

# Geography 3250: Social Science Methods in Geography

Instructor: Dr. Carol Hunsberger

Office: SSC 2409

Office hours: Wednesdays, 1:30-3:00 or by appointment

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## Timetable

**Lecture:** Mondays, 12:30-2:30, SSC 3018

**Tutorial 1:** Wednesdays, 10:30-12:30, WL 259\*

**Tutorial 2:** Thursdays, 11:30-1:30, P&AB 117\*

\*On some dates tutorials will be held in the library or a computer lab – see the schedule below.

## Course calendar description

A survey of a range of social scientific methods for studying humans (e.g., interviews, questionnaires); with an emphasis on research designs involving human interaction. Topics include identifying research problems, questions and designs, sources of error, ethics and values in research, methods of data collection, data analysis and presentation of findings.

## Overview

This course is designed to help students learn and apply all the concepts and skills needed to conduct a small social science research project from beginning to end. It also aims to equip students to understand and critically assess social science research that has been conducted using a variety of approaches. Essentially, the course provides basic tools to help students follow their curiosity by investigating real-world problems and questions in a scholarly way.

## Format

The course includes a two-hour lecture and a two-hour lab/tutorial each week. Lectures will build on the readings and involve discussions and activities, so please be sure to finish all assigned readings before class and come ready to participate. Tutorials will involve a series of activities, discussions and assignments designed to help students apply the course concepts and practice using specific research tools.

## Learning outcomes

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Describe major research approaches in geography, how they relate to theory and to each other;
- Formulate effective problem statements and research questions;
- Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of various methods and research designs for investigating different kinds of questions;
- Find, critically review, and synthesize academic literature on a given topic;
- Anticipate the potential benefits and risks of a research project and design a strategy to manage the risks and ensure that benefits are fairly distributed;
- Create research instruments e.g. surveys and interview guides and use them to collect data;
- Understand and apply basic concepts in sampling and probability;
- Collaborate, divide tasks and manage time effectively as part of a research team;
- Perform basic quantitative analysis using SPSS software;
- Perform basic qualitative analysis using NVivo software; and
- Write a convincing research report that clearly communicates the importance as well as the limitations of the findings.

## Readings

Course text: Bryman, Allan, Edward Bell and James J. Teevan (2012). *Social Research Methods* (Third Canadian Edition). Don Mills: Oxford University Press.

Additional readings may be added and will be made available through OWL. The textbook chapters will not be posted on OWL.

## Lecture schedule (may be adjusted as needed, with notice)

Date	Topic	Notes	Readings
Sep 8	Course introduction and scope		None
Sep 15	Research problems and questions		Ch. 1
Sep 22	Ethics		Ch. 11
Sep 29	Research design		Ch. 2, 18
Oct 6	Quantitative research I: Overview, observation		Ch. 3, 6
Oct 13	NO CLASS: Thanksgiving		
Oct 20	Quantitative research II: Surveys	<b>Proposal due</b>	Ch. 4, 5
Oct 27	Sampling		Ch. 2, 12
Nov 3	Qualitative research I: Overview, interviews, focus groups		Ch. 8, 10
Nov 10	Qualitative research II: Case studies, ethnography, participatory research		Ch. 8, 9
Nov 17	Quantitative analysis		Ch. 13
Nov 24	Qualitative analysis		Ch. 14
Dec 1	Review	<b>Final report due</b>	
Dec 6-17	Final exam: To be scheduled		

## Lab/tutorial schedule (may be adjusted as needed, with notice)

Dates	Topics	Notes	Readings
Sep 10-11	Icebreaker, form groups <b>Lab 1: Critical appraisal</b>		
Sep 17-18	Research problems and questions		Ch. 1
Sep 24-25	Ethics <b>Lab 2: Ethics application</b>	<b>Lab 1 due</b>	CORE tutorial (2-3 hrs)
Oct 1-2	Literature review skills	Meet in the library	
Oct 8-9	Observation <b>Lab 3: Observation</b>	<b>Lab 2 due</b>	Ch. 6
Oct 15-16	NO LAB: Work on your proposal		
Oct 22-23	Survey design I <b>Lab 4: Survey design</b>	<b>Lab 3 due</b>	Ch. 4, 5
Oct 29-30	NO LAB: Work on your project (study days)		
Nov 5-6	Survey design II <b>Lab 4 continued</b>		Ch. 4, 5
Nov 12-13	In-depth interviews	<b>Lab 4 due</b>	Ch. 8, 10
Nov 19-20	Quantitative analysis	Meet in SDAL lab	Ch. 13
Nov 26-27	Qualitative analysis	Meet in SDAL lab	Ch. 14

**Prerequisites:** Two full courses in Geography and third or fourth year status at the University.

Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

### Expectations

These are my expectations for student performance:

- Prepare: Read all readings before the class for which they were assigned.
- Show up: Come to all lectures and tutorials.
- Be fully present: Do not distract yourself and those around you.
- Participate: You will learn more if you actively engage in discussions and activities. Plus, you get participation marks.
- Respect others: Create a positive, inclusive environment in lectures, tutorials and your group project work.
- Seek help when you need it: If you don't understand something, ask. If your project runs into a problem, talk to a TA. If you want more help with your writing, make use of the writing centre.
- Do your best work: Before handing something in, make sure you have followed all directions and paid attention to the quality of your writing.
- Provide constructive feedback about the course.

In turn, as an instructor I strive to:

- Provide an active learning environment to help students apply knowledge.
- Provide exposure to a variety of perspectives in the classroom.
- Clearly communicate expectations, including the criteria used to assess student work, and apply standards consistently.
- Adapt how I deliver course material based on student feedback as appropriate.

### Methods of evaluation

Task	Due date	Weight
Participation	Throughout	10%
Lab 1: Critical appraisal	Sep 24/25	5%
Lab 2: Ethics application	Oct 8/9	5%
Lab 3: Observation	Oct 22/23	5%
Lab 4: Survey design	Nov 12/13	5%
Project: Proposal	Oct 20	10%
Project: Final report	Dec 1	30%
Final Exam	To be announced	30%

You must complete all course components to pass the course.

No electronic devices (e.g. phones, calculators) are allowed at the final exam.

### Participation (10%)

Students will accumulate participation marks throughout the course. Marks will be awarded based on one's attendance and level of active participation in discussions and activities during both lectures and labs. The instructor and TAs will jointly decide on each student's final participation mark.

### **Lab assignments (20% total)**

Students will complete four lab assignments, each worth 5%. You will have some time to work on these assignments during the lab session. Assignments are due 1-2 weeks after the lab was introduced (see schedule). Detailed instructions about each assignment will be provided on the dates shown in the tutorial/lab schedule.

### **Research project (10% proposal, 30% final report)**

Students will complete a research project as a focal point of the course. This involves working in small groups for some stages of the research process (e.g. designing a research instrument, collecting data) – but each student will write up their own report to be submitted individually. More details about the research project will be provided early in the semester.

### **Final exam (30%)**

A final exam will be held during the December exam period. The date and time will be announced once the exam schedule is available. The exam will last 3 hours and have a mixed format including multiple choice, definitions, short answers, and an essay question. The exam will cover material from all lectures, tutorials and readings. Emphasis will be placed on students' ability to apply knowledge, for example by explaining how course concepts relate to each other and comparing the advantages and limitations of different research strategies for particular situations.

### **Submission Policy and Late Policy:**

Material will be handed in at the beginning of class or lab on the due date. There will be a penalty of 5% per day for material handed in late (not including weekends; the clock starts "ticking" at the end of class/lab on the due date). I will no longer accept assignments after the papers have been handed back to the rest of the class (if you have a legitimate reason for not handing in material - e.g., medical - we can reweigh course components). Unless otherwise stated, material should be presented on letter size paper and stapled together. Please do NOT use any sort of folder, binder or protective cover (they are cumbersome).

### **Additional Information**

#### *Mental Health*

If you or someone you know is experiencing distress, there are several resources here at Western to assist you. Please visit the site below for more information on mental health resources:

<http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/>

#### *Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness*

[http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/accommodation\\_medical.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf)

For a downloadable Student Medical Certificate (SMC) see: <https://studentservices.uwo.ca> under the Medical Documentation heading.

#### *Statement on Use of Electronic Devices*

Using electronic devices in class for purposes other than taking notes is distracting to you and everyone around you. Please resist the temptation to surf, text, tweet, shop, and otherwise fiddle around during class. No electronic devices will be allowed during tests and examinations.

#### *Special Examinations*

A special examination is any examination other than the regularly scheduled exam. Special exams will be allowed only on receipt of medical documentation verifying a serious illness that kept the student from writing the exam as originally scheduled. Such documentation is strictly confidential and kept in the student's file. In the case of missing a final exam for documented medical reasons, a

special exam will be set within 30 days. Special exams will not be granted for occasions such as employment interviews, weddings, family reunions, vacations, misreading an exam timetable, or oversleeping. Neither will special exams be granted to facilitate transportation arrangements, such as booking flights home for holidays.

#### *Accessibility*

The University of Western Ontario is committed to achieving barrier free accessibility for persons studying, visiting and working at Western. Please contact Dr. Hunsberger as soon as possible if you require material in an alternate format or if you require any other arrangements to make this course more accessible to you, and to facilitate a positive learning environment. Please contact Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) at 661-2111 x 82147 for any specific question regarding an accommodation.

#### *Plagiarism*

The Department of Geography has a zero tolerance policy towards plagiarism. If a student commits plagiarism, the instructor will assign a grade of zero to the assignment. A second instance of plagiarism is regarded as a scholastic offense and will be dealt with according to The University of Western Ontario policy for Scholastic offenses - [more on the department's policy on plagiarism via this link](#). The most common offense is failing to cite properly. If you quote directly, you must cite the author!

The following is an excerpt from the university secretariat:

“Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site: [http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/scholastic\\_discipline\\_undergrad.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf)”

#### *Turnitin.com*

If you do original work and write and cite properly you have nothing to worry about. The university provides this mandatory wording: "All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and [Turnitin.com](http://www.turnitin.com)."