

Research Practicum Syllabus 2024/25

SOC6711Y

TIMES

FALL: 12-3 pm. Thursday

WINTER: 1-4 pm. Thursday

INSTRUCTORS

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Course Description

Two of the most important components of doctoral training include learning how to create an independent research project and how to communicate findings to different audiences, including the academic community. In this course, we take up the challenge of translating your general sociological interests into a research project, including formulating a research *question*, choosing appropriate data and methods to address those questions, and communicating findings and insights in a way that engages with and contributes to the broader academic literature. The research process involves a set of practices that require careful implementation at each stage, but can also bring unforeseen challenges requiring strategic choices, hard thinking, reflection and compromise.

The Doctoral Research Practicum is designed to guide doctoral students through the process of producing an original research paper, from the specification of an appropriate sociological question to the task of writing up one's findings in a defensible, publishable paper, and everything in between. To accomplish this goal, students will conduct their own research, obtain or produce data, conduct analyses and develop a publishable paper that draws from this research by the end of the course. Along the way, we will meet weekly to discuss each student's progress and suggest ways of improving the research. Toward this end, students will circulate, present and evaluate each other's work in written and oral formats, receiving feedback from their peers, course instructors, and their advisors. Students will also submit response memos regarding how they address feedback with new versions of the paper.

Grade Components and Policies

Students will receive a (provisional) grade for the fall and an overall grade for the course at the end of the year. The grade components are as follows:

1. Class participation during fall and winter terms (20%)
2. Preliminary Research Statement (due 15 July, pass/fail)
3. First Research Statement (due on first class – 12 September, pass/fail)
4. Second Research Statement (due 31 October, pass/fail)

5. Working Paper (due 5 December, 30%)
6. First draft of complete paper (7000-8000 words) (due 27 February, pass/fail)
7. Final Paper (max 10,000 words) (due 10 April, 40%)
8. Pass/fail assignments (10%)

Policy for late assignments

We will apply a late penalty of 5% per day (for the assignment) for cases of undocumented lateness in submitting written work. In order to keep your work and the collective work of the whole class moving along, we stress that this late penalty is non-negotiable.

Pass/fail assignments

Pass/fail assignments are worth 10% of the final grade. An assignment is considered a pass if it is submitted on time and the work shows evidence of real engagement and effort, as determined by instructors. A “pass” is calculated as an A or 8.5/10; a “fail” is a B or 7/10. An incomplete assignment will be calculated as a 0/10.

Class participation

Producing excellent research is never done in isolation. Rather, it is a communal process wherein researchers critically engage with the existing literature and draw on the feedback of others in crafting their study, developing key arguments and sharpening research findings. Students and professors in the course will serve as the “scholarly community” from which to draw inspiration, constructive criticism, and helpful ideas about each step of the research and writing process.

Accordingly, class attendance is crucial and worth 20% of the course grade. Students should complete the assigned readings and carefully review the drafts submitted by their peers prior to the start of class. Students should be prepared to participate in a constructive discussion about their classmates' drafts during class time. You are also expected to provide constructive written comments on the work of those for whom you are assigned to evaluate and provide oral comments to in class. We hope that this class will be a safe space to share your work and help your classmates with theirs. However, should any issues arise during class that make you feel uncomfortable, please do not hesitate to reach out to one of the instructors.

Classroom disengagement (e.g., checking email, scrolling on a phone, not listening to other students when they are speaking) lowers classroom morale, but it also reflects that you are not attending to the breadth of work in the academic discipline. Disengagement is especially problematic during the provision of feedback to authors – a time when authors display their hard work to their peers and are looking for collective engagement, constructive feedback, and fresh ideas. Please do your best to stay connected to the classroom discussions, and avoid using technology (e.g., laptop) as a way to zone out and avoid intellectual engagement. And remember that your graduate student cohort will include your professional and intellectual colleagues, across institutions, for a very long time!

Participation also includes learning to recognize excellent research and how it is communicated within our department. To that end, part of your learning experience and class participation through feedback to the class may include *attending job talk presentations* in the department this fall. Depending on their scheduling, we will ask you to write a 1 paragraph assessment about your views on what worked well and what did not work well in the talk, evaluating their research questions, the suitability of their data and methods, their argument, and their capacity to speak to the relevant literatures in the discipline. In these cases, you should also be ready to speak to the class regarding your impressions of these talks.

Submission Components

Preliminary Research Statement: Due 15 July

Length: 1-2 pages

1. What is my research topic? (e.g. I am going to study X, e.g. child poverty).
2. What is my broad research question? (e.g. how does child poverty affect the life chances of children? Or, how do parents in households living below the official poverty line manage childrearing and family wellbeing?).
3. What is the research puzzle or “problem” (e.g. there are three competing explanations regarding the relationship between poverty in childhood and adult SES...; in the existing literature, how is the concept of “poverty” defined and studied? In what contexts, and with what assumptions?)
4. What data are you going to use? Again, feel free to suggest more than one possibility. Make sure you describe: the population you will be studying as well as the source of the data. If you are collecting your own data, briefly describe the methodology. If you are using secondary data, describe the data set. Please also describe the status of your data (do you have access, if collecting what stage are you at and what is your timeline). **You must have your data in hand by the end of September 2024.**
5. Who will you ask to be your faculty advisor for this paper? You want to pick someone who is going to engage with your work and will play an active role in reading your drafts.

First research statement: Due 12 September, 9:00 am (first day of class)

Length: 1,000-1,500 words, not including references

The first research statement will establish the foundation for the subsequent research process and must include the following subheadings with appropriate content:

1. Title
2. Abstract: (150 words). A complete but very concise description of the paper –one that will entice readers. You may include one sentence with preliminary findings or not mention findings at all. The abstract will change with each draft.
3. Introduction: Here you specify the research problem, provide a rationale for the importance of the problem for sociology, and provide an enumeration of hypotheses or interrelated research questions (no more than three) that will guide the research.
4. Literature Review: A focused, short discussion of how the existing sociological literature on the topic relates to your chosen problem (include a short bibliography for all in-text citations).

5. **Methods:** a brief discussion of the major methodological facets of the proposed research, with special attention to data source, and method of collection and analysis. You should also note if you intend to make generalizations from your research findings to a population and/or to a body of theory. If your data collection is complete, you should include descriptives of your data. See published articles for examples. For interview data, this would be a description, perhaps in table form, of the composition of your sample with relevant sociodemographic information. For survey data (or similar), descriptives should be calculated on a sub-sample of your data—no more than 50% of your cases. This sub-sample will be your “exploratory” sample and will be referenced in future assignments. Descriptives should be presented in a table that describes the distribution of the dependent variable(s), independent variables, and control variables.

Second Research Statement: Due 24 October, 9:00 am

Length: 2,500-4,000 words, not including references

The second research statement will be a more fully developed version of the first that takes into account the comments received from professors and students on the first version. Your second research statement should expand and develop the following sections:

1. **Title Page:** Include your name, advisor’s name, and a title that meaningfully captures the project.
2. **Abstract:** (150 words). A complete but very concise description of the paper – one that entices an audience to read the entire paper. You should include one sentence with preliminary findings. The abstract will change with each draft.
3. **Introduction:** Outline the relevance of the defined research problem in relation to key debates and social issues; elaborate the key arguments and unique contribution of paper; and where appropriate, present an outline of analytical and research plan, including discussion of data and preliminary presentation of sample characteristics or case(s).
4. **Literature Review:** Expanded critical discussion of the relevant sociological literature with the task of connecting it to your research question and data analysis strategy. Here you will want to show: 1) command of the literature on your topic and 2) specify your intended contribution to the literature—how are you extending, clarifying, or challenging it, specifically.
5. **Methods:** Be sure to be clear in your discussion of the types of method you are utilizing to address the research question. Where appropriate, discuss analytical and research plan, including discussion of data, and preliminary presentation of sample characteristics or the context of the case study or comparison. Again, for those using survey data (or similar), all preliminary work should be restricted to the exploratory sample.
6. **Data analysis/empirical discussion:** Here, you should also begin to analyze your data and report some preliminary findings and address possible counter-explanations. For those using survey (or similar) data, these analyses should be restricted to the exploratory sample.
7. **REQUIRED Response memo** (no more than 1000 words, and not included in the overall word limit): The response memo must detail how you responded to the feedback you received. This is a standard document that accompanies revised submissions to peer-reviewed journals. If you receive suggestions that you are not following or accommodating, explain why in this memo. For the feedback that you are incorporating into your revisions, you describe the changes you made and any significant implications of these changes. A good response memo

can be time consuming, so be sure to build in time to write this document. It can also be very helpful in clarifying for yourself how your paper is changing.

Working Paper: Due 5 December, 5:00 pm.

Length: About 4,000 words, excluding references, figures and tables.

This submission should look and feel much like the first draft of a research paper—including your results thus far—except that you should also include notes about unresolved problems regarding theory, data and analysis. In other words, we want to know what still needs to be done. Again, you must submit a response memo that details your responses to the feedback you received.

The working paper must include the following elements:

1. **TITLE:** A meaningful and accurate title; A great abstract – that is one with a “hook” and the preliminary results.
2. **Introduction.** A very clear explanation of how your research will contribute to this literature, by extending, clarifying or challenging an empirical or conceptual aspect of the field. What is the mark you plan to make in this area? Will you contribute new theoretical, conceptual or empirical insights? In short, what will you tell us we didn’t know before, what makes it worth knowing, and why will you be able to do it? This should be contained in a 3-4 paragraph Introduction.
3. **Literature Review:** A well-developed critical and sculpted literature review. Look to well-respected sociological journals for guidance. Use meaningful subheads (not “Literature Review” but “The Downsides of Schedule Control”)
4. **Data and Methods:** A very clear description of the data and methods. Think in terms of whether or not someone could replicate your work based on how you’ve described it.
5. **Results:** A clear write up of your results. In other words, there should be an initial attempt to analyze your data. Provide clear interpretations of your coefficients, quotes, documents or field notes using the relevant literature or theory. Again, for those using survey (or similar) data, these results should be based on the exploratory sample only.
6. **Discussion section:** At this point, a discussion section is not expected because it could change after revising the paper yet again. But you are welcome to include it if you like.
7. **Response memo (no more than 1000 words, and not included in the overall word limit):** The response memo details how you responded to the feedback you received.

Complete Paper Draft: Due 27 February at 9 am

Length: 7000-8000 words, with a hard and firm limit of 10,000 words

The first draft of your complete paper will look like a journal article. Of utmost importance in this draft is the careful match of evidence to claims and data to argument. At this stage you should have a clearly articulated research problem, a clear and succinct critical literature review that logically ends with your research question(s), a clear and detailed methodological section, a clear and succinct data analysis section, and a compelling discussion section that hammers home your key points and advances an original contribution to the literature. The paper must include:

1. *Title Page*: with name, date, word count. Include a title page footnote w/ Advisor, potential discussants, and target journals.
2. *Abstract*: Abstract that conveys key elements of the research puzzle, sample/data, findings, and contribution (250-word max).
3. *Introduction*: Introduction with a clear articulation/framing of the importance of this question for the scholarly literature and/or the welfare of society. Often intros are three paragraphs, with the first two outlining the issue/state of the literature, and the third indicating what this study, with this particular data, will do to extend that literature.
4. *Literature Review*: A well-developed critical literature review where you use the literature (empirical and/or theoretical) to set up the contribution of your research. Use meaningful headers. Often this section ends with a one-paragraph summary and restatement of your research questions.
5. *Data and Methods*: A clear, concise description of the sample, data and measures.
6. *Results*: A presentation and analysis of the results that directly address the central question(s) of your research project. For those using survey or similar data, these analyses can use either the exploratory sample or the full sample. If you are still tinkering with the models, stick with the exploratory sample until the final paper.
7. *Discussion*: Discussion section that demonstrates your contribution by tying findings back to the relevant literature; discusses limitations of the study; and provides avenues for future research.
8. *Conclusion*: Brief conclusion section summarizing the contribution. This is typically only 1-2 paragraphs.
9. *Response memo* (no more than 1000 words, and not included in the overall word limit): The response memo details how you responded to the feedback you received.

Final Paper: Due 10 April 5 pm

Length: 7,000-10,000 words. **Hard limit of 10,000 words.** A journal will typically refuse to review a paper that is above their word limits.

NOTE: many journals have word limits that are shorter than 10,000 words, and these limits include the abstract, endnotes/footnotes, and references.

The paper should include all the elements of the former draft but in a polished, publication-ready fashion in the style of the journal to which you plan to submit it. In this sense, it will be helpful for you to identify a suitable sociological journal for your paper and gain exposure to the structure and style of the range of articles it publishes.

Practicum Annual Conference Presentation

You will be expected to give a 15-minute conference-style presentation on this work at the Practicum Annual Conference (PAC). Be sure to proofread your papers extensively, provide proper ASA style citation format (available online and also on any of the many ASA journals, including the *American Sociological Review*, the *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, *Social Psychology Quarterly*, among others).

The Practicum Annual Conference is typically held in early-mid April and faculty and grad students are invited. Students present their research, conference style, for 15 minutes, and discussant and audience members provide feedback.

Course Schedule

Fall 2024

Week 1. Sept 12. Introduction to Practicum. Research statement due 9:00am.

GOAL: Review syllabus; explain readings groups and research feedback; update about how projects have progressed in the summer.

To prepare for class you must come to class with the following:

1. **One published article** that you find stimulating and inspiring. This article need not be on the same topic as your practicum paper, but it should be an exemplar for the type of intellectual product you aspire to create. Be prepared to discuss what makes it an exemplar for you.
2. **Two journals** to which you would ideally like to submit your article for review. Be prepared to talk about why you selected these journals. Reflect on any implications for what it means for your own paper – length, style, articles on your topic you need to cite from this journal, etc.

Week 2. Sept 19. Formulating a research question: Puzzles, gaps, innovations

GOAL: Workshop and refine your research questions.

**NOTE: These are provisional reading selections, and readings may change.*

To prepare for class please:

1. Read: Kristin Luker. 2008. *Salsa Dancing in the Social Sciences: Research in an Age of Info-Glut*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Chapters 4 and 5. (“What is this a Case of, Anyway?” and “Reviewing the Literature.”)
2. Read: Abbott, Andrew A. 2004. Chapter 1. “Explanation,” in *Methods of Discovery: Heuristics for the Social Sciences*. Norton.
3. Answer the questions that Luker poses at the end of each chapter and be prepared to share these in class.

Week 3. Sept 26. Academic Writing & Making a Contribution

In this class we will continue discussing one of the most essential topics facing sociological researchers: *how to “frame” the research question*. We will also discuss how to relate your research question to relevant social scientific literature, and how to think broadly about your academic contribution to the field. We will also important mechanical issues like writing style, finding the right journal, and how to “get it out the door”.

READ (and be prepared to discuss, engage, and critique, especially in relation to your own research):

- Becker, Howard. 2014. "What's Happening Elsewhere: Reasoning from a Case to the World." In *What about Mozart? What about Murder? Reasoning from Cases*. University of Chicago Press.
- Bartkowski, John P., Carma S. Deem, and Christopher G. Ellison. 2015. "Publishing in Academic Journals: Strategic Advice for Doctoral Students and Academic Mentors." *American Sociologist* 46:99-115.
- Besbris, Max and Shamus Khan. 2017. "Less Theory. More Description." *Sociological Theory* 35(2):147–53.
- Stinchcombe, Arthur. 1982. "Should Sociologists Forget their Mothers and Fathers." *American Sociologist* 17:2-11.

Presentations

Throughout Practicum, you will be presenting and commenting on your colleagues’ work (as will we!). To do so, the following is required:

- When you are *presenting*, you must post your work to a collective Dropbox by noon on Sunday *before class*.
- When you are *commenting on your colleagues’ papers*, you must post your written comments by *the following Wednesday* at 9:00 am.

Note: It is possible and highly foreseeable that we will distribute some brief readings here and there during the course of the semester. Sometimes this will be a sociological article that speaks to a point raised in class discussion. Sometimes it will be an essay on research or writing. Sometimes it might be an interesting book review that raises questions about theory or evidence. The point here is that we are also collaborating with you as your papers develop.

DATE	TOPIC	TO DO	PRESENTING	COMMENTING
May 22	Introductions			
July 15	No Class	Submit preliminary research statement		
Sept 12	Discuss 1 st research statement + Reading group process	Submit 1 st research statement		
Sept 19	Engaging in social research	Read assigned readings		
Sept 26	Academic writing	Read assigned readings		
Oct 3			GROUP 1	GROUP 4
Oct 10			GROUP 2	GROUP 3
Oct 17			GROUP 3	GROUP 2

Oct 24			GROUP 4	GROUP 1
Oct 31	Reading Week	Submit 2nd research statement		
Nov 7			GROUP 1	GROUP 4
Nov 14			GROUP 2	GROUP 3
Nov 21			GROUP 3	GROUP 2
Nov 28			GROUP 4	GROUP 1
Dec 5	No Class	Submit working paper by 5 pm		

Presentation and commenting groups will be placed on Dropbox this summer.

Winter 2024

The Winter term is the continuation of Practicum and includes two major written assignments, as well as class attendance and participation, presentations, and written commentaries on others' research as central to the learning experience and the final grade. In the Winter semester, student authors more formally present their papers to the class.

Week 1. January 9. Discussion

Discussion of second term goals, writing and publication strategies.

Faculty Presentation: Faculty perspectives on writing and the publication process

Week 2. Jan 16. Third Round of Presentations and Feedback

Third round presentations should focus on connecting your research question to your preliminary analysis.

Group 1 presents and Group 2 provides comments

Week 3. Jan 23. Third Round of Presentations and Feedback

Group 2 presents and Group 1 provides comments

Week 4. Jan 30. Third Round of Presentations and Feedback

Group 3 presents and Group 4 provides comments

Week 5. Feb 6. No class, Comp Week

Informal drop-in session during class time.

Week 6. Feb 13. Third Round of Presentations and Feedback

Group 4 presents and Group 3 provides comments

READING WEEK – No class on February 20

Week 7. Feb 27. No class. First draft of complete paper due.

Week 8. March 6. Fourth Round of Presentations and Feedback.

Group 1 presents and Group 2 provides comments

Week 9. March 13. Fourth Round of Presentations and Feedback.

Group 2 presents and Group 1 provides comments

Week 10. March 20. Fourth Round of Presentations and Feedback.

Group 3 presents and Group 4 provides comments

Week 11. March 27. Fourth Round of Presentations and Feedback.

Group 4 presents and Group 3 provides comments

Week 12. April 3. No class. Preparation for the Annual Practicum Conference.

Practicum Conference: Tentative Dates: April 10 and 11.

The practicum conference will likely run for most of the day for these two days, so please make room in your schedule accordingly. We will let you know the exact schedule closer to the date.

Policies & Resources

ACCESSIBILITY SERVICES

It is the University of Toronto's goal to create a community that is inclusive of all persons and treats all members of the community in an equitable manner. In creating such a community, the University aims to foster a climate of understanding and mutual respect for the dignity and worth of all persons. Please see the University of Toronto Governing Council "[Statement of Commitment Regarding Persons with Disabilities.](#)"

In working toward this goal, the University will strive to provide support for, and facilitate the accommodation of individuals with disabilities so that all may share the same level of access to opportunities, participate in the full range of activities that the University offers, and achieve their full potential as members of the University community. We take seriously our obligation to make this course as welcoming and accessible as feasible for students with diverse needs. We also understand that disabilities can change over time and will do our best to accommodate you.

Students seeking support must have an intake interview with a disability advisor to discuss their individual needs. In many instances it is easier to arrange certain accommodations with more advance notice, so we strongly encourage you to act as quickly as possible. To schedule a registration appointment with a disability advisor, please visit Accessibility Services at <http://www.studentlife.utoronto.ca/as>, 416-978-8060, or accessibility.services@utoronto.ca. The office is located at 455 Spadina Avenue, 4th Floor, Suite 400. Additional student resources for

distressed or emergency situations can be located at distressedstudent.utoronto.ca; Health & Wellness Centre, 416-978-8030, <http://www.studentlife.utoronto.ca/hwc>, or Student Crisis Response, 416-946-7111.

EQUITY AND DIVERSITY

The University of Toronto is committed to equity and respect for diversity. All members of the learning environment in this course should strive to create an atmosphere of mutual respect. As course instructors, we will neither condone nor tolerate behaviour that undermines the dignity of any individual in this course and wish to be alerted to any attempt to create an intimidating or hostile environment. It is our collective responsibility to create a space that is inclusive and welcomes discussion. Discrimination, harassment and hate speech will not be tolerated. Please note, however, that creating a respectful environment does not mean we must all agree, and disagreement (and critique) can sometimes be uncomfortable. You might find others' views wrongheaded, or even offensive—but then, they might find your views equally odious, so please try to be understanding.

Additional information and reports on Equity and Diversity at the University of Toronto is available at <http://equity.hrandequity.utoronto.ca>

Academic Integrity

Copying, plagiarizing, falsifying medical certificates, or other forms of academic misconduct will not be tolerated. Any student caught engaging in such activities will be referred to the Dean's office for adjudication. Any student abetting or otherwise assisting in such misconduct will also be subject to academic penalties. Students are expected to cite sources in all written work and presentations. See tips for how to use sources well: (<http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/using-sources/how-not-to-plagiarize>).

According to Section B.I.1.(e) of the Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters it is an offence "*to submit, 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 or program of study in the University or elsewhere.*"

By enrolling in this course, you agree to abide by the university's rules regarding academic conduct, as outlined in the Calendar. You are expected to be familiar with the Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters and the Code of Student Conduct which spell out your rights, your duties and provide all the details on grading regulations and academic offences at the University of Toronto.

In-person versus online classes

Classes will be in person. This is **not** a hybrid class. However, if circumstances require that we have to teach online, here are some guidelines.

- Use a reliable computer or tablet with a working camera and microphone
- Close unnecessary applications to avoid distractions and competing sounds
- Mute microphone while not speaking to avoid background noise

- If at all possible, please use video functionality. Feedback from body language and facial expression is an important element of communication, and we want to ensure that presenters have the fullest sense of active support from their peers.