Sociology 91: The Sociological Imagination

Spring 2023, Dartmouth College
Monday/Wednesday, 3:30-5:20 pm
X-hour: Monday 5:30-6:20 pm
Class Location: Carson 061

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Office Hours: Online by appointment; schedule at https://calendly.com/kbrogers

Course Description. Sociologists have a dual commitment to adequately understand society through rigorous observation and to better the society in which they live. In this capstone course, we will work together as a class to answer research questions that help community partners address key social problems in the Upper Valley and offer solutions to these problems. We will draw upon shared knowledge of sociological theory, research, and methods accumulated over your Dartmouth career and seek out new knowledge and perspectives that help us answer our research question and better the community. Since this is a capstone course, it is expected that students will take the lead during class meetings as well as in research design, execution, and analysis. Faculty will play an advisory role, providing methodological and substantive guidance along the way.

Course Structure. You, the students, will have ownership over this course. Together, you will decide on: the research question(s) you would like to answer, the community partner(s) with whom you will work, and the most effective deliverables to communicate your research findings about and proposed solutions to the problem at hand. To ensure that you stay on track, you will create a work plan for the term (syllabus) that will outline major milestones, due dates, and key tasks for your research project. You will produce two final deliverables for the course: one that communicates your findings to an academic audience (e.g., an academic article or policy brief); and one that communicates them to a public audience (e.g., a website, flyer, resource, podcast, short film, or something else, depending on the goals and needs of your community partner). We will not meet as a class during x-hours, but they may be used for group meetings and work on your research project. All students should plan to keep this time available for work related to our course.

Learning Goals. By the end of this course you will: (1) learn how to translate a social problem of interest into an answerable sociological research question; (2) apply sociological theories, research, and methods to this research question; (3) work as part of a research team to thoughtfully design research and gather, process, and analyze data on behalf of a community partner; (4) communicate research findings about the problem and offer sociologically informed solutions to the community partner; 5) practice "translational research" – clearly communicating the findings of your academic research to a public audience.

> *To reiterate: this will not be a traditional class! Most class periods will be open workshops, rather than seminar or lecture. I will rarely (if ever) lecture, though I am happy to provide refresher lectures on request. Instead of thinking of me as your professor, you should think of me as a key stakeholder, along with your community partner and your teammates. As a public scholar, you must ensure that your goals and your stakeholders' goals are being met throughout the course of the project. As such, you will be most successful if you consult with me, community partner(s), and teammates regularly.*

Course Materials. There is no required textbook for this course. All of our readings will be available on Canvas: canvas.dartmouth.edu. You will also leverage materials from your previous coursework in the Sociology department (e.g., methods, statistics, theory, topics courses) in your research.

EVALUATION AND GRADING

Unless otherwise specified, all assignments in this course are group assignments. Your individual grade for each assignment will be based on a combination of (1) the grade earned by your group, and (2) your contributions to the group, as determined by my observations and confidential peer and self evaluations. For example, if your group earns a 90% on an assignment, but your contribution is graded as an 80%, you would only be eligible for 80% of your group's total points (individual grade = 90*.8 = 72%).

Collaborative Brainstorming Session (5%)

All students will participate in a collaborative brainstorming session during the first week of class. During this session, students will work together to develop a brief research proposal that identifies (1) a social problem facing our community, (2) a sociological research question related to this problem, (3) why research on this problem/question is important, (4) the research methods best suited to addressing it, and (5) a relevant partner organization in our community. Students will evaluate, critique, and improve upon the quality of their ideas, then discuss and receive feedback on their proposal with the broader class. We will then decide which proposal(s) will be developed into our research projects for the term, and sort into research teams based on shared substantive interests.

Proposal and Work Plan (10%)

Following the collaborative brainstorming session, each research team will submit (1) a one-page proposal/vision statement for their project, and (2) a work plan that includes a timeline of major milestones, tasks, and deliverables. The ***proposal*** should (1) clearly state your research question; (2) make a brief case for why this issue is important and worthy of study; (3) discuss the methods you plan to use and why you plan to use them; (4) identify the community partner with whom you would like to work, why you hope to partner with them, and how you plan to involve them in your project; and (5) offer your initial thoughts about the format of your two final deliverables for the course: one directed toward an academic audience (e.g., academic article, policy brief) and one directed toward a public audience (e.g., website, flyer, resource, podcast, short film, or something else, depending on your partner's goals and needs).

The ***work plan*** should specify the deadlines you are setting, as a team, for major assignments, project deliverables, and other research milestones. It must include deadlines for (1) the project assignments outlined below, your final research presentation, and your final deliverables, (2) the rubric I will use to evaluate your public-facing deliverable (which we will workshop in class), and (3) the key tasks that need to be completed and milestones that need to be achieved in advance of each deadline. I will review your work plan and provide feedback on any needed adjustments to your timeline. ***Once finalized, this work plan will become your syllabus for the term. Assignment deadlines will be binding, as they would be for a typical course, unless we explicitly agree upon a revised work plan for your project.*** You can find a template for the work plan on Canvas, which includes recommended deadlines for major assignments and incremental tasks.

Weekly Progress Reports (10%)

Staying on task and on schedule is key to any successful research project. At the end of each week, each group must submit a progress report on Canvas. This document should include: (1) ***a list of tasks that need to be completed in the upcoming week***, with a clear division of labor for each task (e.g., names of

the group members responsible), and an explanation for how each task helps move the project forward, and (2) *a list of tasks completed in the previous week*, including explanations for tasks that were not completed and additional tasks completed that were not included in the previous week's report. These reports should specifically address any necessary changes to the work plan and why they are needed (e.g., additions of tasks to work plan, extra time needed to complete tasks, adjustments to due dates for major milestones).

Project Assignments (25%)

The research project will be completed in stages through a series of 5 project assignments that build toward your final deliverables for the course. Each will be worth 5% of your final grade in the course. *The contents of four of these assignments are predetermined*; guidelines are provided on Canvas. You will submit: (1) a draft of your literature review and conceptual model, (2) a summary of your proposed design for the research (e.g., sampling and recruitment, measures and their relationship to your conceptual model, research methods and procedures, ethical considerations and how you plan to address them), (3) polished drafts of all study materials (e.g., consent form, survey instrument, interview guide, coding/analysis plan), and (4) a brief writeup of your research findings and their significance, including proposed solutions to the problem at hand, and drafts of any figures/tables you hope to include in the final presentation/deliverables.

The fifth assignment builds toward your final public deliverable for the course. While the contents of this assignment will depend upon your chosen deliverable, it should reflect significant progress toward your final deliverable and provide an opportunity for you to receive valuable feedback on it from stakeholders (including myself and your community partner). The rubric for this assignment should be developed in advance of the deadline for set for this assignment in your work plan and provided to stakeholders with the assignment, so it can be used to evaluate and comment on your work.

Confidential Evaluations (0%)

Each student will complete a confidential peer and self evaluation by the deadline for each major assignment for the course (i.e., the proposal and work plan, each of the project assignments, the final presentation, and the final deliverables). These evaluations are required, and will be used to assess individual contributions to the group project. Students who fail to submit an evaluation will be penalized on the assignment being evaluated. *Note: this is an individual, not group, assignment.*

Final Research Presentation (10%)

You will present your research project and findings to our community partner(s) on the last day of class. Research teams will present for approximately 15-20 minutes each, then moderate a Q&A session with their community partner and the class. Your presentation should cover each of the major content areas included in your academic deliverable, then discuss your public deliverable for the project and how you hope it will benefit the community partner and/or help address the problem of interest (see assignment instructions on Canvas for more details). The academic and public value of your research should be emphasized throughout your presentation. You should use the Q&A to get feedback from myself, your community partner, and your classmates on the project, and incorporate the feedback you receive as you make your final revisions to the project deliverables.

Final Deliverables (30%)

Each research team will produce two deliverables as the culmination of your work on the research project: one that communicates your findings to an academic audience (e.g., academic article, policy brief), and one that communicates them to a public audience (e.g., website, flyer, resource, podcast, short film, or

something else, depending on your community partner's goals and needs). Each deliverable is worth 15% of your final grade in the class. Your academic deliverable will be evaluated using the rubric provided on Canvas. Your public deliverable will be evaluated using a rubric developed by your team (the contents of which you will iterate on with myself and your community partner).

Class Participation (10%)

Collaboration is a vital part of producing high quality scholarly work. The best research is produced through iteration on your ideas with others. Active participation is, therefore, vital to the success of our research projects as well as your individual success in the course. An active participant is one who (1) attends class regularly, (2) meets with their research team outside of class, and (3) is well-prepared for and fully engaged in classroom activities (e.g., listens carefully, offers helpful feedback, asks thoughtful questions, generates novel ideas). Research teams will regularly discuss their progress on the project in short, informal (10-15 minute) presentations. These low-stakes presentations will provide teams with an opportunity to get peer feedback on their ongoing work to determine which aspects are working well and which could use improvement. All team members are expected to participate actively in these presentations, reporting on the research tasks they completed during the previous week (including areas of progress and any challenges that arose or tasks that were not completed on time), identifying specific questions they have for their peers or areas in which they would like feedback, and providing thoughtful feedback to other teams following their presentations. *Note: this is an individual, not group, assignment. Chronic unexcused absences will affect your participation grade*.

Final Grade

Your final grade in the course will be determined by our collective brainstorming session at the start of the term (5%), your research team's proposal and work plan (10%), weekly progress reports (10%), five project assignments (25%), your final research presentation (10%) and final deliverables (30%), and active participation in the course (10%). 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.

| 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 our 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.

Cheating, plagiarism, use of the same work in multiple courses, and unauthorized collaboration will not be tolerated. At present, I consider the use of AI writing tools such as ChatGPT in producing written work for this class a form of unauthorized collaboration, as *it is my expectation is that you will independently produce any written work you submit for this course*. Use of AI tools in producing written work will be considered academically dishonest and a violation of Dartmouth's academic honor principle. 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 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 chat with me. Writing and research support are available through RWIT. Peer tutoring and academic coaching are available through the Academic Skills Center.

Absences

Participation is an important part of this course. My expectations for participation are described in the section above on Class Participation. You are permitted up to three absences, no questions asked, without consequences for your class participation grade. ***Chronic unexcused absences, however, will cause a significant loss of points from your participation grade***. If you are already aware of circumstances that will affect your ability to participate in the course regularly or occasionally (e.g., due to participation on an athletic team, college-excused events, religious observances), please arrange a meeting with me at the start of the term so we can plan ahead. If circumstances arise during the term that prevent you from attending class or keeping up with the course material (e.g., serious illness, family emergency), please get in touch with me as soon as possible so we can make plans to keep you on track in the course. Class policies on late and missed work are outlined in more detail below.

Late Work Policy

I expect that students will honor all assignment deadlines and milestones outlined in the syllabus and work plan, unless we explicitly agree upon a revised work plan for your project. Please speak with me at the beginning of the term if you anticipate any circumstances that might affect your ability to get your work in on time and reach out if such a situation arises along the way. My standard policy on late work is as follows. Assignments that come in after the deadline will be ***penalized one letter grade per day; those that are more than five days late will receive a zero***. Reasonable allowances will be made for extenuating circumstances, as long as we connect about these matters at the beginning of the term or on the specific occasions when conflicts arise. Students granted accommodations by Student Accessibility Services should arrange to meet with me early in the term so we can plan ahead.

Course Format and Resources

Course materials will be made available and assignments will be submitted via Canvas. While I plan for our class to meet in person, we may need to shift to a Zoom format if circumstances require. Office hours are by appointment only and will be held via Zoom. You can view my availability and sign up for an appointment using Calendly. If you have any difficulties installing or accessing these resources or are unsure of how to use their necessary features, please contact me as soon as possible.

Re-Grading of Assignments

If you believe I have made an error in grading 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 up, go down, or remain the same*. You have one week from the date the assignment is returned to you to request that it be re-graded.

Accommodations

Students requiring academic accommodations, modifications, or auxiliary aids should contact Student Accessibility Services at either Student.Accessibility.Services@Dartmouth.edu or 603-646-9900. Once your accommodations have been established with SAS, please arrange a private meeting with me early in the term to discuss how I can best support you in the course.

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. 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 or Secure Message in DartHub), 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). 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 COURSE SCHEDULE

The course schedule will largely be dictated by your work plans, but see below for a list of key dates at the beginning and end of the course. You can find more instructions and information about assigned readings for each class period on Canvas.

Class	Topic	Key Activities/Assignments	Assigned Readings
Mon 3/27	Introduction to the course	Course orientation; discussion of potential research topics	Mills; Firebaugh
Wed 3/29	Choosing our research projects	Collaborative brainstorming session; project/team selection	Lareau; Bodovski & Farkas
Mon 4/3	Crafting your course syllabus	In-class workshop for work plan and research proposal	None
…	…	*See Work Plan for details*	…
Wed 5/31	Final research presentations	Presentations to partners/stakeholders; team meetings for final project revisions based on partner feedback	None
Final Deliverables and Confidential Evaluation Due Sunday, June 4 by 11:59 pm			