**SOSC 13100: Social Science Inquiry I**

**DETAILS**
Remote for the Fall 2020 quarter
TuTh 1PM – 2:20PM (section 3) / 2:40 PM – 4 PM (section 4)
Course website on Canvas
wschultz@uchicago.edu

**INSTRUCTOR**
Dr. William Schultz
Virtual “Town hall” office hours (the day can be flexible from week to week)
- WEDNESDAY from 1PM-2PM
- WEDNESDAY from 9PM-10PM
One-on-one Zoom meetings by appointment

“Nothing in life is to be feared, it is only to be understood. Now is the time to understand more, so that we may fear less.” — Marie Curie

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**
It is easy to come up with stories that sound like they explain social phenomena around the world, or what the impacts of a public policy choice will be. But how do we determine whether those stories are accurate, or useful? The answer: science.

As the course catalog explains, this sequence provides students with an introduction to the philosophy of social science inquiry, a sense of how that inquiry is conducted, and an understanding of how policy implications can be drawn responsibly from evidence provided by empirical social science. The sequence’s objective is to expose students to both classic and contemporary perspectives on the promise of social science, as well as a sense of its uses and abuses.

The first course in this sequence (the Autumn Quarter) focuses on the basics of social science, and the basics of quantitative research design in the social sciences. The second course will introduce you to various statistical topics that are foundational for doing quantitative social science. You’ll also learn how to use a statistical computing environment called R. Finally, the third course will be more of a workshop, where I guide each of you through completing your own research project.

**COURSE STRUCTURE**
I’m providing the course material in both synchronous and asynchronous formats to make sure that it is accessible to students who are not able to easily participate synchronously. I only request that students reach out to me if you need to take in the class material asynchronously, so that we can plan occasional Zoom meetings to touch base about the class (you don’t need to prove to me in your email that you cannot participate synchronously).
I’ll post presentation slides for each class day on Canvas. I’ll also host virtual class sessions in which I’ll present those slides and discuss the material with students as in a normal in-person course. I’ll record those virtual sessions and post them to Canvas. I’m not grading attendance in the virtual class sessions (as you can see below), but students should keep in mind that there will sometimes be important material in the recorded classes that are not in the slides. Some class sessions this quarter will be more discussion oriented, while other sessions will be more lecture oriented.

I’ll happily answer questions over email, but I encourage students to post questions about the course material on the Canvas discussion board when possible. Often, if something is confusing you, it is confusing to others as well. It’s helpful for me to know what material students are struggling with.

My scheduled office hours for this course will be virtual “town hall” Zoom meetings for students to drop in either individually or as a group and ask questions about the material. You can come and go from these meetings whenever you like. I’ve scheduled some time for these later in the evening that may be more reasonable for students who are not in the Central US time zone. All students are, of course, welcome to attend the later timeslot. Private meetings are available by appointment for anyone who wants them; we can always find a time that works for you.

**COURSE MATERIALS**

There is no textbook for the first course in this sequence. I’ll post your readings on Canvas. It’s important that you do them. I do my best to limit the amount of reading I assign without threatening your education by leaving something important out. That’s my end of the bargain. Your end of the bargain is keeping up with the readings I do assign. Sometimes the readings will cover the same material I’m discussing in lecture to reinforce it, other times it will cover different material than my lectures to give you a broader understanding of that day’s topic.

**GRADING PHILOSOPHY AND EXPECTATIONS**

Grades in college have several purposes: assessment; signaling a student’s overall ability; and signaling a student’s effort to master the course material. In my personal view, the last purpose is most important. That is my priority when designing and grading assignments.

**EARNING YOUR GRADE**

Your overall grade will be out of 300 points.

- **Three review quizzes (on Canvas):** 90 points = 30%
  - Each quiz is worth 30 points, and you can retake each ONCE. Open notes.
  - These are due by the end of the semester (December 4th at 11:59PM). However, I recommend you take them earlier rather than later. I indicate in the schedule below when these quizzes will be available online.

- **Homeworks / participation:** 90 points = 30%
- There will be a brief homework associated with most class sessions. They will always be at the end of the lecture slides for that day. **You can skip two over the course of the quarter.**
- Sometimes these will involve writing quick responses (i.e., a few sentences) to a couple questions about the assigned readings. Other times I will get more creative. Think of this as your participation grade (they will often involve discussion board posts). These should not take too long to complete, and I’ll grade them leniently.
- **Starting on November 10th,** the homework assignments will require you to briefly summarize the research designs of published studies. I provide multiple options for each homework in the syllabus below, so that you can hopefully find a paper that you are more interested in. This will be your assigned reading for those days. A rubric on Canvas will cover the details of this assignment.

**Three short writing assignments:** 120 points = 40%
- 40 points each
- Due dates are also in the course schedule below: Sunday October 18th; Sunday November 8th, and Thursday December 3rd. All papers are due by 11:59PM.
- 1-3 pages in length depending on the assignment (double spaced) is all I expect.
- I will post rubrics/instructions for these assignments at least 3 weeks before the due dates. The rubric for the first assignment will be available at the start of this course.

**MISSED/LATE ASSIGNMENTS**
I accept missed assignments without penalty for documented medical reasons, family crises, call to active military duty or jury duty, religious holy days, and official University activities. I also give deference to parents with dependent children who are sick.

Otherwise, late assignments drop 10% of their full worth for each day they are late, but you can still submit them to me through email.

**PETITIONS FOR A GRADE CHANGE**
I consider written petitions for a change of grade on assignments. However, I require students to wait two business days after receiving a grade before submitting their petition.

**EMAIL POLICY**
Please include your first and last name and course information in the subject line of your email. When I receive your email, I will make effort to respond in a timely manner, usually within 48 hours. You may receive a reply sooner than that, but you should not expect an immediate response. Please treat all email correspondences with your instructor as you would treat any other professional exchange. I expect emails to be respectful and polite, to use correct grammar and complete sentences.

The course schedule begins on the next page.
Schedule

A philosophy of science

Class 1, Tuesday, September 29th — Introduction to the class; what makes science special?
Recommended reading:
• Chalmers (1976). Introduction. What is this Thing Called Science?

Class 2, Thursday, October 1st — The logic of the scientific method
Read for today:
  o This is an open textbook under a creative commons license. It’s free.
  o You can find it here: https://scientificinquiryinsocialwork.pressbooks.com/.
  o Read everything up until “Being a Scientist” (including the abstract)
  o The “Being a Scientist” section is worth skimming if you have time, but less relevant to the point of today’s lecture.

Class 3, Tuesday, October 6th — Where do scientific advancements come from?
Read for today:
  o Pages 293 – 300 (“Some Examples from Epidemiology”)
  o Pages 347-348 (the introduction)
  o Pages 349-350 (“Induction and Multiple Hypotheses”)
  o Pages 351-352 (“A Yardstick of Effectiveness” to end)

A “social” science?

Class 4, Thursday, October 8th — Can we study the social world scientifically?
Read for today:
  o Pages 27-41 are the most important. What are the different common objections to social science, and McIntyre’s response to each?
  o Available as an e-book through the university library.

Class 5, Tuesday, October 13th — The goals of quantitative social science
Read for today:
• Mahoney and Goertz (2006). A Tale of Two Cultures: Contrasting Quantitative and Qualitative Research. Political Analysis.
  o Pages 230 – 234 (“Approaches to Explanation” and “Concepts of Causation”)
Developing and evaluating social science theories

REVIEW QUIZ 1 AVAILABLE ON CANVAS, THURSDAY, OCTOBER 15th, 9AM

Class 6, Thursday, October 15th — Developing useful social theories
Read for today:
• March and Lave (1975). *Introduction to models in the social sciences.*
  o Pages 10-16 (beginning of the PDF)
  o Page 19-20 ("A Model of the Model-Building Process"; starts on page 5 of the PDF)
  o Pages 21-24 ("Responsibility Corrupts"; starts on page 6 of the PDF)
  o Pages 40-42 ("Three Rules of Thumb for model building"; starts on page 16 of the PDF)

WRITING ASSIGNMENT 1 DUE SUNDAY, OCTOBER 18th, 11:59PM

Class 7, Tuesday, October 20th — Evaluating social theories
Read for today:
  o Pages 145-153
  o Pages 156-158
    ▪ Paragraph starting with “Let us turn now to another example...” through the paragraph starting with “It is only a short step from these examples”.
  o Pages 171 and 172

Class 8, Thursday, October 22nd — Theory change in the social sciences
Read for today:
  o “Introduction” and “Historical sketch”
  o Pages 535-536
  o “Conclusions”

Quantitative social science research design

Class 9, Tuesday, October 27th — Selecting and comparing cases
Read for today:
  o Pages 131-141
  o Page 146-end
  o Look over Table 1 and Table 2.
Class 10, Thursday, October 29th — Measurement in social science research

Read for today:

Tuesday, November 3rd — Election day, no class

Class 11, Thursday, November 5th — Making causal inferences

Read for today:
  - Pages 163-176 are most important.

WRITING ASSIGNMENT 2 DUE SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 8th, 11:59PM

REVIEW QUIZ 2 AVAILABLE ON CANVAS, TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 10th, 9AM

Class 12, Tuesday, November 10th — Experimental designs: laboratory

Read for today (see Class 11 homework assignment):
- Pick ONE of the laboratory experiment studies listed below

Class 13, Thursday, November 12th — Experimental designs: other

Read for today (TWO papers total; see Class 12 homework assignment):
- Pick ONE of the field experiment studies listed below
- Pick ONE of the natural experiment studies listed below

**Class 14, Thursday, November 19th** — Observational designs: cross-sectional and time-series studies

**Read for today** (TWO papers total; see Class 13 homework assignment):
- **Pick ONE of the cross-sectional studies listed below**
  - Environmental studies – Chhatre and Agrawal (2009). Trade-offs and synergies between carbon storage and livelihood benefits from forest commons. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.
- **Pick ONE of the time series studies listed below**

Thanksgiving break

**REVIEW QUIZ 3 AVAILABLE ON CANVAS, TUESDAY, DECEMBER 1st, 9AM**

**Class 15, Tuesday, December 1st** — Observational designs: TSCS studies

**Read for today** (see Class 15 homework assignment):
- **Pick ONE of the TSCS studies listed below**

**Class 16, Thursday, December 3rd** — Review, and what’s next?

**WRITING ASSIGNMENT 3 DUE THURSDAY DECEMBER 3rd, 11:59PM**

**REVIEW QUIZZES DUE, FRIDAY DECEMBER 4th, 11:59PM**

![Comic strip](image)