

RESEARCH METHODS Fall 2019

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Contents

Course Description.....	3
Course Objectives.....	3
Required Materials and Texts	3
Class Format.....	3
Course Evaluation – Overview	3
Course Evaluation – Details	4
Quizzes, three each at 5% (15%)	4
Literature Review (10%), Due October 2 nd	4
Participant Observation Exercise (15%), Due November 6 th	4
Research Proposal (25%), Due November 20 th	5
Final Exam (35%)	5
Weekly Course Schedule and Required Readings	5
Introduction to Research Methods (September 4 th)	5
Arguments (September 11 th)	5
Research Design I (September 18 th)	5
Research Design II (September 25 th)	6
Ethics (October 2 nd)	6
Sampling (October 9 th).....	6
Fall Break Week	6
Field Research (October 23 rd)	6
Surveys & Experiments (October 30 th)	6
Analyzing Quantitative Data (November 6 th).....	6
Archives (November 13 th)	6
Interviews & Focus Groups (November 20 th).....	6
Content Analysis (November 27 th).....	7

Catch-up, Exam Prep (Dec 4 th).....	7
Course Policies	7
Contact Protocol	7
Submission of Assignments.....	7
Technology In The Classroom.....	7
Technical Requirements for Written Assignments	8
Policy On Remarking & No Extra Credit	8
Grades.....	8
Late Assignments	9
Absences, Missed Work, Illness	9
Avenue to Learn	9
Turnitin.com.....	9
University Policies	10
Academic Integrity Statement.....	10
Intellectual Property Notice.....	10
Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities.....	10
Faculty of Social Sciences E-mail Communication Policy	11
Course Modification	11
Appendix A: Guidelines for Written Work	12

Course Description

This course is an introductory course in critical thinking and research methods. It is designed to provide a specific set of skills to students to help them succeed in labour studies. The course asks how students of **social** science find answers to the important and interesting questions about their disciplines. What methods are available to social scientists? How do social scientists conduct research ethically? What constitutes valid evidence in social science? This course is designed to help answer these questions. As such, you will be introduced to qualitative and quantitative methods and analysis, including survey research, interviews, analysis of pre-existing statistics, field research, and content analysis (among others).

The course is broken, roughly, into three major segments. First, we will discuss how to structure an argument and build a research design to answer research questions. We will cover major data collection techniques for both qualitative and quantitative designs. We will also look at how to analyze data collected through research, and we will cover some qualitative and quantitative approaches. Please do not be intimidated with the mathematical content - no background, at all, in math is required to succeed in this course. That said, students will need a calculator - a scientific one is best - to do some of the work in this course.

Course Objectives

By the end of the course students should be able to:

- Construct and evaluate logically consistent arguments
- Design a holistic and ethical research project
- Collect & analyze qualitative & quantitative data

Required Materials and Texts

- Revel for Basics of Social Research, Fourth Canadian Edition, online text.

Class Format

Generally the class will be split into two parts. The first part will be a traditional lecture. Following a short break, the second part of the class will either involve an activity or a quiz. The activities are designed to build the methodological skills taught in the course. The quizzes are designed to test these skills.

Course Evaluation – Overview

1. Three Quizzes, 5% each for 15%
2. Literature Review, 10%, Due October 2nd
3. Participant Observation, 15%, Due November 6th
4. Research Proposal, 25%, Due November 20th

5. Final Exam, 35%, December exam period

Course Evaluation – Details

Quizzes, three each at 5% (15%)

These short quizzes are designed to test the skills learned during in-class activities.

Literature Review (10%), Due October 2nd

The Literature Review is designed to get you thinking about the research proposal, in **3 - 5 pages**. In the first one or two pages, outline your topic and research question. These pages should easily outline the topic and why studying it is important to labour studies. You should also explain why answering your question would better improve our understanding of the social world. In short - why is your question worth studying. The last few pages are a literature review of **three academic, peer-reviewed sources** on your topic. You should briefly explain what the source says about your topic, what methods they used to collect their data, and how it will help inform your research proposal. Please note, you may (and probably should) use the three sources from the literature review as sources in your research proposal.

Participant Observation Exercise (15%), Due November 6th

This exercise is designed to build practical field work experience. You will be conducting participant observation to study the interaction between coffee and culture. Visit both a Tim Horton's and a Starbucks, both off-campus. In each coffee shop, observe your environment. Record observations about the staff, the customers, the physical environment, etc. Where is the shop located and in what surroundings? How is it decorated and furnished? What are the products sold? What else is sold? Who is there? Why are they there? What else is going on? Note, you will need to do this as a "complete observer" – you are **not** to interact with the people in the shop.

After you have completed this participant observation, you should compare the two coffee cultures you observed. What was different between the two shops? Why? What conclusions can you draw about the difference between the two? How can you support these conclusions? This report should be **6 to 8 pages** in length, and you will also need to hand in your "field notes" – the observations you made during your participant observation. It is up to you on how you will collect these field notes (pen & paper, laptop, note app on your phone, etc), but consider how your collection helps you "blend in." The field notes do not count towards the length of the paper.

On Avenue, you will find two essays, "Coffee as Culture" and "For the Love of Joe." Read these *before* you do your participant observation, and you will likely want to refer to them in your report. Additional outside research is not required, nor is it discouraged. You will be marked on both the *process* (ie, your field notes) and your conclusions.

Research Proposal (25%), Due November 20th

The research proposal is the defacto term paper in 3H03. This project asks you to come up with an interesting research question in labour studies, and design a project to answer your question. Please note, *you are not actually doing the research for this question, you are designing a project.* Your research proposal should clearly outline your topic, research question, and hypothesis, provide a brief literature review of **five peer-reviewed academic sources** (see above), outline your variables, explain how you will measure your variables, discuss the ethical implications of your project, and outline the methods you will use. You should clarify if your project is exploratory, explanatory, or descriptive. You will need to provide examples of your methodology: for example, if you say you will be gathering data using a survey, your project should include a sample survey form. If you say you will be performing interviews, you should provide sample interview questions and a list of key interviewees, etc. Describe what sampling method you will use, if you'll be needing to sample, and why you picked that method.

Your research proposal will be marked on the feasibility of your topic, the clarity of your explanations for all the questions above, the detail of your methodology, and the 'fit' between your question and your methodology.

Some sample proposals will be uploaded to the course website as examples of how this assignment should be completed.

Final Exam (35%)

The exam will cover material presented in both the lecture and the course readings. Please note that the readings are designed as a starting point for the week's material, and that lecture will invariably cover topics not in the readings. Thus, it is critical that students attend lecture if they hope to pass the final exam. Do not book vacation until the exam schedule has been posted. No accommodation will be given to students who have booked vacation during the exam period.

Weekly Course Schedule and Required Readings

Introduction to Research Methods (September 4th)

Chapter 1: Doing Social Research

Arguments (September 11th)

Chapter 2: "Theory and Social Research

Activity: Argument Analysis

Research Design I (September 18th)

Chapter 4: Reviewing the Scholarly Literature and Planning a Study

Quiz: Argument Analysis

Research Design II (September 25th)

Chapter 5: Designing A Study

Activity: Research Design

Ethics (October 2nd)

Chapter 3: Ethics in Social Research

Activity: Ethics

Sampling (October 9th)

Chapter 7: Qualitative and Quantitative Sampling

Quiz: Research Design & Ethics

Fall Break Week

Field Research (October 23rd)

Chapter 13: Field Research

Activity: Field Research

Surveys & Experiments (October 30th)

Chapter 8: Survey Research and Chapter 9: Experimental Research

Activity: Surveys

Analyzing Quantitative Data (November 6th)

Note! Bring your calculator to class!

Chapter 11: Analysis of Quantitative Data

Activity: Quantitative Analysis

Archives (November 13th)

Chapter 14: Nonreactive Qualitative Research

Quiz: Quantitative Data. **Note! Bring your calculator to class!**

Interviews & Focus Groups (November 20th)

Chapter 12: Qualitative Interviewing

No activity or quiz scheduled. Extra quantitative workshop, to prepare for the exam, if needed.

Content Analysis (November 27th)

Chapter 15: Analysis of Qualitative Data

Activity: Research Design, Redux

Catch-up, Exam Prep (Dec 4th)

Course Policies

Contact Protocol

I have set aside weekly office hours to meet with students to discuss course material. These office hours are some of your best resources for consulting with me. If you cannot meet during the office hours, feel free to send an email, but please keep the following simple rules for email etiquette in mind:

- At a minimum, include an appropriate salutation in your email
- Emails must be written in proper English. Students will be asked to revise, edit and re-send emails that do not meet minimum standards of grammatically correct English.
- Please allow for a minimum of 48 hours for turnaround on emails

Submission of Assignments

Students must submit assignments **both** via Turnitin submissions on Avenue and as a physical copy. An assignment will *not* be counted as submitted (ie, late penalties will continue to accrue) until both copies have been submitted. A penalty of 5%, per day or part thereof, will be applied to late papers. No paper will be accepted 7 days after the due date.

Technology In The Classroom

Electronic devices are *strongly* discouraged. Laptops are distracting to other students and result in lower grades for the user. I reserve the right to ask you to turn off and put away your laptop if you are not using it to take notes. I am especially concerned how the inappropriate use of laptops may distract other students nearby. Any student being negatively affected by such rude behavior is urged to contact me. The source of student complaints will be kept confidential. Cell phones are prohibited during lecture. Please turn them **OFF** (not to silent) during lecture. Students who use their phones while on silent mode will be asked to leave the class. If a cell phone rings during class, I reserve the right to answer your phone and embarrass you to the best of my ability.

Technical Requirements for Written Assignments

Papers for undergraduate writing **do not** include abstracts - these are reserved for published, peer-reviewed works. Do not include an abstract, unless explicitly instructed to do so, with your written work. The following technical requirements exist for all written components of this course: 12 point font, one inch margins, and double spaced text. All written assignments **must** use a recognized academic citation style for their assignments - Chicago, APA, or MLA. If you use an 'in text' citation system, you **must** reference specific page numbers in your citations - an author / date citation is not sufficient. Students who do not conform to these instructions risk a penalty to the grade of their written work.

Students should also consult the appended "term paper guidelines" for some simple rules, that will be enforced come marking time, on how to write a proper term paper.

Policy On Remarking & No Extra Credit

You will find that I have very limited enthusiasm (read: none) for grade negotiation. Remarking only happens in the case of some kind of "technical" error during grading - the person marking your paper forgot to read a page of the paper, or some other similar outlier. I am always willing to talk with you about your grades or tips for doing well on any assignment in the course. However, assigning grades is not a process of bargaining and negotiating. The grade I report to the registrar is the grade you earn based on the items listed in the course syllabus.

After feedback has been provided on an assignment, students should wait 24 hours before contacting the marker with follow-up questions. However, they should wait no longer than seven days, so that any questions can be resolved quickly and without unnecessary problems.

There will be no opportunity to make up extra credit in this course, there will be no alternative assignments offered for this course (except, of course, in the case of those assignments arranged through the SAS centre), nor will there be 'make-up' assignments for missed seminars, missed papers, etc. Please keep in mind that "I need a higher grade to keep my scholarship," "I need a higher grade to maintain my eligibility," "I need a higher grade to graduate," or "I need a higher grade to get into my major" are not valid reasons for extra credit or make up assignments. Requests of this nature will simply be ignored. Please keep this in mind during the course. You will have ample opportunities to receive a very high grade in this course, assuming you avail yourself of all the resources present: attend lecture, do your readings, visit the office hours of the teaching team or send emails to us when you need help.

Grades

Grades will be based on the McMaster University grading scale:

MARK	GRADE
90-100	A+
85-90	A
80-84	A-
77-79	B+
73-76	B
70-72	B-
67-69	C+
63-66	C
60-62	C-
57-59	D+
53-56	D
50-52	D-
0-49	F

Late Assignments

Papers will be penalized 5% per day that they are late. No paper will be accepted seven days past the due date.

Absences, Missed Work, Illness

Students are expected to attend class and to complete all class readings. University policies around absences due to illness will be respected. Students should speak with an advisor in their faculty office (e.g. the Faculty of Social Sciences office for students enrolled in Political Science) if they are dealing with complicated health, mental health or life situations that might affect their ability to meet the normal course deadlines.

If you require academic accommodation on religious grounds, you should make a formal, written request to your instructor(s) for alternative dates and/or means of satisfying requirements. Such requests should be made during the first two weeks of any given academic term.

Avenue to Learn

In this course we will be using Avenue to Learn. Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of this course, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in this course will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.

Turnitin.com

In this course we will be using a web-based service (Turnitin.com) to reveal plagiarism. Students will be expected to submit their work electronically to Turnitin.com and in hard copy so that it can be checked for academic dishonesty. Students who do not wish to submit their work to Turnitin.com must still submit a copy to the instructor. No penalty

will be assigned to a student who does not submit work to Turnitin.com. All submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic integrity have been upheld (e.g., on-line search, etc.). To see the Turnitin.com Policy, please to go www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity.

University Policies

Academic Integrity Statement

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behavior in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity.

Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behavior can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: "Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty"), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university.

It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy, located at www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity.

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

1. Plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one's own or for which credit has been obtained.
2. Improper collaboration in group work.
3. Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

Intellectual Property Notice

All slides, presentations, handouts, tests, exams, and other course materials created by the instructor in this course are the intellectual property of the instructor. A student who publicly posts or sells an instructor's work, without the instructor's express consent, may be charged with misconduct under McMaster's Academic Integrity Policy and may also face adverse legal consequences for infringement of intellectual property rights.

Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities

Students who require academic accommodation must contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS) to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. Academic accommodations must be arranged for each term of study. Student Accessibility Services can be contacted by phone 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or e-mail sas@mcmaster.ca. For further information, consult McMaster University's Policy for [Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities](#).

Faculty of Social Sciences E-mail Communication Policy

Effective September 1, 2010, it is the policy of the Faculty of Social Sciences that all e-mail communication sent from students to instructors (including TAs), and from students to staff, must originate from the student's own McMaster University e-mail account. This policy protects confidentiality and confirms the identity of the student. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that communication is sent to the university from a McMaster account. If an instructor becomes aware that a communication has come from an alternate address, the instructor may not reply at his or her discretion.

Course Modification

The instructor and university reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term. The university may change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances. If either type of modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. It is the responsibility of the student to check his/her McMaster email and course websites weekly during the term and to note any changes.

Appendix A: Guidelines for Written Work

Rules for essay structure and writing

1. You need to have a title page and a works cited page. These pages are separate. They do not count towards the page minimum of your paper.
2. Number your pages with numerals centred at the top of the page.
3. Follow these steps. Establish your topic. Research the major debates and think through the strongest arguments and counter-arguments. Establish your thesis statement. Develop a skeletal structure of the essay based on the arguments and your counter-arguments. Write the essay. Then write your introduction. Edit. Edit again. Edit again.
4. When choosing an essay topic, take time to think about what will interest you, what will help you confront the pressing issues in your life, and what will give you a chance to be creative. An essay written like it's a chore will likely be a chore to read.
5. You should, at almost all costs, avoid the personal pronoun - "I." It makes your writing seem sloppy and un-academic. Instead of writing "I will argue," use "this essay will demonstrate," or something similar. If you are using "I," it really makes your essay seem weak.
6. Similarly, to be blunt, I care not for your opinion. If you are writing "in my opinion" frequently, or at all, you probably will not do well. I care about what you can show to me with the support of academic evidence from academic sources. Leave your opinion out, and include only what you can support with citations from academic sources.
7. Craft a clear thesis statement. The following example is so broad it is basically meaningless: "This essay will explore Karl Marx's theory of alienation in terms of its political, economic, and cultural implications." Why would anyone invest the time to figure out what the heck the author will argue in this essay? Conversely, this is a clear thesis statement: "This essay argues that Marx's theory of alienation is as important in his later work as his early work, contrary to the assertions of Louis Althusser." A clear thesis statement not only sets the boundaries of your research question, it should also entice readers. If the reader does not know what the thesis of your paper is by the end of the first page, you are unlikely to pass
8. The most important part of any writing is critical analysis. Don't only summarize - also explain and analyze. You should typically summarize and explain only as much as is necessary to get to the good part of your writing: your critical analysis. Don't tack critical analysis on to the end of the essay. It is integral to the entire essay. It begins with your thesis statement.
9. Don't write long, incoherent sentences. Keep them short and succinct, with one main point.
10. Make sure that every sentence includes a subject (noun or pronoun) and a verb.
11. Remove unnecessary words and use concise sentences. Say the most with the least. Remember, you are expected to write at the level of this course - not above it, not below it. If you are using "big" words for the sake of making your essay look more academic or smarter, you run the *very good* chance you're using words wrong, and this has the opposite effect - it makes you look not at all smart.

12. Your writing should be organized in paragraphs. Each paragraph should have one central theme, idea, or argument you're trying to convince the reader of. Long, sprawling paragraphs that span multiple pages are improper. Break them down into clear and concise paragraphs.

13. Your audience is an intelligent layperson. Don't speak down to them, but don't assume their familiarity with the topic. Provide the necessary context. If you begin explaining what a character did before you explain who the character is, you haven't provided enough context.

14. Academic writing shouldn't have an informal, or colloquial, tone: "So, it seems to me that Robert Nozick has a pretty limited idea of free choice and democracy, right?" Nevertheless, don't hide behind academic-speak either: "It is evident that, when considered in their totality, Nozick's disquisitions on the freedom of choice, and concomitantly, on the democracy bequeathed by liberal institutions, are quite, albeit not wholly, limited." Remember, your audience is the intelligent layperson with a nose for academic bullshit. Write clearly and directly: "Nozick's ideas of free choice and democracy are quite limited."

15. Unless you are writing directly about something that occurred in the past (e.g. "Simone de Beauvoir died in 1986."), don't write in the past tense. Rather, write in the present tense. Consider this sentence: "De Beauvoir asserted that ethics is ambiguous." This makes her ideas sound dead and gone. Consider this: "De Beauvoir asserts that ethics is ambiguous." With this, her ideas are living and vibrant. Ethics might be ambiguous, but your writing should not be.

16. You should almost never use block quotes from a source. It makes it look like you have nothing original to say for yourself, so you are just copy-and-pasting the words of another author, and filling up space to reach a page limit. If you *must* use block quotes (and you shouldn't), the proper style is to indent them, justify the edges, and single-space them.

Citation and Citation Style

17. When citing work, irrespective of the citation style,¹ the footnote and endnote numbers or symbols should follow the comma or period.² Or, if a direct quotation, as Gray notes, "The numbers or symbols go after the quotation marks."³ With regard to in-text citations, as Gray (2017) notes, "With a direct quote, put the year of publication beside the author's surname and then put the page number after the quotation" (1). When you are citing an idea without directly quoting the author, as Gray (2017, 1) notes, put the year of publication and page number immediately after the author's name. If you are citing an idea, but not directly quoting and not mentioning the author in the sentence, put the name, year, and page at the end of the sentence (Gray 2017, 1).

18. Bibliographic information belongs in the bibliography, not in the text of the paper! Including it in the paper looks sloppy, and I think you're filling space because you have nothing to write. Never do this!: "in a paper, written by two political scientists, Doug Hagar and Tim Fowler, at Carleton University, entitled, 'Liking' Your Union: Unions and New Social Media During Election Campaigns," published in Labor Studies Journal, they argue....." Instead only ever use the last names of the authors, "Fowler and Hagar (2013) argue that unions have not harnessed the potential of new social media."

19. The three major citation style (APA, MLA, Chicago), all have easily found style sheets online. Pick one citation style, cite with it consistently, and follow a style guide online. Do not make up your own citation style. Citation errors can cause lost marks.

Specific Punctuation, Spelling, Style, and Grammar Errors to Avoid

20. Use proper Canadian English spelling. Most word processors will default to American English - change to, and use, Canadian or British English.

21. “Ideology” is not a synonym for “idea.” It is not the fancy, academic way of saying “idea.” An “ideology” is a system of idea and ideals, and is usually formed around a political, economic, social, or cultural theory. “I think I shall make a sandwich” is an idea. Liberalism is an ideology.
22. “Whom” is not a synonym for “who.” It is not the fancy, academic way of saying “who.” “Who” refers to the subject of a sentence, “whom” refers to the object of a verb or preposition. Generally, if you can replace the word with “he” or “she,” use who. If you can replace it with “him” or “her,” use whom.
23. Affect and Effect are two different words. In everyday speech, *affect* is a verb. It means to influence something, such as in the headline from the Springfield News, “Duff Shortage Affects Moe’s Customers.” The beer shortage had an impact on some of Moe’s customers: they were without beer. *Effect* is mostly commonly used as a noun meaning the result or impact of something, an outcome. Most of the time, you’ll want *affect as a verb* meaning to influence something and *effect for the something that was influenced*.
24. “Novel” is not a synonym for “book.” A novel is a work of fiction.
25. It is stylistically incorrect to use the phrase “on the other hand” without first using “on the one hand.”
26. There are fourteen separate punctuation marks in standard English grammar. You should learn the difference between them, and how to properly use them. The semicolon is particularly abused in undergraduate writing - the only proper use of a semicolon is to connect two independent clauses - two things that could be a sentence on their own.
27. Don’t use apostrophe s (’s) to form the plural of a noun or proper name. Plural nouns are formed by adding s to the noun with no punctuation. ‘s means a possessive relationship as in phrases like “Canada’s future” or “women’s rights”.
28. Don’t confuse “may have” with “might have”. Use “may have” only if you aren’t certain of the facts. Use “might have” for scenarios that you know did not happen. Correct usage: “Germany might have won the war if it had possessed nuclear weapons.” Incorrect usage: “Germany may have won the war if it had possessed nuclear weapons.”
29. Don’t write “lead” when you mean “led”. Lead is a metal. Led is the past tense of “to lead”.
30. Don’t use “amount” to designate a quantity that can be counted. Use “number.” Correct usage: “The number of students has increased.” Incorrect usage: “The amount of students has increased.”