

Geography 3250: Research Methods in Geography Course Outline: Fall 2019

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. (0.5 course)

Overview

Research is the systematic pursuit of answers to questions that fascinate us. Social science research investigates a vast range of problems related to inequality, prejudice, mobility, social behaviour, cultural identity, and more. This course is designed to help students learn and apply the concepts and skills needed to conduct a small social science research project. It also aims to equip students to critically assess research conducted by others.

Place and Time

Lecture: Mondays, 2:30-4:30, SSC-1004

Tutorial 1: Wednesdays, 10:30-12:30, STVH-3101* (TA: Carelle)

Tutorial 2: Wednesdays, 12:30-2:30, NCB-295* (TA: Emma)

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

Teaching team

Role	Name	Email	Office	Office hours
Instructor	Dr. Carol Hunsberger	chunsber@uwo.ca	SSC 2409	Thurs 1:30-3:00
TA	Carelle Mang-Benza	cmangben@uwo.ca	SSC 2316	TBD
TA	Emma Ostermeier	eosterme@uwo.ca	SSC 2316	TBD

Learning outcomes

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

- Describe major research approaches, their relationship to theory and to each other;
- Formulate effective problem statements and research questions;
- Discuss 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 possible benefits and risks of research and plan how to fairly handle them;
- Create research instruments (surveys, interview guides) and use them to collect data;
- Apply basic concepts in sampling and probability;
- Collaborate, divide tasks and manage time effectively as part of a research team;
- Perform basic quantitative and qualitative analysis; and
- Write a convincing research report that communicates contributions and limits of the findings.

Format

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

Prerequisites: Two full courses in Geography and third or fourth year status at the University. Senate regulation: “Prerequisite checking is the student’s responsibility. Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you will 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.”

Readings

Course text: Bryman, Allan and Edward Bell (2019). *Social Research Methods* (Fifth Canadian Edition). Don Mills: Oxford University Press. ISBN 978-0-19-902944-0 (softcover); 978-0-19-902951-8 (PDF).

The text is available in the University bookstore. The E-book format is cheaper and can be ordered via [this link](#) (price is in US dollars). The Fourth Canadian Edition (2016) is very similar and may be used, though chapter and page numbers differ. The digital resources sold with the book are not necessary. Any additional readings will be posted on OWL.

Lecture schedule (may be adjusted, with notice)

Date	Topic	Notes	Readings: 5 th (4 th)
Sep 9	Course introduction		None
Sep 16	Research problems and questions		Ch. 1 (1)
Sep 23	Research design	Quiz 1	Ch. 2, 16 (2, 18)
Sep 30	Ethics		Ch. 3 (3)
Oct 7	Quantitative research: Overview, observation, surveys	Quiz 2	Ch. 4, 5, 6 (4, 7)
Oct 14	NO CLASS: Thanksgiving		
Oct 21	Qualitative research: Overview, interviews, focus groups	Quiz 3	Ch. 9, 11 (5, 6)
Oct 28	Sampling	Proposal due (20%)	Ch. 7 (12)
Nov 4	NO CLASS: Fall Reading Week		
Nov 11	Quantitative analysis	Quiz 4	Ch. 8 (13)
Nov 18	Qualitative analysis		Ch. 13 (14)
Nov 25	Ethnography, participatory research		Ch. 10 (10)
Dec 2	Course Review and Project Showcase	Final report due (30%)	

Lab schedule (may be adjusted, with notice)

Date	Topic	Notes	Readings: 5 th (4 th)
Sept 11	Form project groups		
Sept 18	Research problems and questions	Write 400-word summary in lab (due next day)	Ch. 1 (1)
Sept 25	Literature review skills Lab 1: Critical appraisal	*Meet in Weldon Library Instruction Lab	
Oct 2	Ethics	Lab 1 due (10%)	Ch. 3 (3) CORE tutorial
Oct 9	Observation Lab 2: Observation	Ethics due	Ch. 6 (7)
Oct 16	Ethics revisions and planning	Lab 2 due (10%)	
Oct 23	Research instrument design I		Ch. 5, 11 (5, 6)
Oct 30	Research instrument design II	Bring research instrument	Ch. 5, 11 (5, 6)
Nov 6	No lab: Fall Reading Week		
Nov 13	Quantitative analysis	*Meet in SSC 1316A	Ch. 8 (13)
Nov 20	Qualitative analysis	*Meet in SSC 1316A	Ch. 13 (14)
Nov 27	Independent work time	SSC 1316A is available	

Methods of evaluation

Evaluation Components	Percentage of Course Grade	Assignment Schedule
In-class quizzes	30%	Sep 23, Oct 7, Oct 21, Nov 11
Lab 1: Critical appraisal	10%	Oct 2
Lab 2: Observation	10%	Oct 16
Project: Proposal	20%	Oct 28
Project: Final report	30%	Dec 2

Students are responsible for material covered in the lectures as well as the assigned chapters in the text. Students must complete the research project (proposal and final report) to pass the course.

Lab assignments (2 x 10% = 20% total)

Students will complete two lab assignments, each worth 10%. You will have some time to work on these during the lab session. Detailed instructions will be provided separately.

Research project (20% proposal + 30% final report = 50% total)

Students will complete a research project as a focal point of the course. This involves working in small groups for some stages of the process – e.g. designing a research instrument, collecting data – but each student will write up their own report to be submitted individually. Completing the proposal is a mandatory part of the project. Detailed instructions will be provided separately.



In-class quizzes (3 x 10% = 30% total)

Instead of a final exam there will be a series of quizzes throughout the term. Each quiz will be based on the material covered since the previous one. **There will be four quizzes; your best three will count.**

A note about “unmarked” lab tasks

Most weeks in the lab you will work on one of the steps in the major project. Sometimes you will hand this in for feedback from the TA or instructor. Other times you will give and receive peer feedback. While these tasks are not marked at the time, **they are marked later** when they become embedded in the proposal and final report. **The feedback you get along the way ALWAYS leads to a better mark than you would get without the feedback.** Therefore, these tasks are not “unmarked” (work for no credit) – they are marked after you have a chance to improve. I guarantee this leads to higher grades!

Submission Policy and Late Policy

Material will be handed in at the beginning of class or lab on the due date. The penalty is 5% per day for material handed in late (weekends count as one day; the clock “starts” at the beginning of class/lab on the due date). I will no longer accept assignments after they have been handed back to the rest of the class. Material should be printed double-sided on letter size paper and stapled. Do not use folders or covers. Late assignments should be placed in the drop box outside SSC 2322. Make sure the course name, instructor’s name and TA’s name are on the front page.

Additional Information

Statement on Electronic Devices: To enhance student engagement and learning I propose a **laptop-free classroom** during lectures. Lecture slides (with blanks to be filled in) will be posted on OWL before class. Please do bring your laptop to tutorials as you will often need to do online research or writing. No electronic devices will be allowed during quizzes.

Mental Health: If you or someone you know is experiencing distress, there are resources here at Western to assist you. Please visit Western’s [Health and Wellness website](#) for more information.

Medical Issues: For Western’s NEW [Policy on Accommodation for Illnesses](#) please refer to the Academic [Calendar](#) section on [Academic Rights and Responsibilities](#). Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds for missed exams and/or assignments worth 10% or more of their final grade must follow the procedure outlined below. Students seeking accommodation for missed work worth less than 10% of their final grade should speak with the instructor.

Requesting Academic Consideration: Students who experience an extenuating circumstance (illness, injury, etc) serious enough to temporarily render them unable to meet academic requirements may request academic consideration through the following routes:

- (i) Submitting a [Self-Reported Absence form](#) provided that the conditions for submission are met;
- (ii) For [medical absences](#), submitting a [Student Medical Certificate](#) (SMC) signed by a licensed medical or mental health practitioner; or
- (iii) For [non-medical absences](#), submitting appropriate documentation (e.g., obituary, police report, accident report, court order, etc.) to Academic Counselling in their Faculty of registration. Students are encouraged to contact their Academic Counselling unit to clarify what documentation is appropriate.

Students seeking academic consideration:

- are advised to consider carefully the implications of postponing tests or delaying handing in work;



- are encouraged to make appropriate decisions based on their specific circumstances, recognizing that minor ailments (upset stomach) or upsets (argument with a friend) are not normally an appropriate basis for a self-reported absence;
- **must communicate with their instructors no later than 24 hours** after the end of the period covered by either the self-reported absence or SMC, or immediately upon their return following a documented absence.

Academic consideration is not normally intended for the following circumstances:

- **Students who require academic accommodation based on an ongoing physical or mental illness (recurring or chronic) or an existing disability.** These students are responsible, in consultation with health professionals, to determine if they are capable of pursuing their studies and, if so, with what accommodations. Students are expected to seek and arrange reasonable accommodations with Student Accessibility Services (SAS) as soon as possible in accordance with the [Policy on Academic Accommodation for Students with Disability](#). Students with pre-existing accessibility plans arranged through SAS may not need to provide additional documentation when seeking academic consideration where such request for consideration relates to their disability and where their accessibility plans allow for coursework deferral or deadline extensions.
- **Students who experience high levels of stress related to academic performance** (including completing assignments, taking part in presentations, or writing tests or examinations). Students with academic or exam stress should access supports through [Student Health and Wellness](#) and [Learning Skills Services](#) in order to deal with this stress in a proactive and constructive manner.

Grades will not be adjusted on the basis of need. It is important to monitor your performance in the course. Remember: *You* are responsible for your grades in this course.

Accessibility: The Department of Geography strives to provide accessibility to all faculty, staff, students and visitors in a way that respects the dignity and independence of people with disabilities. Please contact the course instructor if you require material in an alternate format or if you require any other arrangements to make this course more accessible to you. You may also wish to contact Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) at 519-661-2147 with any questions regarding accommodation. More information about [Accessibility at Western](#) is available.

Academic offences: Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a [Scholastic Offence](#). The most common offense is failing to cite properly. If you quote directly, you must cite the author!

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 for such checking 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](#)."

Support Services

[Student Support Services](#)

[Student Development Services](#)

Important Dates

September 5: Classes resume

September 13: Last day to add a first term half course

October 14: Thanksgiving Holiday – Department Office Closed

November 4 to November 10: Fall Reading Week (No classes; Department Office open)

November 12: Last day to drop a first term half course without penalty

November 30: Last day to drop a full course without penalty

December 5: Classes end

December 6 and 7: Study days

December 8-19: Examination Period