

**Methods and Logic of Inquiry (SOCI 303)**

*Class Time – Class Location*

PROFESSOR CONTACT INFO:

*Professor Name*  
*Email*  
*Office Location*  
*Office Hours*

COURSE OVERVIEW

How do sociologists use scientific methods to research questions and issues about social life? What methods do social scientists employ to answer these questions? In this course, you will learn the answers to these questions and receive “hands on” training on the fundamentals of doing research in the social sciences. You will also be introduced to tools that will allow you to become a critical consumer of research. Topics include research design, sampling, data collection, analysis, and interpretation of results.

This class is a **Students as Scholars Scholarly Inquiry Course**. This means that you will be directly engaged in the recursive process of scholarly inquiry by preparing a proposal for original social research. Throughout this process you will meet the following learning outcomes:

- Develop and refine a sociological research question.
- Conduct a literature review that appropriately frames your research question within a broader context.
- Apply knowledge of the relative strengths, weaknesses and ethical issues related to different sociological research methods to determine the appropriate research method(s) to answer your research question.
- Understand various ways to gather and analyze data.
- Write a research proposal. Students as Scholars is Mason's initiative to give students the opportunity to conduct undergraduate research. Check out OSCAR.gmu.edu to learn about their programs.

REQUIRED COURSE TEXTS / READINGS

1. Babbie, Earl. *The Basics of Social Research*, Belmont, CA: Wadsworth. (REQUIRED) – *you may use either the 7th edition (2017) or the 6th edition (2014)*
2. Additional readings posted in Blackboard

The Writing Across the Curriculum Committee has approved this course to fulfill the Writing Intensive (“WI”) requirement for sociology majors. You are required to complete at least 3,500 words of graded writing assignments. A series of scaffolded writing assignments (research question assignment, annotated bibliography assignment, and proposed design and methodology assignment) will be completed over the semester. With each writing assignment you will receive targeted advice and feedback and incrementally build the components of a scholarly research proposal. The process of revision is integral to this course, as you will refine each of these assignments based on feedback and thereby learn to improve the quality of your writing.

Commented [THP1]: Includes a WI statement that briefly describes assignments, scaffolding, and feedback

LEARNING OUTCOMES

This course actively engages students in original inquiry meaningful to themselves and their communities. This course will guide you through the expectations and conventions of formal modes of writing. You will formulate

problems and design a research project that culminates in a scholarly research proposal. You will learn techniques of professional and scientific writing, becoming writers engaged in sociological conversation and debate.

- **Write to Communicate:** Students will demonstrate through writing assignments a rhetorical awareness of the decisions they make related to purpose, audience, and the context in which they write, including writing conventions that are specific to their discipline, profession, or field of study.
- **Write to Learn:** Students will write in response to primary or secondary sources in their field of study in order to better understand, analyze, and synthesize key questions and conversations reflected in those sources and field of study.
- **Writing as a Process:** Students will develop strategies appropriate to the discipline and genre for revising, reorganizing, and proofreading writing based upon feedback they receive as they engage in a recursive writing process.

**Commented [THP2]:** Identifies the specific WI learning outcomes.

## COURSE EXPECTATIONS, ASSESSMENTS, AND GRADING

### Expectations

Social research involves specific forms of analytic thinking and analysis. You are expected to pursue independent research using methods and tactics that you may never have encountered or considered before. Because so much of your experience in this class will be shaped by your individual research question and group research projects—meaning that you will provide the topic and much of the content—how much you learn will depend largely on you. **You will be assessed via the following:**

### Concept Quizzes

You must understand a lot of detailed information in order to design a successful sociological research study. To ensure you are reading and understanding the assigned material there will be short in-class quizzes at the beginning of most classes checking your comprehension of concepts covered in the assigned readings. You may use any handwritten notes for the in-class quizzes. Quizzes cannot be made up without prior notice.

### CITI Training

To ensure ethical treatment of subjects, we will spend significant course time discussing research ethics. You will also complete the online CITI (Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative) ethics training and submit your certificate of completion. If you have completed this training in the past two years you may submit your prior completion certificate for this assignment. See assignment guide in Blackboard for full instructions.

### Design and Data Collection Assignments

In groups of 3-4 people, you will practice constructing, implementing, and evaluating research designs based on experiment, survey, and interview methods. Each person will submit three components for each assignment: a research report, a collaboratively written group evaluation, and an individual evaluation. See the assignment guides in Blackboard for full assignment details.

### Research Proposal Assignment

WI Application - SOCI 303

The main project for this course is a research proposal for an independent original research project by which you could answer a sociological research question. You will not complete the research project (gather/analyze the data) in this course (though you could do so as an independent study, through OSCAR's Undergraduate Research Scholar's Program, or in your Capstone course), but you will write a research proposal. Your final research proposal will include revisions of the assignments outlined below, as well as an introduction, discussion, and conclusion. A complete assignment guide will be posted in Blackboard.

**Research Question Assignment**

The Research Question assignment will be your first attempt at constructing an empirical, sociological question based on your interests and meeting the criteria discussed in class and in your readings. A complete assignment guide is posted in Blackboard.

**Annotated Bibliography**

In this assignment you will summarize five empirical articles (primary, peer-reviewed research) that are related to your research question, paying close attention to the research design and findings. This annotated bibliography will be used to help you construct the literature review section of your Research Proposal. A complete assignment guide is posted in Blackboard.

**Proposed Design and Methodology**

Here you will propose a method by which you could answer your research question. You will present the research design(s), data collection method(s), and data analysis method(s) that would best answer your research question. A complete assignment guide is posted in Blackboard.

**Formatting Notes and Late Penalty**

All assignments should be written and referenced using ASA style, in 12 -point font, with standard margins and tabs, and uploaded in .doc/.docx format. Full details and examples of ASA style can be found in the Johnson et al. chapter in Blackboard. Late penalties are noted in each assignment rubric.

**Commented [THP3]:** Includes brief writing assignment descriptions

<b>Grade Breakdown</b>	
Concept Quizzes	10%
CITI Training Module	2.5%
<b>Design &amp; Data Collection Assignments</b>	
Experiment	12.5%
Survey	12.5%
Interview	12.5%
<b>Research Proposal</b>	
Research Question	5%
Annotated Bibliography	12.5%
Proposed Design and Methodology	12.5%
Final Research Proposal	20%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Commented [THP4]:**

**Commented [THP5]:** Shows that writing contributes significantly to the overall course grade.

## **COURSE SCHEDULE**

### **Grading Scale\***

97 – 100 A+    87 – 89 B+    77 – 79 C+    60 – 69 D  
93 – 96 A      83 – 86 B      73 – 76 C      Below 60 F  
90 – 92 A-    80 – 82 B-    70 – 72 C-

\* Final grades will be rounded to the nearest whole percentage number.

## **POLICIES AND RESOURCES**

### CLASS EXPECTATIONS AND ENVIRONMENT

Your participation is essential to reaching the course learning outcomes. I expect you to come to class prepared, having read the assigned readings and ready to discuss course materials. All students are expected to check their university email accounts and this course's Blackboard site regularly. Important materials will be posted on Blackboard, and I will communicate with the class via email throughout the semester.

Insults, sexual advances, slurs directed against racial, ethnic, religion, sexual, gender or any other group, whispered comments, disruptive behavior and disrespectful language **will not be tolerated**. If you feel as though anyone is spoiling your learning environment, please inform me or the Office of Equity and Diversity Services ([diversit.gmu.edu](http://diversit.gmu.edu) / 703-993-8730).

### TECHNOLOGY POLICY

**Cell phones are not allowed in this class.** Please keep them stowed away and out of sight. Laptops or tablets may be permitted for the purpose of taking notes and class activities only. If you are engaging in activities not related to the course I may ask you to leave.

### ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

All material must be your own work. Plagiarism or copying on writing assignments or cheating on exams or quizzes will not be tolerated. Cheating or plagiarism will result in a zero (0) for that assignment and may lead to an academic integrity violation report being filed with the Honor Committee. If you have any questions as to what constitutes a violation of the academic integrity policy, please see the Office for Academic Integrity website at <http://oai.gmu.edu>.

### GMU LIBRARY

The University Libraries are wonderful resources. The library has a very useful sociology and anthropology subject database: <http://infowiz.gmu.edu/dbs/subjects/soc>. As well as two subject librarians whom you may contact for assistance with your research. The libraries also offer virtual assistance through their "Ask a Librarian" system (<http://library.gmu.edu/ask>). I strongly recommend that you make use of the libraries' resources early and often in the course. Additionally, GMU is a member of the Washington Research Library Consortium (WRLC). That means that if GMU's library doesn't have a book you are looking for, the consortium catalogue lets you check the libraries at AU, CUA, Gallaudet, GW, Georgetown, Howard, Marymount and UDC. If one of the other libraries has your book you can complete and inter-library loan request (ILL) and they will alert you when your book has arrived at GMU.

GMU DIGITAL SCHOLARSHIP CENTER (formerly Data Services)

GMU's Digital Scholarship Center (DiSC / <http://dsc.gmu.edu/>) provides help with finding, getting, and using all forms of data. You can get a good idea of the wide range of data that are available by checking out their website. Though you will not need to analyze data for your proposal, you will need to propose a data source that can answer your research question. If you need help you can email your request to [datahelp@gmu.edu](mailto:datahelp@gmu.edu).

#### WRITING CENTER

The Writing Center provides free tutorial sessions for all students needing help with any writing project from freshman essays to scholarly publications. It is best to make an appointment; walk-ins are accepted if there are openings at that time. Assistance is also offered online. You are strongly encouraged to take advantage of this free service! (703-993-1200; [writingcenter.gmu.edu](http://writingcenter.gmu.edu)).

#### STUDENT SERVICES

If you have a documented learning disability or other condition that may affect academic performance you should: 1) make sure this documentation is on file with Office of Disability Services (SUB I, Rm. 4205; 703-993-2474; <http://ods.gmu.edu>); and 2) talk with me to discuss your accommodation needs.

#### COUNSELING SERVICES

Counseling and Psychological Services offers free services to students that include a host of learning and counseling services designed to facilitate student success. Contact them at 703-993-2380 or via their website: <http://caps.gmu.edu>.