



## MRPE 9100A · Research Design

Fall Term 2023

The University of Western Ontario

**Jasmine Ha**

Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology

Class: See Student Center for details.

Office Hours: To be announced in Week 1

Contact Details: [jasmine.ha@uwo.ca](mailto:jasmine.ha@uwo.ca)

### Course Description

This course aims to provide students with an understanding of the fundamental principles underlying research inquiries in the social sciences. Beginning with the importance of understanding previous research and conducting effective literature reviews, students will learn how to formulate research questions and design projects to answer their respective questions. By the end of the course, students will be able to recognize the value of different research approaches and critically evaluate the appropriateness of distinct empirical strategies. Each student will gain a clear understanding of which tools and approaches can be used to conduct a variety of qualitative and quantitative research projects.

### Learning Outcomes

At the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Understand quantitative and qualitative methods, their differences, and their uses
- Understand the difference between description, correlation, and causality
- Collect articles and interpret an existing body of literature
- Understand and evaluate research, the method used, the findings, and their limits
- Understand the steps of research design
- Develop practical research proposals

### Course Materials

**Textbook.** Carr, D., Boyle, E. H., Cornwell, B., Correll, S. J., Crosnoe, R., Freese, J., & Waters, M. C. (2021). The art and science of social research (Second edition). W.W. Norton & Company.

The textbook is available for purchase at the UWO Bookstore. Both hard-copy and

electronic formats are available. Students are also welcome to purchase used books.

**Additional Materials.** Additional readings and materials will be made available through the course website on OWL.

**Announcements and Other Important Information.** You will find course content and announcements posted to our OWL website. I will also announce any upcoming deadlines or changes to the course schedule both in class and on the website. If you miss a class, check with a classmate for any notes or other materials.

## Course Evaluation

**General Expectations.** Attendance is expected each week for the full scheduled class time. The course is designed to be collaborative and interactive, and we use the full scheduled time each week to be present and engaged. As such, be sure to arrive in class on time and ready. Students are allowed to use electronic devices such as laptops and cell phones, however, be mindful that you'd need to step out of the class for any personal issues (e.g., responding to an emergency call).

**Discussion Facilitation (15%).** Each student will serve as facilitator once from Week 5 (October 10<sup>th</sup>) to Week 11 (November 21<sup>st</sup>). Discussion Facilitation includes 1) delivering a short presentation of the readings, and 2) leading the discussion following the presentation (posing 4-5 prepared discussion questions to the class). Students must send the prepared discussion questions to the instructor by Monday, 9AM of the assigned week. Discussion Facilitation will be worth 15% of the final mark, with 10% based on the presentation, and 5% based on the quality of discussion questions and the in-class facilitation. Additional details will be provided during the first class.

**Research Assignments (15% each, 45% total).** The assignments are designed to help students refine their ideas and work towards the Research Proposal. Students must select a research topic and put together a research proposal to answer a research question. The research question(s) must be grounded in relevant literature, specifying how the proposed project build on and expand existing knowledge. Students must also formulate hypotheses, select a method, explain its relevance, and address ethical concerns.

- **Assignment 1** (due Friday, September 29<sup>th</sup> at 11:55PM). Students are asked to select research question(s) for their research proposal. In up to 2 pages single spaced, write out 1-3 research questions. Explain why these questions are interesting, important, and novel? How do they link to the literature?
- **Assignment 2** (due Friday, October 20<sup>th</sup> at 11:55PM). Building on your research questions and motivation, which research method(s) and data might you use for your research project? What is your sampling strategy? Apply the tools of the class to your own project. In this assignment, you must also identify at least one relevant research output (article, books, or reports).
- **Assignment 3** (due Friday, November 10<sup>th</sup> at 11:55PM). Students will evaluate one existing literature source (ideally the one identified in Assignment 2) relevant to their topic. In 4-5 pages single space, students must evaluate the evidence that the authors have presented

in support of their conclusions. Students should also consider how their proposed projects will extend existing knowledge.

**Peer-review Activity for Research Proposal (15%).** In Week 12 (November 28<sup>th</sup>), a mock conference will be held where students will provide peer feedback to one another's research proposal. Students must send an outline of the research proposal (max. 2 pages) to the instructors and all students on the preceding Friday (November 24<sup>th</sup>) by 11:55PM. On the conference day, each student will give a flash presentation of the proposal (3 minutes) which will be followed by a Q&A session (3 minutes). Students will get 10% of the grade based on their presentation and 5% based on engagement with others' presentations.

**Research Proposal (25%).** Based on principles of research design introduced in the course, students will make clear the research questions, a motivation, choose a method and data source to be used in their own research projects. Students will write up the proposal in 5-7 pages single spaced and submit to the instructor on Friday, December 8<sup>th</sup> by 11:55PM.

## How to Contact Me

If you have course-related questions that may be relevant for the whole class, it is best to ask the questions in class or to post them on our OWL course site's Forum.

If you have a specific question for me, you may contact me through OWL Messages, or send me an email (at [jasmine.ha@uwo.ca](mailto:jasmine.ha@uwo.ca).)

Students are also encouraged to meet with me individually or in small groups by appointment. Note that the weekly office hours are for walk-ins (no appointment required).

## Important Policies

**Assignment Deadlines.** Students must submit their assignments by the date and time stated in the course outline and on the OWL website. Late assignments will be penalized 10% for each day they are late. Any assignment not received within 5 days of the due date will not be accepted, except in the event of a documented medical or family emergency. If a student anticipates an issue with an assignment, they are recommended to speak to the professor as early as possible to make alternative arrangements.

**Plagiarism.** 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). All required assignments may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for 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 ([www.turnitin.com](http://www.turnitin.com)).

**Standards of Professional Behaviour.** It is the responsibility of all 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). Take responsibility for your own learning by: relating course content and projects to your own professional interests; monitoring your own understanding; seeking clarification and assistance when necessary.
- Personal integrity (following through on commitments; doing one's 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>

---

**Copyright of Lectures and Other Course Materials.** Any materials created by the instructor (e.g., videos, notes, handouts, summaries, slide decks, assignments, exams, etc.) are protected by copyright law and may not be copied or distributed in any form without the explicit permission of the instructor. Any non-authorized use of these materials constitutes an academic offence.

**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 ([www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/scholastic\\_discipline\\_undergrad.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf)).

**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 encouraged to register with Student Accessibility Services, a confidential service designed to support graduate and undergraduate students through their academic program. With the appropriate documentation, the student will work with both SAS 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. For more information, see <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/ssd/>.

**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 graduate program office. More details regarding incompletes are outlined in the Graduate Handbook: [http://www.sociology.uwo.ca/graduate\\_handbook/course\\_information.html](http://www.sociology.uwo.ca/graduate_handbook/course_information.html).

**Accessibility Options.** 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, x82147 for any specific question regarding an accommodation. Information regarding accommodation of exams is available on the

Registrar's website: [www.registrar.uwo.ca/examinations/accommodated\\_exams.html](http://www.registrar.uwo.ca/examinations/accommodated_exams.html).

**Mental Health.** Students in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western ([http://uwo.ca/health/mental\\_wellbeing/index.html](http://uwo.ca/health/mental_wellbeing/index.html)) for a complete list of options how to obtain help.

**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 website provides tips for thriving at grad school and other helpful information ([http://grad.uwo.ca/current\\_students/living\\_well/index.html](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. Numerous cultural events are offered throughout the year. Also, we encourage you to check out the Faculty of Music webpage (<http://www.music.uwo.ca/>), and our own McIntosh Gallery (<http://www.mcintoshgallery.ca/>).

**Disputing a Grade.** Students who wish to dispute an assignment, exam, or course grade must write a one-page explanation justifying why their work should be re-evaluated. Work will not be re-evaluated on the basis that students were sick or feeling stressed when completing the assignment. Please be advised that a student's mark may go up or down upon re-evaluation.

**Extraordinary Circumstances.** The content and/or evaluation of this course is subject to change in the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's or instructor's control.

## Course Schedule

*Please note: This schedule is subject to change over the course of the term in order to meet the needs of the class. Any changes will be announced through our OWL course website.*

Week	Date	Topic	Readings	Assignment
1	12-Sep	Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Textbook (TB)</b> Chapter 1</li><li>• Consider the following questions:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>❖ What makes research interesting?</li><li>❖ What skills will I develop?</li><li>❖ Why do researchers use different methods?</li></ul></li></ul>	
2	19-Sep	Data in Social Science Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>TB</b> Chapter 2</li><li>• Burgard &amp; Ailshire (2013)</li></ul>	

3	26-Sep	Hypotheses, Operationalization, and Measurement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>TB</b> Chapter 4 &amp; 5</li> <li>• Feliciano &amp; Lanuza (2017)</li> </ul>	Assignment 1 due Friday.
4	3-Oct	Research Ethics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>TB</b> Chapter 3</li> <li>• Cwikel &amp; Hoban (2005)</li> <li>• Complete the TCPS 2 training here: <a href="https://tcps2core.ca/welcome">https://tcps2core.ca/welcome</a></li> </ul>	Be ready to show your TCPS training certificate in class!
5	10-Oct	Sampling Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>TB</b> Chapter 6</li> <li>• Small (2009)</li> <li>• Wier et al (2012)</li> </ul>	Discussion Facilitation 1
6	17-Oct	Experimental designs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>TB</b> Chapter 8</li> <li>• Mullen et al. (2021)</li> <li>• Leventhal &amp; Brooks-Gunn (2003)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion Facilitation 2</li> <li>• Assignment 2 due Friday</li> </ul>
7	24-Oct	Survey research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>TB</b> Chapter 7</li> <li>• Herd (2010)</li> <li>• Couper (2017)</li> </ul>	Discussion Facilitation 3
8	31-Oct	Reading week -- NO CLASS	No class & No reading	
9	7-Nov	In Depth Interviewing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>TB</b> Chapter 11</li> <li>• Turney et al. (2012)</li> <li>• Lehmann (2019)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion Facilitation 4</li> <li>• Assignment 3 due Friday</li> </ul>
10	14-Nov	Materials-Based Methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>TB</b> Chapter 12</li> <li>• Chakrabarti &amp; Frye (2017)</li> <li>• Wilkes et al. (2017)</li> </ul>	Discussion Facilitation 5
11	21-Nov	Ethnography	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>TB</b> Chapter 12</li> <li>• Higginbottom et al. (2016)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion Facilitation 6</li> <li>• Share your outline by Friday.</li> </ul>
12	28-Nov	Communicating Research Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>TB</b> Chapter 13 &amp; 14</li> </ul>	Peer-review Activity
13	5-Dec	Current & On-going Debates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Small (2011)</li> <li>• Lazer &amp; Radford (2017)</li> <li>• Freese &amp; Peterson (2017)</li> </ul>	Final Proposal due Friday.

#### Course Readings (will be made available on OWL)

Burgard, S. A., & Ailshire, J. A. (2013). Gender and time for sleep among US adults. *American Sociological Review* 78(1), 51-69.

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.
- Couper, M. (2017). New Developments in Survey Data Collection. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 43:121-145
- Cwikel, J. & Hoban, E. (2005). "Contentious Issues in Research on Trafficked Women Working in the Sex Industry: Study Design, Ethics, and Methodology." *The Journal of Sex Research* 42(4): 306-316.
- Feliciano, C. & Lanuza, Y. (2017). An Immigrant Paradox? Contextual Attainment and Intergenerational Educational Mobility. *American Sociological Review* 82(1): 211-241.
- Freese, J. & Peterson, D. (2017). Replication in Social Science. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 43:147-165.
- 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.
- Higginbottom, G.M., Safipour, J., Yohani, S. et al. (2016) An ethnographic investigation of the maternity healthcare experience of immigrants in rural and urban Alberta, Canada. *BMC Pregnancy Childbirth* 16, 20.
- Lazer, D. & Radford, J. (2017). Data ex Machina: Introduction to Big Data. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 43:19-39.
- Lehmann, W. (2019) Forms of capital in working-class students' transition from university to employment. *Journal of Education and Work*, 32:4, 347-359.
- Leventhal, T. & Brooks-Gunn, J. (2003). Moving to opportunity: an experimental study of neighborhood effects on mental health. *American Journal of Public Health* 93.9: 1576-1582.
- Mullen, A. L., Baker, J., Menard, G., & Walker, B. (2021). Does alma mater matter? An audit study of labour market outcomes of Canadian Bachelor's Degree recipients. *Canadian Review of Sociology*, 58(4), 456-475.
- 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.
- 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.
- Turney, K., Kissane, R., & Edin, K. (2013). 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.
- Weir SS et al. (2012). A comparison of respondent-driven and venue-based sampling of female sex workers in Liuzhou, China. *Sex Transm Infect.* 88 Suppl 2:i95-101.
- Wilkes, R., Duong, A., Kesler, L. & Ramos, H. (2017). Canadian University Acknowledgment of

Indigenous Lands, Treaties, and Peoples. *Canadian Review of Sociology*, 54(1):89-120.