

**University of Toronto**  
**Sociology 6711Y**  
**Doctoral Research Practicum**

**2011-2012**

**Instructors:**

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**1. Course Summary**

This year-long seminar is organized as a research workshop for students in the second year of the doctoral program. The end product will be an original research paper appropriate for submission for publication. You will be evaluated on both your written work and on course participation. You will be expected to circulate and present in class all written work that you do for this class. All students will be expected to read drafts of your work, to submit written comments to the instructors about your work, and most importantly to engage with the discussion about your work during the seminar. Student presentations will be supplemented by assigned readings (yet to be determined). Specific presentation dates will be assigned in September.

The first two semesters will be spent largely ‘doing’ and writing up your research. By the end of the fall term, you should be at the stage to begin the long process of drafting and redrafting the research paper. In the winter term, much of the focus will switch to presenting your results. Typically, it is when communicating your work to others that the most difficult questions of theory and method become transparent. What do your results really demonstrate? Do you need to go back and tweak your analysis, get supplementary evidence, or reframe our theoretical arguments? This course will focus both on the process of writing a research paper and how to effectively present your results.

As your papers get longer (in the winter semester), we will divide the written peer reviewing among two writing circles. You will still be required to read and be prepared to comment on all student papers (this will be part of your class participation mark), but you will only provide written feedback on the papers in your writing circle. We will determine the writing circles early in the winter term after getting to know your projects better.

**2. Course Requirements**

Your grade for this course will be comprised of the following requirements (unless otherwise noted, due dates are tentative):

1. **Class participation (15% of final grade)**
2. **Preliminary research statement (5%) - Due June 30. This due date is FIRM.**
3. **Second research statement (5%) - Due September 21**
4. **Third research statement (10%) - Due October 26**
5. **Working paper (20%) - Due December 14**
6. **First draft of complete paper (15%) - Due February 29**
7. **Final paper (30%) - Due April 13**

### **3. Further Details on Requirements**

A full syllabus—including specific dates for student presentations and any additional assigned reading—will be determined before the first week of the course. Nevertheless, below we discuss in more detail the course requirements and important due dates (though **all except for June 30<sup>th</sup> are tentative**).

#### **3.1. Class participation (15% of final grade)**

Participation is a very important element of the course. If you don't participate, you won't do well. Your participation grade will be derived from how well you present your own work and your weekly comments on your colleagues' work (both written summaries and class discussion). You will be graded on both quality and frequency. Your comments on your peers' work are due to the instructors via an email attachment (preferably in PDF format) by Monday morning of the week of the relevant workshop (more details to follow in September). These written comments should form the basis of your feedback to your peers during class discussions.

#### **3.2 Preliminary Research Statement (June 30<sup>th</sup> – Firm deadline)**

This preliminary statement should be approximately 1-2 double spaced pages. It should include the following information:

- a) Your research topic (e.g. I want to study the labour process), including a very brief description of why your topic is important to study
- b) The source(s) of your evidence, expected methods of data collection and analysis (of course, some of this could change as the paper progresses)
- c) If you are collecting your own data, you must show evidence that you have secured ethics approval
- d) Evidence that you have acquired a commitment from a faculty member to supervise your project through the course of the year.

### **3.3 Second Research Statement (September 21)**

The second research statement should be 4-5 double spaced pages. As well as build on the first statement to take into account our feedback, the statement *must* include the following:

- a) Your research problem and how it relates to an existing body of sociological research. Be sure to cover any theoretical or methodological considerations that are important to your study. Also, be sure to know the literature to ensure that you are doing something new—this course is not about replicating someone else’s work.
- b) A small set of organizing hypotheses or research questions (no more than five) that will guide your research.
- c) A short review of what you consider to be the most important pieces of published research on your topic.
- d) A more detailed account of your data, and how you plan to collect and analyze them
- e) As well as your research statement, you must identify one major published piece of research (ideally an article in a top-rated journal, though other sources are acceptable) that is driving your own research. It matters little if you praise or criticize this piece. All that matters is that we know where you are coming from. This will let us all know your frame of reference and how you plan to build on what has been done in the past. All students will be required to read this ‘inspirational’ piece before your seminar.

Statements will be evaluated, in part, on their feasibility within the time constraints of a two semester (three including the summer) program and the availability of a faculty member willing and able to supervise the research. In other words, your goals for the proposed project must be realistic. Think in terms of two criteria: 1) it should be possible to reach a point in your data analysis to submit an initial “working paper” (more details on this below) by the end of the first semester, and 2) you should have a complete—and well-polished—paper to submit by the end of the course.

### **3.4 Third Research Statement (October 26)**

This research statement should 10-12 double-spaced pages. It is meant to be a more fully developed version of the second statement. This statement should reflect initial efforts to actually *analyze your data*. It should also reflect revisions of your research question/problem and a fine-tuning of your sources of evidence and the content/organization of your literature review.

### **3.5 Working Paper (December 14)**

The working paper should 18-22 double spaced pages. 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. The working paper must include the following elements:

- a) A well-developed literature review (*not* an annotated bibliography). We suggest that you look to well-respected sociological journals for guidance.
- b) A very clear explanation on how your research will contribute to this. What is the “gift” you plan to give to the discipline? Will you contribute new theoretical or methodological insights? In short, what will you tell us we didn’t know before, and why will you be able to do it?
- c) 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.
- d) A clear write up of your results. In other words, there should be an initial attempt to analyze your data. That is, you should provide clear interpretations of your coefficients, quotes, documents or field notes using the relevant literature or theory.
- e) At this point, a discussion section is not expected because it could change after tweaking the paper yet again.

### **3.6 First Draft of Complete Paper (February 29)**

The first draft of your paper should be 7,000 to 10,000 words and look like complete, albeit not polished, journal article. Although you should strive for clarity in writing, this draft is still more focused on matching evidence to claims, or data to argument, than on writing style. It should have made significant progress toward addressing comments of instructors and peers regarding theory, data and analysis. It should therefore include the following components:

- a) A well-developed and succinct literature review, where you *use* the literature and/or theory to demonstrate the contribution of your research.
- b) A very clear explanation of your claim(s), or argument(s)
- c) A very clear description of the data and methods.
- d) A presentation and analysis of your results that demonstrates your claims(s) or argument(s).
- e) A demonstration of your contribution by tying your findings back to the relevant literature and theory either as you present the data or in a separate discussion section.
- f) A brief conclusion summarizing all of the elements above and highlighting strengths/weaknesses of your study and avenues for future research.

### **3.7 Final Paper and Presentations (April 13)**

Your final paper will be due on April 13. You will also be required to give a professional conference-style presentation based on this paper. The presentation will occur sometime during the last four weeks of the course. Exact dates for your presentation will be assigned sometime during the winter time.

The final draft of your paper should be 7,000 to 10,000 words and read like a published journal article. In addition to a well-developed and succinct literature review, a clear contribution to the literature and/or theory, clear claims or arguments, extensive description of your data and methods, effective presentation and analysis of data that convinces the reader of your claim(s) or argument(s) (e.g. see above), and a thoughtful discussion section. Your paper should also be written well. By “written well” we do not just mean it should be grammatically correct, although it should be. We also mean that you should effectively communicate your message, and that the paper is well polished. In short, you should plan to spend time some writing and re-writing the whole paper, but especially the introduction and conclusions.

#### **4. Recommended Readings**

- Abbott, Andrew. 2004. *Methods of Discovery*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Alford, Robert. 1998. *The Craft of Inquiry*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Aneshensel, Carol. 2002. *Theory-Based Data Analysis for the Social Sciences*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press.
- Becker, Howard Saul. 1986. *Writing for Social Scientists: How to Start and Finish Your Thesis, Book, or Article*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Becker, Howard Saul. 1998. *Tricks of the Trade*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Firebaugh, Glenn. 2008. *Seven Rules for Social Research*. Princeton University Press.