

INSH 6300: Research Methods in the Social Sciences

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Office Hours: Thursdays 4-5 or by appointment

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Class Hours: Tuesdays 5:30pm - 8:50pm

Class Room: Richards Hall 235

Course Description

This class is a high-level introduction for students who wish to learn how to conduct and evaluate social science research at the graduate and professional level. While we will introduce specific methods, we will focus on general principles and perspectives of the social sciences. The goal of the class, as elaborated in the learning goals below, will be to assess scholarly literature in the social sciences, to identify interesting research questions, to formulate strategies for answering them, to understand which qualitative or quantitative tools will best address your theoretical questions, and to know how and where to find the resources that will later help you gain expertise in the specific research methods you find that need to develop.

The course will combine a mix of traditional lectures, workshops on how to carry out research (and write up the results), opportunities to critique published social science research, and first-hand experience planning and conducting research.

Learning Goals

Students who succeed in this course will be able to:

- Evaluate and critique the methods used in contemporary social science research.
- Develop a research question(s) from an interest in any particular topic in social science.
- Design and propose social science research using qualitative and/or quantitative methods that match their research question.
- Explain the ethical requirements of social science research, appraise ethical issues arising from their own research, and design research in a way that addresses and mitigates these issues.

- Communicate effectively in written and oral formats relevant to the field of political science, sociology, criminal justice, and/or related academic fields.
- Identify a number of research methods used in the social sciences (including survey research, interviewing, experiments and quasi-experiments and content analysis), and explain the assumptions and goals of each method.
- Recognize additional research techniques that may be developed in later courses or by doing research firsthand, and assess others' research that uses these techniques.
- Identify the research methods most relevant to their own research questions, and plan for further training and development of those skills.

Office Hours

My primary office at Northeastern is in the Network Science Institute, which is off-campus and not open for unscheduled walk-ins. This would be very inconvenient for office hours, so I have reserved space in Renaissance Park (right behind the Ruggles T station) on Thursdays from 4-5 for drop-in office hours. If you are not available during this time slot but would like to meet, or if you would prefer to meet remotely, please email me and we will schedule something. Students are strongly encouraged to attend office hours, especially for consultation regarding their research proposals as they develop over the course of the semester.

Course Texts

Required:

- Alan Bryman, Edward Bell, Jennifer Reck, and Jessica Fields, *Social Research Methods*
 - If you have access issues, there are open-source alternatives available which are not as well aligned with the course (and you may need to find different chapters in different resources), but I am happy to help connect you with these if needed and with some extra effort you can keep up with the course materials using these free alternatives.

Recommended:

- Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams, *The Craft of Research*
 - This book will be especially useful for students who could use additional resources on how to efficiently and effectively *read* and *write* for the social sciences. We will not be explicitly covering material from this book as it is less oriented toward research *methods*, but this is the book my Ph.D. advisors handed me on my first day of graduate school and I'm very glad they did.

For PhD students, there are a few additional books that are not required for this course but that you should be aware of as you continue with your methods training:

- Gary King, Robert Keohane, and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry*, 1994

- Henry Brady and David Collier, *Rethinking Social Inquiry*, 2004
- Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development*, 2005
- Gary Goertz, *Social Science Concepts: A User's Guide*, 2006
- Charles Ragin, *Redesigning Social Inquiry*, 2008
- Gary Goertz and James Mahoney, *A Tale of Two Cultures: Qualitative and Quantitative Research in the Social Sciences*, 2012
- John Gerring, *Social Science Methodology: A Unified Framework*, 2012
- Jason Seawright, *Multi-Method Social Science*, 2016
- Lee Ann Fujii, *Interviewing in Social Science Research: A Relational Approach*, 2017
- Judea Pearl and Dana MacKenzie, *The Book of Why*, 2018
- James N. Druckman, *Experimental Thinking*, 2022

Assignments and Evaluation

Assignments are due by the beginning of class on the date indicated unless otherwise noted. *Starred assignments are ungraded; that is, any satisfactory submission will receive full credit and unsatisfactory submissions may be resubmitted.

- **Participation (10%):** Students are required to attend class, participate in classwide discussions, and fully contribute to their group projects.
 - Some students are more vocal than others, and participation in classwide discussions includes listening as well as speaking. Do not feel like you have to talk a lot for talking's sake in order to receive full credit for participation.
- ***Northeastern CITI Training for Human Subjects Protection (5%):**
 - Follow this link and complete the training for Social and Behavioral Research Investigators: <https://research.northeastern.edu/hsrp/training/>
 - Due date: Week 3 (January 24th)
 - If your CITI certification is up-to-date, you have already completed this assignment. Just submit a copy of your certificate via Canvas.
- **Journal Club (15%):** Each student will select, circulate, and lead an in-depth discussion of one peer-reviewed journal article of their choice from their home discipline (see below for more details).
- **Group Project: 20%:** Students will work in small groups to develop a short, practice survey project in Qualtrics
 - ***Survey proposal: 5%**

- * The survey proposal is a short (no more than two pages) memo outlining what your survey will be about and why, motivated by the relevant academic literature
- * Due by Week 4 (January 31st) at the latest, but earlier is strongly encouraged so you can get your survey out sooner)
 - **Group Report: 15%:**
 - * The group report is a longer document (no more than ten pages) that builds on your survey proposal and outlines key preliminary findings
 - * Due Week 8 (February 28th)
- ***Referee Report: 10%:** Students will evaluate a paper they have read for their final research proposal from the perspective of an anonymous peer reviewer.
 - This assignment can be completed at any point after our class session on February 28th
- **Individual Research Proposal: 40% Total:** Students will outline a project in their own field of study in the format of a grant proposal.
 - ***Portfolio of Articles: 5%,** check-ins during Weeks 4, 6, and 8
 - * The portfolio check-ins can be as formal or informal as you want them to be. At a minimum, I'll ask that you provide a collection of peer-reviewed research that is potentially relevant to your final proposal. This can take the form of a .zip file with pdfs or a Word/PDF document with a bibliography (which might be easier if you plan on referencing books) that you build over the course of the semester. There is no minimum number of references that must be included, but you should be honest with yourself about your progress and I'll let you know if your portfolio looks thin. If you'd also like to meet to discuss your progress, bounce ideas around, or get directions for further reading as part of the check-in, shoot me an email or drop by office hours.
 - ***Draft Literature Review: 10%,** due March 28
 - **Conference-style presentation,** conducted over the final two class sessions: 10%
 - **Final Research Proposal,** 10-12 pages: 15%, due 8:50pm on April 25th

Table of due dates:

- January 24: CITI Training
- Week of January 30: Portfolio Check-in 1
- Week of February 13: Portfolio Check-in 2
- January 31: Survey proposal for group project
- Week of February 27: Portfolio Check-in 3
- February 28: Group report
- Any time after February 28: Referee report

- March 28: Draft Literature Review for Individual Project
- April 11/18: Conference presentations
- April 25 (8:50pm): Final Research Proposal

Readings

General Reading Guidelines

The general expectation is that you come to class ready to discuss the material for the week. However, as is the case in real world social science research, being able to discuss the material is not the same thing as having read every page of the material in full depth. Being able to read *efficiently* is an important skill. I will signal ahead of time if you need to pay particularly close attention to a specific reading. A guide for how to read a journal article in the social sciences is linked here (https://www.icpsr.umich.edu/files/instructors/How_to_Read_a_Journal_Article.pdf) and included on Canvas.

The assigned reading load for this course is intentionally light, especially later in the semester, because I expect you to do a non-trivial amount of self-directed reading as you build toward writing a successful final research proposal. Assigned readings may change *slightly* over the course of the semester. Any changes will be made with as much advance notice as I can provide and will be reflected on Canvas.

Required Text

There is one required textbook for the course: Social Research Methods (listed above), which should be available as a paperback for purchase or an e-book for rental. A copy of the paperback will be available at Snell Library for 3-hour checkout in case you are unable to purchase a copy.

Journal Club

In addition to readings that I assign, each student will be responsible for selecting, circulating, and leading an in-depth discussion of one academic journal article from their home discipline. I will organize sign-ups for weeks in which you will present during the first week of the semester, and will lead the first week so everyone has an idea of how it works. You will be responsible for circulating your selected reading on Canvas (I recommend using the Discussions feature) no later than the Wednesday before the class session in which we will be discussing it. During this discussion, you will explain why you selected the article you did (it doesn't have to be because you think the article is great) and its relevance/significance to your field of study before helping your peers evaluate its strengths and weaknesses. Aligning your journal article with the method(s) we will be covering in the given week is encouraged but not required, and you are welcome to consult with me ahead of time if you are unsure about whether a given article is a good fit.

Weekly Reading List

- Week 1 (January 10): Introduction - no assigned reading
- Week 2 (January 17): What is Social Research?
 - Karl Gustafsson and Linus Hagström, "What is the Point?," *European Political Science*, 2018
 - Eric W. Groenendyk, Erik O. Kimbrough, and Mark Pickup. "How Norms Shape the Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics." *American Journal of Political Science*, 2022
 - * This article will be the the first in our in-class journal club. I will explain why I selected this article and its relevance to the field of political science, followed by a group discussion of its relative strengths and weaknesses.
- Week 3 (January 24): Ways of Knowing
 - Judea Pearl and Dana MacKenzie, *The Book of Why*, 2018, Chapter 1: "The Ladder of Causation"
 - Stephen L. Morgan and Christopher Winship. *Counterfactuals and Causal Inference*, 2014, Ch 2.1- 2.4
 - Jake M. Hofman , Amit Sharma , and Duncan J. Watts, "Prediction and explanation in social systems," *Science*, 2021
 - Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 1973, pp. 3-30
- Week 4 (January 31): Operationalizing Concepts
 - Social Research Methods, Chapter 3
 - James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, 1998, pp. 22-33
 - Chris Tausanovitch and Christopher Warshaw, "Estimating Candidates' Political Orientation in a Polarized Congress" *Political Analysis*, 2017
 - NPR, "Painting By Numbers", Code Switch (podcast), October 2021
<https://www.npr.org/transcripts/1041510105>
- Week 5 (February 7): Quantitative Research and Questionnaires
 - Social Research Methods, Chapters 6 and 8
 - Paul P. Biemer, "Total Survey Error: Design, Implementation, and Evaluation." *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 2010
 - John Zaller and Stanley Feldman, "A Simple Theory of the Survey Response: Answering Questions versus Revealing Preferences." *American Political Science Review*, 1992
- Week 6 (February 14): Sampling
 - Social Research Methods, Chapter 4
 - Barbara Geddes, "How the Cases You Choose Affect the Answers You Get." *Political Analysis*, 1990

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- Jason Seawright and John Gerring: "Case Selection Techniques in Case Study Research: A Menu of Qualitative and Quantitative Options." *Political Research Quarterly*, 2008
 - Jason Radford, et al, "Evaluating the Generalizability of the COVID States Survey – A Large-Scale, Non-Probability Survey." Working paper. <https://osf.io/cwkg7>.
 - Week 7 (February 21): Qualitative Research / Interviews
 - Social Research Methods, Chapters 5 and 9
 - Annika Lillrank, "Managing the Interviewer Self" in *The SAGE Handbook of Interview Research: The Complexity of the Craft*, 2012
 - Cathie Jo Martin, "Crafting Interviews to Capture Cause and Effect," in *Interview Research in Political Science*, 2013
 - Kristin Luker, "Field (and Other) Methods)" in *Salsa Dancing Into the Social Sciences*, 2008
 - Week 8 (February 28): Reading and Writing for the Social Sciences
 - Raul Pacheco-Vega's Blog
 - * "How Many Sources Are Enough?" ([Link](#))
 - * "Forward Citation Tracing and Backwards Citation Tracing in Literature Reviews" ([Link](#))
 - Helen Sword, "Writing Higher Education Differently: A Manifesto on Style," *Studies in Higher Education*, 2009
 - Jon Green, Meredith Conroy, and Ciera Hammond. "Something to Run For: Stated Motives as Indicators of Candidate Emergence." Submission, reviews, and revision memo for *Political Behavior*
 - * Skim the paper enough so that you get the gist (don't worry about understanding it in depth unless you're intrinsically interested), but read the reviews and our revision memo a bit more carefully
 - March 7 - No Class (Spring Break)
 - Week 9 (March 14): Ethics
 - Social Research Methods, Chapter 2
 - Vanessa Williamson, "On the Ethics of Crowdsourced Research," *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 2016
 - Christopher T. Kenny, et al. "The use of differential privacy for census data and its impact on redistricting: The case of the 2020 U.S. Census." *Science Advances*, 2021
 - Alan S. Gerber, Donald P. Green, and Christopher W. Larimer. "Social Pressure and Voter Turnout: Evidence from a Large-Scale Field Experiment." *American Political Science Review*, 2008
 - Paul Musgrave, "Political Science Has Its Own Lab Leaks," *Foreign Policy*, July 2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/07/03/political-science-dangerous-lab-leaks/>

- Nurith Aizenman, "An Experiment Gives Cash Aid To The Poor. Is That Ethical?" NPR, September 2017, <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2017/09/13/542261863/cash-aid-changed-this-family-s-life-so-why-is-their-government-skeptical>
- Emily M. Bender, "On the dangers of stochastic parrots: Can language models be too big?", Alan Turing Institute, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N5c2X8vhfBE>
 - * **If you want to read the article this talk is about:** Emily M. Bender, Timnit Gebru, Angelina McMillan-Major, and Shmargaret Shmitchell, "On the Dangers of Stochastic Parrots: Can Language Models Be Too Big?" *FACCT '21: Proceedings of the 2021 ACM Conference on Fairness, Accountability, and Transparency*, March 2021
 - * **If you want to read about the professional fallout for one of this article's authors:** <https://www.wired.com/story/google-timnit-gebru-ai-what-really-happened/>
- Week 10 (March 21): Study Design and Reproducibility
 - Social Research Methods, Chapter 7
 - Andrew Gelman and Eric Loken, "The Garden of Forking Paths." Working paper, 2013
 - Norbert L. Kerr, "HARKing: Hypothesizing After the Results are Known," *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 1998
 - Courtney K. Soderberg, et al. "Initial evidence of research quality of registered reports compared with the standard publishing model," *Nature Human Behaviour*, 2021
- Week 11 (March 28): Deductive Research / Inferential Statistics
 - Social Research Methods, Chapter 14
 - David Broockman and Joshua Kalla, "Durably reducing transphobia: A field experiment on door-to-door canvassing," *Science*, 2016
 - Andrew Guess, "(Almost) Everything in Moderation: New Evidence on Americans' Online Media Diets," *American Journal of Political Science*, 2021
- Week 12 (April 4): Inductive Research
 - Social Research Methods, Chapter 13
 - Ashley Muddiman, Shannon McGregor, and Naomi Stroud, "(Re)Claiming Our Expertise: Parsing Large Text Corpora With Manually Validated and Organic Dictionaries," *Political Communication*, 2019
 - Justin Grimmer, "Appropriators not Position Takers: The Distorting Effects of Electoral Incentives on Congressional Representation," *American Journal of Political Science*, 2013
- Week 13 (April 11): Conference presentations - no assigned reading
- Week 14 (April 18): Conference presentations - no assigned reading
- April 25 - No Class (Exam week, Final Research Proposal due by the end of our scheduled exam period)

Course Policies

Attendance

You are generally expected to attend class when you can and let me know when you can't (you don't need to give any more reason than you want to). This class is primarily intended and designed for in-person instruction. However, a permanent Zoom link is available on Canvas for anyone who needs to attend virtually at any point. I do ask that you provide advance notice if something comes up and you'll need to attend virtually on a one-off basis – not because you need my permission, but because it will help me be cognizant of the hybrid format during class. If you need to *regularly* attend via Zoom please check in with me as soon as possible (this will be discouraged in most circumstances, but we'll do what we need to do).

Deadlines and Late Work

Assignment due dates for this class are set where they are for a reason, and you are generally expected to turn assignments in on time. However, things happen, and there may be good reasons why you need to move a deadline. These reasons can range from serious unexpected circumstances to simply having a lot of other work due at the same time. Extension requests will typically be granted in cases where a reasonable request is made with reasonable advance notice, or if there is a clear need to extend a deadline on short notice. Written assignments turned in after a deadline (original or extended) will be marked down one letter grade for every week they are late, with the exception of the final research proposal, which will be marked down one letter grade for every day it is late.

Class Discussions

Group discussions between students from a variety of personal, professional, and scholarly backgrounds are a core feature of this course. These discussions will operate under mutual respect with assumptions of good faith. This will be especially important as we engage with and evaluate work from a variety of academic disciplines and methodological approaches – including specific pieces of scholarship that we might feel we have learned more or less from. Of course it should go without saying, but expectations of mutual respect and assumptions of good faith are not licenses to engage in ableism, classism, homophobia, racism, sexism, transphobia, or any other exclusionary language that is inherently disrespectful.

Grading

If you feel that a grade you receive on an assignment does not reflect the quality of the work you submitted, you may email me to request either a clarification or a re-grade. The email must include, either in the body or as an attachment, a rationale for why the request is warranted. This means explicitly acknowledging and engaging with any substantive feedback you received, and if requesting a regrade, making a case (with reference to any provided grading criteria, such as a rubric) why the grade you received does not align with that substantive feedback.

Writing

Written work should be proofread for spelling and grammar, arguments should be supported by scholarly or otherwise reliable evidence, and all references *must* be appropriately cited (see below). *I do not care what citation format you use as long as you pick one and use it consistently.* If you haven't already, I strongly encourage you to familiarize yourself with a citation management tool – my personal recommendation would be Zotero because it's free and easily integrates with Microsoft Word and Google Docs – that will make this easier when you need to compile a bibliography. You are also welcome to consult myself or the University's writing center for general writing advice.

Academic Honesty

Academic dishonesty is when you present someone else's ideas as your own. Students are strongly encouraged to learn from one another through discussions both in and outside of class, so long as individual writing assignments reflect their own intellectual labor. This means that when you submit writing with your name on it and no one else's, you did the work that produced the document. All ideas and claims included in written work that are not your own should be appropriately cited.

Northeastern takes the issue of academic honesty very seriously. Any student who appears to violate the University's Academic Honesty and Integrity Policy (<http://www.osccr.neu.edu/policy.html>) may be referred to the University's Office of Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution. If a proven violation involves an exam or course assignment, the student shall receive a failing grade for the assignment, in addition to sanctions imposed by the Office of Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution. Individual faculty, with the support of the Department, can impose harsher penalties as they deem necessary.

Inclusion and Accommodation

As an academic community at Northeastern, we will actively support students from all backgrounds and identities. Please let me know if you have any difficulties integrating yourself or your perspectives into class discussions or groups.

If you have any physical, cognitive, or psychiatric needs that require accommodations for this course, please meet with me as soon as possible to discuss the appropriate steps I can take to make sure you have what you need to succeed. In addition, Northeastern University's Disability Resource Center is located at 20 Dodge Hall (phone: 617.373.2675; website: <http://www.northeastern.edu/drc>) and can assist you with managing any challenges that may affect your performance.

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972

The Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 protects individuals from sex or gender-based discrimination, including discrimination based on gender-identity, in educational programs and activities that receive federal financial assistance.

Northeastern's Title IX Policy prohibits Prohibited Offenses, which are defined as sexual harassment, sexual assault, relationship or domestic violence, and stalking. The Title IX Policy applies to the entire community – including all students, faculty, and staff – regardless of their sex or gender identity.

If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, confidential support and guidance can be found through University Health and Counseling Services staff and the Center for Spiritual Dialogue and Service clergy members. By law, those employees are not required to report allegations of sex or gender-based discrimination to the University.

Alleged violations can be reported non-confidentially to the Title IX Coordinator within The Office for Gender Equity and Compliance at: titleix@northeastern.edu and/or through NUPD (Emergency 617.373.3333; Non-Emergency 617.373.2121). Reporting Prohibited Offenses to NUPD does NOT commit the victim/affected party to future legal action.

Faculty members and instructors are considered "responsible employees" at Northeastern University, meaning they are required to report all allegations of sex or gender-based discrimination to the Title IX Coordinator. In case of an emergency, call 911. Please visit <http://www.northeastern.edu/titleix> for a complete list of reporting options and resources both on- and off-campus.