FALL 2013
GRADUATE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY
LAURENTIAN UNIVERSITY

SOCI 5216 – SEMINAR IN RESEARCH DESIGN, DATA COLLECTION, AND DATA ANALYSIS

Day/Time: Wednesdays, 7:00 p.m. – 10:00 p.m.
Room: A-226A
Professor: Dr. Reuben Roth
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Email: rroth@laurentian.ca
Web: www.reubenroth.com
Phone: ext. #4362
Office Hours: As posted. By appointment or email.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course will familiarize students in *Applied Social Research* with the tasks of planning and conducting empirical research using a critical, applied social research perspective. To this end, students will learn how to define research problems in light of theoretical (especially epistemological) questions and the larger social context. Students will acquire skill in determining the usefulness of a range of quantitative and qualitative research methods, including, but not limited to surveys, interviews, and focus groups. Emphasis will be placed on developing and articulating a research problematic for investigation in the student's graduate thesis. Related tasks include developing a research plan, crafting a literature review and proposal, writing an ethics application and beginning preliminary fieldwork, with the goal of combining these into a final research report. (N.B. See Graduate Studies course calendar).

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING:

All students are required to execute 4 components of this course: (1) completion of the assigned readings prior to the class for which they are assigned, (2) class attendance, participation and preparation for discussion via a reading journal, (3) discussion leading and (4)

REQUIRED READINGS:

Required readings will be assigned from the following:

- De Vaus, David. 2006. *Research Design in Social Research.* Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage.
- Grix, Jonathan. 2010. *The Foundations of Research.* NY: Palgrave-Macmillan.
- Roth, Reuben (ed.). SOCI-5216 Course Reader, Fall 2013 Edition.

> ***NOTE: This photocopied and bound reader is printed <u>at cost</u> and will be made available at Kwik Kopy Design and Print Centre, 75 Elm Street, Sudbury (corner Elm and Elgin) Tel. (705) 671-0070. Cost: approximately $30-40.00. No refunds.***

See the section below on weekly readings for details. Note that I reserve the right to modify readings with sufficient notice.

GRADING SCHEMA:

The following assignments are mandatory:

Assignment	**Value (%)**	**Due Date**
Participation	10%	Weekly
Leading Discussions (2)	20%	TBD (sign-up sheet)
Reading Journals	15%	Weeks 4, 8, 12.
Literature Review	15%	Oct. 2, 2013
Ethics Application or Research Proposal	15%	Nov.13, 2013
Research Report	25%	Dec. 4, 2013

Detailed Outline of Assignments:

The following course elements are **mandatory**. Ultimately, the degree of competence that you exhibit in each of these will determine your final grade (See the guideline "York University Senate Definition of Grades" below as an example of the level of my expectations).

Participation (10%)

As is generally the norm in graduate studies, this is a seminar class. That format implies less emphasis on lectures from your professor, and that you are expected to take an active part in each week's discussion. Therefore <u>your</u> participation is essential if this class is to be deemed a success (i.e. a 'good' learning experience). Elements of this include attending class, participating in class discussions with informed and insightful comments on the readings, taking turns leading the discussion of readings, preparation for your presentations, and completing assignments on time.

Leading Discussion (20%)

Students will lead discussions of the readings throughout the term, and will be responsible for at least one reading (a short 20-30" presentation and discussion/exercise) during the term. During the seminar, students should offer some critical commentary on the readings (what was good, bad, valuable, or simply interesting) and raise questions for class discussion. Do not spend your presentation time summarizing the required readings (you will lose marks); we will assume that others in the class have done the reading. However, if there is recommended (i.e. not required) reading assigned on your date(s), please review how that reading relates to your presentation. It will be more effective to pull out common themes from the readings and to raise questions for discussion *around these themes* rather than to go through each reading individually.

Reading Journals (15%)

Completion of assigned readings prior to the class for which they are assigned is mandatory. I cannot stress the importance of *actually* reading and understanding the assigned readings prior to the appropriate class. Although it is not mandatory, I strongly recommend that you form a study group and discuss the readings among yourselves prior to class. Each student in the course will be required to keep a weekly reading journal of 500 words per entry (i.e. each weekly assigned set of readings). 1-2 pages per week will be sufficient (it's best to select only one reading for your journal – depth is preferred over breadth), and to focus on only one aspect of a reading. At scheduled intervals (exact dates in the table above) you will hand these in to me. The reading journal is where you will: (a) Note your observations, comments, questions and reflections on the readings – in short, what was good, what was bad and what was interesting about our assigned reading for that class? From what theoretical tradition do the readings emerge? How does a reading relate to your own paradigm or worldview? This is also where you share your critical comments or questions; and (b) Introduce and link our assigned readings to examples from other university texts you've read, your experiences, observations, media reports. You can also link the readings to daily experience and analyze these using the course material. Your reading journal should be brought to every class and you should be prepared to share your journal entries in our seminars and presentations. Your journal will be graded on the extent to which it shows that you are learning and understanding the course material and are capable of applying readings to actual events. Due dates noted in the table above.

Literature Review (15%)

Each student will select an area of the academic literature on the major themes related to their graduate thesis and write a 12-15 page review. Note the review must be an integrated, narrative essay and NOT simply a series of summaries of books and journal articles. See Grix and the Course Reader appendix for detailed guidelines. Your literature review must demonstrate that you have acquired an understanding of the literature in your subject-area, by discussing: (a) the main concepts, (b) controversies and (c) the state of research related to the topic in your selected subject-area. Summarize articles by stating the author's (i) goal, (ii) thesis, (iii) controlling statement/s (the 'big ideas' that support a thesis), and (iv) conclusion. You should also show how these articles are all related. Your literature review should work as a building block for the research proposal and ultimately the final research essay or report. In this context "Research" includes secondary, as well as primary, sources, although I do not expect you to do field work at this early stage. Due date: See table above.

Ethics Application or Research Proposal (15%)

This option expects students to prepare a university ethical review application and will be expected to submitting the necessary forms to the university ethics review committee. The research proposal will ideally describe the research that will be pursued in the student's graduate thesis. It should contain an introduction and background, a clear statement of research questions, a methodology section that details the approach that will be followed in answering the research questions, and a section on problems that may be encountered in conducting the proposed research. Due date: See table above.

Research Report (25%)

The research report builds on both the literature review and the research paper proposal. The final research report should be approximately 15-20 pages in length, excluding notes and bibliography. Due on December 12, 2013.

POLICIES: CITATION, PLAGARISM, LATE ASSIGNMENTS, ATTENDANCE:

Attendance

This is a seminar class and therefore relies heavily on student contributions during our weekly discussions. Therefore you are required to attend all lectures and sign an attendance sheet that will be distributed after the break.

Policy on Missed or Late Assignments

Assignments are due on the dates specified in this outline. No extensions will be granted without medical documentation. Late assignments will be subject to a 5% penalty for each day after the due date. After one week has elapsed without an assignment, you will receive an automatic grade of 'F' unless you provide sufficient medical documentation.

Academic Citation and Plagiarism

Students are expected to consult a standard social science style guide to ensure the correct citation style (either ASA or APA formats are acceptable and readily available online). I will recommend a variety of style guides during in-class discussions. Plagiarism has always been with us but easy Internet access makes this act more tempting than ever. Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty are extremely serious academic offences. Penalties range from failure in an assignment or exam to expulsion from the University. Definitions, penalties and procedures for dealing with plagiarism are set out on Laurentian University's website.

ADDITIONAL NOTICE ON PLAGIARISM:

I have decided to add this note because over the years, I have noticed a steady increase of plagiarism among graduate students' work. Know that I do not take this at all lightly. Be aware that insufficient or 'deceptive' citation constitutes grounds for plagiarism. You should be familiar with proper citation at this stage in your academic career and are assumed responsible for uncited work taken from another source. In short, when in doubt it is always preferable to over-cite, rather than under-cite. Again, this is an extremely serious academic offence that carries penalties varying from failure in an assignment to suspension or expulsion from the university. Know that if I find that you have plagiarized work in this course, I will fill out the necessary reporting forms, which will open all of your written work to scrutiny, and might possibly result in your ejection from the program. Do not be tempted.

RESEARCH REPORT/ESSAY REQUIREMENTS:

The suggested structure below is merely one example of how a research report might be organized. Typically academic research essays with data from field research are composed of number of sections as follows (you can modify these to accommodate your own thesis-related needs):

1. INTRODUCTION. This section identifies the major problem or question to be examined in the essay. Although this section is short use it to demonstrate the *value* of what follows.

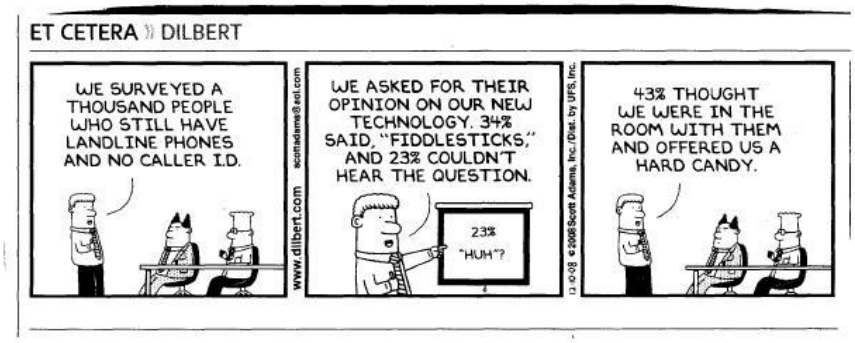
2. LITERATURE REVIEW. This section of the essay is a summary of the work by other researchers on the topic you have selected. A literature review is a synthesis of the most important theories and findings, rather than a mere summary of each work. In this section you need to show the reader that you have a strong understanding of the major issues and controversies related to your topic.

3. RESEARCH METHODS. In this section you outline the research methods you employed in your research, including the reasons for selecting a particular method, and any potential pitfalls or problems associated with it. An important objective of this section is to show to the reader that the research method will gather data in a systematic manner to answer the research question. Don't forget that the 'research methods' section applies equally to secondary research.

4. FINDINGS/RESULTS. In this section you present the most important findings from your field research. Careful consideration should be given as to how to best present the data (tables, charts, photos, etc.). In some cases it may be best to combine this section with the next one to allow for an integration of findings and discussion.

5. ANALYSIS/DISCUSSION. The purpose of this section is to explain and analyse the findings from your field research. A critical aspect of doing so is to relate the findings to the past research and existing theories (as outlined in your literature review). In this section you will also want give an indication as to how convincing your findings are.

6. CONCLUSION. Like the introduction, the conclusion is relatively brief. Its purpose is summarize what you have done and should not raise new questions. The best conclusions are those that follow logically from the introduction; that is, the reader need read only the introduction and conclusion to gain an overview of your essay. Try it before you hand in your essay.



SOCI-5216-EL-01 – Weekly Themes, Readings, Assignments

DATE	THEMES & ASSIGNED READINGS
Week 1 Sept. 4	Introduction of course themes and objectives; overview of syllabus, including course expectations, research projects, texts, grading schema, Q&A, etc.
MAJOR THEME	**DEFINING RESEARCH PROBLEMS**
Week 2 Sept. 11	**WHAT IS TRUTH? WHAT IS SCIENCE?** – Carr, 'The Historian and His Facts' pp. 7-30. – Carr, 'History, Science and Morality' pp. 56-86. – Durkheim, 'What is a Social Fact?' pp. 34-59. – Durkheim, 'Rules for the Observation of Social Facts' pp. 60-84.
Week 3 Sept. 18	**THE NATURE AND LANGUAGE OF RESEARCH** – Grix, chapter 1, pp. 1-17. – De Vaus, Part I 'What is Research Design?' pp. 1-52. – Stinchcombe, 'The Logic of Scientific Inference' pp. 3-56. – Rose, 'Deciphering Sociological Research – Part I' pp. 3-48.
Week 4 Sept. 25	**EPISTEMOLOGICAL QUESTIONS, , SOCIAL CONTEXT** – Grix, chapter 4, pp. 57-75. – Plato, 'The Republic, Book VII' pp. 167-191. – Weber (in Gerth and Mills), 'Science as a Vocation' pp. 129-156. – Arner, 'Epistemology' pp. 1-28.
MAJOR THEME	**SELECTING A RESEARCH METHOD**
Week 5 Oct. 2	**THE TOOLS OF RESEARCH** – Grix, chapter 2, pp. 18-34. – Grix, chapter 7, pp. 116-137. – De Vaus, Part III 'Longitudinal Design' pp 113-169.
Week 6 Oct. 9	**GETTING STARTED: ARTICULATING A RESEARCH PROBLEMATIC** – Grix, chapter 5, pp. 78-99. – Luttrell, Schoolsmart and Motherwise (excerpts) pp. 1-35; 113-126. – Luttrell, Personal Correspondence to R. Roth pp. 1-3. – Luttrell, 'Good Enough' Methods for Ethnographic Research' pp. 499-523.

Week 7 Oct. 16	**DEVELOPING A RESEARCH PLAN** – Grix, chapter 3, pp. 35-56. – Hipp, 'Block, Tract, and Levels of Aggregation' pp. 659-680. – De Vaus, Part IV 'Cross-Sectional Design' pp. 170-214. – Grix, Appendix 1, 154-160. – Whyte, 'Planning the Project and Entering the Field' pp. 35-81.
OCTOBER 21-25: FALL STUDY WEEK – NO CLASS	
MAJOR THEME	**PLANNING, CONDUCTING & ANALYZING**
Week 8 Oct. 30	**ACADEMIC STANDARDS, ETHICS, AND PLAGIARISM IN RESEARCH** – Grix, chapter 8, pp. 138-149. – Fryer, Trade Unions and Social Research: The Casualties and Victims of Social Research. – Whyte, 'Ethics in Field Research and Publication' – Ellis, 'Emotional and Ethical Quagmires in Returning to the Field' – Shaffir and Stebbins, chapters. 4,7,15. – **Optional:** American Sociological Association 'Code of Ethics'
Week 9 Nov. 6	**INTERVIEWING SKILLS** – Gorden, pp. 47-171. – Kinsey Institute material (3-pp. package) – Snow and Anderson, 'Researching the Homeless: The Characteristic Features and Virtues of the Case Study' pp. 148-173. – De Vaus, Part V 'Case Study Design' pp. 219-266.
Week 10 Nov. 13	**FOCUS GROUPS AND GROUP INTERVIEWS** – Kreuger, 'Moderating Focus Groups' pp. 3-35. – Tiberius, 'Making Sense and Making Use of Feedback from Focus Groups' pp. 63-75. – Eubanks and Abbott, 'Using Focus Groups to Supplement the Assessment of Techical Communication Texts, Programs, and Courses' pp. 25-45.
Week 11 Nov. 20	**ANALYZING DATA** – Wellman, 'Doing it Ourselves' pp. 71-78. – Lofland and Lofland chapters 5, 8, 9. – Shaffir and Stebbins, chapters 10, 12, 14. – Strauss and Corbin, 'Grounded Theory Methodology' pp. 273-285.
Week 12 Nov. 27	**SUMMING IT ALL UP: 'AGAINST METHOD'** – Feyerabend, 'Against Method' pp. vii-53 and pp. 164-208.
DUE DATE Dec. 4	**No Class – Due Date for Research Report (i.e. Final Assignment = 25%)**

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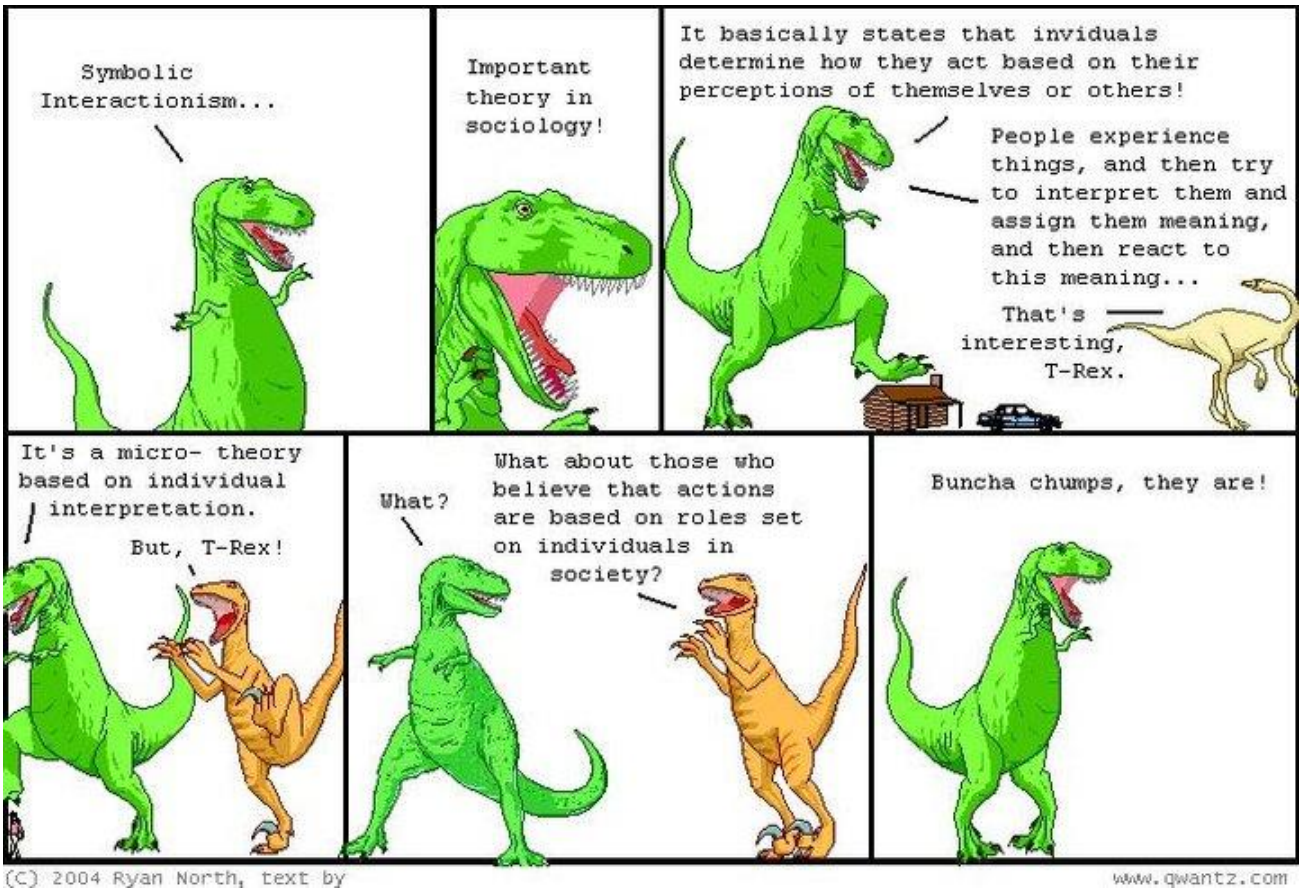

DEFINITION OF GRADES (from the Senate of York University)

A+ (90-100) Exceptional: Thorough knowledge of concepts and/or techniques and exceptional skill or great originality in the use of those concepts, techniques in satisfying the requirements of an assignment or course, [exceeding factors 1-6].

A (80-89) Excellent: Thorough knowledge of concepts and/or techniques together with a high degree of skill and/or some elements of originality in satisfying the requirements [factors 1-6].

B+ (77-79) Very Good: Thorough knowledge of concepts and/or techniques together with a high degree of skill in the use of those concepts, techniques in satisfying the requirements [factors 1-5].

B (70-76) Good: Good level of knowledge of concepts and/or techniques together with considerable skill in using them to satisfy the requirements [factors 1-5].

C+ (67-69) Competent: Acceptable level of knowledge of concepts and/or techniques together with considerable skill in using them to satisfy requirements [factors 1-4].

C (60-66) Fairly Competent: Acceptable level of knowledge of concepts or techniques together with some skill in using them to satisfy requirements [factors 1-4].

D+ (57-59) Passing: Slightly better than minimal knowledge of required concepts and/or techniques together with some ability to use them [factors 1-3].

D (53-56) Barely Passing; Minimum knowledge of concepts and/or techniques [factors 1-2].

F (50 and below) Failing.

FACTORS TO WARRANT A GRADE OF "C+"

1. Understanding the assignment.

2. Organization of the material: a sense of the relative importance of data, observations, criticisms, avoiding irrelevancies.

3. Articulate expression (saying what one means).

4. Presenting a case (vs. descriptive writing).

ADDITIONAL FACTORS TO WARRANT A GRADE OF "B" OR HIGHER

5. Superior grasp of concepts essential to the discipline.

6. Superior grasp of the methodology required to think systematically.

(ADDENDUM FROM UofT) FACTORS WHICH WARRANT A GRADE OF "A+"

7. A piece of work which is expertly synthesized (or original), and where a complete knowledge of concepts and/or techniques are demonstrated with no flaws. A piece of wholly original work.

8. A piece of work where an ‘expert’ or exceptional degree of skill in writing, conceptualization, use of theory, original contribution to the literature, conclusion or synthesis has been demonstrated.