



Course Description & Learning Outcomes

How do we measure racism, pay inequality, or health disparities? What is social science research, and how and why do we conduct it? What are the ethical considerations of studying real people in social settings? How do we know if research is valid? In this course, we'll become familiar with common sociological research methods and methodological debates. Our focus will be on introducing concepts and dipping our toes into applied research through hands-on projects. My goal is that you'll leave this course with a solid foundation in basic research methodology and familiarity with common sociological methods.

After successfully completing this course you will be able to:

- Identify ethical considerations of engaging in social science research (*assessed by Research Ethics Paper*).
- Describe the benefits and limitations of various sociological research methods, including original surveys, secondary data analysis, experimental designs, interviews, and ethnographies (*assessed by in-class participation assignments; Media Assessment Podcast; Applied Research Experiences*).
- Critique sociological research methodology by reading and assessing empirical examples (*assessed by in-class participation assignments; Media Assessment Podcast*).
- Use sociological theories to develop a research question, propose a plan for analysis to answer that question, and conduct a pilot version of the study (*assessed by Applied Research Experiences; Group Research Project*).

Required Texts and Materials

There is one primary book for this class. It is available at the campus bookstore, online, and may be borrowed for free through the campus library. *Please see me as soon as possible if obtaining the book for this course is a challenge for you.*



Dixon, Jeffrey C., Royce A. Singleton, Jr., and Bruce C. Straits. 2018. *The Process of Social Research*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2nd Edition.

Additional book excerpts and articles will be posted on our course website:

elms.umd.edu

Brittany N. Dernberger

bdernber@terpmail.umd.edu

Class Meets

Tuesdays & Thursdays

10:00am – 11:15am

BLD #1234

Office Hours

BLD #5678

Tues & Thurs 2:00-4:00pm

and by appointment

Prerequisites

Introduction to Sociology

Course Communication

I will frequently communicate with the class via ELMS; please be sure to check this regularly.

E-mail is the best way to contact me. During the week, I will make every effort to respond to your e-mail within 24-48 hours. I may not respond to e-mail over the weekend.

Please keep in mind that e-mail should be viewed as professional communication. For guidance and tips, visit ter.ps/email.

Campus Policies

It is our shared responsibility to know and abide by the University of Maryland's policies that relate to all courses, which include topics like:

- Academic integrity
- Student and instructor conduct
- Accessibility and accommodations
- Attendance and excused absences
- Grades and appeals
- Copyright and intellectual property

Please visit www.ugst.umd.edu/courserelatedpolicies.html for the Office of Undergraduate Studies' full list of campus-wide policies and follow up with me if you have questions.

Activities, Learning Assessments, & Expectations for Students

Final grades will be based on the following components:

- Preparation, Participation, and Engagement (20%)
- Research Ethics Paper (15%)
- Media Assessment Podcast (15%)
- Applied Research Experiences (20%)
- Group Research Project (30%)

Preparation, Participation, and Engagement (20%). This course includes many in-class activities that allow us to experience hands-on aspects of the research process. Therefore, it is important that you prepare for class, attend, and actively engage during our class time. Some in-class assignments will be collected and others will not. Inappropriate use of technology or electronic devices, being disrespectful to your peers, and other disruptive behaviors will negatively affect your participation grade.

- A level participants are **consistently** prepared and knowledgeable. They have their materials handy and are able to refer to specifics in their materials during class. They contribute to the ongoing discussion by responding thoughtfully to others and/or by asking questions that help build useful group understanding. They are active leaders and listeners in small group discussion. They abide by the attendance policy. If this person were not a member of the class, the quality of the discussion would diminish.
- B level participants **mostly** meet the above criteria.
- C level participants **occasionally** meet the above criteria.
- D level participants **rarely** meet the above criteria.
- F level participants **fail** to meet the above criteria.

More details about attendance and engagement are on page 3.

Research Ethics Paper (15%). Research standards in Sociology continue to evolve. Some prior studies, in retrospect, do not maintain the ethical standards that we expect scholars to follow today. While the findings of these studies may be beneficial to the field, it is important as critical consumers of sociological research to be very thoughtful about weighing the value against the potential harm of research. In this assignment, you will have the chance to further explore one of these controversies by selecting an example of a controversial sociological study conducted in the past 20 years. I will provide options, or you can find one of your own. Describe why the study was controversial, the relevant ethical research principles, and how open science practices may have helped or further hurt the study. We will workshop a rough draft of the essays via peer feedback prior to the final due date.

Media Assessment Podcast (15%). In this project, you will work in pairs to find an example from the media (newspaper, TV, etc.) that makes a social scientific claim and assess it. As consumers of information and media resources, it is crucial that as sociologists familiar with research theories and methods, we learn how to determine

the validity behind common claim. Is the claim backed by adequate evidence? How would a reasonable person know whether the statement is scientifically sound? You will put together a one-page fact sheet and accompanying 3-to-5 minute podcast that debunks and/or confirms the social scientific claim. *See assignment details on page 9.*

Applied Research Experiences (20%). One of the best ways to master research methodology is to try it yourself. To get in the practice of conducting research, you will complete four experiential mini-projects over the course of the semester. While some class time will be dedicated to these activities, you will also need to dedicate active time outside of class to complete the four projects. *For more information about these four experiential mini-projects, see page 10.*

Research Project (30%). Working in a group, you will use sociological theories to develop a research question, propose a plan for analysis to answer that question, and conduct a pilot version of the study. The final product will be a brief research report. At the end of the semester, your group will present your research findings to the class., *See page 11 for more details about this project.*

Note: *assignment guidelines that are typically distributed separately throughout the semester are included at the end of the syllabus for reference.*

Attendance is crucial for your success in this class. Attendance will be taken every class period. There are times when absences are unavoidable; you are permitted two absences without penalty. After two absences and for every absence thereafter, your participation grade will be lowered by one percentage point. Special cases will be handled on a case-by-case basis. If such circumstances arise, please inform me as soon as possible and provide documentation.

I suggest you find a “class buddy” and exchange contact information in order to ask for updates and notes for a missed class period. If you are absent from class, please contact a classmate first to obtain the information you missed and then contact me if you have further questions about course material.

On the first day of class, we’ll make some time for introductions.

Classmate name: _____

Contact information: _____

Engagement. Please come to class prepared with notes, ideas, and questions to discuss. This class will largely be discussion and activity-based. Therefore, it is essential that we all complete the readings before class begins and you’re prepared to share your ideas with your peers. We will use Discussion Board on ELMS as an additional tool for the class to share relevant articles, news events related to the course, etc.

Classroom Community. During class discussions, we want to create a safe space in which individuals can ask questions and express ideas without fear of judgment from others. Our classroom community depends on the consistent presence and thoughtful engagement of all members. As members of this community, it is imperative that we listen empathically to one another, that we articulate our disagreements thoughtfully and respectfully, and that we remain committed to critical comprehension of all ideas and materials. An inclusive and open classroom community is the work of all of us; please do your part to address topics with sensitivity and maturity to ensure a productive discussion within this safe space. We will establish our class ground rules for our learning community during the first week of class and they will be added as an addendum to the syllabus.

Course-Specific Policies

Technology: Laptops are welcome for the purposes of note taking, research on topics under discussion, and/or review of course material. Please refrain from accessing personal e-mail, social media, or other non-course-related items during class time. Use of cell phones, iPads, laptops, etc. during class for non-course related purposes will negatively impact your participation grade.

I expect you to make the responsible and respectful decision to refrain from using your cellphone in class. If you have critical communication to attend to, please excuse yourself and return when you are ready.

Late Work Policy: In general, late work will not be accepted. Preparation, Participation, and Engagement assignments will not be accepted late unless prior arrangements have been made. Other assignments received after the due date will be reduced a partial letter grade (i.e. B+ → B) for each day that it is late.

Assignment Submission and Formatting: Unless otherwise noted, your work will be submitted via ELMS prior to class starting. Assignments must be submitted on ELMS as a Microsoft Word document (not Pages or PDF). E-mail submissions will not be accepted.

Get Some Help!

Taking ownership for your own learning means acknowledging when your performance does not match your goals and doing something about it. I hope you will come talk to me so that I can help you find the right approach to success in this course, and I encourage you to visit tutoring.umd.edu to learn more about the wide range of campus resources available to you. In particular, everyone can use some help sharpen their communication skills (and improving their grade) by visiting ter.ps/writing and schedule an appointment with the campus Writing Center. You should also know there are a wide range of resources to support you with whatever you might need (see go.umd.edu/assistance), and if you just need someone to talk to, visit counseling.umd.edu or [one of the many other resources on campus](#).



Most services free because you have already paid for it, and **everyone needs help**... all you have to do is ask for it.

Basic Needs Security

If you have difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat every day, or lack a safe and stable place to live and believe this may affect your performance in this course, please visit go.umd.edu/basic-needs for information about resources the campus offers you and let me know if I can help in any way.

Names/Pronouns and Self Identifications

The University of Maryland recognizes the importance of a diverse student body, and we are committed to fostering inclusive and equitable classroom environments. I invite you, if you wish, to tell us how you want to be referred to both in terms of your name and your pronouns (he/him, she/her, they/them, etc.). The pronouns someone indicates are not necessarily indicative of their gender identity. Visit trans.umd.edu to learn more.

Additionally, how you identify in terms of your gender, race, class, sexuality, religion, and dis/ability, among all aspects of your identity, is your choice whether to disclose (e.g., should it come up in classroom conversation about our experiences and perspectives) and should be self-identified, not presumed or imposed. I will do my best to address and refer to all students accordingly, and I ask you to do the same for all of your fellow Terps.

Grades

Your grade is determined by your performance on the learning assessments in the course and is assigned individually (not curved). If earning a particular grade is important to you, please speak with me at the beginning of the semester so that I can offer some helpful suggestions for achieving your goal.

All assessment scores will be posted on the course ELMS page. If you would like to review any of your grades (including the exams), or have questions about how something was scored, please email me to schedule a time for us to meet in my office.

I am happy to discuss any of your grades with you. Any formal grade disputes must be submitted in writing and within one week of receiving the grade.

Final letter grades are assigned based on the percentage of total assessment points earned. To be fair to everyone I have to establish clear standards and apply them consistently, so please understand that being close to a cutoff is not the same this as making the cut (89.99 \neq 90.00). It would be unethical to make exceptions for some and not others.

| Final Grade Cutoffs | | | | | | | | | |
|---------------------|--------|---|--------|---|--------|---|--------|---|---------|
| + | 97.00% | + | 87.00% | + | 77.00% | + | 67.00% | | |
| A | 94.00% | B | 84.00% | C | 74.00% | D | 64.00% | F | <60.00% |
| - | 90.00% | - | 80.00% | - | 70.00% | - | 60.00% | | |

Course Schedule

Why Do We Conduct Research?

Week 1

Tuesday, August 25: Introduction to the course and to one another

- Establish collective community guidelines

Thursday, August 27

Read: Chapter 1, Introduction: Why Care about Research Methods?

Due: “About Me” discussion post on ELMS

Research Ethics and the IRB

Week 2

Tuesday, September 1

Read: Chapter 2, Science and Social Research: From Theory to Data and Back

Thursday, September 3

Read: Chapter 3, The Ethics and Politics of Research: Doing What’s “Right”

Sociological Debates: Open Science & Public Sociology

Week 3

Tuesday, September 8

Read: Prasad, Monica. 2018. “Problem-Solving Sociology.” *Contemporary Sociology: A Journal of Reviews* 47(4):393–98.

Thursday, September 10

Read: Cohen, Philip N. 2019. "Public Engagement and the Influence Imperative." *Contemporary Sociology: A Journal of Reviews* 48(2):119–23.

From Questions to Answers: Sampling, Measurement, and Data Collection

Week 4

Tuesday, September 15: **In-Class Activity: Designing a Research Question**

Read: Chapter 4, Research Designs: It Depends on the Question

Thursday, September 17

Read: Chapter 5, Measurement: Linking Theory to Research

Due: Media Assessment Podcast

Survey Design & Analysis

Week 5

Tuesday, September 22

Read: Chapter 6, Sampling: Case Selection as a Basis for Inference

Thursday, September 24

Read: Chapter 8, Surveys: Questioning and Sampling

Week 6

Tuesday, September 29

Read: Chapter 12, Quantitative Data Analysis: Using Statistics for Description and Inference

Due: Applied Research Project #1

Thursday, October 1

Read: Chapter 10, Existing Data Analysis: Using Data from Secondhand Sources

Due: Group Research Question

Ethnographies

Week 7

Tuesday, October 6

Read: Chapter 9, Field Research and In-Depth Interviews: Systematic People Watching and Listening

Thursday, October 8:

Read:

1. Excerpts from Goffman, Alice. 2014. *On the Run: Fugitive Life in an American City*. University of Chicago Press.
2. Campos, Paul. 2015. "Alice Goffman's Implausible Ethnography." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*

Due: Applied Research Project #2

Week 8

Tuesday, October 13

Read: Excerpts from Desmond, Matthew. 2017. *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City*. Broadway Books

Thursday, October 15: Peer Review Workshop

Due: Rough Draft of Ethics Paper. Bring 2 printed copies to class

Interviews

Week 9

Tuesday, October 20

Read: Chapter 4, “A Dramaturgical Look at Interviewing” in Berg, Bruce, L. 2017. *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*. 9th ed. Boston: Pearson Education, Inc.

Thursday, October 22

Due: Ethics Paper

Week 10

Tuesday, October 27

Read: Chapter 13, *Qualitative Data Analysis: Searching for Meaning*

Thursday, October 29

Read: Deterding, Nicole M. and Mary C. Waters. 2018. “Flexible Coding of In-Depth Interviews: A Twenty-First-Century Approach.” *Sociological Methods & Research* 004912411879937.

Due: Group Research Project Lit Review

Experimental Designs

Week 11

Tuesday, November 3

Read: Chapter 7, *Experiments: What Causes What?*

Due: Applied Research Project #3

Thursday, November 5

Read:

1. Deterding, Nicole M. and David S. Pedulla. 2016. “Educational Authority in the “Open Door” Marketplace: Labor Market Consequences of For-Profit, Nonprofit, and Fictional Educational Credentials.” *Sociology of Education* 89(3):155–70.
2. Rivera, Lauren A. and András Tilcsik. 2016. “Class Advantage, Commitment Penalty: The Gendered Effect of Social Class Signals in an Elite Labor Market.” *American Sociological Review* 81(6):1097–1131.

Due: Group Research Project Methodology

Co-Designed by Class

Week 12: TBD based on Class Interest

Tuesday, November 10

Read: TBA

Thursday, November 12

Read: TBA

Due: Applied Research Project #4

Communicating Research Findings & Dissemination Strategies

Week 13

Tuesday, November 17

Read: Chapter 14, Reading and Writing in Social Research: It's All about Communication

Thursday, November 19

Read: Excerpts from Becker, Howard S., and Pamela Richards. 2007. *Writing for Social Scientists: How to Start and Finish Your Thesis, Book, or Article*. University of Chicago Press.

Week 14

Tuesday, November 24: Group Work Time

Thursday, November 26: *No Class - Thanksgiving*

Week 15

Tuesday, December 1: Group Presentations

Due: Group Research Report

Thursday, December 3: Group Presentations

Finals Week

Exam Period: Remaining Group Presentations & End-of-Semester Reflection

Due: Group Self & Peer Assessments

Note: This is a tentative schedule, and subject to change as necessary – monitor the course ELMS page for current deadlines. In the unlikely event of a prolonged university closing, or an extended absence from the university, adjustments to the course schedule, deadlines, and assignments will be made based on the duration of the closing and the specific dates missed.

Media Assessment Podcast Guidelines

Adapted from Dr. Jessica Calarco, Indiana University

You will work in pairs to produce a podcast (roughly 3-5 minutes in length) that:

- 1) Describe a social scientific claim made in the media (TV, newspaper, podcast, etc.)
- 2) Assess the reliability of that claim:
 - a. Is the claim backed by adequate evidence?
 - b. How would a reasonable person know whether the statement is scientifically sound?

You will put together a one-page fact sheet and accompanying 3-to-5 minute podcast that debunks and/or confirms the social scientific claim.

Rubric

Podcasts and the accompanying fact sheet will be graded out of 100 points. Pairs will earn points based on the four components below.

| Component | Points | Criteria |
|---|--------|--|
| Identify and Describe Social Scientific Claim | 20 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Clearly identifies a social science claim• Succinctly describes the claim and its source |
| Assessment of Reliability | 50 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Explains the evidence that would support or refute the claim• Uses compelling background information to support argument |
| Compelling Case | 20 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Effectively persuades the listener about whether the claim is valid• Uses appropriate outside sources to bolster argument |
| Structure/Organization | 10 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Clear introduction and conclusion• Arguments and evidence are presented in a logical/organized order• Transitions between sections/arguments/pieces of evidence are clear and easy to follow |

Applied Research Project Guidelines

Applied Research Project #1: Mini Survey Design

You will design a survey that examines topics relevant to University of Maryland students. For instance, how could the undergraduate student association better serve students? How could the university increase women's participation in STEM fields? It will be necessary to narrow down these broad questions to a specific and achievable research question. You will then design a ten-question survey to answer the chosen research question. Your survey must include at least one qualitative question (e.g. a short answer question) and two demographic variables (e.g. gender, race, or class standing).

We will discuss how to create research questions and survey items during class. After the survey is complete, you will ask 10 students to complete the survey.

Two documents must be submitted for this assignment:

1. Copy of the final survey
2. Reflection memo discussing the sampling procedure, rationale for how each survey question connects to your broader research question, and the contributions and limitations of your survey.

Applied Research Project #2: Mini Secondary Data Analysis

You will conduct a comprehensive analysis of your survey data. The analysis should include key trends that answer your research question, as well as some descriptive statistics about attitude differences by demographic group. For example, do freshmen respondents have views that are distinct from junior respondents?

You will summarize the results in a **short report**. The report must include at least one graph and one table. The report should highlight the findings that you think are most interesting and pertinent to your research question.

Applied Research Project #3: Mini Interviews

You will conduct one short interview that addresses a topic relevant to University of Maryland students, which may be the same or different from the mini-survey design and analysis topic. If the same topic is chosen, however, the interview questions should be different from the survey questions. Your research question will inform the target sample of potential interview respondents.

Two documents must be submitted for this assignment:

1. Copy of the interview protocol
2. Reflection memo. The reflection memo should address the rationale behind the interview questions, your interview process, and the contributions and limitations of the mini study.

Applied Research Project #4: Mini Experiments

Imagine that you are applying for a research grant to obtain funds for conducting your dream experiment. While the broader proposal has many parts, your colleague is willing to review the methodology section. In no more than two pages, describe the research question and detailed methodology. Include as many details as possible. What are the treatment conditions and how will they answer your research question? How will you control as much of the environment as possible? What is the ideal sample size? Describe the set-up and instructions for the experiment, along with any other information the reviewers would need to favorably award your grant request.

Group Research Project Guidelines

Working in a group, you will use sociological theories to develop a research question, propose a plan for analysis to answer that question, and conduct a pilot version of the study. The final product will be a brief research report. At the end of the semester, your group will present your research findings to the class. Each group will create a shared Google Drive/Group that will house all aspects of the group work: articles, the shared literature review, draft reports, etc. I will also have access to each group's shared space and will use that to monitor progress.

Research question. Students will work collectively to create a feasible research question. Each group will turn in a one-page statement that discusses the research question, how it was formed, and initial ideas of how to answer it. I will host brief conferences with each group to provide feedback on the research question and plan for analysis.

Review of the literature. This assignment contains two parts: (1) an annotated bibliography of three relevant scholarly articles or books *from each group member*, (2) a combined review of the previous literature from the group. Students must work collaboratively to produce a 3-5 page long review based on each group member's annotated bibliography.

Methodology section. Each group will write a methodology paper for the chosen area of study which contains a description of: (1) the chosen data collection method; (2) the population you wish to study; (3) your sampling strategy; (4) the measurements each group will use to study the population, including a discussion of the dependent and independent variables when applicable; (5) any ethical concerns associated with the study; (6) the planned data analysis. The final product should be 5-7 pages. (Note: no secondary data may be used, and groups *must* provide copies of all survey and interview questions.)

Final group report. Each group will have the opportunity to incorporate my feedback on the previous assignments and compile a final research report. Each report must address: (1) the specific research question; (2) what other scholars have studied on the broad topic; (3) methodology to answer the question; (4) results from a brief pilot study of the methodology; (5) findings section that summarizes how the results answer the research question; and (6) lessons from the pilot that will be incorporated into future iterations of this research project.

Final presentation. Groups will deliver a 15-minute presentation using appropriate slides or handouts.