

Introduction to Qualitative Methods in Sociology

SOC204H1S

Winter 2020; Mondays 4-6pm

Instructor: Professor Tahseen Shams
Office Hours: Tuesdays 3:30-4:30pm
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Class Location: WI1016 Wilson Hall – New College, 40 Wilcocks Street

Tutorials: TUT0101: Wednesdays, at 2-3pm, in Ramsay Wright Lab, Room 142
TUT0201: Wednesdays, at 3-4pm, in Wilson Hall, Room 523
TUT0301: Thursdays, at 11am-12pm, in Ramsay Wright Lab, Room 142

Teaching Assistants: Andrew Cooper (Email: cal.cooper@mail.utoronto.ca)
Emily Kim (Email: emilyj.kim@mail.utoronto.ca)
TA Office Hours are by appointment only.

Course Description

Why do people do what they do? How do social structures shape people's behaviour, experiences, and sense of selves? And, how, as sociologists, can we attempt to demystify and explain these numerous social phenomena unfolding all around us? Qualitative research methods are the tools sociologists use to come to a richer understanding of the fundamental dialectic that drives people's behaviour and social processes: that between macro, structural forces and human agency at the micro, day-to-day life. This course will introduce students to the wide range of qualitative methods sociology has to offer. We will begin the course with epistemological questions (How do we know what we know) and learn to ask good research questions ourselves. We will then walk through how these questions can be addressed systematically, ethically, and reflexively using qualitative tools. We will also try our hand at applying a few methods ourselves to unpack things that are taking place here in our very own natural laboratory: the city of Toronto.

Course Objectives

The main goal of this course is to prepare students with foundational introductory knowledge on qualitative research methods in sociology. By learning how these methods can be used to connect the minutiae of everyday life to larger societal patterns, students will learn to observe the social world around them more critically, think and write more reflexively, and ask engaging, sociological questions. Students will also gain some hands-on experience on how to apply qualitative tools and techniques. Students can apply the knowledge gained from this course to study social phenomena from any disciplinary orientations or topic of interest.

Prerequisite

All students must have taken the prerequisite (SOC101Y1, or a combination of SOC102H1+SOC103H1, SOC102H1+SOC150H1, SOC103H1+SOC150H1, or SOC100H1+SOC150H1 prior to enrolling in this class. Students without this prerequisite will be removed at any time discovered and without notice.

Required Textbook

(LB) Lune, Howard and Bruce L. Berg. 2017. *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*, Ninth Edition. New York: Pearson. (available for purchase at the UofT Bookstore)

Course Assignments and Evaluation

All Course Assignments	Points (100 in total)
Midterm Test	20
Final Test	25
Final Project Paper	35
Stepping-stone Submissions for Final Project	20

- 1) Midterm and Final Tests (45% of final grade): The in-class midterm and final tests will cover the readings, lectures, and other forms of media (like movies, images, music) discussed in class. The tests are non-cumulative, meaning that the final test will not include materials tested in the midterm.
- 2) Final Project Paper (35% of final grade): As a vibrant immigrant destination, Toronto's rich multicultural milieu offers a unique and exciting opportunity. One but needs to step outside their doorsteps and walk into one of Toronto's numerous ethnic restaurants to examine how processes of globalization, migration, race, religion etc. are changing the physical, cultural, and demographic make-up of the city, shaping what we eat, where we live, who we befriend, how we go to work, and even how we think of our identities.

For the final paper of the course, each student will select an ethnic restaurant—their “fieldsite”—and use participant observation and interviews to write a 5-8-page (double-spaced) research paper. Students will first formulate a research question on a topic related to food, ethnicity, and immigration based on a list of guiding questions/topics provided at the beginning of the semester on Quercus. Then, to pursue this question, students will visit their fieldsite twice throughout the course of the semester.

On their first visit, they will conduct participant observation, taking extensive “fieldnotes” that describe in detail everything they observe about the restaurant—the location and setting, how the space is organized, the food and presentation, the people at the location (such as, owners, managers, servers, and customers), how the people are dressed, how they are interacting with one other, how everyone is responding to the student's presence etc. These notes will form the first “dataset.” From this set of fieldnotes, students will identify 2-3 key themes related to their research question to collect more detailed information. Students can use the guiding interview questions as a reference to identify possible key topics.

On their second visit to the fieldsite, students will interview two adult individuals at the setting to collect as much information as they can about the key themes they identified from their first set of fieldnotes. Students will select 3-4 guiding questions from the list of topics they will be given on Quercus. They may slightly modify it based on their interests. However, all students must have their questions reviewed by the TA before approaching interviewees in the fieldsites. Each interview should range from 15 minutes to at most 25 minutes. The interviewees can be customers, owners, waiters and/or staff depending on what the student's research question warrants. You will need to ask for consent from your interviewees verbally and provide them with the participant information sheet. Students must not collect the actual names or any identifiable information of the participants

but assign random pseudonyms. If given consent, students will audio record the interviews. If consent is not given to audio record, students will jot down the responses in order to take extensive notes immediately after exiting the fieldsite. If conducting two interviews is not possible during one visit, students can visit the fieldsite as many additional times as needed. Students will “transcribe” these interviews, thus forming the second dataset.

Students will then analyze and “code” their two datasets to identify patterns and variations pertaining to their research question. Based on their analyzed data, students will write the final paper where they will provide the answers to their research question. The paper must directly draw examples from their fieldnotes as “evidence” to back-up their analyses.

To help students learn how to improve based on constructive feedback, the final paper submission is broken into two parts, each with a different deadline. By the first deadline, students are to submit the first draft of their paper. However, turning in the first draft is optional. This first draft submission is not graded. Students who turn in this optional first draft will receive meaningful, constructive feedback from myself and the TAs during open office hours. Based on the comments they have received, students will revise their first draft and write the final version of the paper, which they will turn in as their final submission. The students who choose not to take advantage of submitting the first draft and receiving feedback will turn in their final draft, which will be graded, on the day the final assignment is due.

Final Project Submissions	Points	Due Date
First draft of paper	No points; optional	March 13, Friday at 4pm
Final draft of paper	35	April 3, Friday at 4pm

- 3) Stepping-stone Submissions (20% of final grade): The stepping-stone assignments are designed to help you with the research and writing components for the final paper in one small step at a time. The stepping-stone deadlines are strict and must be followed in order to make continued progress on the research paper throughout the course. **Please be advised: the final paper for this course is not the kind of paper that can be constructed in a few days right before the submission deadline.** The tutorials will help you accomplish the stepping-stone assignments, which are as follows.

Stepping-stone Submissions	Points	Due Date
Crafting and operationalizing a research question	5	January 17, Friday at 4pm
Fieldnotes	5	February 7, Friday at 4pm
Transcribed Interviews	5	February 28, Friday at 4pm
Coding and analysis of fieldnotes	5	March 6, Friday at 4pm

Grades

Out of a total of 100 points, students will have to overall score the following to get the corresponding final grades.

90-100 = A+ 77-79 = B+ 67-69 = C+ 57-59 = D+
 85-89 = A 73-76 = B 63-66 = C 53-56 = D 49 or below = F
 80-84 = A- 70-72 = B- 60-62 = C- 50-52 = D-

Course Policies

1. Class Attendance: Attendance in lecture is mandatory. Students unable to attend class are responsible for obtaining notes on all material covered, including lecture material and course announcements.
2. Tutorials: Students are required to participate in one of the mandatory tutorials associated with this course: TUT0101, TUT0201, TUT0301. Tutorial sessions are designed to help you practice methodological skills and will prepare you for the course project. The tutorial schedule is included below.
3. Late Attendance for Tests: Because the test starts at the beginning of the class, if you arrive late you must turn in your test at the same time as other students do (this means you will **not** get extra time to compensate for the late arrival).
4. Make-Up Tests: Please read carefully! Students cannot make-up tests unless they missed the original date for reasons beyond their control (such as, illness, accidents, funerals). In these extraordinary circumstances, **the student must contact me within 2 days of the missed test** and submit proper VOI documentation, doctor's note (which MUST indicate start and anticipated end date of illness), or signed note from the college registrar. Students who have been approved by me to take make-up tests will do so by making an appointment with the TA. **The make-up test MUST be taken within that week, before the next lecture.** However, the questions for the make-up test may be different from those on the original date. **There will be no make-up for make-up tests.** Link to VOI documentation: <https://www.economics.utoronto.ca/munro5/Verification-of-Illness-or-Injury-form-2013.pdf>.

Make-Up Assignments: Please read carefully! Students cannot make-up for assignments or submit late papers unless they missed the original date for reasons beyond their control (such as, illness, accidents, funerals). In these extraordinary circumstances, **the student must contact me within 2 days of the missed deadline** and submit proper VOI documentation, doctor's note (which MUST indicate start and anticipated end date of illness), or signed note from the college registrar. **Students who have been approved by me to submit a late paper must do so within 2 days after receiving my permission.** Please note: I will not consider requests for extensions unless the situation is sudden, an emergency, or extraordinarily beyond control. There will be no make-up for make-up assignments. Link to VOI documentation: <https://www.economics.utoronto.ca/munro5/Verification-of-Illness-or-Injury-form-2013.pdf>.

5. How to Submit Course Assignments: Students are to submit their assignments online via Quercus **before the beginning of class (i.e., before 4pm)** on the days the assignments are due as per the class schedule below. **For each day the paper is late, 2 points will be deducted from the final score on the assignment. I will not accept late submissions without penalty** unless for extraordinary circumstances and without documentation as outlined above. **Grades will not be reweighed** to earlier or later assignments.
6. Remarking: If you feel that your assignments or tests were not properly evaluated, you may request a remark. But, all requests for re-grading the course assignments should be made to your TA within **one week** of the date when the assignments are returned to the class. A short essay that clearly states specific reasons to justify the request and backs up these reasons with evidence from your assignment must be submitted to your TA. No re-grading requests will be considered if the request is submitted more than one week after the assignments are returned to the class. **Note: compared to the original mark, a new grade can go up, be the same or go down.**

7. Communication: Please direct your emails and questions to the course TA. When emailing, please use your utoronto.ca address. The university tells faculty not to reply to emails that use Gmail, yahoo etc. or other web accounts. Please also include “SOC204” and a brief description in the subject line, so your email can be easily prioritized. Emails will typically be answered within 3 business days. Keep in mind that for simple questions, email is the preferred method of communication. However, for longer questions, students should attend office hours and/or schedule an appointment with the TA or the professor. Before emailing a routine question, please make sure the answer is not given in the syllabus. Please note that just as you would/should not email or greet your workplace boss as “Hey Boss” or “Hi There,” beginning with “Hi Prof” is not a good idea. I would most likely not respond to those emails.
8. Course Website: The course website on Quercus is available at <https://q.utoronto.ca/>. The site will contain the course syllabus, all handouts, links of interest and course announcements. Students are responsible for the content of all course materials.
9. Making Appointments: TA office hours are by appointment only. If you would like to meet with your TA to discuss assignment feedback, course content or concerns, please contact them with 24-hour notice (via email). TAs will not hold office hours unless notified of a student’s arrival.
10. Accessibility: If you require accommodations or have any accessibility concerns, please visit <http://studentlife.utoronto.ca/accessibility> as soon as possible.
11. Academic Integrity: Academic integrity is fundamental to learning and scholarship at the University of Toronto. Participating honestly, respectfully, responsibly, and fairly in this academic community ensures that the U of T degree that you earn will be valued as a true indication of your individual academic achievement, and will continue to receive the respect and recognition it deserves. Familiarize yourself with the University of Toronto’s *Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters* (<http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/policies/behaveac.htm>). It is the rulebook for academic behavior at the U of T, and you are expected to know the rules. Potential offences include, but are not limited to:

In papers and assignments:

 - Using someone else’s ideas or words without appropriate acknowledgement.
 - Copying material word-for-word from a source (including lecture and study group notes) and not placing the words within quotation marks.
 - Submitting your own work in more than one course without the permission of the instructor.
 - Making up sources or facts.
 - Including references to sources that you did not use.
 - Obtaining or providing unauthorized assistance on any assignment including:
 - Working in groups on assignments that are supposed to be individual work
 - Having someone rewrite or add material to your work while “editing”
 - Lending your work to a classmate who submits it as his/her own without your permission.

Misrepresentation:

 - Falsifying or altering any documentation required by the University, including doctor’s notes.
 - Falsifying institutional documents or grades.

The University of Toronto treats cases of academic misconduct very seriously. All suspected cases of academic dishonesty will be investigated following the procedures outlined in the *Code*. The consequences for academic misconduct can be severe, including a failure in the course and a notation on your transcript. If you have any questions about what is or is not permitted in this course, please do not hesitate to contact me. If you have questions about appropriate research and citation methods, seek out additional information available campus resources like the [U of T Writing Website](#). If you are experiencing personal challenges that are having an impact on your academic work, please seek the advice of your college registrar.

12. Plagiarism: Cheating and misrepresentation will not be tolerated. Students who commit an academic offence face serious penalties. Avoid plagiarism by citing properly: practices acceptable in high school may prove unacceptable in university. Know where you stand by reading the “Code of Behavior on Academic Matters” in the Calendar of the Faculty of Arts and Science.

Class Schedule

Week	Date	Topic	Readings	Tutorials	Assignment Due	
1	January 6	<i>Course overview</i>				
2	January 13	Epistemology and Asking Good Research Questions	LB Ch. 1	Yes	Research questions Due Friday, January 17th at 4pm	
3	January 20	Research Design and Ethics	LB Ch. 2 and 3	Yes		
4	January 27	Ethnography	LB Ch. 6	Yes		
5	February 3	Interviewing	LB Ch. 4	Yes	Fieldnotes Due Friday, February 7th at 4pm	
6	February 10	<i>In-Class Midterm Test</i>				
7	February 17	<i>Reading Week; No Class</i>				
8	February 24	Coding	LB Ch. 11	Yes	Transcribed interviews Due Friday, February 28th at 4pm	
9	March 2	Writing Research	LB Ch. 12	Yes	Coding and analysis of fieldnotes Due Friday, March 6th at 4pm	
10	March 9	Focus Groups	LB Ch. 5	Yes	First draft of paper <i>(optional)</i> Due Friday, March 13th at 4pm	
11	March 16	<i>Open office hours for final project</i>		<i>Yes (open office hours)</i>		
12	March 23	Historical Research	LB Ch. 9	Yes		
13	March 30	<i>In-Class Final Test</i>			Final Paper Due Friday, April 3rd at 4pm	