

# SOCI-2911-FA Social Research Traditions

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**Classes (days/times):** September 6-December 5, 2016; Tuesday & Thursday, 2:30 PM-4:00 PM

**Location:** RB-1023

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**office hours:** Tuesday & Thursday, 1:00 PM–2:00 PM, or by appointment

**Course website:** <http://misina.ca/sociology> (file password: sociology)

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## COURSE DESCRIPTION

The aim of SOCI 2911 is to explore the nature of social research by dealing with the issues of its logic, objectives and limitations. This will be done by taking a conceptual approach to the subject-matter and by addressing the fundamental question of ‘how to *think* about social research?’. The course will thus take a non-statistical and non-mathematical path and will focus on some of the key questions/issues that underlie the practice of social 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 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 social 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 **fifth 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 some prior exposure to the above themes by having successfully completed SOCI 1100. 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 research foundations, the course focuses on developing a conceptual understanding of the logic, objectives and limitations of the social research process and practice, 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 approaches to research 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 social research procedure(s) and be prepared for the more advanced explorations of the research practice in sociology.

## COURSE READINGS

We will be using the following book:

- *The Craft of Research* (3<sup>rd</sup> 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.

**Note:** While not all chapters from the book are assigned as required course readings, 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 at the Lakehead University bookstore. An e-book is available electronically through the Lakehead University library catalogue.

All other course readings are available at <http://misina.ca/sociology>

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

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 (Tuesday, September 27, 2016)
- Assignment 2** (20%): Week 6 (Tuesday, October 18, 2016)
- Assignment 3** (20%): Week 9 (Tuesday, November 1, 2016)
- Assignment 4** (20%): Week 11 (Tuesday, November 15, 2016)
- Assignment 5** (20%): Week 13 (Tuesday, November 29, 2016)

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 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 2016-2017 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:** Students are asked to submit a brief statement about their academic background as it relates to the Sociology program in general and this course in particular. The statement should be accompanied by either a recent photograph, or a photocopy of 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.

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**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><b>Week 1</b> (Sept 6-9)</p>	<p align="center"><i>COURSE INTRODUCTION; SYLLABUS WALKTHROUGH</i></p> <p><b>Readings:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “The Promise” (selections), by C. Wright Mills</li> <li>• “The Social Construction of Reality” (selections), by Peter L. Berger &amp; Thomas Luckman</li> </ul>
<p><b>Week 2</b> (Sept 12-16)</p>	<p align="center"><b>THEME I: What is Social Research?</b></p> <p><b>Readings:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Thinking in Print: The Use of Research, Public and Private” (Ch. 1 in <i>The Craft of Research</i>)</li> <li>• “Connecting with Your Reader: (Re-)Creating Yourself and Your Readers” (Ch. 2 in <i>The Craft of Research</i>)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Week 3</b> (Sept 19-23)</p>	<p><b>Readings:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Human Inquiry and Science” (Ch. 1 in <i>The Practice of Social Research</i>)</li> <li>• “Major Choices in Social Inquiry” (Ch. 1 in <i>Approaches to Social Enquiry</i>)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Week 4</b> (Sept 26-30)</p>	<p align="center"><b>THEME II: What are Social Research Traditions?</b></p> <p><b>Readings:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Developments in Social Theory” (Ch. 4 in <i>Researching Society and Culture</i>)</li> <li>• “Theories and Philosophies for Social Research” (Ch. 3 in <i>Investigating the Social World</i>)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Week 5</b> (Oct 3-7)</p>	<p><b>Readings:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Research and Social Theory” (Ch. 5 in <i>Researching Society and Culture</i>)</li> <li>• “Review and Critique of the Research Paradigms” (Ch. 6 in <i>Approaches to Social Enquiry</i>)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Week 6</b> (Oct 10-14)</p>	<p align="center"><b>Fall Study Break (no classes)</b></p>
<p><b>Week 7</b> (Oct 17-21)</p>	<p align="center"><b>THEME III: What are Research Topic, Research Question, and Research Problem?</b></p> <p><b>Readings:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “From Topics to Questions” (Ch. 3 in <i>The Craft of Research</i>)</li> <li>• “From Questions to a Problem” (Ch. 4 in <i>The Craft of Research</i>)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Week 8</b> (Oct 24-28)</p>	<p><b>Readings:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Making a Claim and Supporting It” (Part III in <i>The Craft of Research</i>)</li> </ul>

<p><b>Week 9</b> (Oct 31-Nov 4)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>THEME IV: What is Research Design?</b></p> <p><b>Readings:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “The Challenge of Research Design” (Ch. 11 in <i>Theory and Methods in Political Science</i>)</li> <li>• “Designing the Research Project” (Ch. 2 in <i>Doing Social Research</i>)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Week 10</b> (Nov 7-11)</p>	<p><b>Readings:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “The Conceptual Framework” (Ch. 3 in <i>Doing Social Research</i>)</li> <li>• “From Problems to Sources” (Ch. 5 in <i>The Craft of Research</i>)</li> <li>• “Validity, Reliability and the Quality of Research” (Ch. 7 in <i>Researching Society and Culture</i>)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Week 11</b> (Nov 14-18)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>THEME V: Ethics, Power, Reflexivity?</b></p> <p><b>Readings:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Ethics and Social Research” (Ch. 10 in <i>Researching Society and Culture</i>)</li> <li>• “Politics, Identities and Research” (Ch. 3 in <i>Researching Society and Culture</i>)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Week 12</b> (Nov 21-Dec 25)</p>	<p><b>Readings:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Research and Social Policy” (Ch. 6 in <i>Researching Society and Culture</i>)</li> <li>• “Financial Interests and the Norms of Academic Science” (Ch. 4 in <i>The Commodification of Academic Research</i>)</li> <li>• “The Truth Wears Off”, by Jonah Lehrer (<i>The New Yorker</i>, December 13, 2010)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Week 13</b> (Nov 28-Dec 2)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>COURSE REVIEW</i></p>