

## **DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY**

### **SOC 211: Sociological Inquiry** **Winter Semester 2017**

**Meeting Times:**  
**Tue.-Thu.-Fri., 2:35-3:25**  
**Location: MAASS 10**

**Professor: Barry Eidlin**  
**([barry.eidlin@mcgill.ca](mailto:barry.eidlin@mcgill.ca))**  
**Office: Leacock 820**  
**Office Hours: Tue. 3:45-5:15**

**TA: Sakeef Karim**  
**([sakeef.karim@mail.mcgill.ca](mailto:sakeef.karim@mail.mcgill.ca))**  
**Office Hours: by appointment**

**TA: Kimberly Seida**  
**([kimberly.seida@mail.mcgill.ca](mailto:kimberly.seida@mail.mcgill.ca))**  
**Office Hours: TBA**

### **COURSE OBJECTIVES**

People today are barraged by information – a torrent of facts, opinions, and analyses that appear in books, in newspapers and magazines, on radio stations, through television broadcasts, on computer screens, and on cell phones. The pressure to make sense of that information has never been greater.

This course will improve your ability to evaluate much of that information by showing you how to think about social research, which is commonly used to introduce and support, or challenge and discard, public policies in all societies. Your life as a citizen is shaped by people who argue that “the evidence shows” that we should abolish affirmative action, reinstitute the draft, eliminate welfare, establish markets for air pollution, keep abortion legal, and so on. Our task in this course is to learn how to treat those claims with the skepticism they deserve, without falling into the despairing conviction that since data can be used to prove anything, any kind of data is as good as any other.

This course will not give you deep proficiency in any single research method; instead, it will give you an overview of the tools used by social scientists and a sense of what distinguishes good research from bad. By the end of the semester, you will be able to assess the soundness of research by evaluating research designs and data-collection strategies in light of research questions and theory. With these skills, you will be able to determine whether or not you agree with researchers’ conclusions. And when you disagree, you will be able to articulate why.

To learn how to evaluate research, we will read some examples of real sociological research. At the end of the class, you will also be asked to try your hand and conceptualizing your own research project. The course will demand much time and effort, but it is an investment that will pay off in future courses: the logic of evaluation of evidence can be transferred to most scientific and research endeavors. You will also find this course useful after college, as you will be better able to evaluate journalistic reports of current research, design your own reports in a variety of professional settings, and think logically through situations where you are asked to evaluate evidence (*e.g.*, on a jury, in the voting booth, at work, in response to news reports).

## **CLASS CULTURE AND STANDARDS OF BEHAVIOR**

**Readings** offer you the chance to learn how working social scientists actually DO research, how they gather and analyze data. **You are expected to do assigned reading before class.** You will be tested on the readings in quizzes at some point during every lecture.

There is one **required textbook**: Earl Babbie and Lance Roberts, *Fundamentals of Social Research, 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Edition*. Toronto: Nelson Education. ISBN 978-0-17-657011-8. The book is available at the McGill bookstore. It is very expensive – almost \$130 for the print version. It's by far the best book on this topic, which is why I chose it, despite its cost. You can find used versions of it at the McGill bookstore, or through [www.abebooks.com](http://www.abebooks.com), a network of independent bookstores. You are welcome to purchase a second-hand copy of the third edition, although I have not found any copies cheaper than the new 4<sup>th</sup> edition. I do not recommend buying editions earlier than the 3<sup>rd</sup>, as the content is substantially different. I have put copies of the book on reserve in the Humanities and Social Sciences Library.

**Additional Readings** are available on the class MyCourses website, and in a course pack available for purchase at the McGill bookstore. These are mandatory readings, not optional. They are designed to provide some examples of real social research, or to put forth alternate viewpoints that are absent from the textbook. While you can certainly read them electronically on your laptop, tablet, or smartphone, you should be sure to bring a hard copy to class, so that you can reference it in discussions.

**Lectures** will explore the philosophical underpinnings of research design and describe the many ways of gathering and evaluating evidence. You are responsible for all material discussed in lectures, as well as any announcements made there.

**No laptops are allowed in class** unless you have a legitimate, OSD-documented reason and have received explicit permission from me. (I know I couldn't resist surfing the web, emailing my friends, *etc.*, during class, so I'm removing the temptation!) Plus, recent research shows that taking notes on laptops is detrimental to learning because it results in shallower information processing (Mueller and Oppenheimer, *Psychological Science* 2014 – see article abstract at <http://pss.sagepub.com/content/25/6/1159>). You can also read a summary of other research on classroom electronics in this piece by a professor of Media Studies (i.e. someone whose job it is to study the internet and electronic communication), explaining why he does not allow electronics in class: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/wp/2014/09/25/why-a-leading-professor-of-new-media-just-banned-technology-use-in-class/>.

**Cell phones** must be switched off (not just set to vibrate) unless you have a legitimate need (*e.g.*, your spouse is about to have a baby or a liver transplant) that you have told me about.

**In-class quizzes** will be drawn from the readings, section discussions, and/or lectures. They will be held at a random point during every lecture, beginning with our January 19th class. They will usually consist of 3 or 4 multiple-choice questions. Your scores on these quizzes constitute 10% of your grade. The grade itself will simply be for participation (i.e. you will not

be penalized for wrong answers), although you will be able to know if you got the answer right or not.

You will take these quizzes using TurningPoint online polling technology, which you can access through your phone, tablet, or laptop. For information on how to use the technology, and to register your student account, go to <http://www.mcgill.ca/polling>.

I adopted this technology for several reasons. Research by cognitive psychologists (e.g., Brown, Roediger, and McDaniel 2014 *Make It Stick*) indicates that students should be graded frequently throughout the semester rather than at only a few points in time. Clickers make this possible in large classes. Clickers also make it possible for me to determine how well you grasp the material so I can spend less time on the concepts you understand well and more time on the challenging ones. This, in turn, leads to more interesting discussions. Finally, using clickers makes it easier for your reactions and opinions to serve as launching point for in-class discussion and debate.

Using your phone/tablet/laptop for quizzes is the only acceptable use of electronics in this class. That means that you need to bring one of these devices to class every day, but it can only come out during the quiz. The care and keeping of your device is your responsibility. If you forget it, if it runs out of batteries, if it fails to communicate with the receiver, or if it experiences any other kind of technical difficulty, you will get 0 on that day's quiz (equivalent to being marked absent). I will not change any quiz grade based on a report of a technical malfunction. I understand, however, that freak accidents happen and that even the most conscientious person can forget something occasionally. To allow for that possibility, I will drop your 3 lowest quiz scores. If you do not have a phone, tablet, or laptop to use to respond to polling questions, please contact the instructor immediately in order for appropriate arrangements to be made.

**Conferences** are an indispensable part of the course. There will be five of them throughout the semester. They will be places to engage with real-world sociological research, to allow you "get your hands dirty," so to speak. They will also provide you with opportunities to ask questions about the readings or lectures, and otherwise engage the material actively, which is hard to carry off in a large lecture.

### **Exams and Assignments**

In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.

Conformément à la Charte des droits de l'étudiant de l'Université McGill, chaque étudiant a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit devant être noté (sauf dans le cas des cours dont l'un des objets est la maîtrise d'une langue).

In addition to regular participation in class and conferences, there will be assignments over the course of the semester that will test your knowledge of the course materials, and your ability to assimilate them and apply them to real-world situations. They will include:

1. A first in-class exam, taken on **JANUARY 27**
2. A second in-class exam, taken on **FEBRUARY 24**
3. A third in-class exam, taken on **APRIL 11**
4. A 5-7-page research proposal, which will be accomplished in three steps:
  - a. A preliminary proposal, due on MyCourses on **FEBRUARY 17**
  - b. A first draft, due on MyCourses on **MARCH 24**
  - c. A final draft, due on MyCourses on **APRIL 14**

## **Grading**

Your final grade will be based on the following:

<b>Item</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Due Date</b>
Participation (Clicker quizzes)	10%	Throughout semester
Conferences (Attendance 5%, Preparation 5%, Engagement 5%, Activities 5%)	20%	Throughout semester
Exams (three total, 10% each)	30%	Jan. 27, Feb. 24, Apr. 11
Research Proposal (question)	10%	February 17
Research Proposal (draft)	10%	March 17
Research Proposal (final)	20%	April 14

**IMPORTANT NOTE ON GRADING:** Your preliminary research proposal and first complete draft of your research proposal will be graded by double-blind peer review, using an online software package called Peerceptiv ([www.peerceptiv.com](http://www.peerceptiv.com)). Peer-review is the main form of evaluation in the real world of scholarly research, not to mention grant proposals, business plans, and more. This will give you an introduction to how that process works.

That means that, in addition to submitting your own work, you will be responsible for evaluating and providing *constructive criticism* on three of your classmates' work. "Double-blind" means that you will not know the identity of the students whose work you will be evaluating, and the students whose work you will be evaluating will not know your identity. It also means that for the preliminary and first draft of your research proposal, your grade will consist of three components: 1) the quality of your assignment, as judged by **THREE** of your peers (50%); 2) the quality of the peer evaluations you provide for **THREE** of your classmates (40%); and 3) whether you complete all three parts of the assignment (submitting your own work, evaluating the work of three of your classmates, and evaluating the quality of the three reviews of your work that you receive from your classmates) on time (10%).

For the research proposal and first draft, you will have **ONE WEEK** to read and evaluate three of your classmates' assignments, using the Peerceptiv software. **IF YOU DO NOT SUBMIT YOUR PEER REVIEWS, YOU WILL NOT RECEIVE A GRADE FOR THAT ASSIGNMENT.**

Your final research papers will be graded by me and your TAs, with the full grade consisting of our evaluation of the quality of your research and writing.

I will provide more details on the peer review process and the research assignment in class.

\*\*\* If you experience a significant situation that affects your ability to complete the work in this class in a timely fashion **DO NOT DELAY IN DISCUSSING THE PROBLEM WITH ME.**

**Procedure for appealing grades.** To appeal a grade on the research project or the exams please follow this procedure:

- 1) Within **10 working days** after the project or exam is handed back to you, write a note explaining why you think your grade should be changed. One or two paragraphs should be sufficient to argue the merits of your case.
- 2) Make an appointment to meet with the TA during office hours, during which time your TA will explain her decision about your appeal. If you cannot meet your TA during office hours, your TA will respond to you via email.
- 3) If you are not satisfied with your TA's decision and reasoning, within **10 working days** of receiving your TA's decision, make an appointment to meet the professor, who will evaluate the TA's decision. After that, students are entitled to a re-read or re-assessment by a professor not teaching the course should they request it.

**Academic honesty.** McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see [www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/](http://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/) for more information).

L'université McGill attache une haute importance à l'honnêteté académique. Il incombe par conséquent à tous les étudiants de comprendre ce que l'on entend par tricherie, plagiat et autres infractions académiques, ainsi que les conséquences que peuvent avoir de telles actions, selon le Code de conduite de l'étudiant et des procédures disciplinaires (pour de plus amples renseignements, veuillez consulter le site [www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/](http://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/)).

According to a recent national survey (the National Study of Youth and Religion Wave 2), 50% of college students reported cheating at least once in the previous year and 18% reported more frequent cheating. It is a mathematical certainty that some members of our class will try to cheat at some point during the semester. In fairness to students who are honest, those who are detected cheating will be dealt with as severely as University policy allows. Cheating includes, but is not limited to, using notes or written or electronic materials during an exam or quiz; copying another person's exam, quiz or research project; allowing someone to copy your exam, quiz, or research project; having someone take an exam or quiz for you; or plagiarizing any written assignment. Any suspected cheating will be immediately reported to the Office of the Dean of Students.

The use of online software in lectures will allow us to have more enjoyable, more interactive discussions and to conduct daily quizzes quickly. It also creates opportunities for academic dishonesty. Using someone else's polling login for them is the same as cheating on an exam. Students caught engaging in such activity will be reported to the Dean of Students.

## **Accommodations**

If you require special accommodations for this class, please let me know as soon as possible. You are never required to tell me personal information; however, if you are having problems that affect your ability to attend, participate, or keep up with the workload in this class, please don't wait until right before the exams to ask for help, and don't just disappear. I may be able to help you or direct you to someone else who can help you.

The McGill Office for Students With Disabilities (514-398-6009, <https://www.mcgill.ca/osd/office-students-disabilities>) provides resources for students with disabilities. You will need to provide documentation of disability to them in order to receive official university services and accommodations.

## **Absences**

If you are absent, you are still responsible for the course materials you missed. You should get the notes from someone in the class, review those notes, and come see me in office hours if you have any questions. I do not deviate from the syllabus, and if I do, I will email the class, so you can assume that what is on the syllabus is what we covered in class. Please do not email me to ask if you "missed anything important," as that implies that every class is not important.

## **Respect**

Please be respectful of yourself, your peers, and me. This means raising your hand before speaking, keeping an open mind, and never chatting while someone else is speaking. Making excessive noise during class (such as by chatting or packing up before class is over) is rude to everyone in the room, as it denies the people around you (and yourself) a chance to learn. If you have a question, please ask me (not your neighbor). Finally, if you make an office hours appointment with me, show up. If you cannot come, send me an email letting me know ASAP.

## **Email**

I will be communicating with you via email a lot. Please check your McGill email regularly.

I am not always available via email. I will usually be able answer your email within 24 hours (except on weekends). Please do not expect an immediate response to your emails.

Please write your emails to me like you would write an email to your boss or fellow work colleague. Emails should have a proper greeting (Hi, Hello, Dear, Greetings, etc.) followed by my name (you may call me Dr. Eidlin, Professor Eidlin, or Barry). The body of your email should be written in complete sentences, using standard English grammar and spelling (not in "text speak"), and should use a respectful, professional tone. Please be sure to sign your emails with at least your first name. It can be hard to tell who the email is from if you do not sign it.

## Questions

You can approach me with questions at any time. My preference is to answer questions in class or in office hours – this format is best for avoiding misunderstandings (which are common via email or when conversations are rushed). I am also available to answer quick questions via email (allow up to 24 hours to respond, longer if on the weekend) and right after or before class. If at any time you feel that what I am doing is not advancing your learning, please let me know (in a respectful manner) – I want each and every one of you to feel safe and to learn, so please let me know if that is not happening.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

### WEEK 1

January 5: Course Introduction: Logistics, syllabus, overview

January 6: What's scientific about sociological inquiry? The standard view

Reading: Babbie and Roberts, Chapter 1: Human Inquiry and Science

### WEEK 2

January 10: What's scientific about sociological inquiry? The problem-based view

Reading: Eidlin, Fred. 2011. "The Method of Problems Versus the Method of Topics." *PS* 44(4):1-4.

Popper, Karl. 2000. "Preface, 1956: on the Non-Existence of Scientific Method." Pp. 5-8 in *Realism and the Aim Of Science: From The Postscript To The Logic Of Scientific Discovery*. London: Routledge.

Popper, Karl R. 1976. "The Logic of the Social Sciences." Pp. 87-104 in *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology*, edited by Theodor W. Adorno. New York: Harper & Row.

January 12: Paradigms, Theory, and Social Research—1

Reading: Babbie and Roberts, Chapter 2: Paradigms, Theory, and Research

January 13: Paradigms, Theory, and Social Research—2

Reading: Babbie and Roberts, Chapter 2: Paradigms, Theory, and Research

### WEEK 3

January 17: Paradigms, Theory, and Social Research—3

Reading: Collins, Harry M. and Trevor Pinch. 1993. "The Sex Life of the Whiptail Lizard." Pp. 109-20 in *The Golem: What you Should Know about Science*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

January 19: Research Design and Conceptualization—1 **(First day of in-class quizzes)**

Reading: Babbie and Roberts, Chapter 4: Research Design and the Logic of Causation

January 20: Research Design and Conceptualization—2

Reading: Babbie and Roberts, Chapter 4: Research Design and the Logic of Causation

#### **WEEK 4**

January 24: Research Design and Conceptualization—3

Reading: Davis, Murray. 1971. "That's Interesting! Towards a Phenomenology of Sociology and a Sociology of Phenomenology." *Philosophy of the social sciences* 1(2):309–44.

January 26: In-class midterm exam review

January 27: **IN-CLASS EXAM 1**

#### **WEEK 5**

January 31: Conceptualization, Operationalization, and Measurement

Reading: Babbie and Roberts, Chapter 5: Conceptualization, Operationalization, and Measurement

February 2: Sampling—1

Reading: Babbie and Roberts, Chapter 6: The Logic of Sampling

February 3: Sampling—2

Reading: Babbie and Roberts, Chapter 6: The Logic of Sampling

#### **WEEK 6**

February 7: Methods of gathering data: Experiments

Reading: Babbie and Roberts, Chapter 7: Experiments

February 9: Methods of gathering data: Surveys

Reading: Babbie and Roberts, Chapter 8: Survey Research

February 10: CONFERENCE 1

Reading: Pager, Devah. 2003. "The Mark of a Criminal Record." *American Journal of Sociology* 108(5):937–75.

#### **WEEK 7**

February 14: Methods of gathering data: Field Research

Reading: Babbie and Roberts, Chapter 10: Field Research

February 16: Methods of gathering data: Qualitative Interviewing

Reading: Babbie and Roberts, Chapter 11: Qualitative Interviewing

February 17: CONFERENCE 2

Reading: Lohr, Steve and Natasha Singer. 2016. "How Data Failed Us in Calling an Election." *New York Times* (<http://nyti.ms/2eELbOL>).

Metz, Cade. 2016. "Trump's Win Isn't the Death of Data—It Was Flawed All Along." *WIRED* (<https://www.wired.com/2016/11/trumps-win-isnt-death-data-flawed-along>).

Newkirk, Vann R., II. 2016. "What Went Wrong with the 2016 Polls?" *The Atlantic*. (<http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/11/what-went-wrong-polling-clinton-trump/507188/>).

**PRELIMINARY RESEARCH PROPOSAL DUE ON MYCOURSES FEBRUARY 17, 11:59 P.M.**

## **WEEK 8**

February 21: Methods of gathering data: Official statistics and archives

Reading: Babbie and Roberts, Chapter 9: Unobtrusive Research

February 23: In-class midterm exam review

February 24: **IN-CLASS EXAM 2**

**READING WEEK: FEBRUARY 27—MARCH 3**

## **WEEK 9**

March 7: Data analysis: Quantitative Data Analysis—1

Reading: Babbie and Roberts, Chapter 14: Quantitative Data Analysis

March 9: Data analysis: Quantitative Data Analysis—2

Reading: Babbie and Roberts, Chapter 14

March 10: CONFERENCE 3

Reading: Aschwanden, Christie. 2015. "Science Isn't Broken." *FiveThirtyEight.com*.

(<http://fivethirtyeight.com/features/science-isnt-broken/>).

**PEER EVALUATIONS OF PRELIMINARY RESEARCH PROPOSALS DUE MARCH 10, 11:59 PM**

## **WEEK 10**

March 14: Data analysis: Qualitative Data Analysis—1

Reading: Babbie and Roberts, Chapter 13: Qualitative Data Analysis

March 16: Data analysis: Qualitative Data Analysis—2

Reading: Babbie and Roberts, Chapter 13: Qualitative Data Analysis

March 17: CONFERENCE 4

Reading: Luft, Aliza. 2015. "Toward a Dynamic Theory of Action at the Micro Level of Genocide Killing, Desistance, and Saving in 1994 Rwanda." *Sociological Theory* 33(2):148-72.

**BACKEVALUATIONS OF PRELIMINARY RESEARCH PROPOSALS DUE MARCH 17, 11:59 PM**

## **WEEK 11**

March 21: Data analysis: Multivariate analysis

Reading: Babbie and Roberts, Chapter 15: The Logic of Multivariate Analysis

March 23: Data analysis: Social statistics

Reading: Babbie and Roberts, Chapter 16: Social statistics

March 24: CONFERENCE 5: Review of quantitative data analysis

**FIRST DRAFT OF RESEARCH PROPOSAL DUE ON MYCOURSES MARCH 24, 11:59 P.M.**

## **WEEK 12**

March 28: Data analysis: Comparative-Historical methods

Reading: Pierson, Paul. 2003. "Big, Slow-Moving, and...Invisible: Macrosocial Processes in the Study of Comparative Politics." Pp. 177–207 in *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences*, edited by James Mahoney and Dietrich Rueschemeyer. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press.

March 30: Data analysis: Comparative-Historical methods

Reading: Eidlin, Barry. 2016. "Why Is There No Labor Party in the United States? Political Articulation and the Canadian Comparison, 1932 to 1948." *American Sociological Review* 81(3):488–516.

March 31: Research Ethics

Movie: *The Stanford Prison Experiment* <https://youtu.be/rFDTGMw2TDk>

**PEER EVALUATIONS OF DRAFT RESEARCH PROPOSALS DUE MARCH 31, 11:59 PM**

## **WEEK 13**

April 4: Research Ethics

Reading: Babbie and Roberts, Chapter 3: Ethical Issues for Social Researchers

April 6: Concluding thoughts: Thinking critically about research methods

Reading: Gawande, Atul. 2016. "The Mistrust of Science." *The New Yorker*. June 13, 2016 (<http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/the-mistrust-of-science>).

April 7: In-class final exam review

**BACKEVALUATIONS OF DRAFT RESEARCH PROPOSALS DUE APRIL 7, 11:59 PM**

## **WEEK 14**

April 11: **IN-CLASS EXAM 3**

**FINAL RESEARCH PROPOSAL DUE ON MYCOURSES APRIL 14, 11:59 P.M.**