SOSC 5110 Social Science Research Design and Methods Fall 2014

Last modified: 21 August 2014

Tuesdays, 6:30pm-8:20pm

Academic Building 2302, Lifts 17-18

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+5110@ust.hk

I have programmed my mailer to bring emails addressed to camcam+5110@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 offers a broad overview of principles of social science research design and methods. It is intended to provide an understanding of the major approaches in social science to research design, 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. Through this survey, the course is intended to help new postgraduate students translate their general interests into a well-defined research topic. Students will also identify the substance and methods they will need to learn in order to pursue research. Students are encouraged to use the final project to refine their plans for their MPhil thesis, or to develop plans to be pursued in their PhD research.

- Understand:
  - The relationship between theory, hypothesis, data collection, and analysis.
  - The key methodological challenges to social science research, and why social science requires fundamentally different methodologies from the life and natural sciences and the humanities.
  - The respective strengths and limitations of quantitative and qualitative approaches to social science research.
  - The importance of the choice of unit 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 systematic instruction or exercises in statistics, quantitative methodology, or relevant software.

TEXTBOOK


Note that several of the chapters are only available electronically. Please follow the instructions in your text to access the ebook.

Or


ASSESSMENT

The grade will be calculated as follows:

- Article review - 30%
- Research proposal – written - 25%
- Research proposal presentation - 5%
- Final exam – 15%
- Lecture participation, via PRS - 5%
- Assignments- 10%
- Tutorial attendance - 5%
- Tutorial discussion participation - 5%

ARTICLE REVIEW Saturday, November 8, 2014, at midnight via TurnItin

Select three or more research articles published in major journals that are all related to a specific social science topic in which you have a personal interest, but which make use of different methodologies. Later in the semester I will provide a list of the journals that you can choose from. If you want to review an article from another journal, you will need my permission. At least one of the articles should make use of qualitative methods and evidence, and at least one should be quantitative. Write a 2000 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 750 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 750 words. What problems do you identify with the papers? What do you suggest as a better study?

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

The final project will be due Friday, December 6, via Turnitin. This is one week after the end of class. For your final project, you will write a research proposal. The proposal should reflect what you have learned in class about social science research design. The proposal should be for research that could be carried out assuming available of adequate funding. It should not be trivial. Nor should it be impossible, implausible, or require infinite resources. The object should be generalizable social science knowledge. Case studies, whether of specific places, firms, organizations, or other entities, are only acceptable insofar as the goal is generalizable knowledge. Thus, for example, marketing studies, or highly focused opinion studies are not acceptable. You may work in teams of up to 3. It is fine to work alone, or in pairs, if that is what you prefer. We will ask you to identify your teammates at some point in the middle of the semester. The proposal is intended to resemble an actual research proposal as much as possible. It should include the following elements:

Abstract

In 400 words, provide an overview of the project, with key information from elements 1-6 in the proposal text below.

Proposal text

1. Significance and likely contribution. What is the larger question to which this research will contribute, and how will this research make a difference?
2. Background. What is the current understanding of this topic. Make sure to demonstrate knowledge of relevant literature, and identify limitations of existing studies.
3. Hypothesis. What specific question do you seek to address? What theory do you seek to test
4. Methodology. Provide an overview of the proposed research, including specification of the research design. Survey? Experiment? Analysis of archival or administrative data? Analysis of existing data? Qualitative analysis?
5. Data collection. Provide details on the data collection process, including site, time frame, target population, procedures for sampling/randomization/obtaining access. Also specify what data are to be collected.
6. Analysis. How do you plan to analyze the data? What outcomes would be consistent with confirming or refuting the hypothesis in 3?
7. References
8. Budget

Parts 1-6 should be 15 double-spaced pages. Use 11 point fonts, and leave 1" margins. Since most funding agencies are strict about page limits for proposals, I will also be strict. 7 and 8 do not count towards the page limit. Tables and figures do count toward the limit, so use them judiciously.

You will present your proposals in Tutorials in the last week of class. I expect the final versions that you submit to reflect input you receive from your classmates.

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 PRIS, 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.

ASSIGMENTS

Over the course of the semester, there will be very 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 in tutorials 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’s 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**

Overview of Course

Human Inquiry and Science

Babbie, Chapter 1

*Tutorials*

Self-introductions

**Week 2 – 9/11**

Paradigms, theory and social research

How does social science differ from humanities or journalism?
Babbie, Chapter 2

*Tutorials*

Academic publication. What are journals? How are papers submitted, reviewed, revised, and published?

**Week 3 – 9/16**

Ethics and Politics of Social Research

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

Authorship, peer review, research funding Social science research and advocacy

Publication bias

Babbie, Chapter 3

*Tutorials*

Library orientation. Tuesday tutorials will be held in the E-Learning Classroom B. Thursday tutorials will be held in the E-Learning Classroom A.

**Week 4 – 9/23**

Research design

Units of analysis and the ecological fallacy

Babbie, Chapter 4

*Tutorials*

Ethical issues

Is deception ever justified?

What are the risks to subjects of participating in a social science research study?

Balancing the commitment to rigor and objectivity in research with the desire to advocate a point of view.

**Week 5 – 9/30**

Sampling Logic
Babbie, Chapter 7

_Tutorials_

Choosing a unit of analysis.

**Week 6 - 10/7**

Survey Research

Babbie, Chapter 9

_Tutorials_

Ideas for questionnaire topics, including target audiences

**Week 7 – 10/14**

Conceptualization, operationalization, and measurement

Babbie, Chapter 5

_Tutorials_

Examples of questionnaires

**Week 8 – 10/21**

Indexes, scales, typologies

Babbie, Chapter 6

_Tutorials_

TBA

**Week 9 – 10/28**

Experiments and Experimentation

Babbie, Chapter 8

_Tutorials_

Discussion of article review
Week 10 – 11/4

Analyzing Quantitative Data

Babbie, Chapters 14, 15

Reminder: Article review due 11/8 via Turnitin, at midnight

Tutorials

Discussion of topics and articles to be used in the final project.

Week 11 – 11/11

Analyzing Quantitative Data, continued

Babbie, Chapters 14, 15

Tutorials

Major sources of secondary and administrative data

Week 12 – 11/18

Unobtrusive Research

Evaluation Research: Types, Methods, and Issues

Comparative and Historical Research

Babbie, Chapters 11, 12

Tutorials

Discussion of final project

Week 13 – 11/25

Paradigms, Methods, and Ethics of Qualitative Field Research

Analyzing Qualitative Data

Ch. 11, Ch. 13

Tutorials
Presentations of final project