of research, such as managing projects, writing proposals, and reviewing articles.

In sum, this class aims to offer a foundation for understanding and conducting sociological research.

Grade Distribution:

Reviews (2 reviews, no more than 1000 words):	25%
NSF-GRFP Proposal (2 pages, single-spaced):	20%
Final Prospectus (about 4000-5000 words):	35%
Flash Article Presentation:	10%

Requirements:**• Reviews**

- Like an article review, critique an empirical article from the syllabus, but focus primarily on the methods. Explain what the paper seeks to accomplish and delve into the strengths and weaknesses of the approach. Are there any counterfactuals worth considering? Would a different methodological approach provide different insight? No more than 1000 words.

- **NSF-GRFP Proposal** The midterm project is based on the National Science Foundation's Graduate Research Fellowship Program application. The application consists of two sections. For this class, we will only develop the second, the Graduate Research Statement. This statement is no more than 2 pages long, single-spaced.

• Final Prospectus

- The final prospectus is a formal front-end of a research paper through the data and methods section that can be used as a prospectus for an MA thesis. Imagine trying to convince your adviser and potential outside members that you have a good manageable research idea for an MA project. It should correspond in style to the introductions and literature reviews in your subfield, but must contain a clear research question(s), a discussion of concepts pertinent to your topic, and an overview of relevant methodological approaches to your topic and how they present conflicting or overlapping results. The data and methods section should present your proposed data and methods. Note: Students with MA thesis in hand can make alternative arrangements for final project prior to the end of week 3.

• Weekly Discussion Questions and In-Class Participation

- Submit three questions to a discussion board on canvas about the reading at least 1 hour before each class. These questions should provide evidence of how you are reading the material and highlight what is most intriguing to you from the weekly readings. Students should be prepared to participate and discuss readings and weekly topics during class.

• Flash Article Presentation

- Each student is asked to present the material from one of the assigned articles (scheduled during week 1 or 2). The presentation should address the following issues:
 1. What are the main research questions?
 2. What are the main theoretical arguments?
 3. What are the methods?
 4. Do the theory, methods, question match?
 5. Do the authors' use any heuristics?
 6. What are the main "take-home points?"
 7. Generate 2-3 questions to motivate discussion.

Recommended Texts:

Abbott, Andrew. 2004. *Methods of Discovery*. Norton.

Becker, Howard. 1986. *Writing for Social Scientists*. University of Chicago Press.

Lieberson, Stanley. 1985. *Making It Count*. California.

Luker, Kristin. 2008. *Salsa Dancing into the Social Sciences: Research in the Age of Info-Glut*. Harvard University Press.

Singleton, Royce A., Jr. and Bruce C. Straits. 2010. *Approaches to Social Research*. Oxford UP.
Sword, Helen. 2012. *Stylish Academic Writing*. Harvard UP.

Schedule: The schedule is subject to change with appropriate notice in class or through email.
Note that all material is available on Canvas.

Date	Topic	Task
9/28	<i>Introduction</i>	(Moody and Light 2006) (Schwemmer and Wieczorek 2020)
10/5	<i>What is a good idea? What questions do I ask? Research questions as the engine of research</i>	(Baldassarri 2018) (Martin 2018) (Luker 2009 (excerpt)) (Vasquez-Tokos and Norton-Smith 2017) (Wingfield and Chavez 2020)
10/12	<i>What do I study? And what do I read? And what do I write? Building a theoretical lens through prior research</i>	(Walton 1992) (Small 2011) (Herbert 2018) (Becker 2008) (Wohl and Fine 2017) (Cloutier 2016)
10/19	<i>How do I explain? Research Design and Causality</i>	(Singleton Jr, Straits, and Straits 1993 (excerpt)) (Jackson and Cox 2013) (Mishel 2016) (Bail et al. 2018) (Hailey 2022)
		Reader Response #1
10/26	<i>To what end: Theory-building, description, and explanation</i>	(Gross 2009) (Hedström and Udehn 2011) (Charmaz 1995) (Timmermans and Tavory 2012) (Besbris and Khan 2017) (Mueller and Abrutyn 2016)
11/2	<i>Who or what do I “talk” to?</i>	Luker Babbie Excerpt (Musto 2019) <i>Heat Wave Debate</i> (Clarke 2004) (Duneier 2006) (Klinenberg 2006)
11/9	<i>Research Ethics and Reflexivity: Institutional Imperatives and Beyond</i>	ASA Code of Ethics: (Association 1997) CITI Training (Blee and Currier 2011)

		(Goffman 2009) (Cohen 2015) (Hirschman 2016) (Bonilla-Silva and Zuberi 2008) (Basile, Asselin, and Martin 2018) NSF Proposal
11/16	<i>Qualitative Analysis: Issues and Exemplars</i>	(Jerolmack and Khan 2014) (Lamont and Swidler 2014) (Vasquez-Tokos 2017) (Harrison 2012): Methods Appendix (Hernández Vidal, Merlinsky, and Bolados 2023) (Jerolmack 2007) (Pascoe and Diefendorf 2019)
11/23	<i>University Holiday</i>	<i>No Class</i>
11/30	<i>Quantitative Analysis: Issues and Exemplars</i>	(Bourdieu 1979) (Hauser, Paolacci, and Chandler 2018) (Westbrook and Saperstein 2015) (Littlejohn 2019) (McGee, Greiner, and Appleton 2021) (Light and Odden 2017) Reader Response #2
12/5		Final Proposal

Additional University and Course Policies¹

Access and Accommodations:

The University of Oregon and I are dedicated to fostering inclusive learning environments for all students and welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. The Accessible Education Center (AEC) assists students with disabilities in reducing campus-wide and classroom-related barriers. If you have or think you have a disability (<https://aec.uoregon.edu/content/what-disability>) and experience academic barriers, please contact the AEC to discuss appropriate accommodations or support. Visit 360 Oregon Hall or aec.uoregon.edu for more information. You can contact AEC at 541-346-1155 or via email at uoaec@uoregon.edu.

¹ From Professor Light and/or the Teaching Engagement Program (tep.uoregon.edu)

Academic Misconduct:

The [University Student Conduct Code](#) defines academic misconduct, which includes using unauthorized help on assignments and examinations, the use of sources without acknowledgment, and recording class without “the express written permission of the instructor(s).” Academic misconduct is prohibited at UO. I will report all suspected misconduct to the Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards. If the Office finds a student has committed misconduct, consequences can include failure of the relevant assignment or exam, or of the course.

While unauthorized help and use of sources without citation is prohibited, learning together and citing sources is crucial! Each assignment and assessment will have a note about whether and how you might work with others so that you can clearly act with academic integrity. All assignments will use the format of your choice (e.g., ASA, APA, MLA) and you can find more support in using citation methods at the [UO Libraries' Citation Guides research guide](#).

If at any point in the term you are unsure about whether a behavior aligns with academic integrity in our course, please contact me. I view student questions about academic integrity as a desire to act with integrity, so I welcome your questions.

Being A Good Academic Citizen:

What it means to be a good academic citizen is changing at a rapid pace. Classroom norms differ between departments and professors. Technology and our relationship to it have much to do with these ambiguities. So, being a good academic citizen means following traditional norms of good academic behavior: don't plagiarize, including non-appropriated paraphrasing and quotation, be respectful of others ideas, and so forth. But, it is also worth considering newer norms. For my class your phones should be put away. It is distracting to others to have people fidgeting with their text messages. You *can* use a laptop, but you should stay on task and respectful of others around you. If someone is being distracting, please contact me or a GTF. Last, you may NOT sell material for this class (notes, study guides, etc.). Any student who needs help with note-taking should talk to me.

Artificial Intelligence Use:

All work you submit for this course toward completion of course requirements must be your own original work done specifically for this course and without substantive assistance from others, including artificial intelligence systems (e.g., ChatGPT). Work you've completed for previous courses or are developing for other courses this term should not be submitted for this course. Please note that your work may be submitted to AI or plagiarism detection tools to ensure all work is human-created and original. Please also carefully read the academic integrity policy concerning plagiarism.

Your Well-being:

Life at college can be very complicated. Students often feel overwhelmed or stressed, experience anxiety or depression, struggle with relationships, or just need help navigating challenges in their life. If you're facing such challenges, you don't need to handle them on your own--there's help and support on campus.

As your instructor if I believe you may need additional support, I will express my concerns, the reasons for them, and refer you to resources that might be helpful. It is not my intention to know the details of what might be bothering you, but simply to let you know I care and that help is available. Getting help is a courageous thing to do—for yourself and those you care about.

[University Health Services](#) help students cope with difficult emotions and life stressors. If you need general resources on coping with stress or want to talk with another student who has been in the same place as you, visit the Duck Nest (located in the EMU on the ground floor) and get help from one of the specially trained Peer Wellness Advocates.

University Counseling Services (UCS) has a team of dedicated staff members to support you with your concerns, many of whom can provide identity-based support. All clinical services are free and confidential. Find out more at counseling.uoregon.edu or by calling 541-346-3227 (anytime UCS is closed, the After-Hours Support and Crisis Line is available by calling this same number).

Basic Needs

Any student who has difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat every day, or who lacks a safe and stable place to live and believes this may affect their performance in the course is urged to contact the Dean of Students Office (346-3216, 164 Oregon Hall) for support.

[The UO Basic Needs Resource Guide](#) includes resources for food, housing, healthcare, childcare, transportation, technology, finances, and legal support.

Grade Culture

A+ Quality of student's performance significantly exceeds all requirements and expectations required for an A grade. Very few, if any, students receive this grade in a given course.

A: Quality of performance is outstanding relative to that required to meet course requirements; demonstrates mastery of course content at the highest level.

B: Quality of performance is significantly above that required to meet course requirements; demonstrates mastery of course content at a high level.

C: Quality of performance meets the course requirements in every respect; demonstrates adequate understanding of course content.

D: Quality of performance is at the minimal level necessary to pass the course, but does not fully meet the course requirements; demonstrates a marginal understanding of course content.

F: Quality of performance in the course is unacceptable and does not meet the course requirements; demonstrates an inadequate understanding of course content.

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