

**St. Francis Xavier University  
Department of Sociology**

**SOCI 202: Research Principles and Practices  
Fall 2016**

Instructor: Dr. Neal A. Smithwick  
Office: AX 111A  
E-mail: [nsmithwi@stfx.ca](mailto:nsmithwi@stfx.ca)  
Office Hours: Mondays 2:15-3:30; Tuesdays 11:15-12:30; Wednesdays 12:45-2:00 (and after class); Thursdays 9:45-12:30; or by appointment.

Class Times: Mondays 12:45-2:00 p.m. and Wednesdays 11:15 a.m.-12:30 p.m.  
Classroom Location: Nicholson Hall, Room 252

- Please use your St. FX e-mail to avoid having your message blocked by SPAM filters.
- Include “SOCI 202” in the subject line.
- Finally, in our academic environment, please practice writing e-mails formally, as you will need to do on a regular basis upon graduation! For example, use a simple greeting, do not use slang or abbreviations, and always sign off with your name!

**Course Description**

This course is designed as an introduction to the field of sociological research methodology. The course is designed to provide an understanding of the various approaches to social research to include both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. All phases of the research process are examined, including the formulation of research problems, the design of research instruments or protocols (such as survey questionnaires or interview schedules), the conducting research and the collection of data, and elementary analyses of results. In exploring each broad methodological approach and specific research technique, emphasis is placed upon identifying the strengths and limitations associated with a particular strategy, which will serve to demonstrate that no single research method or technique is valid or appropriate for investigating *all* research questions or problems. At the end of the course, students are expected to be able to understand how to design a research project and how to write a preliminary research proposal.

- It is strongly recommended that students attend all classes because the textbook for the course is considered supplemental to help students understand the core principles of social research methods (the text will not provide the details for tests or the entire construction of the major assignment!).

**Learning Objectives**

This course is designed to:

- Describe the key components of social research methodologies.
- Develop skills and knowledge about both quantitative and qualitative social research.
- Identify criteria used to evaluate the quality of social research (ie: their reliability and validity).
- Formulate researchable questions/topics.
- Define a research strategy and design a research project outline.
- Discuss the practices and principles of both quantitative and qualitative research.

## **Required Textbook**

Walliman, Nicholas. 2011. *Research Methods: The Basics*. London: Routledge.

- **Please note:** This is a lecture and class participation-based course, so the textbook is considered supplemental material to assist students to comprehend the core principles and practices in research strategies.

## **Evaluation**

- All components are required for course completion. **In order to be fair to all students, there will be no alternative assignments for course evaluation.** This includes commitments to other activities outside of class times.
- Furthermore, it is your responsibility to track your own grades: Please do not contact the professor for such information.

The breakdown of the final grade is as follows:

|                           |            |
|---------------------------|------------|
| <b>Mid-Term Test:</b>     | <b>25%</b> |
| <b>In-Class Exercises</b> | <b>20%</b> |
| <b>Research Proposal</b>  | <b>30%</b> |
| <b>Final Exam</b>         | <b>25%</b> |

### **Mid-Term Test (25%): Wednesday, October 19**

This test will cover the first half of the course material. Students are responsible for all lecture material and assigned readings. The test will consist of multiple choice questions and short answer questions.

### **In-Class Exercises (20%):**

Attendance in this class is mandatory, so it is imperative that students complete all weekly reading assignments prior to the class time, and that you arrive to class on time. There will be small group in-class assignments (ten in total) that are worth 20% of your final grade. You will be asked to work in groups of two to three students, and you do not have to work with the same people for any given discussion. The purpose of these discussions is to reinforce course material, reduce the reliance on memorization, facilitate conceptual synthesis, and create an opportunity for collaborative learning. Students will apply course material discussed in the lectures and readings within a guided activity.

Class time will be allocated for these discussions, which are to be handed in at the end of the class period. ***Each group will submit ONE copy of responses with each group member's name and StFX-ID printed clearly at the top of the page.*** All discussion work will be submitted by hand-written responses before the end of class. You are expected to brainstorm together, and then write one, cohesive final draft.

Each student participating within a group will receive equal credit for their contributions. The small group work will be graded on a check plus, check, check minus grading scheme as follows:

|                    |  |                 |
|--------------------|--|-----------------|
| <i>Check Plus</i>  | The assignment was completed with all of the associated questions addressed. Answers were substantiated with material from the course. | <i>3 points</i> |
| <i>Check</i>       | The assignment was completed with all of the associated questions addressed. Responses did not adequately apply the course material.   | <i>2 points</i> |
| <i>Check Minus</i> | Incomplete submission with either unanswered questions or little to no relation to course material.                                    | <i>1 point</i>  |
| <i>Absent</i>      | Student was not in class to complete the small group assignment.   | <i>0 points</i> |

**Research Proposal (30%): Due in class on Wednesday, November 30**

A major component of the course will be the preparation of a formal research proposal. Students will complete a realistic and detailed proposal for an empirical study. You may address any empirical question using any accepted research approach.

For this proposal you will design a study based on a topic and methodological procedure of your choice. I will not provide predetermined topic areas because this can make it more difficult to complete the assignment if none of the areas are of interest to you! Once you have decided upon a topic, you will explain how you would go about investigating that social phenomenon. You must check your topic with the instructor. As a second year course, this skill is intended to help you to:

- a) practice writing academically.
- b) teach you how to write a proposal, rather than an essay or report.

The proposal will be between 2,500 – 3,000 words (not including title page/contents/abstract/references). Your proposal will vary in structure according to the methodological procedure that you choose (quantitative or qualitative). I will discuss further information on the expectations for the proposal in class; however, your proposal will need to address the following aspects:

**Introduction:** Describe the purpose for conducting the research and include a problem statement. Stipulate the research question(s) and/or any hypotheses (if you are using quantitative methods. For example, if a hypothesis is used, then identify the dependent and independent variables).

**Background/Literature Review:** Review existing literature (theory and background) on your social phenomenon, define key terms and highlight what is known/unknown about this phenomenon. This requires some research!

**Methodology:** Describe the research design in detail. Include the type of research (quantitative or qualitative) and explain why this is the most appropriate approach for investigating your central research question (for quantitative) or research statement (for qualitative). Include the research questions and determine the sampling technique to be used and why (conceptualize and operationalize key concepts). This is the main part of the entire assignment.

**Conclusion:** Describe the significance of your research and its limitations/future implications.

**References:** You *must* use an academic style of in-text citations and referencing. ASA formatting is used in this course, but you can use another format, **except that all citations must include the page number**. This means that you must not list web-sites (always download the PDF version in order to obtain proper citations and referencing).

\* You must submit a **hard copy** of your assignment at the beginning of the final class. E-mail attachments are not acceptable. Late assignments will be penalized 3% per day, including weekends.

**Final Test (25%): Date to be set by the Registrar during the Final Exam Period.**

This test will cover half of the course material. Students are responsible for all assigned readings and class lectures. The test will consist of multiple choice questions and short answer questions.

**Course Outline**

| <b>Date</b>      | <b>Topic</b>   | <b>Recommended Readings and Assignments Due</b>   |
|------------------|--|---|
| Sept. 7          | <b>Introduction.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Course expectations and outline.</li> <li>• Foundations in Social Research.</li> </ul>   | Course Text: pp. 1-3  |
| Sept. 12 & 14    | <b>Theoretical Assumptions in Research Orientations.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Key principles.</li> <li>• Theory and research.</li> <li>• Induction and deduction.</li> </ul> | Course Text: Ch. 1<br>Course Text: Ch. 2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Think about a research topic that interests you.</li> </ul>           |
| Sept. 19 & 21    | <b>Social Research Ethics.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Operationalization of research: Some case studies.</li> </ul>  | Course Text: Ch. 4 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is your research question or research topic?</li> </ul>                                |
| Sept. 26 & 28    | <b>Elements of Research Design.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Causal relationships, variables and measurement.</li> </ul>   | Course Text: Ch. 3<br>Course Text: Ch. 6 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Begin your research proposals: Refer to course text: Ch. 5</li> </ul> |
| Oct. 3 & 5       | <b>Quantitative Research Sampling.</b>   | Course Text: Ch. 8: pp. 93-98   |
| Oct. 12          | <b>Quantitative Survey Design.</b>   |   |
| Oct. 17          | <b>Quantitative Data Analysis.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review.</li> </ul>   | Course Text: Ch. 9  |
| Oct. 19          | <b>Mid-Term Test</b>   |   |
| Oct. 24 & 26     | <b>Unobtrusive Research</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How the researcher may affect the research.</li> </ul>  | Course Text: Ch. 7<br>Course Text: Ch. 8: pp. 100-102   |
| Oct. 31 & Nov. 2 | <b>Qualitative Data Collection: Field Research</b>   | Course Text: Ch. 8: pp. 102   |
| Nov. 7 & 9       | <b>Qualitative Data Collection: Interviewing</b>   | Course Text: Ch. 8: pp. 98-100  |
| Nov. 14 & 16     | <b>Qualitative Data Analysis.</b>  | Course Text: Ch. 10   |
| Nov. 21          | <b>Review Designing a Proposal.</b>  | Course Text: Ch. 11: pp. 146-158  |

|              |   |  |
|--------------|---|--|
| Nov. 23 & 28 | <b>Mixed Methods: Quantitative and Qualitative Research Design.</b> |  |
| Nov. 30      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review.</li> </ul>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Research proposals due at the beginning of class: Hard copies only.</b></li> </ul> |

### **Technology and Academic Conduct**

Although electronic devices are allowed in class, especially for annotating lecture content, it is expected that students not distract themselves and others by engaging in content outside of course materials. Think of your undergraduate studies as practice for entering the real world, in which using social media during work hours can often lead to you being fired! Furthermore, *cell phone usage is a very disrespectful and disruptive act, so please put them away prior to class.*

- The course includes a **Moodle** course page, but please do not e-mail the professor via Moodle (use the StFX web-mail). All topics are listed on Moodle to help you follow the course syllabus easily.
- Furthermore, there is a student discussion forum available on Moodle for you to communicate with one another outside of class. Please use this forum for whatever you want, such as asking questions that you may have missed in lectures, organizing study groups, seeking clarity or just to introduce yourself. This forum is for student communication, so I will not be monitoring them (in other words, I will not participate).

### **Accessibility and Accommodation**

St. Francis Xavier University supports academic accommodation for students with any sort of disability so that they may meet the learning objectives of their courses and be given the opportunity to be evaluated fairly on their mastery of course material. The **Tramble Room** welcomes students with documented disabilities and offers them a student-centred program of support. For more information about access and accommodation, please see: [http://sites.stfx.ca/accessible\\_learning/](http://sites.stfx.ca/accessible_learning/). **For all students**, please feel free to speak with me about course material and how to succeed in academia. It is my pleasure to help you.