

Sociology 11: Research Methods

Winter 2021, Dartmouth College
Tuesday/Thursday 10:20-12:10
X-hour: Friday 4:00-4:50
Office Hours: calendly.com/kbrogers

Professor: Dr. Kimberly B. Rogers
E-mail: kr Rogers@dartmouth.edu
Office: 308E Blunt Hall
Phone: 603-646-8212

Zoom: <https://dartmouth.zoom.us/j/94845687612?pwd=ZFhyN0RtNGFwaWZQZTBmdDcrOTFBUT09>

WE INTERRUPT THIS BROADCAST FOR AN IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT:

We are living through a once-in-a-century global pandemic. To say that our lives have changed in the past nine months is a gross understatement. Even if we are beginning to get used to these changes, none of this is normal. Some of us have lost friends and loved ones, and we are all juggling new responsibilities as we navigate an uncertain world where the rulebook has been thrown out. And relevant to this class, all of us are managing the stress and anxiety of living through historically unprecedented times. Some of us have the resources necessary to help us cope with these strains, while some of us do not.

It is for these reasons that we cannot keep the same expectations we had before. We cannot make it through this without empathy, support, care, and grace. So, this course will look somewhat different than it usually does: We will not be meeting face to face. There are fewer and less demanding assignments. The grading criteria are more forgiving. You all have enough stress and uncertainty in your lives right now, and I do not want this class to add to that burden. And yet, I hope we can retain the best elements of this class. Namely, that we have a space to talk about important issues and interesting ideas, build community, and learn from one another. I trust that we can do this. I am looking forward to getting to know you all, hearing your thoughts, and talking through these ideas with you.

AND NOW, BACK TO YOUR REGULARLY SCHEDULED PROGRAMMING.

Course Description. This course will provide you with the basic skills necessary to conduct social science research and evaluate the research of others. You will be introduced to the central methods that sociologists use to gather information about social phenomena, along with “best practices” in research design that help ensure data quality and usefulness. You will gain firsthand experience with the research process as you try out different data collection methods on a small scale and develop your own research design. You will also learn how to be a thoughtful consumer of social science research, and sharpen your skills as a reader and writer.

Learning Objectives. By the end of the course, you will be able to (1) read, understand, and critically evaluate social science research; (2) develop precise research questions and hypotheses that build on prior theory and research; (3) clearly specify and measure the variables necessary for hypothesis testing; (4) draw samples and build research designs that are appropriate to your research question; (5) identify and practice ethical research standards; (6) effectively communicate your research findings to others; and (7) construct a scholarly research proposal that constructs a scholarly research proposal that addresses a research question, reviews the existing literature, describes an appropriate methodology, and considers ethical issues associated with the research.

Course Structure. Lectures will be posted to Canvas by midnight on Sundays each week of the term, with some exceptions noted on Canvas. You should watch these before the start of class on Tuesdays. Click the Panopto Video menu tab on Canvas to access these recordings. We will meet synchronously during our regularly scheduled class times each week, but I will *not* lecture over the material during this time. Instead, we will use this time to address your questions about the material, complete exercises to hone your research skills, begin the hands-on portions of your lab assignments, and work on your team research project. We will rarely use the entirety of our class meeting time. You are welcome to use any time remaining to work on the final project in your research teams, if you so choose. We will not use the X-hour for this course.

Course Materials. The books for this course are available for rent or purchase online. All other readings will be available through our course Canvas site: <http://canvas.dartmouth.edu>. Since traditional library reserves will be unavailable to students who are living off campus, the library has scanned most of the required book chapters and placed them on Canvas. However, it was not possible to make all chapters available digitally due to copyright restrictions. If you have difficulty accessing the assigned readings or encounter financial challenges related to this class, please let me know.

Required Books:

Dixon, Jeffrey C., Royce A. Singleton, Jr., and Bruce C. Straits. 2015. *The Process of Social Research*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. ISBN: 978-0199946754.

Smith-Lovin, Lynn and Cary Moskovitz. 2016. *Writing in Sociology: A Brief Guide*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. ISBN: 978-0190203924.

Optional Book:

American Sociological Association. 2014. *American Sociological Association Style Guide*. 5th edition. Washington, DC: American Sociological Association. ISBN: 978-0912764214.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Class Participation

Group work and class participation are central features of the course. You are expected to come to class prepared, which includes completing the assigned reading prior to the class meeting in which it will be discussed. You are also expected to be an active and respectful participant in small group and class discussions and activities. Class participation will count for 10% of your final grade. I have provided a rubric on Canvas that explains how your class participation grade will be calculated. Synchronous participation in virtual class meetings is strongly encouraged, but students unable to attend class may participate asynchronously by streaming recorded class sessions, then participating via our Slack workspace. Please see the Remote Learning Plan on Canvas for more information on good class participation in our online learning context. We will not meet during X-hour unless it is necessary to reschedule a regular class meeting for this time. However, you may wish to meet with your classmates during this time to work on a lab assignment or your research proposal.

Lab Assignments

Each week, you will complete a lab assignment that engages you in the practice of social research. At the beginning of the term, lab assignments will introduce you to the basic elements of research design. Later assignments will give you hands-on experience with different social science research methods: experiments, surveys, archival research, field observation, and in-depth

interviews. Lab assignments will be worth 40% of your final grade in the course (5% each). These assignments are an opportunity to practice and hone your research skills. ***They will be graded on completion.*** You will receive full credit for assignments that follow the instructions, include all of the required elements, and are submitted on time, even if some of your answers are incorrect. You will be given specific guidelines for each assignment that lay out my expectations for your work. You can find more details about these assignments on our course Canvas site.

Research Proposal

Lab assignments will give you basic, hands-on experience with a variety of different research methods. You will get a deeper understanding of the research process as you independently develop and propose a research design to answer a question of your choosing. We will be working with the [Dartmouth Center for Social Impact](#) to answer real research questions posed by local community partners, who need your help to develop a research design relevant to their work in the Upper Valley. You will develop your proposal incrementally throughout the term. The process will take time and effort; you will face challenges and moments of success as your project evolves. We will return to your proposal time and again to allow for new ideas, revisions, and improvements. Transformations are to be expected, and an indication that you are thinking carefully about the quality of your work.

We will hit the ground running so you have plenty of time to create the strongest research proposal possible. Review the schedule below carefully, and plan ahead for major deadlines. You will identify your research question in Week 2, and do background research on your chosen community partner for Week 3. In Week 5, you will review the literature and submit an annotated bibliography. Assignments up to this point will be submitted individually. Your team will submit a detailed outline of your research proposal in Week 6, which will include a list of tasks that need to be completed and a clear action plan for each task (e.g., timeline for the completion of each task, names of group members responsible). Teams will informally present and receive/provide peer feedback on research proposals during class on Week 8. Together, these assignments are worth 20% of your final grade in the course. ***Like lab assignments, they will be graded on completion.*** You will receive full credit for assignments that follow the instructions, include all required elements, and are submitted on time.

Your team will formally present its research proposal to our community partners during the final class meeting of the term. This assignment is worth 10% of your grade. The final version of your research proposal, worth 20% of your grade, will be due during exam week. ***These assignments will be graded as usual, and grading rubrics will be provided.*** Your individual grade on the final research presentation and proposal will be based on a combination of: (1) the grade earned by your group, and (2) your contribution to the group's work, as determined by my observations and confidential peer evaluations. For example, if your group earns 90% on an assignment, but your contribution is graded as 80%, you would only be eligible for 80% of your group's points (individual grade = $90 \cdot .8 = 72\%$).

Final Grade

Your final numeric grade in the course will be determined by your class participation (10%), lab assignments (40%), the components of your research project submitted throughout the term (20%), and your final team research presentation (10%) and proposal (20%). Your numeric grade will be converted into a letter grade using the scale below. A description of the quality of work necessary to receive a certain letter grade in the course is available [here](#).

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|----|----------|----|----------|----|----------|----|----------|---|----------|
| A | 95-100 | B+ | 89-91.99 | B- | 80-82.99 | C | 73-76.99 | D | 60-69.99 |
| A- | 92-94.99 | B | 83-88.99 | C+ | 77-79.99 | C- | 70-72.99 | E | 0-59.99 |

COURSE POLICIES

Academic Responsibility

Dartmouth College is a community of scholars and learners committed to academic and personal honesty, responsibility, and respect for others. All students should conduct themselves in accordance with the Dartmouth community standards, particularly the [academic honor principle](#). Academic integrity includes a commitment not to engage in or tolerate acts of falsification, misrepresentation or deception. Such acts of dishonesty violate the fundamental ethical principles of the Dartmouth community and compromise the worth of work completed by others. As such, cheating, plagiarism, use of the same work in multiple courses, and unauthorized collaboration will not be tolerated. Minor violations of the honor principle may result in loss of credit or failure for a given piece of work or in the course. Major violations may result in suspension or expulsion from the College.

Academic dishonesty often occurs when students feel too much pressure to perform and that they do not have the tools to achieve their goals. If you are falling behind or feeling overwhelmed, please come talk with me before you decide to cheat. [Writing and research support](#) are available through the Institute for Writing and Rhetoric. More information about the Academic Honor Code, plagiarism, and proper citation of sources is available [here](#).

Absences

Participation is an important part of this course. My expectations for participation are described in the section above on Class Participation. Synchronous participation in virtual class meetings is strongly encouraged, but students unable to attend class may participate asynchronously by streaming recorded class sessions, then participating via our Slack workspace. You are permitted up to three absences (i.e., occasions where you neither participate synchronously nor asynchronously), no questions asked, without consequences for your class participation grade. Chronic absences will cause a significant loss of points from your participation grade. For our purposes this term, chronic absences are repeated occasions (i.e., four or more) where you do not (1) participate in the course synchronously or (2) make up for a missed class by watching the recording of our class session and participating asynchronously via Slack before the start of the next class period.

I recognize that we are facing extremely unusual circumstances this term. While I have provided options for synchronous and asynchronous participation, you may find yourself in a situation that makes it challenging to keep up with the course material or participate in any fashion. If such a situation arises, please reach out to me as soon as possible so we can find a solution. I'll be more than happy to work with you to find an avenue for participation that works for your situation if you reach out. If you are already aware of circumstances that will affect your ability to participate in the course regularly or occasionally, please arrange a meeting with me at the start of the term so we can plan ahead.

Late Work Policy

All students will receive one 24-hour extension on any class assignment of their choosing, no questions asked. You should notify me via email if/when you plan to use your extension. After that, your (completion) grade on any assignment will go down by one letter grade per day. ***Assignments that are 5 or more days late will receive a zero.*** If the deadline has arrived and your work isn't complete, it's best to turn in whatever you have finished. These are extraordinary times and I am willing to be flexible with this policy, within reason. Please talk to me if you are having difficulty keeping up with the coursework. Students who have been granted accommodations by Student Accessibility Services should arrange to meet with me early in the term so we can plan ahead.

Remote Learning: Canvas, Slack, and Zoom

I have created a Remote Learning Plan for this course, available on Canvas. This document describes the methods and technologies we will use to support online learning (and how to get them installed and running on your devices), and explains what good participation looks like in a remote learning context. Please review this document as soon as you can and follow the steps for technological onboarding before our first class meeting, if possible. Course materials will be made available and assignments will be submitted via [Canvas](#). Most online communications will occur via a [Slack](#) workspace for our course. Class meetings and office hours will be held via [Zoom](#). You may need to use Dartmouth's [VPN client](#) to access library and other resources if you are working off campus. If you have difficulty installing or accessing these technologies or are unsure of how to use their necessary features, please contact me as soon as possible.

Re-Grading of Assignments

If you believe there has been an error in the grading of an assignment, please provide me with a written explanation of why your grade should be changed, not to exceed one page. Based on your rationale and my careful examination of your work, your grade *may go either up or down*. You have one week from the date the assignment is returned to you to request that it be re-graded.

Accommodations

Students desiring academic accommodations, modifications, or auxiliary aids should contact [Student Accessibility Services](#) at Student.Accessibility.Services@Dartmouth.edu or 603-646-9900. Once you've established your accommodations with SAS, we should arrange a private meeting early in the term to discuss how I can best support you in the course.

Remote Access to Campus Resources

I recognize that the academic environment at Dartmouth is challenging, that our terms are intensive, and that classes are not the only demanding aspect of your life. Many of you may be facing greater challenges than usual given the changes to your living and learning environment, public health concerns, and a host of other factors (e.g., housing or food insecurity, new or changing caregiving responsibilities, accessibility and visa concerns, access to health and mental health support, and so on).

There are a number of campus resources available to support your needs. For concerns about health and wellness, you may reach out to the [Dartmouth Health Service](#) (603-646-9400), [Counseling Services](#) (603-646-9442), and the [Student Wellness Center](#). For academic needs, you may contact your [undergraduate dean](#) (603-646-2243), [Student Accessibility Services](#) (603-646-9900), and the [Academic Skills Center](#) (603-646-2014). Students with concerns related to campus employment may connect with the [Student Employment Office](#) (603-646-3641). Those with visa-related concerns may reach out to the [Office of Visa and Immigration Services](#) (603-646-3474). I encourage you to take advantage of these resources, and to speak with me if you need support in the class.

Please note that faculty and staff are required by law to report certain matters to relevant parties on campus, including disclosures of sexual or gender-based harassment, sexual assault, relationship and interpersonal violence, and stalking. You can find more information about confidential versus non-confidential resources and support options [here](#).

TENTATIVE CLASS SCHEDULE AND READINGS

| Class | Topic | Readings | Assignment Due Dates |
|---------|--|--|---|
| Th 1/7 | Introduction to the Course | <i>The Process of Social Research</i> , Introduction (Chapter 1), Science and Social Research (Chapter 2) | |
| Tu 1/12 | Fundamentals of Research Design | <i>The Process of Social Research</i> , Research Designs (Chapter 4) | Select Research Question |
| Th 1/14 | Measurement | <i>The Process of Social Research</i> , Measurement (Chapter 5) | Lab #1, Measurement due 1/17 |
| Tu 1/19 | Sampling | <i>The Process of Social Research</i> , Sampling (Chapter 6); Small, "How Many Cases Do I Need?" | Background Research on Community Partner |
| Th 1/21 | Refining Your Research Question; work on project in class | <i>Writing in Sociology</i> , Starting Your Original Research Project (Ch 4) | Lab #2, Sampling due 1/24 |
| Tu 1/26 | Ethics in Social Research; guest speaker from Dartmouth CPHS | <i>The Process of Social Research</i> , Ethics and Politics of Research (Ch 3); NCPHS, "The Belmont Report" | Nothing due, but work on Annotated Bibliography, due next week |
| Th 1/28 | Reviewing the Literature; work on project in class | <i>Writing in Sociology</i> , Choosing and Using Sources (Chapter 7); Literature Review Handout | Lab #3, Research Ethics due 1/31 |
| Tu 2/2 | Experimental Research | <i>The Process of Social Research</i> , Experiments (Chapter 7) | Annotated Bibliography |
| Th 2/4 | Writing an Academic Research Paper; work on project in class | <i>Writing in Sociology</i> , Writing About Your Original Research: Before You Have Data (Chapter 5) | Lab #4, Experimental Research due 2/7 |
| Tu 2/9 | Survey Research | <i>The Process of Social Research</i> , Surveys (Chapter 8) | Nothing due, but work on Outline of Research Proposal, due next week |
| Th 2/11 | Research Design Workshop; work on project in class | <i>Writing in Sociology</i> , Citing Sources and Avoiding Plagiarism (Chapter 8); ASA Style Handout | Lab #5, Survey Research due 2/14 |
| Tu 2/16 | Research Design Workshop; work on project in class | <i>The Process of Social Research</i> , Existing Data Analysis (Ch 10) | Outline of Research Proposal |
| Th 2/18 | Historical Research; guest speaker from Rauner Library, Peter Carini | Review the archival documents assigned to you before class | Lab #6, Historical Research due 2/21 |
| Tu 2/23 | Field Research | <i>The Process of Social Research</i> , Field Research and Interviews (Ch 9); Field Research Handouts | Nothing due, but prepare for informal presentation of your research proposal next class |
| Th 2/25 | Informal Research Presentation and Peer Feedback | | Lab #7, Field Research due 2/28 |
| Tu 3/2 | In-Depth Interviews | In-Depth Interview Handouts; Research Presentation Handout | Nothing due, but work on Research Presentation, due next week |
| Th 3/4 | Mixed Methods; work on final presentations in class | <i>The Process of Social Research</i> , Multiple Methods (Chapter 11); Small, "How to Conduct a Mixed Methods Study" | Lab #8, In-Depth Interviews due 3/7 |
| Tu 3/9 | Research Presentations to Community Partners | | Upload final presentation slides by 11:59 pm on 3/8 |

Final Research Paper Due Monday, March 15 at 5:00 pm EST