

SOCY 91: THE SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

Winter Quarter 2025

Meeting Times: Tu/Th, 2:25-4:15pm, x-hour Fri 4:35-5:25pm (2A)

Classroom: 075 Irving Institute

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Course Description

Sociologists have a dual commitment to adequately understand society through rigorous observation and to better the society they live in. In this capstone course, we will work together as a class to answer a research question that helps a community partner address key social problems in the Upper Valley and offer solutions to these problems. We will draw upon shared knowledge of sociological research and theory accumulated over your Dartmouth career and seek out new knowledge, perspectives, and methods that help us answer our research question and better the community. As 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.

Learning Objectives

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 and research to this research question; 3) work as part of a research team to process, collect, and analyze qualitative and/or quantitative 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”—whereby you will translate academic research to a public audience. To do this, you will produce two final deliverables: one scholarly-facing deliverable that communicates your findings to an academic audience, in the form of a white paper; and one public-facing deliverable that communicates your findings to a public audience (options include but are not limited to a podcast, op-ed, website, flyer, resource, or something else, depending on the needs of your community partner and your goals).

Course Readings

There is no required textbook for this course. Readings will be made available on Canvas.

Course Structure

As a capstone class, you, the students will have ownership over this course. Together, you will decide on: the research question you would like to answer; the community partner you will work with; and the most effective final deliverables to communicate your research findings about and proposed solutions to the problem at hand (e.g., podcast, policy brief, white paper, or something else). To ensure that you stay on track, you will create a work plan (syllabus) for the term that will outline major milestones, due dates, and key tasks. We will not meet as a class during x-hour, but you may wish to use this time to meet with your research team. 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 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.**

COVID-19 Safety Regulations

In accordance with [current College policy](#), mask use will be optional in the classroom this term. However, those who test positive for COVID-19 should not attend class, and all students who are identified as a close contact should mask for at least 10 days after exposure. If you refuse to comply with masking or other safety protocols, and to ensure the health and safety of our community, I am obligated to report you to the Dean's office for disciplinary action under Dartmouth's [Standards of Conduct](#). Additional COVID-19 protocols may emerge. Pay attention to emails from the senior administrators at the College. I will communicate any changes and their resulting implications for our class community.

For the health and safety of our class community, please: do not attend class when you are sick, nor when you have been instructed by Student Health Services to stay home.

Evaluation and Grading

Unless otherwise specified, all assignments in this course are group assignments. Therefore, your individual grade for each assignment will be based on a combination of: 1) the grade earned by your group; 2) your contribution to the group, as determined by my observations and your confidential group 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 = $90 \times .8 = 72\%$).

Pitch Competition (5%): In order to decide on our research questions for the term, all students will participate in a pitch competition. Each student (or pair of students) will give a brief five minute "pitch" where they outline their proposed research question, why it is important, the methods they propose using to answer this question, and a proposed community partner. Students will vote on which pitch/es will be developed into our term-long research projects, and we will sort into research teams based on shared substantive interests.

Proposal and Work Plan (5%): Following the pitch competition, research teams must submit: a) a one-page proposal/vision statement for their research project. This must include a clear articulation of your final deliverables (public and scholarly facing); b) a work plan that includes a timeline of major milestones and tasks, and final deliverables. This work plan will be your syllabus for the term. It will be up to the research team to decide upon major deadlines, but all work plans should, at minimum, include the following assignments/milestones:

- 1) Literature search / annotated bibliography and conceptual model
- 2) Methods (design plan) memo
- 3) Results memo
- 4) Description of Public Deliverable
- 5) Final Rubrics (to be used to evaluate your final deliverables—we will workshop this in class)
- 6) Presentation to stakeholder/community partner (final class of the term)
- 7) Two final deliverables (one academic-facing; one public-facing)

Weekly Progress and Goals 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 their progress and goals report on Canvas, no later than Friday @ noon. This document should include: 1) a list of tasks (goals) that need to be completed in the next week, with a clear division of labor for each task (e.g., names of group members responsible for each task), and an explanation for how each task helps move the project forward; and 2) a list of the tasks/goals completed in the past week, including explanations for uncompleted tasks/goals and additional tasks/goals 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).

Biweekly Confidential Group Evaluations (0%): Each student will complete confidential evaluations of their group mates every other week, upon submitting the weekly progress and goals report. These evaluations are required, and will be used to assess individual contributions to the group project. Students who fail to complete a confidential group evaluation will receive a zero on the weekly progress and goals report for the week. (*Note: this is an individual, not group, assignment*).

Project Assignments (30%): The research project will be completed in stages, through a series of at least **three** preliminary project assignments that build to the final deliverable. Project assignments include but may not be limited to: (1) Literature Search / Annotated Bibliography and Conceptual Model (10%); (2) Methods / Design Plan (e.g., interview guide construction, survey design, data coding) (10%); (3) Interpretation of Results (10%). You should consider each of these project assignments to be “rough drafts” of sections of your academic final deliverable (especially the methods and results memos). **These preliminary drafts will be graded on completion (complete/incomplete). For this reason, I may ask you to “revise and resubmit” an assignment and make changes based on my feedback.**

Biweekly Presentations/Workshops (5%): At the end of each week, research teams will present their progress for the week in a short (10-15 minute) presentation. These are low-stakes presentations that will provide teams with an opportunity for feedback from their peers to get a sense of what works and what needs improvement on their portion of the research project.

Final Research Presentation (10%): We will present our research project(s) and findings to our community partner(s) on the last day of class. Research teams will present for approximately 15 minutes each, then moderate a Q&A session with the community partner afterward.

Final Deliverables (30%): Each research team will produce two final deliverables that represent the culmination of the term-long research project (each will be worth 15%). These final deliverables could take many different forms, including but not limited to a policy brief, white paper, podcast, or something else, depending on the team’s interests and the goals of the stakeholders (Prof Houle and Community Partner)

Class Participation (5%): An active class participant is one who: (1) attends classes regularly; (2) meets with their research team outside of class; (3) is actively engaged in classroom activities (e.g., speaks regularly in class, asks questions in the Q&A session of our presentations/workshops). (*Note: this is an individual, not group, assignment*).

Final Grade: 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

Late Policy

We expect that students will honor all assignment deadlines and milestones outlined in the syllabus and Work Plan. On any assignment, your grade will be reduced by 8 percentage points for each day late (e.g., 1 day late a grade of 100 would be reduced to a 92; 2 days, 84; and so on). Please talk to me if you are having difficulty keeping up with the coursework.

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 chat with us before you decide to cheat. [Writing and research support](#) are available through the Institute for Writing and Rhetoric. For additional resources on the Academic Honor Code, plagiarism, and proper citation of sources, please see: <http://writing-speech.dartmouth.edu/learning/materials/sources-and-citations-dartmouth>.

Accommodations

Students who may need disability-related academic adjustments and services for this course are encouraged to see us privately as early in the term as possible. Students requiring disability-related academic adjustments and services must consult with the [Student Accessibility Services](#) office (Carson Hall, Suite 125, 603-646-9900, Student.Accessibility.Services@Dartmouth.edu). Once SAS has authorized services, students must show the originally signed SAS Services and Consent Form and/or a letter on SAS letterhead to us. As a first step, if students have questions about whether they qualify to receive academic adjustments and services, they should contact the SAS office. All inquiries and discussions will remain confidential, but please note that the Student Disabilities Coordinator may be consulted to verify the disability.

Access to Campus Resources

We 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). We encourage you to take advantage of these resources, and to speak with us 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

Note: the course schedule will largely be dictated by research team's work plans, but see below for a list of key dates at the beginning and end of the course. More instructions will be available on canvas.

Class	Topic	Key Activities/Assignments
Tu 1/7	And Now for Something Completely Different: An Introduction to the Course	Course orientation; initial discussion of research project pitches
Th 1/9	Choosing the research project	Pitch competition; voting; team selection
T 1/11	Crafting the work plan / course syllabus	Work plans and proposal
...
Th 3/6	Final Presentations	Presentations to partners/stakeholders; team meetings for final project revisions based on partner feedback
FINAL PAPER AND FINAL CONFIDENTIAL EVAL DUE BY MONDAY, MARCH 10 @ 12 PM EST		