

Brescia University College, at
Western University

2017

Sociology 3306B

Investigating the Social World: Quantitative Research

Prof. E. Bell
Office: 213 Merici

Classes
Tuesdays 10:30 - 11:30 am
Thursdays 9:30 - 11:30 am
Location: BR206

Office Hours:

Tuesdays 2:30 - 3:30 pm
Wednesdays 1:30 - 2:30 pm

Or by appointment:

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Course Description

This course is mandatory for third-year Sociology students in the Honors Specialization. Students will learn to evaluate quantitative sociological research and will gain hands-on experience carrying out and writing up a research project that investigates an issue of public importance. Issues to be addressed in this course include: posing a research question, developing concepts and measures, and analyzing quantitative survey data.

The philosophy to be followed is:

I hear, and I forget.

I see, and I remember.

I do, and I understand. (Confucius, sometimes attributed to Xunzi)

Much of the learning for this course will take place through conducting your own research project and completing a number of computer assignments. An important learning opportunity will come from the feedback you get from your fellow students and the instructor as you complete various stages of your research project and share your work with the rest of the class. You will receive guidance on how to do the statistical analysis using SPSS software in lab sessions, which will be complemented by classroom instruction on various statistical procedures.

Note

Students will need a portable USB drive (“flash drive”) for the assignments in this course. A capacity of 256 MB is plenty.

Brescia Competencies

Brescia courses are designed to develop students’ competencies in a number of different areas (see <http://brescia.uwo.ca/academics/brescia-competencies/>). This course is designed to create a learning environment in which you will develop your competency in:

- 1) **Critical thinking**, in particular how to think analytically and statistically about the world around you, and how to evaluate empirical claims about the social world. You will gain experience in constructively criticizing published quantitative research, and in offering critiques of the ideas and research presented by your classmates.
- 2) **Inquiry and analysis**, which is related to critical thinking, and is the major focus of this course. You will learn valuable lessons in how to conduct your own inquiry into and quantitative analysis of a sociological topic of your own choosing. In particular, you will gain experience in using multiple linear regression to investigate your topic.
- 3) **Problem solving**. The first step in problem solving is identifying what the problem is. In social research, the identification of the problem to be solved often takes the form of posing a research question. You will get some practice in formulating a research question, which you will then address by doing multivariate analyses of survey data and other related tasks throughout the term.

You will also learn how to use SPSS software to calculate and interpret statistics and thus how to use it to solve statistical problems.

- 4) **Communication**. You will have an opportunity to communicate, both in writing to the instructor and verbally to your classmates, what your research question is and how it will be researched. Near the end of the term you will have a chance to present your research findings to the rest of the class, discuss how the results may be interpreted, and talk about what the social and theoretical implications of your findings are.

Most classes will have a seminar format, which will allow for informal communication in a small-group setting.

- 5) ***Self awareness and development***, and ***social awareness and engagement***. These competencies are enhanced by increasing your knowledge about the empirical world and how it may be researched and analyzed. To develop oneself and to become more socially aware and engaged, it helps to have some familiarity with quantitative research procedures that allow you to better understand certain aspects of yourself and society at large.
- 6) ***Valuing***, which involves the application of moral principles and ethical codes. An important part of developing this competency relates to the issue of how to conduct social research in an ethical manner. Also to be considered and discussed are the social justice implications of the research you will do.

Course Requirements

- 1) The initial statement of your research question, worth 5% of your final grade.*
- 2) Three computer assignments, each worth 5% of the final grade.*
- 3) A research proposal, worth 20% of your final grade.*
- 4) A major research project, worth 35% of your final grade.*
- 5) A final exam, worth 25% of the final grade, to be written in the April exam period, scheduled by the Registrar.

* A separate handout will be provided that outlines what is required, due dates, etc.

Classroom Etiquette

PLEASE:

Do not use computers in class *for any reason*, except to take notes.

Turn **off** cell phones (putting them on vibrate is not allowed) and **store them out of sight**.

Do not send or read e-mails or text messages while class is in session.

Refrain from speaking to a neighbour during class time, especially if someone (either the instructor or a fellow class member) is speaking to the class.

How We Will Proceed

In class we will alternate between “classroom discussion topics,” which will cover general points pertaining to quantitative research and their implications for students’ projects, and the “statistical and methodological learning modules,” which will involve instruction on various statistical procedures and their computer applications using SPSS software.

Classroom Discussion Topics

- 1) Overview of course requirements
- 2) Finding a research topic
- 3) Developing research questions
- 4) Student presentations on their research questions
- 5) Doing a literature review
- 6) Preparing a research proposal
- 7) Student presentations of their research proposals
- 8) Completing a research project
- 9) Student presentations of research projects

Statistical and Methodological Learning Modules

A number of class lectures will be devoted to refreshing your memory on some basic statistical procedures that you learned in Sociology 2205A/B, and to an introduction to multivariate statistics. Computer lab sessions will be held where you will learn how to conduct those statistical analyses using SPSS software. Some of the learning modules have assigned readings.

Summaries of learning modules:

1) Creating new variables using the Transform > Compute Variable function; specifying missing data; creating syntax files; creating variable and value labels; producing and interpreting basic descriptive statistics: mean, median, mode, standard deviation, standard error of the mean, skewness and kurtosis; basic graphing techniques: line graphs, histograms with normal curves superimposed; and using the Explore function to create confidence intervals for a mean and to test the significance of the difference between two sample means.

2) Basic causal models:

- a) independent effects
- b) spurious relationships
- c) suppressor variables
- d) chain relationships
- e) interaction effects

Assigned reading: “Reading #1,” on reserve at the Beryl Ivey Library.

3) Recoding variables and selecting cases (working with a subset of respondents); creating and interpreting two- and three-way contingency tables; producing and interpreting the chi square statistic; and producing and interpreting measures of association for nominal and ordinal variables: lambda, gamma, Kendall’s tau-b, and Spearman’s rho.

4) Review of: Pearson’s r , simple (bivariate) regression, and one-way analysis of variance; introduction to multiple (linear) regression; use of “dummy” variables in regression; standardized and unstandardized regression coefficients.

Assigned reading: “Reading #2,” on reserve at the Beryl Ivey Library.

5) Working with weighted samples.

6) Handling missing data: listwise versus pairwise deletion of missing cases.

Course Antirequisites and Prerequisites

Antirequisites: The former Sociology 3302A/B.

Prerequisites: Enrollment in Honors Specialization or Honors Double Major in the Department of Sociology with a minimum grade of 60% in both Sociology 2205A/B and 2206A/B.

2016-17 BRESCIA UNIVERSITY COLLEGE ACADEMIC POLICIES AND REGULATIONS

1. POLICY REGARDING MAKEUP EXAMS AND EXTENSIONS OF DEADLINES

When a student requests academic accommodation (e.g., extension of a deadline, a makeup exam) for work representing 10% or more of the student's overall grade in the course, it is the responsibility of the student to provide acceptable documentation to support a medical or compassionate claim. All such requests for academic accommodation **must** be made through an Academic Advisor and include supporting documentation. Academic accommodation for illness will be granted only if the documentation indicates that the onset, duration and severity of the illness are such that the student could not reasonably be expected to complete her academic responsibilities. Minor ailments typically treated by over-the-counter medications will not normally be accommodated. Documentation shall be submitted as soon as possible to the student's Academic Advisor indicating the period of illness and when the student should be able to resume academic responsibilities. Students must submit their documentation along with a request for relief specifying the nature of the accommodation being requested no later than two business days after the date specified for resuming responsibilities. Appropriate academic accommodation will be determined by the Dean's Office in consultation with the student's instructor(s). Please note that personal commitments (e.g., vacation flight bookings, work schedule) which conflict with a scheduled test, exam or course requirement are **not** grounds for academic accommodation.

A UWO Student Medical Certificate (SMC) is **required** if a student is seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds. This documentation should be obtained at the time of the initial consultation with the physician/nurse practitioner or walk-in clinic. A SMC can be downloaded from: <http://www.westerncalendar.uwo.ca/2016/pg117.html> The student must request documentation sufficient to demonstrate that her ability to meet academic responsibilities was seriously affected. Please note that under University Senate regulations documentation stating simply that the student "was seen for a medical reason" or "was ill" is **not** adequate to support a request for academic accommodation.

Whenever possible, requests for academic accommodation should be initiated in advance of due dates, examination dates, etc. Students must follow up with their professors and Academic Advisor in a timely manner.

The full policy on requesting accommodation due to illness can be viewed at:
http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_illness.pdf

2. ACADEMIC CONCERNS

If you feel that you have a medical or personal problem that is interfering with your work, contact your instructor and Academic Advisor as soon as possible. Problems may then be documented and possible arrangements to assist you can be discussed at the time of occurrence

rather than on a retroactive basis. Retroactive requests for academic accommodation on medical or compassionate grounds may not be considered.

If you think that you are too far behind to catch up or that your work load is not manageable, you should consult an Academic Advisor. If you consider reducing your workload by dropping one or more courses, this must be done by the appropriate deadlines (refer to the Registrar's website, www.registrar.uwo.ca, for official dates). You should consult with the course instructor and the Academic Advisor who can help you consider alternatives to dropping one or more courses. *Note that dropping a course may affect OSAP eligibility and/or Entrance Scholarship eligibility.*

The Dean may refuse permission to write the final examination in a course if the student has failed to maintain satisfactory academic standing throughout the year or for too frequent absence from the class or laboratory (<http://www.westerncalendar.uwo.ca/2016/pg130.html>)

3. ABSENCES

Short Absences: If you miss a class due to a minor illness or other problems, check your course outline for information regarding attendance requirements and make sure you are not missing a test or assignment. Cover any readings and arrange to borrow notes from a classmate. Contact the course instructor if you have any questions.

Extended Absences: If you have an extended absence, you should contact the course instructor and an Academic Advisor. Your course instructor and Academic Advisor can discuss ways for you to catch up on missed work and arrange academic accommodations, if appropriate.

4. POLICY ON CHEATING & ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site: <http://www.westerncalendar.uwo.ca/2016/pg113.html>

Students are responsible for understanding the nature of and avoiding the occurrence of plagiarism and other academic offences. Students are urged to read the section on Scholastic Offences in the Academic Calendar. Note that such offences include plagiarism, cheating on an examination, submitting false or fraudulent assignments or credentials, impersonating a candidate, or submitting for credit in any course without the knowledge and approval of the instructor to whom it is submitted, any academic work for which credit has previously been obtained or is being sought in another course in the University or elsewhere. Students are advised to consult the section on Academic Misconduct in the Western Academic Calendar.

If you are in doubt about whether what you are doing is inappropriate or not, consult your instructor, the Student Services Centre, or the Registrar. A claim that "you didn't know it was wrong" is not accepted as an excuse.

The penalties for a student guilty of a scholastic offence (including plagiarism) include refusal of a passing grade in the assignment, refusal of a passing grade in the course, suspension from the University, and expulsion from the University.

Plagiarism:

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea or a passage from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offence (see Scholastic Offence Policy in the Western Academic Calendar).

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com.

Computer-marked Tests/exams:

Computer-marked multiple-choice tests and/or exams may be subject to submission for similarity review by software that will check for unusual coincidences in answer patterns that may indicate cheating. Software currently in use to score computer-marked multiple-choice tests and exams performs a similarity review as part of standard exam analysis.

5. PROCEDURES FOR APPEALING ACADEMIC EVALUATIONS

All appeals of a grade must be directed first to the course instructor. If the student is not satisfied with the decision of the course instructor, a written appeal signed by the student must be sent to the Department Chair. If the response of the department is considered unsatisfactory to the student, she may then submit a signed, written appeal to the Office of the Dean. Only after receiving a final decision from the Dean may a student appeal to the Senate Review Board Academic. A Guide to Appeals is available from the Ombudsperson's Office, or you can consult an Academic Advisor. Students are advised to consult the section on Student Academic Appeals under Academic Rights and Responsibilities in the Western Academic Calendar (<http://www.westerncalendar.uwo.ca/2016/pg112.html>)

6. PREREQUISITES AND ANTIREQUISITES

Unless you have either the prerequisites for a course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you will be removed from the course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisite(s).

Similarly, you will also be deleted from a class list if you have previously taken an antirequisite course unless this has the approval of the Dean. These decisions may not be appealed. You will

receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course because you have taken an antirequisite course.

7. SUPPORT SERVICES

The Brescia University College Registrar's website, with a link to Academic Advisors, is at <http://brescia.uwo.ca/academics/registrar-services/>. The website for the Student Development Centre at Western is at <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/>. Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health @ Western http://uwo.ca/health/mental_wellbeing/ for information including a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

Portions of this document were taken from the Academic Calendar, the Handbook of Academic and Scholarship Policy and the Academic Handbook of Senate Regulations. This document is a summary of relevant regulations and does not supersede the academic policies and regulations of the Senate of the University of Western Ontario.