



MRPE 9100A - Research Design

Fall 2024

The University of Western Ontario

Jasmine Ha

Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology

Class: Mondays, 10 AM – 1 PM, Room SSC 6210

Office Hours: After class or by appointment

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Course Description

Overview. 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

Readings. This course does not use a textbook. The required readings will be posted on the course's OWL Brightspace. Academic research articles can be accessed through the Western library.

Recommended Materials. This course will assume that students are already familiar with the basics of research methods. Students can use any undergraduate social science research methods textbook as a "reference dictionary" to refresh their memory of specific research methods (e.g., surveys, experiments, interviews).

Below is a list of recommended books which students can borrow from the instructor or Western library:

- 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.
- Bell, E., Bryman, A., & Kleinknecht, S. W. (2023). *Social research methods* (Sixth Canadian edition.). Oxford University Press.
- Singleton, R., & Straits, B. C. (2018). *Approaches to social research* (Sixth edition.). Oxford University Press.
- Babbie, E., & Edgerton, J. D. (2023). *Fundamentals of social research*. Cengage Canada.

Course Evaluation

The final grade in this course will be determined as follows:

Worksheets	15%
Research methods quiz	5%
Course project	80%
Initial research plan	10%
Paper 1 (Policy brief)	15%
Presentation 1	15%
Peer feedback	5%
Paper 2 (Grant proposal)	20%
Presentation 2	15%

Worksheets (15%). The worksheet will include questions to help students engage with the course materials before each class session. Your answers to the question prompts will also be used to guide class discussion and build towards a stronger understanding of the course materials. The worksheet for each week must be submitted on Saturday at noon before class. There will be 7 worksheets in total (please see the dates marked on the course schedule). As universal accommodation for all students, I will only count 5 of your best scores. Therefore, each completed worksheet is worth 3% of your final course grade.

- Late work and academic consideration will not be accepted for missing the worksheets because the assignment is already designed with flexibility (I only count 5 of 7 scores).

- If you encounter medical or personal circumstances that would entail missing more than 2 weeks of class, contact the instructor to discuss alternative arrangements.

Research methods quiz (5%). This is a small take-home exercise to get everyone up to speed with the wide array of research methods available for social science research. The quiz will be distributed in Week 1 (September 9) and students can use any resource to complete the quiz by Saturday (September 14) at noon.

Because the goal of the quiz is to support learning rather than penalizing students who do not have a social science background, the minimum grade for this quiz will be recorded as a 70. So, try your best! Not doing well in this quiz simply means that we need to come up with a plan for you to catch up on the missing parts.

Course project (80% total). Each student will work towards designing their very own research project. This will be done through a series of smaller assignments, as listed below.

Initial research plan (10%). Submit a one-page document to state your research question and an initial plan for conducting the literature review. The initial research plan is due on Saturday, October 5, at noon.

Paper 1 – Policy brief (15%). In the format of a policy brief, summarize current knowledge for your specific research question. How well has existing literature answered your research question(s)? The policy brief is due on Saturday, November 2, at noon.

Presentation 1 (15%). Public speaking and the ability to talk about your area of research expertise are important skills to develop! After you have submitted the policy brief, use about 5 minutes to present the key highlights to your classmates and the instructor. Presentation 1 will be held in-class on Monday, November 4.

Peer feedback (5%). Each student will provide feedback to some classmates based on both the policy brief and the presentation. Help your friends develop stronger research proposals while also learning to provide constructive feedback! The feedback notes are due on Saturday, November 9, at noon. The assignment of peer-to-peer feedback groups will be determined by the instructor in Week 6, after considering the number of enrolled students and research topics.

Presentation 2 (15%). This is a presentation to “pitch” your grant proposal. To be held in-class on Monday, December 2, you should use this presentation as a platform to test whether your approach to organizing the grant proposal is clear and effective.

Paper 2 – Grant proposal (20%). The final proposal is due on Saturday, December 7, at noon

Extra credit. I am eager to learn about your learning journeys! You can submit a short reflection (300-500 words) to describe a key learning moment for 2% of the final course grade. Each student can submit two reflections, in Week 7 and Week 13, to earn a maximum of 4% in extra credits. Detailed guidelines will be discussed in class.

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. If you have a specific question for me, you may send me an email (at jasmine.ha@uwo.ca.) Students are also encouraged to meet with me individually or in small groups by appointment.

Important Policies

Assignment Deadlines. Students must submit their assignments by the date and time stated in the course outline and on the OWL Brightspace website. Late assignments will be penalized 10% for each day they are late. Any assignment not received within 5 days (including weekends and holidays) 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.

Attendance. Class attendance is mandatory, with the option for students to miss a maximum of two classes without penalty. If you are absent for more than two classes, a discussion with the course instructor will be required to determine whether it is possible to make up the missed time or a Fail will be assigned to the course.

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).

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 others; 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).

Artificial Intelligence. Unless otherwise explicitly stated by your course instructor, all assignments must be completed independently, without the aid of artificial intelligence (AI). Suspected use of AI will result in an automatic zero on assignments and may be escalated to the Program's Director to investigate for possible scholastic offence.

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.

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.

Mental Health. Students in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western (http://uwo.ca/health/mental_wellbeing/index.html) for a complete list of options on 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). 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 web page (<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 Brightspace course website.

W	Date	Topic	Assignment	Worksheet*
1	9-Sep	Introduction	Methods quiz due Sat (Sep 14)	
2	16-Sep	Research Methods: A review		
3	23-Sep	Literature Review I		1
4	30-Sep	No class - Reconciliation Day	Initial research plan due Sat (Oct 5)	
5	7-Oct	Literature Review II		2
6	14-Oct	No class - Reading Week		
7	21-Oct	Research Designs		3
8	28-Oct	Mixed methods design	Paper 1 due Sat (Nov 2)	4
9	4-Nov	Presentation 1	Peer feedback due Sat (Nov 9)	
10	11-Nov	Case selection		5
11	18-Nov	New types of data & research		6
12	25-Nov	Flex day - Cover a topic by students' choice		7
13	2-Dec	Presentation 2	Paper 2 due Sat (Dec 7)	

***Note:** The worksheets are due the Saturdays before class. Worksheet 1 must be submitted by Sat (Sep 21) at noon.