SOCI-5115-WA **From Thought to Expression: An Architecture of Research Foundation**

Classes (days/times): January 6, 2012 - April 4, 2012; Wednesday, 1:00 PM-4:00 PM (class time will be divided into two 75-min. sessions, separated by a 15-min. break).

Location: RB-1047

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

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The idea behind SOCI 5115 is to offer an advanced exploration of how to craft a research proposal and help students translate their sociological ideas into a viable foundation for an MA project. Correspondingly, the course is divided into two parts: Part 1 focuses on the how-to aspect of soci(ologic)al research, while Part 2 is more hands-on and centered on actually producing an MA research proposal.

The objective of Part 1 is to take an in-depth look at five fundamental questions/issues built into soci(ologic)al research, and help students understand the conceptual essentials underlying the process of crafting a research proposal and research project. The rationale behind Part 1 is the notion that to *do* soci(ologic)al research successfully one needs to be mindful of everything that is built into the research practice, and that the only way to become a good sociology researcher is to get a handle on the important issues that surround the research process itself. Being able to craft a viable research proposal is, in this context, the first – and perhaps most important – step because it sets the research foundation everything else rests upon.

The first question we will explore in Part 1 is 'what is social research?' The focus will be on understanding what it is that social researchers actually do, what makes social research different from other means of knowing the social world, and what are the key stages/phases of the social research process. Our second question is 'what are social research traditions?' We will explore the key 'epistemological divide' between positivism and anti-positivism, consider a distinction between 'explanation' and 'interpretation', and take a look at specific social research traditions that rely on these two modes of research inquiry. After that, we will take up the question of 'what are research problem, theory, and method?' and consider the following sub-questions: 'what is theory?', 'can research be done without theory?', and 'should research be theory-testing or theory-generating?'. Our forth question is 'what is research design?' Here, we will consider the nature and range of research design(s) and the issue of how to decide on appropriate research design strategy. The final question of Part 1 will focus on ethics, power and reflexivity. Our aim will be to 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 also take a look at the issues surrounding 'uses and abuses' of social research.

The objective of Part 2 is to build on 'reflexive insights' of Part 1 and have students work on and present their research proposals to their peers. Correspondingly, this portion of the course will consist of a series of presentations structured as mock MA-proposal defence sessions. Each student will present his/her proposal in front of a three-member peer committee which will examine the 'candidate' and offer verbal and written feedback on the proposal. The rest of the class will take on a role of specialized audience allowed to participate in the 'examination', should they see it fit. Thus, every student in class will cycle through all three

roles: presenter, examiner, and audience member. At the end of Part 2, all students are expected to rework their proposals based on the feedback received from their peer committee, and submit them for a final assessment.

SOCI 5115 is a graduate seminar and all students are expected to take a lead in the learning process throughout the term. In Part 1 of the course, everyone will contribute as panellists and discussants, while in Part 2 everybody will take on the roles of presenters, committee members/examiners, and active audience members. The instructor will moderate the discussion panels and – if/when necessary – supervise and guide the defence sessions. All to say, by and large you will be in charge of the course. How much you get out of it will for the most part depend on how much you are willing to put into making it work for all of you.

COURSE LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The first learning objective is to have students develop 'permanent reflexivity' about the nature of soci(ologic)al research and the fundamentals built into translating general sociological ideas into a viable – and sociologically relevant – research proposal and project. At the end of Part 1 of the course, the diligent student will have a thorough understanding of the key issues informing the social research process, and be ready to craft an original research agenda.

The second learning objective is to mold 'permanent reflexivity' into an experiential process of putting together and evaluating a research proposal, accomplished through practical exercises of writing, presenting and assessing an original foundation for MA research. At the end of Part 2 of the course, the diligent student will have a comprehensive hands-on experience with the principal aspects of crafting a sociological research project, and be ready to successfully execute it moving forward.

COURSE READINGS

We will be using the following required textbooks:

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.

Note: an e-book version is available through the Lakehead University library catalogue.

Approaches to Social Enquiry: Advancing Knowledge (2nd ed), by Norman Blaikie. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007. ISBN: 9780745634494.

There is also a recommended research and writing handbook:

Making Sense in the Social Sciences: A Student's Guide to Research and Writing (5th ed), by Margot Northey et al. Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 2012.

All additional 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 done your readings *before* coming to class.

METHOD OF EVALUATION

Your performance in the course will be evaluated on the basis of the following:

OPTION 1

Reflective Commentaries (25%)

Committee Participation/Proposal Reports (30%)
Proposal Presentation (15%)
Research Proposal (15% + 15%)

OPTION 2

Reflective Commentaries (20%)
Discussion Lead-in (5%)
Committee Participation/Proposal Reports (30%)
Proposal Presentation (15%)
Research Proposal (15% + 15%)

Reflective commentaries are your in-depth reflections on the weekly readings. You will be submitting them at the beginning of each Part 1 session of the course (Week 2 through Week 6). The objective of the commentary is to have you provide a detailed assessment of assigned readings and reflect on the issues raised therein in relation to your own research project. Thus your task in putting together the commentary is to reflect on the following questions: 'what are the readings saying and what do I think about it?', and 'how does what is being said connect to my own research?'. You are also expected to come up with, minimally, three discussion questions and explain the relevance/significance of each question for our class discussion and/or your research project.

The length of each commentary should not exceed **four pages** of typed text, using 1.5 line spacing and 12 pt Times New Roman font. Any external sources used for completing your commentaries 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.

Discussion lead-in (for **Option 2**) is a structured jumping-off point for class discussions/debates. The purpose of a lead-in is to set the stage for considering the main issues/questions raised in the weekly readings and engage the class in a dialogue about the readings in terms of their relevance for students' research ideas/projects. You should think of your discussion lead-in as a chance to set the class tone and agenda, and determine the range and depth of issues to be discussed by your classmates. It is up to you to determine the format of your lead-in: a general requirement is that it be informative, engaging and conversation-inducing. Your discussion lead-in performance will be assessed by your classmates.

Committee participation is your active input as a member of peer committee examining and assessing research proposals during mock defense sessions. Your participation will be evaluated on the basis of your active engagement in the sessions (i.e. the feedback you provide to the 'candidate' and the questions you ask during the 'defense'). Each student is expected to be a member of three peer committees.

Committee proposal reports are written assessments of your classmates' research proposals. As a committee member, you will receive a proposal one week before the defense session. You will read it carefully and write your assessment of the proposal's strengths and weaknesses (if any), and recommend the ways to revise and improve it (if necessary). Your report will be handed to a proposal presenter after the defense session. At that time, you will also hand in a copy to me. Each student is expected to write three committee reports. The length of each committee report should not exceed **four pages** of typed text, using 1.5 line spacing and 12 pt Times New Roman font.

Proposal presentation is an oral presentation of your research project. Its purpose is to explain, in as much detail as necessary, the nature and objectives of your research project to your peer committee and audience members, and set the stage for your proposal defense. Part of your proposal presentation is also handling the questions from your peer committee and audience members during the defense.

Each student is expected to produce a **research proposal** for his/her MA project. In general, the purpose of the proposal is to identify and explain your research topic, research problem(s) and research question(s), and detail your research strategy by elaborating on conceptual, theoretical and methodological frameworks of your research project. Initially, you will hand in your proposal to me and to your peer committee members one week before your proposal defense. This will give the committee members enough time to read your proposal and write a report (which will be handed to you at the end of your defense session). Once you receive the reports, you will revise your research proposal following the committee's

suggestions/recommendations. At the end of the term, you will submit the revised version of your research proposal for a final assessment.

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 2013-2014 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 class (except under exceptional circumstances in which approval has been granted by the instructor).

Notebooks/portables: Use of notebook computers and/or portable devices during class 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.

Week 1 (January 6-10)	*COURSE INTRODUCTION; SYLLABUS WALKTHROUGH* **Readings**: • "The Promise" (selections), by C. Wright Mills • "The Social Construction of Reality" (selections), by Peter L. Berger & Thomas Luckman
Week 2 (January 13-17)	**Question I: What is Social Research?** **Readings**: • "Thinking in Print: The Use of Research, Public and Private" (Ch. 1 in *The Craft of Research*) • "Connecting with Your Reader: (Re-)Creating Yourself and Your Readers" (Ch. 2 in *The Craft of Research*) • "Human Inquiry and Science" (Ch. 1 in *The Practice of Social Research*) • "Major Choices in Social Inquiry" (Ch. 1 in *Approaches to Social Enquiry*) • "Major Dilemmas in Social Inquiry" (Ch. 2 in *Approaches to Social Enquiry*)
Week 3 (January 20-24)	**Question II: What are Social Research Traditions?** **Readings**: • "Theories and Philosophies for Social Research" (Ch. 3 in *Investigating the Social World*) • "Classical Research Paradigms" (Ch. 4 in *Approaches to Social Enquiry*) • "Contemporary Research Paradigms" (Ch. 5 in *Approaches to Social Enquiry*) • "Review and Critique of the Research Paradigms" (Ch. 6 in *Approaches to Social Enquiry*)
Week 4 (January 27-31)	**Question III: What are Research Problem, Theory, and Method?** **Readings**: • "From Topics to Questions" (Ch. 3 in *The Craft of Research*) • "From Questions to a Problem" (Ch. 4 in *The Craft of Research*) • "Research and Social Theory" (Ch. 5 in *Researching Society and Culture*) • "Developments in Social Theory" (Ch. 4 in *Researching Society and Culture*)
Week 5 (February 3-7)	**Question IV: What is Research Design?** **Readings**: • "The Challenge of Research Design" (Ch. 11 in *Theory and Methods in Political Science*) • "Designing the Research Project" (Ch. 2 in *Doing Social Research*) • "The Conceptual Framework" (Ch. 3 in *Doing Social Research*) • "Validity, Reliability and the Quality of Research" (Ch. 7 in *Researching Society and Culture*) • "Advancing Knowledge Using Four Research Strategies" (Ch. 3 in *Approaches to Social Enquiry*)

Week 6 (February 10-14)	**THEME V: Ethics, Power, Reflexivity?** **Readings**: • "Ethics and Social Research" (Ch. 10 in *Researching Society and Culture*) • "Politics, Identities and Research" (Ch. 3 in *Researching Society and Culture*) • "Research and Social Policy" (Ch. 6 in *Researching Society and Culture*) • "The Truth Wears Off", by Jonah Lehrer (*The New Yorker*, December 13, 2010) • "Financial Interests and the Norms of Academic Science" (Ch. 4 in *The Commodification of Academic Research*)
Week 7 (February 17-21)	**FAMILY DAY/FEBRUARY BREAK: NO CLASSES**
Week 8 (February 24-28)	**Defense session 1** **Defense session 2**
Week 9 (March 3-7)	**Defense session 3** **Defense session 4**
Week 10 (March 10-14)	**Defense session 5** **Defense session 6**
Week 11 (March 17-21)	**Defense session 7** **Defense session 8**
Week 12 (March 24-28)	**Defense session 9** **Defense session 10**
Week 13 (March 31-April 4)	**Defense session 11** **Defense session 12**