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SOSC 2140 Fall 2014 Research Methods in the Social Sciences - Syllabus

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SOSC 2140

Research Methods in the Social Sciences Fall 2014

Last modified: 4 September 2014

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 4:30pm-5:50pm

Room 1014, LSK Building

[Class schedule and quota](#)

[Class site at LMES](#)

This syllabus may be updated. The most up to date and authoritative syllabus will always be [available here](#).

INSTRUCTOR

Cameron Campbell

Academic Building 3387

Office Hours: Tuesdays 1pm-3pm, and by appointment

Email: camcam+2140@ust.hk

I have programmed my mailer to bring emails addressed to camcam+2140@ust.hk to my attention. Please send ALL class related email to that address, not to camcam@ust.hk.

Please also include your name as it appears in the roster and student ID in the subject line so that I can find your emails later.

Also, when you email me, please use the official UST email account that is connected to the ID associated with you on the roster. I will not respond to emails if I am unable to verify that the sender is in fact the person on the roster.

COURSE LEARNING OUTCOMES

This course provides an overview of research methods in the social sciences. It is intended to provide a foundation for an understanding of the major approaches in the social sciences to the collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data, and the specification and testing of theories. The course covers the logic of scientific inquiry and various research techniques such as experimentation, scientific sampling, survey research, field methods, archival data, and quantitative analysis that are commonly used by researchers in economics, education, political science, psychology, and sociology.

- Understand:
 - The relationship between theory, hypothesis, data collection, and analysis in the pursuit of social science knowledge.
 - How the focus on the production of generalizable knowledge distinguishes social science from the humanities.
 - How the capacity for autonomous, deliberate behavior on the part of individuals, families, and the other social units that are the objects of study is the key challenge to social science research, and the most important distinction between social science research and life and natural science research.
 - The respective strengths and limitations of quantitative and qualitative approaches to social science research.
 - The importance of the choice of level of analysis in social science research, and the risks associated with generalizing from relationships at a higher level to relationships at a lower level (the ecological fallacy)
 - The basic features of an experimental design, and the distinction between an experiment and an observational study.
 - The criteria for claiming that an observed relationship is causal.
 - The ethical issues that commonly arise in the course of conducting social science research.
 - How selection bias can affect the composition of a sample, and the conclusions drawn from the analysis
- Learn about:
 - The differences between the major social science disciplines, including sociology, economics, anthropology, and political science.
 - The most common methodologies for social science research, most notably ethnography, questionnaire-based surveys, analysis of secondary and administrative data, and archival research.
 - Sampling and questionnaire design for survey research
 - Principles for case or site selection in ethnographic or archival research
 - Major sources of publicly accessible data for use in quantitative analysis
 - Commonly used techniques for assessing whether observed relationships reflect causal influences

- Basic techniques for approximating an experimental design with analysis of observational data, including natural experiments, instrumental variables, and the inclusion of control variables.
- Become critical consumers of published social science research findings, able to assess whether claims are supported by the evidence, especially the data and methods used in the analysis.
- Identify methods and data most useful in the future pursuit of research on a specific topic

This is not a course in statistics or quantitative methods. There will not be any instruction or exercises in statistics, quantitative methodology, or relevant software.

TEXTBOOK

Babbie, Earl. *The Practice of Social Research with CourseMate 13th Edition*. Cengage Learning. Note that several of the chapters are only available electronically. Please follow the instructions in your text to access the ebook.

Or

Babbie, Earl. *The Practice of Social Research, International Edition 13e*. Cengage Learning. (*May still be available in the bookstore, and will work just as well.*)

ASSESSMENT

The grade will be calculated as follows:

- Questionnaire design - 25%
- Final project - 25%
- Final exam – 20%
- Lecture participation, via PRS - 10%.
- Assignments- 10%
- Tutorial attendance - 5%
- Tutorial discussion participation - 5%

QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN Saturday, November 8, 2014, at midnight via TurnItin

- Draft, test, and then revise a short questionnaire designed to elicit information about a social science topic in which you are interested. The design of the questionnaire should reflect key points in relevant chapters in the textbook. The questionnaire should include 10-12 distinct items related to your topic of interest, plus whatever standard items you deem necessary to collect basic background information about your respondents.
- The accompanying write-up should be roughly 1000 words, equivalent to two single-spaced pages. You will turn in the draft questionnaire and the revised questionnaire, along with a written discussion that 1) introduces the topic in which you are interested,

2) specifies how the initial draft of the questionnaire is intended to address that topic, including the logic for including specific questions, 3) suggests a sampling strategy that you would use to recruit participants in the 'real world', if you were to actually use the questionnaire as the basis for a larger survey and 4) describes your experiences testing the questionnaire and modifying it, focusing on problems identified in the test and how they were resolved in the final version.

- The draft and final versions should include all key elements of a survey questionnaire, including an introduction to the research project, instructions to participants, and a clear statement reminding participants that completion of the survey is entirely voluntary and that they are free to decline to answer any or all of the questions.
- The questionnaire should also include common elements of survey questionnaires such as skip patterns, and a mixture of question types, such as examples of indexes, scales, and so forth.
- Please do not ask any sensitive questions since you do most likely not have the means to properly secure the data you collect and provide participants with a guarantee of confidentiality. The procedures for properly securing data from responses are beyond the scope of the class.
- You should examine responses only to assess how well an item on the questionnaire is working, and you do not need to carry out any systematic analysis of the data you collect.
- Once you have the information you need to revise your questionnaire and prepare the final version, destroy all the data you have collected. Moreover, participants during the test should be instructed that if they consider any item on the questionnaire sensitive, they should not answer, and instead indicate in the feedback that they consider the question sensitive.
- To test the questionnaire, recruit classmates or friends here at HKUST. If you approach anyone outside HKUST, they should be people you already know well, and you must explain that you are simply testing the questionnaire and will not keep the responses. Do not approach strangers.
- You may do administer the questions orally, asking your classmates to fill in a form with the questions you have provided, or creating an online survey using Google Drive Forms, SurveyMonkey, Zoomerang, or another site and distributing a link in a discussion thread I will create at the LMES.
- Participants must be instructed that they are free to refuse to answer one or all of your questions. Please do not test the questionnaire on anyone outside of class. You may show the questionnaire to people outside of class and ask for feedback, but do not collect any data from them.
- When testing, make sure to solicit feedback on the questionnaire design. If you administer the survey online, make sure to leave space for participants to enter comments.
- Based on the input you receive, and any other problems you note during the test, you should prepare the revised, final version of the questionnaire.
- If you have asked your classmates to fill in a form, leave the form with them after you have gone over it and received their feedback.
- You may work in teams of up to three. If you work in a team, the length of the questionnaire and the write-up should be scaled to reflect the size of the team. For a three person team, for example, I would expect a questionnaire with 30-36 distinct items. The writeup should also be scaled accordingly.

FINAL PROJECT Due via Turnitin, Saturday, December 6, 2014 at midnight

Select two or more research articles that are all related to a single social science topic in which you have a personal interest, but which make use of different methodologies. At least one of the articles should make use of qualitative methods and evidence, and at least one should be quantitative. Write a 1500 word paper that summarizes, contrasts, and critiques the articles. The paper should demonstrate your understanding of the material covered in class.

- The summary should be about 500 words. Focus on the theory, hypotheses (if any), the data and the methods, and the conclusions.
- The contrast should be about 500 words. What are the key differences between the articles in terms of data and method, and how do these differences affect the conclusions?
- The critique should also be about 500 words. What problems do you identify with the papers? What do you suggest as a better study?

FINAL EXAM

The final exam will be in-class. The date, time and location will be announced later, once set by the ARRO. It will be multiple choice or short answer. It will be open book and open note. Electronic devices may be used to read class-related materials, but must be in airplane mode, i.e. no connectivity.

LECTURE ATTENDANCE/PARTICIPATION VIA PRS

We will use the PRS to take attendance, conduct surveys, and possibly administer quizzes. We will begin using the PRS in the 2nd week. You are responsible for obtaining a PRS, remembering to bring it to each class, and making sure that the batteries have sufficient charge. You will not get credit for lectures if you forget to bring your PRS or the battery is dead, even if you come talk to me after lecture.

ASSIGNMENTS

Over the course of the semester, there will be short assignments intended to help illustrate key points from lecture, facilitate your progress on the major assignments, or encourage you to prepare for tutorials. These will normally be only be one or two paragraphs each and will be designed so that they can be completed quickly.

TUTORIAL ATTENDANCE

Tutorials are an important part of the class. The TA will take attendance via a sign-in.

TUTORIAL DISCUSSION PARTICIPATION

The TA will assess your participation and assign a grade for that as well.

GRADING RUBRIC

All written work will be graded on a scale of 1-5:

1. Substantially incomplete. Many or most elements specifically requested in the prompt are missing. This roughly corresponds to an F.
2. Partially incomplete. Some of the elements specifically requested in the prompt are missing, or the content suggests substantial misunderstanding of many or most key concepts. This roughly corresponds to a D.
3. Adequate. The written work reflects a serious attempt to respond to the prompt, and all requested elements are present. This roughly corresponds to a C.
4. Good. Not only are all requested elements present, but the content clearly reflects understanding of key concepts, and there is some effort at independent, creative thinking. This roughly corresponds to a B.
5. Excellent. The content reflects mastery of all important concepts, and includes substantive evidence of independent, creative thinking. This roughly corresponds to an A. This will be given out only rarely.

- Grading will focus primarily on content.
- I recognize that for many students, English is a second language. We may flag problems with writing but normally this will not affect the grade, unless problems are so severe that they make it difficult to understand the written work.
- Written work will be submitted via TurnItIn.
- Late assignments will be penalized 1 for every week they are late. Thus an essay that would have scored a 5 but which was turned in up to one week after the due date would receive a 4. If it was turned in up to two weeks after the due date, it would receive a 3.
- I will provide instructions for TurnItIn once the semester starts. You may upload your file at the TurnItIn page, or copy and paste it to a window at the TurnItIn page.
- Remember to save your work frequently. Software and hardware problems that cause your work to vanish after you have completed it but before you have had a chance to send it are not acceptable as excuses for turning in late work.
- If TurnItIn is inaccessible at the time you are trying to upload your assignment, email a copy of your essay to me before the deadline so that I have a record that you completed it on time, and submit to TurnItIn as soon as possible after it is accessible again. We will only grade essays submitted via TurnItIn. We will not grade emailed essays. We will use them only as proof that the essay was completed by the due date. An emailed essay that is not eventually uploaded to TurnItIn will not be graded.
- Problems with the recording of scores must be brought to our attention within one week of the grade being posted. It is your responsibility to confirm that scores posted to the LMES are correct.
- Similarly, any questions about grading must be raised within one week of the time the score is posted. Once a grade has been posted for one week, we will consider it final.
- In assigning final grades, I generally refer to the University' [historical experience with grade distributions](#).

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

The work you submit must be your own. Unattributed use of the work of others is plagiarism, and is not acceptable. If you do feel the need to include text from another source, set it off in quotes and include a proper citation. If you have any questions about how to attribute sources, how to use quotations, etc., ASK! Do not put yourself in jeopardy by submitting an essay that includes material that appears to be plagiarized. Keep in mind that I have complete files of every essay submitted in this class since I began teaching it and electronically compare essays with those submitted in previous years.

The Office of the Provost offers resources to help you avoid plagiarism and copying. Please read all of the materials here: <http://www.ust.hk/provost/integrity/student-1.html>

Here are a variety of additional resources that should help clarify what constitutes plagiarism, and how to avoid it: <http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/wts/plagiarism.html>
<http://www.hamilton.edu/academics/resource/wc/usingsources.html>
http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/r_plagiar.html
<http://sja.ucdavis.edu/avoid.htm>

If you discuss the assignments with other students, or otherwise work together, be mindful of the boundary between collaboration and academic dishonesty. I certainly encourage you to discuss the homework with each other, but the work you turn in must be your own, and reflect that you completed the assignment on your own. Paraphrase instead of quoting. By successfully paraphrasing, you demonstrate your understanding of the material. By providing quotations, you just demonstrate that you can type. If your essay has too many quotations, it will be penalized.

If you make a claim or assertion that is not clearly based on material from lecture or the reading, and the validity of it is not self-evident, you must provide evidence to back it up, in the form of a citation or a brief argument. If you can't do that, you at least must clarify that what you are saying represents a personal opinion by prefacing the claim with "I believe that..." or something equivalent.

SCHEDULE AND READINGS

Week 1 – 9/2, 9/4

Overview of Course

Human Inquiry and Science

Babbie, Chapter 1

Tutorials - 9/1

Self-introductions

Week 2 – 9/11

Paradigms, theory and social research

How does social science differ from humanities or journalism?

Babbie, Chapter 2

Week 3 – 9/16, 9/18

Ethics and Politics of Social Research

Informed consent, confidentiality/data security, deception, intervention studies

Social science research and advocacy

Publication bias

Babbie, Chapter 3

Week 4 – 9/23, 9/25

Research design

Units of analysis and the ecological fallacy

Babbie, Chapter 4

Week 5 – 9/30

Sampling Logic

Babbie, Chapter 7

Week 6 - 10/7, 10/9

Survey Research

Babbie, Chapter 9

Week 7 – 10/14, 10/16

Conceptualization, operationalization, and measurement

Babbie, Chapter 5

Tutorials – 10/13

Discuss ideas for questionnaires

Week 8 – 10/21, 10/23

Indexes, scales, typologies

Babbie, Chapter 6

Tutorials – 10/20

Go over examples of questionnaires

Week 9 – 10/28, 10/30

Experiments and Experimentation

Babbie, Chapter 8

Week 10 – 11/4, 11/6

Analyzing Quantitative Data

Babbie, Chapters 14, 15

Reminder: Questionnaire assignment due 11/8 via Turnitin, at midnight

Tutorials – 11/3

Discuss questionnaires

Week 11 – 11/11, 11/13

Analyzing Quantitative Data, continued

Babbie, Chapters 14, 15

Tutorials – 11/10

Discuss ideas for final project

Week 12 – 11/18, 11/20

Unobtrusive Research

Evaluation Research: Types, Methods, and Issues

Comparative and Historical Research

Babbie, Chapters 11, 12

Week 13 – 11/25, 11/27

Paradigms, Methods, and Ethics of Qualitative Field Research

Analyzing Qualitative Data

Ch. 11, Ch. 13

Tutorials – 11/24

Review for final