

SOCI 2911: Social Research Traditions

Classes (days/times): September 12, 2011 - December 5, 2011; Wednesday & Friday, 11:30 AM - 1:00 PM

Location: BB2006

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Course website: <http://go.to/sociology> (file password: sociology)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The aim of SOCI 2911 is to introduce students to the nature of social research by dealing with the issues of the logic, objectives and limitations of different research traditions in sociology. This will be done by taking a conceptual approach to the subject-matter and by exploring the fundamental question of 'how to *think* about sociological research'. Thus the course will take a non-statistical and non-mathematical path and will focus on some of the key questions/issues that underlie the practice of sociological research (i.e. how the research is actually *done*). The rationale for the approach is the notion that to *do* research successfully one needs to be mindful of everything that is built into the research practice, and that the only way to be a good sociology researcher is to get a handle on the important issues that surround the research process itself.

We will examine the question of 'how to think about sociological research' by exploring the five fundamental themes and by focusing on some of the key issues/questions associated with each theme. Our first theme will address the question of 'what is social research?' The theme will focus on understanding what is it that social researchers actually do, how is social research different from other means of knowing the social world, and what are the key stages/phases of the social research process. The second theme will deal with the issue of different social research traditions in the context of which we will explore the key 'epistemological divide' between positivism and anti-positivism. In addition, we will consider a distinction between explanation and interpretation and introduce specific social research traditions that rely on these two modes of research inquiry. The third theme will address the issue of research problem, theory and method. Here we will deal with the questions of 'what is theory?', 'can research be done without theory?', and 'should research be theory-testing or theory-generating?'. The fourth theme will consider the matter of research design and will deal with the following questions: 'what is research design?', 'how should we decide on research design?', and 'what alternative research designs are there?'. The final theme of the course will examine the issues of ethics, power and reflexivity, and will explore different ways of negotiating research values and power interests among researchers, between researchers and research-subjects, and between researchers and users of social research. We will conclude the course by reflecting on the issues surrounding 'uses and abuses' of social research.

The course assumes that students taking it have a little or no prior exposure to the above themes, issues and questions. Thus the primary method of instruction will be formal lectures, which, however, will be as dialogical and participatory as possible. Students are expected not only to take an active interest in the

contents of the course but also to take an active part in class lectures and discussions of class materials. The willingness to read, think and talk is indispensable for the overall success of the course, and for what and how much you as a student get out of it. As with everything else, the more you put in, the more you shall receive back.

COURSE LEARNING OBJECTIVES

In offering an introductory exploration of social research traditions, the course focuses on developing a conceptual understanding of the logic, objectives and limitations of different research traditions in sociology, and on developing a broader sensibility about the distinction between common-sense and sociological understanding of ourselves, our society and our world. Thus the central learning objectives of SOCI 2911 are: (1) to have students become familiar and comfortable with the *idea* of social research; (2) to have them appreciate the value and, also, potential pitfalls of different research traditions in sociology; and (3) to develop within students a conceptual and methodological reflexivity about their own research ideas and their future research projects. By the end of the course, the diligent student will have a foundational understanding of the key issues regarding social research traditions and be prepared for the more advanced explorations of the research practice in sociology.

COURSE READINGS

All course readings are available at <http://go.to/sociology>

Readings for the course will reflect a conceptual and thematic nature of our approach to the subject-matter, and will range from the light and experiential to the relatively dense and abstract. Some will be more sweeping in their scope, while others will focus on specific questions and/or particular issues. Regardless of their nature, content and intent, all readings should be read carefully and thoroughly.

A recommended reading that will be useful for and beyond this course:

- *The Craft of Research* (3rd ed.), by Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb and Joseph Williams. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2008. ISBN-10: 0226065669 | ISBN-13: 978-0226065663.

Some of the chapters from the book are assigned as required course readings, but at some point – and probably sooner rather than later – you should read the whole book as it will be of great help with your research and paper-writing for any university course. The book is available electronically as an e-book through the Lakehead University library catalogue. You can also purchase it on-line very inexpensively from your book-seller of choice. Some copies are also available at the Lakehead University bookstore.

You are expected to have read your readings *before* coming to class.

METHOD OF EVALUATION

Your performance in the course will be evaluated on the basis of five take-home assignments:

- Assignment 1** (20%): Week 4 (Wednesday, October 5, 2011)
- Assignment 2** (20%): Week 6 (Wednesday, October 19, 2011)
- Assignment 3** (20%): Week 8 (Wednesday, November 2, 2011)
- Assignment 4** (20%): Week 10 (Wednesday, November 16, 2011)
- Assignment 5** (20%): Week 12 (Wednesday, November 30, 2011)

Each **assignment** will ask you to reflect on the nature of one of the five course themes by addressing some of the key issues/questions discussed in our readings and class lectures. All necessary assignment instructions will be handed out in class, one class before the assignment due date. All assignments are to be written using a paragraph-style prose. *Point-form style is not allowed.* The length of each assignment

should not exceed three pages of typed text, using 1.5 line spacing and 12 pt Times New Roman font. All the sources used for completing your assignment need to be referenced using ASA style. Please corner-staple your assignments and do not use paper clips, plastic covers or binders. In the interest of environmental responsibility, avoid using a cover page for your assignments and put your name and your student ID number in the top left corner of page 1.

All assignments are to be handed in at the beginning of a due-date Wednesday class. Late assignments will not be accepted without penalty unless accompanied by appropriate documentation. Late assignments without appropriate documentation are subject to a 10%-per-day penalty (weekend counts as one day). Assignments more than one week late will not be accepted.

There are no formal exams for this class.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

The following grading scale will be applied in evaluating your course work:

90-100% (A+)

Outstanding Performance: superb mastery of the principles and materials treated in the course; exceptional fluency in communicating that mastery and a high degree of originality and independence in applying material and principles.

80-89% (A)

Excellent Performance: comprehensive in-depth knowledge of the principles and materials treated in the course; fluency in communicating that knowledge and originality and independence in applying material and principles.

70-79% (B)

Good Performance: thorough understanding of the breadth of materials and principles treated in the course and ability to apply and communicate that understanding effectively.

60-69% (C)

Satisfactory Performance: basic understanding of the breadth of principles and material treated in the course and an ability to apply and communicate that understanding competently.

50-59% (D)

Marginal Performance: adequate understanding of most principles and material treated in the course, but significant weakness in some areas and in the ability to apply and communicate that understanding.

40-49% (E)

Failure: inadequate or fragmentary knowledge of the principles and material treated in the in the course, or failure to complete the work required in the course.

1-39% (F)

Failure: inadequate or fragmentary knowledge of the principles and material treated in the in the course, or failure to complete the work required in the course.

0% (F)

Academic Dishonesty: demonstrable violation of the academic rules of conduct as defined by Lakehead University academic standards.

Your grade is a reflection of your performance in the course, which is the only criterion for your final mark. *There will be no rescaling of grades at the end of the course* and no adjustments except for legitimate clerical errors. Please take note of that.

According to Lakehead University defined standards, grade 0-49% constitutes unsatisfactory academic performance and means failing the course; 50-59% is a minimally accepted level of performance for

passing the course, while 90-100% constitutes outstanding performance. For details on evaluation and grading see your Lakehead *University 2011-2012 Academic Calendar*, section University Regulations (V Standing).

If you wish to review your course work you can do so within *one week from the day exam marks* have been posted.

GENERAL POLICIES

Academic Statement: Each student is asked to submit a brief statement about his or her academic background as it relates to the Sociology program in general and this course in particular. The statement should be accompanied by either your recent photograph or a photocopy of your Lakehead University student ID card.

Email: Emailing is to be regarded as an official form of communication. Only emails sent through Lakehead University account will be read and replied to. All other email messages will be ignored.

Cell phones: Cell phones are to be turned off during lectures (except under exceptional circumstances in which approval has been granted by the instructor).

Notebooks/portables: Use of notebook computers and/or portable devices during lectures is **not allowed** (except under exceptional circumstances in which approval has been granted by the instructor).

ATTENDANCE POLICY

Class attendance is not mandatory but is highly recommended. If you decide to attend, you are expected to arrive on time and be respectful to other students in class. Disruptive and otherwise inappropriate behaviour in the classroom will not be tolerated. Students engaged in such behaviour will be dealt with accordingly.

Disclaimer: The information in this Course Outline is subject to change; any changes will be announced in class.

WEEKLY COURSE SCHEDULE (subject to change; any changes will be announced in class)

<p>Week 1 (September 12-16)</p>	<p align="center"><i>COURSE INTRODUCTION; SYLLABUS WALKTHROUGH</i></p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The Promise” (selections), by C. Wright Mills • “The Social Construction of Reality” (selections), by Peter L. Berger & Thomas Luckman
<p>Week 2 (September 19-23)</p>	<p align="center">THEME I: What is Social Research?</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Thinking in Print: The Use of Research, Public and Private” (Ch. 1 in <i>The Craft of Research</i>) • “Connecting with Your Reader: (Re-)Creating Yourself and Your Readers” (Ch. 2 in <i>The Craft of Research</i>)
<p>Week 3 (September 26-30)</p>	<p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Human Inquiry and Science” (Ch. 1 in <i>The Practice of Social Research</i>) • “Major Choices in Social Inquiry” (Ch. 1 in <i>Approaches to Social Enquiry</i>)
<p>Week 4 (October 2-7)</p>	<p align="center">THEME II: What are Social Research Traditions?</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Theories and Philosophies for Social Research” (Ch. 3 in <i>Investigating the Social World</i>) • “Classical Research Paradigms” (Ch. 4 in <i>Approaches to Social Enquiry</i>)
<p>Week 5 (October 10-14)</p>	<p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Contemporary Research Paradigms” (Ch. 5 in <i>Approaches to Social Enquiry</i>)
<p>Week 6 (October 17-21)</p>	<p align="center">THEME III: What are Research Problem, Theory, and Method?</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “From Topics to Questions” (Ch. 3 in <i>The Craft of Research</i>) • “From Questions to a Problem” (Ch. 4 in <i>The Craft of Research</i>)
<p>Week 7 (October 24-28)</p>	<p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Research and Social Theory” (Ch. 5 in <i>Researching Society and Culture</i>) • “Developments in Social Theory” (Ch. 4 in <i>Researching Society and Culture</i>)
<p>Week 8 (October 31-November 4)</p>	<p align="center">THEME IV: What is Research Design?</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The Challenge of Research Design” (Ch. 11 in <i>Theory and Methods in Political Science</i>) • “Designing the Research Project” (Ch. 2 in <i>Doing Social Research</i>)

<p>Week 9 (November 7-11)</p>	<p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The Conceptual Framework” (Ch. 3 in <i>Doing Social Research</i>) • “Validity, Reliability and the Quality of Research” (Ch. 7 in <i>Researching Society and Culture</i>) • “The Truth Wears Off”, by Jonah Lehrer (<i>The New Yorker</i>, December 13, 2010)
<p>Week 10 (November 14-18)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">THEME V: Ethics, Power, Reflexivity?</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Ethics and Social Research” (Ch. 10 in <i>Researching Society and Culture</i>) • “Politics, Identities and Research” (Ch. 3 in <i>Researching Society and Culture</i>)
<p>Week 11 (November 21-25)</p>	<p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Research and Social Policy” (Ch. 6 in <i>Researching Society and Culture</i>) • “Financial Interests and the Norms of Academic Science” (Ch. 4 in <i>The Commodification of Academic Research</i>)
<p>Week 12 (November 28-December 2)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>COURSE REVIEW</i></p>