

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

SOC 580: Sociological Research Design and Practice

Fall Semester 2016

Meeting Times:
Wed. 12:35-2:25
Location: Leacock 721

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Office: Leacock 820
Office Hours: TBA

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Whether as producers, consumers, or disseminators of sociological knowledge, professional sociologists need skills to design and evaluate research. This course is designed to develop these skills. Broadly speaking, my aim is to help you develop a deeper, more rigorous way of understanding the social world. More concretely, my aim is to help you develop some of the professional tools needed to write research proposals, dissertations, and publishable journal articles and books, as well as to critically read and evaluate published sociological research. You will learn how to formulate and recognize researchable sociological research problems and how to identify research designs that may be used to conduct studies that speak to these problems.

Some methods courses focus on the techniques of data collection and the measurement and analysis of the “nuts and bolts” of research. This is not one of those courses. While we will touch on some of these issues, my main goal is not to walk you through the specific details of each method and make you an expert in each of them (for this there are other designated classes, which you will have a chance to take later on). Rather, you can think of this course as a course in “applied epistemology”: How do we know the things that we think we know about the social world, and how can we expand that knowledge? We will start by discussing the serious problems that scientists face in struggling to understand the world, and evaluating different strategies scientists have developed for addressing those problems. We will also examine some of the core obstacles that can get in the way of scientific understanding, even as they are essential for developing that understanding. These include language, concepts, and frameworks. We will spend the last half of the course making sense of the abstract debates we study in the first half by reading examples of real social research done using a variety of methodological strategies.

This course cannot and will not try to teach you “all you need to know about methods.” Instead, my aim is to increase your ability to continually practice and develop your critical thinking and your informed judgment about methodology. In addition, the course is designed to help you develop your dissertation research ideas and to learn how to write solid proposals, asking for financial support from funding agencies such as SSHRC and FQRSC.

CLASS CULTURE AND STANDARDS OF BEHAVIOR

Grappling with the questions we will be dealing with in this course will require effort on your part. This is not a course where you can just come to class and hope to absorb something. Below I lay out my expectations of you over the course of this semester.

Reading: Students are required to read close to 200 pages per week on average. **If you are unable or unwilling to do this much reading consistently, you should drop the course now.** You must come to class prepared to discuss the readings, meaning that the reading should be completed before the class for which it is assigned. To help you prepare for class, I will require you to prepare short written responses to the week's readings at least nine times over the course of the semester.

Attendance: Class time will be devoted to a combination of lecturing and discussion. Attendance at all class sessions is mandatory. That said, you should absolutely not attend class if you are sick – doing so is detrimental to both your health and the health of those around you. Because of this, you may miss a total of 2 class sessions without any penalty to your grade. If you need to miss more than a total of two days during the semester because of a family or health emergency, please notify me and we will discuss your options. Please note that I will take attendance at the beginning of every session; thus, if you are late, you run the risk of being marked absent.

Participation: Beyond simply attending class, you are expected to participate in class discussions based on the readings. The required reading responses will help ensure you come to class prepared to participate. Participation includes contributing to discussion and raising questions. However, participation does not necessarily mean taking up classroom airtime. Your participation grade will not increase the more you talk. Sometimes, taking time to really listen is participating. Sometimes, helping another student draw out their point with a relevant question is participating. Sometimes, knowing when to hold back and let others speak is participating.

Most importantly, we must all work together to foster a respectful environment where everyone can voice diverse opinions and create a critical but constructive dialogue. Please be open-minded with your classmates and with me. This class deals with politically charged subject matter, and I want this class to be a safe and stimulating forum for discussion for all students.

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: [2](http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-</p></div><div data-bbox=)

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.

Evaluation 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 course participation, you will have four main assignments over the course of the semester. These will test your ability to grapple with the central questions of the course over the course of the semester. They will include:

1. Nine structured one-page reading responses, addressing one of the week's readings;
2. A preliminary proposal, using theories discussed in class to analyze in greater depth a problem of your choosing, due on MyCourses by 11:59 p.m. on **FEBRUARY 19**;
3. A first draft of your research proposal (20 pages maximum), due on MyCourses by 11:59 p.m. on **MONDAY, OCTOBER 24**.
4. A final draft of your research proposal (20 pages maximum), due on MyCourses by 11:59 p.m. on **FRIDAY, DECEMBER 2**.

You will also be expected to report on your proposed research project throughout the semester, and provide a short presentation for the last class. This will be incorporated into your participation grade. You have considerable leeway in determining the content of your research proposal. Needless to say, it should be something close to the research interests you intend to pursue as part of your graduate training at McGill. However, there are certain rules. Most importantly, the paper must have **a clearly-articulated problem**, which you should discuss with me beforehand. Additionally, it should be well organized, and engage at least **two** assigned authors (along with other scholarly sources). Structurally, it should follow the guidelines for SSHRC Graduate Scholarship applications. It should also be printed and double-spaced, using 1" margins and Times New Roman font. Please format your paper references using the ASA Style Guide (<http://www.asanet.org/students/Quick%20Style%20guide.pdf>). I will also provide handouts with a more detailed template of what your final proposal should look like, as well as examples of successful SSHRC scholarship applications from your fellow McGill sociology graduate students.

I am giving you time to think about and develop your ideas for your proposal over the course of the semester, and will provide you with feedback at each step. Beyond the feedback you get on

your assignments, I encourage you to speak with me about your ideas before you write your proposals and submit your papers. We will also have time to discuss your research proposals at the beginning of class each week.

There will be no in-class examinations in this class.

Extra Credit: I never offer extra credit. The way to succeed in this course is to do all of the assignments as best you can and come see me in office hours if your best effort is not earning you the grade you want.

Grading

Your final grade will be based on the following:

Item	Percentage	Due Date
Participation in seminars	20%	Throughout semester
Analytical Reading Responses	30%	Throughout semester (9 total)
Preliminary proposal	10%	September 26
First draft of research proposal	10%	October 24
Final draft of research proposal	30%	December 2

According to McGill policies, course assignments will be graded as follows:

Grades	Grade Points	Numerical Scale of Grades
A	4.0	85 – 100%
A-	3.7	80 – 84%
B+	3.3	75 – 79%
B	3.0	70 – 74%
B-	2.7	65 – 69%
C+	2.3	60 – 64%
C	2.0	55 – 59%
D	1.0	50 – 54%
F (Fail)	0	0 – 49%

Related to grading: this course has both undergraduate and graduate students enrolled. Given that these two groups are in different types of academic programs and at different stages of their education, they will be evaluated based on different sets of standards. Undergraduates will not be compared to graduate students.

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/ 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/).

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 (and not your neighbor). Finally, if you make an office hours appointment with me, please 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 supervisor or other 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. “Mr. Eidlin” is not an appropriate form of address for university professors). The body of your email should be written in complete sentences, using standard English grammar and spelling (i.e. 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.

READING ASSIGNMENTS

Week 1 (September 7): Introduction

Aschwanden, Christie. 2015. “Science Isn't Broken.” *FiveThirtyEight.com*.

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

Gawande, Atul. 2016. “The Mistrust of Science.” *The New Yorker*.

<http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/the-mistrust-of-science>

Sanger-Katz, Margot. 2015. “It’s Hard to Count Calories, Even for Researchers.” *New York Times The Upshot*. <http://nyti.ms/1LHF0Gw>

Eidlin, Fred. 2011. “The Method of Problems Versus the Method of Topics.” *PS* 44(4):1–4.

Popper, Karl R. 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.

Zeitlin, Maurice. 2007. “The Four Questions, AKA How to Read.”

Week 2 (September 14): What is social research? The craft of sociology

Mills, C. Wright. 1959. *The Sociological Imagination*. New York: Oxford University Press. (Pay particular attention to the appendix, “On Intellectual Craftsmanship.”)

Week 3 (September 21): What is social research? The problem-oriented approach

- 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.
- Popper, Karl R. 1963. *Conjectures and Refutations. the Growth of Scientific Knowledge*. London: Routledge. Introduction and Chapters 1, 3, 5, and 10.
- Davis, Murray S. 1971. "That's Interesting! Towards a Phenomenology of Sociology and a Sociology of Phenomenology." *Philosophy of the social sciences* 1(2):309–44.

Week 4 (September 28): Clear thinking and clear language

- Frankfurt, Harry G. 2005. *On Bullshit*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Orwell, George. 1946. "Politics and the English Language." *Horizon* 13(76):252–65.
- Popper, Karl R. 1994. "Reason or Revolution?" Pp. 65–81 in *The Myth of the Framework*. London: Routledge.

Week 5 (October 5): Positivism and its discontents

- Comte, Auguste. 1853. *Positive Philosophy*. New York: Calvin Blanchard. Chapter 1.
- Durkheim, Émile. 1982a. *The Rules of Sociological Method*. edited by Steven Lukes. Free Press. Chapter 2: Rules for the Observation of Social Facts.
- Eidlin, Fred. 2015. "Positivism." in *The Encyclopedia of Political Thought*, edited by M. T. Gibbons. John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.
- King, Gary, Robert Keohane, and Sidney Verba. 1994. *Designing Social Inquiry*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press. Chapter 1: "The Science in Social Science."
- Lieberson, Stanley. 1992. "Einstein, Renoir, and Greeley: Some Thoughts About Evidence in Sociology: 1991 Presidential Address." *American Sociological Review* 57(1):1–15.
- Mahoney, James. 2010. "After KKV: the New Methodology of Qualitative Research." *World Politics* 62(1):120–47.

Week 6 (October 12): Myth, Metaphysics, and Science—1

- Kuhn, Thomas S. 1970. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. 2nd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Recommended:

- Agassi, Joseph. 2002. "Kuhn's Way." *Philosophy of the social sciences* 32(3):394–430.
- Hattiangadi, Jagdish. 2003. "Kuhn Debunked." *Social Epistemology* 17(2-3):175–82.
- Jarvie, Ian C. 2003. "Fuller on Kuhn." *Social Epistemology* 17(2-3):187–95.

Week 7 (October 19): Myth, Metaphysics, and Science—2

- Lakatos, Imre. 1970. "Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes." Pp. 91–196 in *Criticism and the growth of knowledge, Volume 4*, edited by Imre Lakatos and Alan Musgrave. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Burawoy, Michael. 1990. "Marxism as Science: Historical Challenges and Theoretical Growth." *American Sociological Review* 55(6):775.
- Bartley, W. W., III. 1976. "On Imre Lakatos." Pp. 37–38 in *Essays in Memory of Imre Lakatos*, vol. 39, *Boston Studies in the Philosophy of Science*. Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands.
- Berkson, William. 1976. "Lakatos One and Lakatos Two: An Appreciation." Pp. 39–54 in *Essays in Memory of Imre Lakatos*, vol. 39, *Boston Studies in the Philosophy of Science*. Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands.

Week 8 (October 26): Comparisons, counterfactuals, and alternative explanations

- Fearon, James D. 1991. "Counterfactuals and Hypothesis Testing in Political Science." *World Politics: A Quarterly Journal of International Relations* 43(2):169–95.
- Moore, Barrington. 1978. "The Suppression of Historical Alternatives: Germany 1918-1920." Pp. 376–97 in *Injustice: The Social Bases of Obedience and Revolt*. White Plains, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe.
- Skocpol, Theda, and Margaret Somers. 1980. "The Uses of Comparative History in Macrosocial Inquiry." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 22(02):174–97.
- Weber, Max. 1949. "Objective Possibility and Adequate Causation in Historical Explanation." Pp. 164–88 in *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*, edited by Edward A. Shils and Henry A. Finch. Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press.

Week 9 (November 2): Ethnographic methods

- Sallaz, Jeffrey J. 2009. *The Labor of Luck*. Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press.

Week 10 (November 9): Interview methods

- Hochschild, Arlie Russell. 1983. *The Managed Heart*. Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press.

Week 11 (November 16): Comparative historical methods

- Brenner, Robert. 1976. "Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe." *Past & Present* 70(1):30.
- Riley, Dylan J. 2005. "Civic Associations and Authoritarian Regimes in Interwar Europe: Italy and Spain in Comparative Perspective." *American Sociological Review* 70(2):288–310.
- 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.

Week 12 (November 23): Varieties of quantitative methods

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

Network analysis: Bearman, Peter S., James Moody, and Katherine Stovel. 2015. "Chains of Affection: the Structure of Adolescent Romantic and Sexual Networks." *American Journal of Sociology* 110(1):44–91.

Spatial analysis: Braun, Robert. 2016. "Religious Minorities and Resistance to Genocide: the Collective Rescue of Jews in the Netherlands During the Holocaust." *American Political Science Review* 110(01):127–47.

Time series analysis: Muller, Christopher. 2015. "Northward Migration and the Rise of Racial Disparity in American Incarceration, 1880–1950." *American Journal of Sociology* 118(2):281–326.

Week 13 (November 30): Wrap-up

Student presentations