

Research Methods in Sociology

Sociology 2206B

Section 530
Winter, 2018

Brescia University College, at
Western University

Prof. E. Bell
Office: 213 Merici Wing

Office Hours:

Tuesdays 11:30 am - 12:30 pm

Thursdays 3:30 - 4:30 pm

Or by appointment:

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Classes:

Tuesdays 10:30 am - 11:30 am

Thursdays 9:30 am - 11:30 am

Room: BR 135

Course Description

This course provides an introduction to the research processes used by sociologists. The basic question to be addressed is: How is knowledge acquired in sociology and other social sciences, and how is it evaluated? We begin with a discussion of the leading research paradigms and their philosophical underpinnings, then move on to more specific topics such as causation, conceptualization, measurement, validity, reliability, research ethics, ethnography, qualitative interviewing, and sampling.

Textbook

Alan Bryman and Edward Bell

2016 *Social Research Methods: Fourth Canadian Edition*. Don Mills: Oxford University Press.

Brescia Competencies

Brescia courses are designed to develop students' competencies in a number of different areas (see <http://brescia.uwo.ca/academics/brescia-competencies/>). This course is designed to create a learning environment in which you will develop your competency in:

- 1) ***Critical thinking***, in particular how to think analytically about the world around you, and how to evaluate theoretical and empirical claims about the social world. An important aspect of developing this competency involves learning about how science differs from other ways of knowing. In this course we take a very broad view of science by comparing and contrasting the positivist, interpretive, and critical approaches to social science.

- 2) ***Inquiry and analysis***, which is related to critical thinking, and is the major focus of this course. Central to inquiry and analysis are: a) comprehending the notion of causation and how it may be established; b) appreciating the importance of conceptualization, operationalization, and measurement in social research; c) developing the ability to assess the reliability and validity of empirical data; and d) recognizing the need for sampling and gaining a working knowledge of sampling procedures.

Another important aspect of inquiry and analysis concerns the essential procedures used to collect sociological data, which will be examined in depth.

You will also gain experience with some practical activities related to inquiry and analysis, such as using library resources to locate scholarly books and articles.

- 3) ***Problem solving***. The first step in problem solving is identifying what the problem is. In social research, the identification of the problem to be solved often takes the form of posing a research question. The class discussions, in-class exercises and written assignment you will do will develop your ability to construct a sociological research question of some public significance, and provide a thorough explanation of how appropriate research methods could be used to answer it.

Various in-class activities and the work you will do outside the classroom will help you understand research reported in scholarly books and articles and in the media, and will put you in a better position to do your own research.

- 4) ***Communication***. You will have an opportunity to communicate, both in writing to the instructor and verbally to an audience of your peers, what your research question is and how it can be researched. In-class exercises will also foster your communication skills, both in a small-group context and with the class as a whole.

- 5) ***Self awareness and development***, and ***social awareness and engagement***. These competencies are enhanced by increasing your knowledge about the empirical world and how it may be researched and analyzed. To develop oneself and to become more socially aware and engaged, it helps to have some familiarity with social research methods so you can better understand certain aspects of yourself and society at large.
- 6) ***Valuing***, which involves the application of moral principles and ethical codes. An important part of developing this competency will centre on our discussion of how to conduct social research in an ethical manner. We will also consider the role of values in sociological research, and the issue of whether social justice should be a prime consideration in doing research.

Course Requirements*

- 1) An in-class test to be held on Thursday, February 15, 2018, worth 40% of the final grade.
- 2) A written assignment due in class on Tuesday, April 3, 2018, worth 20% of the final grade. A separate handout will be provided outlining what is required.
- 3) A registrar-scheduled exam to be held in the April exam period, worth 40% of the final grade. See posting for exact date.

*Notes:

- a) Normally, absences from examinations will be excused only on the basis of serious illness documented by a note from a physician. **In such cases, students are to contact the instructor before the exam is held**, if possible. Students will receive a score of zero for any unexcused absence from an examination. *The policies governing requests for academic accommodation applicable to this course are outlined in the Academic Policies and Regulations section, which appears at the end of this course outline.*
- b) It is possible to get a final grade ending in "9," e.g., 69%. Grades ending in "9" will not be "bumped up," e.g., a final grade of 69% will not be changed to 70%.

Classroom Etiquette

PLEASE:

Do not use computers in class *for any reason* except to take notes.

Do not send or read e-mails or text messages during class time.

Turn off cell phones and other electronic devices (putting them on vibrate is not allowed), and **place them out of sight**.

Refrain from speaking to a neighbour during class time, especially if someone (either the instructor or a fellow class member) is speaking to the class.

Topics to be Covered

Textbook Readings

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|---|---|
| 1) The nature of science, research, and theory a) Science vs. other ways of knowing b) Three approaches to social science: positivist, interpretive, critical | Guide to the Book (pp. x-xi); Introduction (pp. xxii-xxiv); Chapters 1, 9, 10 |
| 2) A general introduction to causation and research design | Chapter 2 |
| 3) Research ethics | Chapter 3 |
| 4) Conceptualization, operationalization and measurement: levels of measurement; reliability, validity | Chapter 4; Chapter 13 (pp.256-259 only) |
| 5) Survey research | Chapters 5, 6 |
| 6) Writing up social research, completing research projects | Chapters 17, 18 |

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| 7) Structured observation, other sources of data | Chapters 7, 8 |
| 8) Qualitative research: ethnography, qualitative interviewing | Chapter 11; Chapter 14 |
| 9) Sampling | Chapter 12 |
| 10) Merging quantitative and qualitative approaches | Chapter 15 |

Course Antirequisites and Prerequisite

Antirequisites: Social Work 2206A/B or the former 2205, Health Sciences 2801A/B or the former Health Sciences 2800.

Prerequisite: At least 60% in 1.0 from Sociology courses at the 1000 level or First Nations Studies 1020E or Women's Studies 1020E, or enrolment in Honors Specialization in Human Resource Management, or Honors Specialization in Public Administration, or Specialization in Public Administration.

2017-18 BRESCIA UNIVERSITY COLLEGE ACADEMIC POLICIES AND REGULATIONS

1. POLICY REGARDING MAKEUP EXAMS AND EXTENSIONS OF DEADLINES

When a student requests academic accommodation (e.g., extension of a deadline, a makeup exam) for work representing 10% or more of the student's overall grade in the course, it is the responsibility of the student to provide acceptable documentation to support a medical or compassionate claim. All such requests for academic accommodation **must** be made through an Academic Advisor and include supporting documentation. Academic accommodation for illness will be granted only if the documentation indicates that the onset, duration and severity of the illness are such that the student could not reasonably be expected to complete her academic responsibilities. Minor ailments typically treated by over-the-counter medications will not normally be accommodated. Documentation shall be submitted as soon as possible to the student's Academic Advisor indicating the period of illness and when the student should be able to resume academic responsibilities. Students must submit their

documentation along with a request for relief specifying the nature of the accommodation being requested no later than two business days after the date specified for resuming responsibilities. Appropriate academic accommodation will be determined by the Dean's Office in consultation with the student's instructor(s). Please note that personal commitments (e.g., vacation flight bookings, work schedule) which conflict with a scheduled test, exam or course requirement are **not** grounds for academic accommodation.

A UWO Student Medical Certificate (SMC) is **required** if a student is seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds. This documentation should be obtained at the time of the initial consultation with the physician/nurse practitioner or walk-in clinic. A SMC can be downloaded from:

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf. The student must request documentation sufficient to demonstrate that her ability to meet academic responsibilities was seriously affected. Please note that under University Senate regulations documentation stating simply that the student "was seen for a medical reason" or "was ill" is **not** adequate to support a request for academic accommodation.

Whenever possible, requests for academic accommodation should be initiated in advance of due dates, examination dates, etc. Students must follow up with their professors and Academic Advisor in a timely manner.

The full policy on requesting accommodation due to illness can be viewed at:

<http://westerncalendar.uwo.ca/2017/pg117.html>

2. ACADEMIC CONCERNS

If you feel that you have a medical or personal problem that is interfering with your work, contact your instructor and Academic Advisor as soon as possible. Problems may then be documented and possible arrangements to assist you can be discussed at the time of occurrence rather than on a retroactive basis. Retroactive requests for academic accommodation on medical or compassionate grounds may not be considered.

If you think that you are too far behind to catch up or that your work load is not manageable, you should consult an Academic Advisor. If you consider reducing your workload by dropping one or more courses, this must be done by the appropriate deadlines (refer to the Registrar's website, <http://brescia.uwo.ca/academics/registrar-services/> or the list of official dates <http://westerncalendar.uwo.ca/2017/pg7.html>). You should consult with the course instructor and the Academic Advisor who can help you consider alternatives to dropping one or more courses. *Note that dropping a course may affect OSAP eligibility and/or Entrance Scholarship eligibility.*

The Dean may refuse permission to write the final examination in a course if the student has failed to maintain satisfactory academic standing throughout the year or for too frequent absence from the class or laboratory (<http://westerncalendar.uwo.ca/2017/pg130.html>)

3. ABSENCES

Short Absences: If you miss a class due to a minor illness or other problems, check your course outline for information regarding attendance requirements and make sure you are not missing a test or assignment. Cover any readings and arrange to borrow notes from a classmate. Contact the course instructor if you have any questions.

Extended Absences: If you have an extended absence, you should contact the course instructor and an Academic Advisor. Your course instructor and Academic Advisor can discuss ways for you to catch up on missed work and arrange academic accommodations, if appropriate.

4. POLICY ON CHEATING & ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT

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.

Students are responsible for understanding the nature of and avoiding the occurrence of plagiarism and other academic offences. Students are urged to read the section on Scholastic Offences in the Academic Calendar. Note that such offences include plagiarism, cheating on an examination, submitting false or fraudulent assignments or credentials, impersonating a candidate, or submitting for credit in any course without the knowledge and approval of the instructor to whom it is submitted, any academic work for which credit has previously been obtained or is being sought in another course in the University or elsewhere. Students are advised to consult the section on Academic Misconduct in the Western Academic Calendar.

If you are in doubt about whether what you are doing is inappropriate or not, consult your instructor, the Student Services Centre, or the Registrar. A claim that "you didn't know it was wrong" is not accepted as an excuse.

The penalties for a student guilty of a scholastic offence (including plagiarism) include refusal of a passing grade in the assignment, refusal of a passing grade in the course, suspension from the University, and expulsion from the University.

Plagiarism:

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea or a passage from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offence (see Scholastic Offence Policy in the Western Academic Calendar).

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 (<http://www.turnitin.com>).

Computer-marked Tests/exams:

Computer-marked multiple-choice tests and/or exams may be subject to submission for similarity review by software that will check for unusual coincidences in answer patterns that may indicate cheating. Software currently in use to score computer-marked multiple-choice tests and exams performs a similarity review as part of standard exam analysis.

5. PROCEDURES FOR APPEALING ACADEMIC EVALUATIONS

All appeals of a grade must be directed first to the course instructor. If the student is not satisfied with the decision of the course instructor, a written appeal signed by the student must be sent to the Department Chair. If the response of the department is considered unsatisfactory to the student, she may then submit a signed, written appeal to the Office of the Dean. Only after receiving a final decision from the Dean may a student appeal to the Senate Review Board Academic. A Guide to Appeals is available from the Ombudsperson's Office, or you can consult an Academic Advisor. Students are advised to consult the section on Student Academic Appeals under Academic Rights and Responsibilities in the Western Academic Calendar (<http://westerncalendar.uwo.ca/2017/pg112.html>).

Note that final course marks are not official until the Academic Dean has reviewed and signed the final grade report for the course. If course marks deviate from acceptable and appropriate standards, the Academic Dean may require grades to be adjusted to align them with accepted grading practices (http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/exam/evaluation_undergrad.pdf and http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/exam/finalgrades.pdf).

6. PREREQUISITES

Unless you have either the prerequisites for a course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you will be removed from the 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 prerequisite(s).

7. SUPPORT

Support Services

The Brescia University College Registrar's website, with a link to Academic Advisors, is at <http://brescia.uwo.ca/academics/registrar-services/>. The website for the Student Development Centre at Western is <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/>.

Mental Health and Wellness

Students may experience a range of issues that can cause barriers to your learning, such as increased anxiety, feeling overwhelmed, feeling down or lost, difficulty concentrating and/or

lack of motivation. Services are available to assist you with addressing these and other concerns you may be experiencing. You can learn more about mental health and wellness at Brescia at <http://brescia.uwo.ca/life/mental-health-wellness/>. Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental_Health@Western <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

Sexual Violence

All members of the Brescia University College community have a right to work and study in an environment that is free from any form of sexual violence. Brescia University College recognizes that the prevention of, and response to, Sexual Violence is of particular importance in the university environment. Sexual Violence is strictly prohibited and unacceptable and will not be tolerated. Brescia is committed to preventing Sexual Violence and creating a safe space for anyone in the Brescia community who has experienced Sexual Violence.

If you or someone you know has experienced any form of Sexual Violence, you may access resources at <http://brescia.uwo.ca/life/sexual-violence/>.

Portions of this document were taken from the Academic Calendar, the Handbook of Academic and Scholarship Policy and the Academic Handbook of Senate Regulations. This document is a summary of relevant regulations and does not supersede the academic policies and regulations of the Senate of the University of Western Ontario.