

SOC 500: Sociological Research Methods

Syllabus, Fall 2024

Meetings 10:00 – 12:45 on Mondays
4102 Behavioral Sciences Building

Instructor **Mahesh Somashekhar**
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Course Available on Blackboard
Webpage

Contact For simple questions, email is the best way to reach me. I will respond to your messages within 72 hours. For more involved questions or discussions, please use my drop-in office hours.

Course Description and Objectives:

This class is the first semester of your required graduate research methods training. It is designed to be a general introduction to the core principles and practices of social science research. We will begin the course with a general overview of the nature of social science research, and then we will focus in on a set of core building blocks of research methods, followed by a closer look at the range of methodological tools used by social scientists. The intent of the course is to teach students various elements of theory building, theory testing, measurement, sampling, causality, and research ethics so that students can conduct independent research and evaluate the research of others using sound logic and design principles. More concretely, by the end of this class, students will better be able to:

1. Understand what makes for a good “sociological puzzle” that is worth addressing through the use of social science methods.
2. Learn how social science research brings together theory and method to make sound arguments about the social world.
3. Appreciate the wide range of methods available for sociological analysis.
4. Develop their own sociological research projects.
5. Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of existing social science research.

Prerequisites:

There are no formal prerequisites for this course beyond graduate standing.

Required Equipment:

There is one required textbook for the course:

Carr, Deborah et al. 2020. *The Art and Science of Social Research*. 2nd ed. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

There will be other readings that complement the required textbook. These other readings will be provided to you through the course website.

Assignments and Grading:

Your course grade will be based on the following:

- **Research Proposal Exercises**

There will be four assignments for this course, all due at points throughout the semester as noted on the course schedule. We will discuss the specific parameters of the assignments before they are due. Late assignments will be accepted up to 2 days after the due date, and 20% will be deducted from your assignment grade for each day it is late.

a. *Formulating a Research Question*: Your first assignment is to articulate your research question. For this assignment, you will write your research question in a paragraph, which will explain why your question is sociologically important and propose at least one hypothesis. Due September 8. (worth 5% of final grade)

b. *Proposal Assignments*: You will formulate your research question for three methods, writing a short (5 page) proposal for each. Quantitative proposal due October 20. Qualitative proposal due November 17. Materials-based methods proposal due December 8. (worth 25% of final grade each)

- **Student-Led Presentation on an Empirical Reading (worth 20% of final grade)**

Each student will lead and facilitate a conversation on one empirical reading throughout the semester, leading their session with a roughly 10-minute discussion that does four things: (1) summarizes the methods used in the paper; (2) proposes an alternative method that could have been used, discussing the pros and cons of using this other method rather than the original method; (3) designs a follow-up research project that extends the study's argument beyond the sample investigated; and (4) generates several discussion questions for the group.

Academic Accommodations:

The University of Illinois at Chicago is committed to maintaining a barrier-free environment so that students with disabilities can fully access campus programs, courses, services, and activities. Students with disabilities must inform the instructor of the need for accommodations. Those who require accommodations for access and participation in this course should be registered with the Disability Resource Center. Please contact the DRC at <https://drc.uic.edu/>.

Things You Should Do to Succeed in This Class:

This course tries to engage you in active rather than passive learning. That means it is not a standard lecture course. You will be expected to participate in activities and discussion in class. The following things will help you to succeed in this kind of course:

1. Read the assigned texts *before* class. This is where you will learn course content.
2. Do not wait until the last minute to do assignments. Taking time with assignments will help solidify your learning and ensure better retention of course content.
3. Most importantly, ASK QUESTIONS. If you are confused, others likely are too. You will be doing your classmates a favor, and make it easier to keep up, by asking the question early.

Class Rules:

1. Maintain a good learning environment by:
 - entering quietly and politely if you happen to arrive late
 - turning off the ringers on your cell phones and any other devices
 - avoid loud eating or talking
2. Respect your class partners by:
 - participating honestly and earnestly
 - pulling your weight during in-class group activities
 - listening carefully to other students and the instructor.

Religious Accommodations:

Following campus policy, if you wish to observe religious holidays, you must notify me by the tenth day of the semester. If the religious holiday is observed on or before the tenth day of the semester, you must notify me at least five days before you will be absent. Please submit this form by email with the subject heading: "YOUR NAME: Requesting Religious Accommodation."

Pregnancy Accommodations:

Following campus policy, pregnant students have rights under Title IX. To request pregnancy-related accommodations, contact the Title IX Coordinator at titleix@uic.edu or 312-996-8670.

Grievance Procedures:

UIC is committed to the most fundamental principles of academic freedom, equality of opportunity, and human dignity involving students and employees. Freedom from discrimination is a foundation for all decision making at UIC. Students are encouraged to study the University's "Nondiscrimination Statement". Students are also urged to read the document "Public Formal Grievance Procedures". Information on these policies and procedures is available on the University web pages of the Office of Access and Equity: <http://oae.uic.edu/>

Academic Honesty:

All students are expected to do their own work on all assignments and exams. Students who cheat and/or represent the work of others will receive a zero for the assignment in question and may fail the course or be referred to the college for disciplinary action. The use of large language models (LLMs) such

as ChatGPT will also be considered cheating, and any student caught relying on an LLM to do their work for them will be referred to the department and the university for disciplining.

Methods represent the foundation of sociological analysis. The use of rigorous methods is what separates a professional sociologist from the layperson who waxes poetic about “society” over drinks on a Friday night or the politician who cherry-picks data to fit their particular agenda. Any graduate students who rely on LLMs to do the thinking for them in their first-year methods class will be at a severe disadvantage when they try to develop their own research projects later in graduate school. In some of my other classes, I allow the use of LLMs, and sometimes even encourage it. This is not one of those classes. The foundational concepts you will learn and master in this class are what separate the professional human sociologist from the artificial intelligence that pretends to be one.

Schedule of Topics and Required Readings:

*****Dates listed below are subject to change. Changes will be announced in class and/or the class website. Also, any required supplementary readings will be announced in class and provided to you on the course website.*****

WEEK 1—8/26—Overview of the Course and the Research Process

Overview of course; steps of the research process; difference between science and pseudoscience; introduction to validity

IN-CLASS EXERCISE: In-class reading and breakdown of...

Axelsson, John, Tina Sundelin, Michael Ingre, Eus JW Van Someren, Andreas Olsson, and Mats Lekander. 2010. “Beauty Sleep: Experimental Study on the Perceived Health and Attractiveness of Sleep Deprived People.” *BMJ* 341:1-5.

*******WEEK 2—NO CLASS*******

Due on 9/8 at 11:59pm: Assignment #1 Research Question

WEEK 3—9/9—Research Ethics

Ethics and quantitative research; ethics and qualitative research; institutional review boards; reflexivity

IN-CLASS EXERCISE: CITI Training

EMPIRICAL READING

Humphreys, Laud. 1970. *Tearoom Trade: Impersonal Sex in Public Places* (pp. 1-15 & 104-130). Chicago: Aldine Publishing.

OTHER REQUIRED READINGS

Carr et al., Chapter 3

von Hoffman, Nicholas. 1970. “Sociological Snoopers...” *Trans-action* 7:4–8.

RECOMMENDED READINGS

Whitbourne, 2013. "The Secrets Behind Psychology's Most Famous Experiment." *Psychology Today*.

WEEK 4—9/16—Measurement, Operationalization, and Construct Validity

Principles of conceptualization, measurement, and operationalization; units of analysis; hypothesis construction; concepts vs. indicators; how to evaluate construct validity and ensure its robustness

IN-CLASS EXERCISE: Practicing Units of Analysis & Turning Hypotheses into Indicators

REQUIRED READINGS

Carr et al., Chapters 1, 2, and 4

Sutton, Robert and Barry Staw. 1995. "What Theory is Not." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 40(3):391-397.

WEEK 5—9/23—Causality, Logical Fallacy, and Internal Validity

Types of internal validity; types of logical fallacy; mechanisms; mediation; moderation; spuriousness

IN-CLASS EXERCISE: In-class breakdown of selections from...

Rotolo, T., & Tittle, C. R. (2006). Population size, change, and crime in US cities. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, 22, 341-367.

EMPIRICAL READING

Portes, Alejandro, and Patricia Landolt. 2000. "Social Capital: Promise and Pitfalls of Its Role in Development." *Journal of Latin American Studies* 32(2):529-547.

OTHER REQUIRED READINGS

Carr et al., Chapter 5

Firebaugh, Glenn. 2008. "The First Rule: THERE SHOULD BE THE POSSIBILITY OF SURPRISE IN SOCIAL RESEARCH (pp. 1 – 18 only)." *Seven Rules for Social Research*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

RECOMMENDED READINGS

Portes, Alejandro. 1998. "Social capital: its origins and applications in modern sociology." *Annual Review of Sociology* 24(1):1-25.

Volker, Beate. 2020. "Social Capital." *Sage Research Methods Foundations*. London: Sage.

WEEK 6—9/30—Sampling, Generalizability, and External Validity

Probability Sampling vs. Non-Probability Sampling; Representativeness and Selection Bias; Quantitative and Qualitative Sampling Methods; The Utility of Sampling Distributions

IN-CLASS EXERCISE: Sampling Exercise

EMPIRICAL READING

Bearman, Peter. 2005. *Doormen* (Chapter 1 and Appendix). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

OTHER REQUIRED READINGS

Carr et al., Chapter 6

Firebaugh, Glenn. 2008. "The First Rule: THERE SHOULD BE THE POSSIBILITY OF SURPRISE IN SOCIAL RESEARCH (pp. 18 – 30 only)." *Seven Rules for Social Research*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

WEEK 7—10/7—Experiments

Core Principles of Experiments; Validity of Experiments; Types of Experiments

IN-CLASS EXERCISE: Research Scenarios Using Laboratory and Field Experiments

EMPIRICAL READING

Pager, Devah. 2003. "The Mark of a Criminal Record." *American Journal of Sociology* 108(5):937-975.

OTHER REQUIRED READINGS

Carr et al., Chapter 8

RECOMMENDED READINGS

Heckman, James. 1998. "Detecting Discrimination." *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 12(2):101-116.

Jackson, Michelle, and D.R. Cox. 2013. "The Principles of Experimental Design and Their Application in Sociology." *Annual Review of Sociology* 39:27-49.

WEEK 8—10/14—Survey Research

Survey design; the connection between survey research, sampling, and external validity; the challenge of internal validity with surveys; the types of research questions for which survey research is appropriate

IN-CLASS EXERCISE: Research Scenarios Using Experiments and Surveys

EMPIRICAL READING

Mark Regnerus. 2012. "How Different Are the Adult Children of Parents Who Have Same-Sex Relationships? Findings from the New Family Structures Study." *Social Science Research* 41:4.

OTHER REQUIRED READINGS

Carr et al., Chapter 7

Perrin, Andrew, Philip Cohen, and Neal Caren. 2013. "Responding to the Regnerus Study: Are Children of Parents who had Same-Sex Relationships Disadvantaged? A Scientific Evaluation of the No-Differences Hypothesis." *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Mental Health* 17:327–336.

*******WEEK 9—10/21—NO CLASS*******

Due on 10/20 at 11:59pm: Assignment #2 Quantitative Proposal

WEEK 10—10/28—Deduction, Induction, and Case Study Logics

Deductive vs. inductive reasoning; case studies and sampling methods; the purpose of case-oriented vs. variable-oriented research

IN-CLASS EXERCISE: Bring in a case study and be prepared to discuss how it situates itself in the larger literature

REQUIRED READINGS

Flyvbjerg, Bent. 2004. "Five misunderstandings about case-study research." *Sociologisk Tidsskrift* 12(2):117-142.

Ragin, Charles. 1999. "The Distinctiveness of Case-oriented Research." *HSR: Health Services Research* 34(5):1137-1151.

Small, Mario L. 2009. "'How many cases do I need?' On science and the logic of case selection in field-based research." *Ethnography* 10(1):5-38.

RECOMMENDED READINGS

Burawoy, Michael. 1998. "The Extended Case Method." *Sociological Theory* 16(1):4-33.

Glaser, Barney, and Anselm Strauss. 1967. *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. Chicago: Aldine.

Tavory, Iddo, and Stefan Timmermans. 2014. *Abductive Analysis: Theorizing Qualitative Research*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

WEEK 11—11/4—Interviews

Principles of interviewing; structured, semi-structured, and unstructured interviews; interview schedules; focus groups; emic vs. etic perspectives

IN-CLASS EXERCISE: Coding Interview Transcripts

EMPIRICAL READING

Garcia, Lorena. 2009. "Now why do you want to know about that?" Heteronormativity, Sexism, and Racism in the Sexual (Mis)education of Latina Youth." *Gender & Society* 23(4):520-541.

OTHER REQUIRED READINGS

Carr et al., Chapter 11

RECOMMENDED READINGS

Deterding, Nicole M., and Mary C. Waters. 2021. "Flexible coding of in-depth interviews: A twenty-first-century approach." *Sociological Methods & Research* 50(2):708-739.

Jerolmack, Colin, and Shamus Khan. 2014. "Talk is Cheap: Ethnography and the Attitudinal Fallacy." *Sociological Methods & Research* 43(2):178-209.

Lareau, Annette. 2021. *Listening to People: A Practical Guide to Interviewing, Participant Observation, Data Analysis, and Writing It All Up*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Small, Mario and Jessica Calarco. 2022. *Qualitative Literacy: A Guide to Evaluating Ethnographic and Interview Research*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

WEEK 12—11/11—Ethnography

Ethnography vs. interviewing; observer vs. participant status; gaining access to ethnographic research sites; saturation; ethnography and the problem of reproducible research methods

IN-CLASS EXERCISE: Practice with Software for Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA Miner Lite)

EMPIRICAL READING

Goffman, Alice. 2009. "On the Run: Wanted Men in a Philadelphia Ghetto." *American Sociological Review* 74(3):339-357.

OTHER REQUIRED READINGS

Carr et al., Chapter 10

Lubet, Steven. 2015. "Ethics on the Run." *The New Rambler Review*, May:15-34.

RECOMMENDED READINGS

Snow, David A., Calvin Morrill, and Leon Anderson. 2003. "Elaborating analytic ethnography: Linking fieldwork and theory." *Ethnography* 4(2):181-200.

Wacquant, Loïc. 2002. "Scrutinizing the Street: Poverty, Morality, and the Pitfalls of Urban Ethnography." *American Journal of Sociology* 107(6):1468-1532. (Also read the books criticized as well as responses to Wacquant in the same journal issue)

Due on 11/17 at 11:59pm: Assignment #3 Qualitative Proposal

WEEK 13—11/18—Materials-Based Methods

Types of materials-based methods; working in archives; introduction to demography; computational methodology; comparative/historical sampling methods

IN-CLASS EXERCISE: Content Analysis of Historical Magazine Covers

EMPIRICAL READING

Gonsalves, Tara. 2020. "Gender identity, the sexed body, and the medical making of transgender." *Gender & Society* 34(6):1005-1033.

OTHER REQUIRED READINGS

Carr et al., Chapter 12

Mahoney, James. 2004. "Comparative-historical methodology." *Annual Review of Sociology* 30(1):81-101.

WEEK 14—11/25—Critical Methods and Public Sociology

Critical theory and methodology; positivism vs. critical approaches; pure, applied, and public sociology

IN-CLASS EXERCISE: In-Class Reading and Exercise Based on Selections From...

Gitlin, T. (1979). Prime time ideology: The hegemonic process in television entertainment. *Social Problems* 26(3), 251–266.

REQUIRED READINGS

Burawoy, Michael. 2005. "For public sociology." *American sociological review* 70(1):4-28.

Harvey, Lee. 1990. *Critical Social Research* (Chapters 1 and 5). New York: Taylor & Francis.

Stage, Frances K. 2007. "Answering Critical Questions Using Quantitative Data." *New Directions for Institutional Research* 133:5-16.

Turner, Jonathan H. 2017. "Is Public Sociology Such a Good Idea?" Pp. 263-288 in *Public Sociology: The Contemporary Debate*, ed. L.T. Nichols. New York: Routledge.

RECOMMENDED READINGS

Bywater, William. 1990. "The Paranoia of Postmodernism." *Philosophy and Literature* 14(1):79-84.

Latour, Bruno. 2004. "Why has critique run out of steam? From matters of fact to matters of concern." *Critical Inquiry* 30(2):225-248.

*******WEEK 15—12/2—NO CLASS*******

Due on 12/8 at 11:59pm: Assignment #4 Materials-Based Methods Proposal