RESEARCH METHODS IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES (SOSC 2140)

Rm 4582, Lift 25
Mon & Wed, 12:00 pm-1:20 pm
Spring Semester, 2024

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

The best way to learn social scientific methods is to use them. First-hand experience will help you master the "tools of the sociological trade." While the course begins with a discussion of the theory and logic of social scientific research, the second half of the course will require you to engage with social scientific methods. You will carry out your own research project as a group and produce a final research paper.

This course will be delivered in a blended mode, i.e., "a blend of self-paced online and face-to-face teaching". Blended-learning courses at HKUST are supposed "to replace 30-50% of contact hours with online components for self-study and keep the remaining 50-70% of the contact hours for face-to-face learning activities". For a significant portion of the semester (see schedule below), we meet in person only once a week on *Wednesdays*. On *Mondays* when we do *not* meet in person, instructional videos and a quiz (about the content covered in the videos) will be released through Canvas. You are expected to spend about 45~60 minutes watching the videos and 15~25 minutes working on the quiz. The course is designed in such a way that the minimum amount of time required is no more than other 3-credit bearing courses.

This course is a combination of experiential and blended learning. Experiential learning means that you are 'learning by doing'. In the course of this course, you will be 'learning by doing' in terms of creating, as a group, a viable qualitative research project. In order to do this project, you will be asked to identify a 'real life' social issue/topic which will serve as a lens' through which you will develop and hone your skills as a social science researcher. During the weeks that follow, you will work in your groups, utilizing a set of resources including a series of specially recorded videos, provided reading and your own independently sourced reading to work on the project.

In order to complete the project, it will be necessary for you to watch the online lectures. This is what we call a 'blended learning' approach. The advantage of this approach is that you will be able to utilize the time of the instructors more effectively in our class time. However, this approach requires you to take responsibility for engaging with the online materials and other reading. To be clear, you will not be able to complete the course without watching the online videos. You will, however, be closely guided about how to use the online lectures, which to watch and when. A

comprehensive Canvas site will be constructed which will allow you to freely download the videos, as well as other relevant materials such as reading and a course calendar.

REQUIRED TEXT
None.

SUPPLEMENTARY READINGS
Any supplementary readings will be announced through Canvas. P l e a s e c heck with TA regarding accessing readings.

POLICY ON CHEATING AND PLAGIARISM
It goes without saying, but zero tolerance is in effect. Any evidence of cheating or plagiarism (copying the work of others or having someone else complete one's assignments) may result in failure of the entire course for any students involved. Scholarly work depends on honesty and integrity and students are expected to uphold academic standards. Refer to https://registry.hkust.edu.hk/resource-library/academic-integrity for more information.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS
It goes without saying that you must attend class with ALL the readings completed. In addition to your on-going participation, you will be required to complete 3 assignments and 2 presentations (once in the middle and once at the end of the semester) as a group (3-6 students a group).

Grading
Class Participation — 40% (attendance on three randomly selected sessions 15% + quizzes 25%)
Assignment 1: Statement of Research Question + Plan for Data Collection (at most two pages) + Topic Guides (at most two pages) — 10%
Assignment 2: Interview Transcripts — 5%
Assignment 3: Reflection Log — 25%

A key element of this approach to learning social science is for you to understand why you are doing what you are doing, and how your understanding both of social science and society changes throughout the course. In other words, experiential learning means 'learning through reflection on doing'. In order to do this, we will ask you to write a 'reflection log' each week. This should be a place for you to think about some of the themes in Course below, but also for your own reflections on:
- What you have learnt over the past week
- How this has developed your understanding of social science and society.
- As the weeks go on, how your learning in the past week has changed your view from what you thought at the start of the course.
- What you found easy and intuitive, as well as what you found difficult.
- Which aspects you enjoyed and which you did not.

You should keep the log in a document in your own computer.

The reflection logs can be as long or as short as you feel, but you will be marked on the extent to which you:
- Provide an account of what you have learnt over the course.

- Critically reflect on what you have learnt and how this applies to the study of society.
- Connect your reflections to methodological/academic terms introduced over the course or academic papers/books that I uploaded to Canvas and recommended you to read.

Final Research Paper (including 5% peer review; see Canvas for details) — 20%

Class participation, assignment 2 and assignment 3 will be graded on an individual basis (each student receives their own grade). Assignment 1 and the final research paper are graded on a group basis (everyone in the same group receives the same grade).

Free-rider Policy
If all the other team members agree that they don't want to keep collaborating with one person, each one will need to send an email to TA to justify their request. The "free rider" may choose to a) leave the group, construct a new proposal and complete all the remaining assignments independently, or b) stay in the group, stick to the group topic, complete the remaining assignments that are graded on an individual basis, and receive zero score for the remaining assignments that are graded on a group basis.

COURSE SCHEDULE (subject to change; updates will be posted on Canvas)

Week	Topic	Date	Due*
1	Course Overview and Introduction to Social Research	Jan 31	
2	Blended Learning	Feb 5	
	Processes and Problems of Social Research	Feb 7	
3	No Class	Feb 12	No Class
	Concepts and Measurement I	Feb 14	
4	Blended Learning	Feb 19	Form a team
	Sampling	Feb 21	
5	Blended Learning	Feb 26	
	Interview	Feb 28	
6	Demographic Techniques	Mar 4	
	Blended Learning	Mar 6	
7	Blended Learning	Mar 11	
	Age-Period-Cohort Effect	Mar 13	Assignment 1
8	Blended Learning	Mar 18	
	Midterm Presentation I	Mar 20	
9	Midterm Presentation II	Mar 25	
	Midterm Presentation III	Mar 27	
9	No Class	Apr 1	No Class
	No Class	Apr 3	No Class
10	Blended Learning	Apr 8	
	Central Limit Theorem	Apr 10	Assignment 2
11	Blended Learning	Apr 15	
	Hypothesis Testing	Apr 17	
12	Blended Learning	Apr 22	
	TBA	Apr 24	
13	Final Presentation I	Apr 29	
	No Class	May 1	No Class
14	Final Presentation II	May 6	
	Final Presentation III	May 8	Assignment 3
		May 18	Submission of final paper

*: All assignments are due by 5pm on the specified dates.