Instructor: Dr. Gregg M. Olsen
Office: 314 Isbister
Telephone/email: 474-9199  olsen@cc.umanitoba.ca
Meeting Times: Thursday 9:30-12:30, 335 Isbister
Office hours: After class or by appointment


**Honours Thesis Seminar: Content and Process**

**Course Objectives**
The overarching objectives of this course are to help students develop their abilities to think logically, critically evaluate their own work and the research of others, formulate and defend theory-based arguments, analyze and interpret various forms of data and other information, and learn to design a research project. The course is also geared toward helping students improve their written and oral communication skills and more clearly and effectively present their research. In order to meet these broad objectives and goals, students will initiate, develop and conduct their own studies, culminating in the completion of an Honours Thesis by the end of the course. The Honours Thesis is an original work which explores a social problem, issue, or theoretical debate that is more complex than can normally be handled in a term paper and requires a more extended investigation. However, it is primarily distinguished by the need for a thorough and disciplined multi-stage examination of a subject, rather than by its length. And, it typically comprises a series of chapters that each form a necessary part of the larger project.

This course is divided into 2 main parts. In Part I (1st term) we explore the research process, critically reviewing several published studies and readings, and utilize in-class exercises, presentations, group work, debates and short written assignments to illustrate each stage. Throughout this process students will learn how to: (1) narrow broad general interests and topics into manageable research questions and problems, (2) apply theory to develop hypotheses and research proposals, (3) identify the method(s) appropriate to answering research questions, (4) identify and collect the quantitative and/or qualitative data that will answer research questions, (5) analyze data and interpret the results of the analysis, and (6) identify the theoretical and policy implications of research findings. In Part II (2nd term) students will apply these skills to their own research, identifying researchable questions and problems, conducting comprehensive literature reviews, writing thesis proposals, and carrying out their proposed studies. Students will present their ongoing research to the class at several stages and receive critical, constructive feedback from the instructor and other class members throughout the course.
Course Format and Evaluation

As reflected in the course work, assignments and grading schedule, the central purpose of this course is not simply to have students produce an Honours Thesis. Rather, it is designed to help students become professional sociologists and prepare them for graduate work and/or further research when they leave the University. The course will follow a seminar format with weekly presentations by students on a rotating basis. Students will be responsible for presenting all of the readings each week, generating questions and leading class discussions. Most weeks the readings include articles and chapters that review the fundamentals of thesis construction, such as formulating research questions and developing hypotheses, as well as published studies that address and illustrate specific topics and concepts under scrutiny. The latter studies relate to broad themes or topic areas that are central to sociology, such as social inequality, the state, and political ‘culture’, that will be pursued throughout the term. They typically take a comparative and interdisciplinary perspective. These readings serve to assist students in identifying the research questions they will pursue in their Honours Theses in the 2nd term. However, students should also come to class prepared to discuss other articles and studies from outside the SOC 4450 course syllabus that reflect their own/other sociological interests.

Everyone is expected to regularly attend all classes and actively discuss all of the assigned readings. Students should be prepared to present an informed summary of the readings, identify the main issues or questions and what they contribute to the weekly topic or theme, and provide a critical assessment. Students will be graded on their class presentations, participation in class discussions, group work, debates and other exercises, and short written assignments. There are a total of 5 formal, short written assignments, all in the first term. Each is worth 4% of your grade. There are also several other exercises (some of which will also be submitted to the instructor) that are included in the class participation component of your grade.

In the second term, we continue our examination of the process and mechanics of thesis writing, building upon the concepts and steps explored in the first term. Students will present their research in progress at various stages throughout the second term. Everyone will be graded on these presentations, and on their constructively critical evaluations of those of their classmates, as well as on their presentations of readings and participation in class discussions. Students who are absent from class will receive a grade of zero for their presentation, class participation (for classes missed), and any other assignments due unless they have obtained permission from the instructor or a medical certificate (or proof of other exceptional circumstances) is provided.

All deadlines for assignments must, under normal circumstances, be met. Note that all of the 5 short written exercises for this course are due in class the same day that the articles under review are being presented. To help to ensure that your assignments are handed in on time, do not wait until the last minute to print them out. All late papers will be subject to a penalty of one grade per day (e.g., from B+ to B, or B to C+) unless students have obtained prior permission from the instructor. All written assignments must be typed, double-spaced and use normal margins, numbered pages, and, when appropriate, a bibliography using the standard sociological referencing format (see examples in The Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology). The Honours Thesis
The Honours Thesis provides students with an opportunity to conduct in-depth research in a particular area or sub-discipline in the field of Sociology, ideally building upon interests they have developed throughout their program. It is an extended, intensive and scholarly study of a particular research problem that reflects student interests and has been approved by both the course instructor/advisor and your thesis supervisor. Although it is more involved than a term paper, the Honours Thesis should not be a massive undertaking; given the constraints of the course, it should normally comprise 3-4 chapters and not exceed 40-50 pages in length. Time and budgetary constraints likely will also necessitate the use of readily available secondary data sources, which will be identified in class, for most theses. The instructor and students will also attempt to identify departmental or other faculty members with expertise in a student’s particular field of interest who might serve as their thesis supervisor. The completed written version of the Honours Thesis is due on April 9, 2009, the date of our last class. Students will formally present their completed theses in the last few classes of the term.

**Student Responsibility and Academic Integrity**

Part of our professional responsibility as researchers is to appropriately acknowledge the work of other persons who contribute to our ideas. In particular, we must guard against presenting the general ideas, organization of material, or specific textual statements taken from other sources or researchers as our own. The published and unpublished works of others must always be properly recognized and identified. Similarly, while a collaborative and cooperative work ethic among students is strongly encouraged, students must do their own work when it is time to submit assignments. The written material of your colleagues is the fruit of their labour and should not, under any circumstances, be utilized by anyone but its author. Acts of academic dishonesty or plagiarism are serious offenses and are subject to academic discipline. Students should acquaint themselves with the University of Manitoba’s policies on ‘Plagiarism and Cheating’ in the *University of Manitoba Undergraduate Calendar*. If in doubt, students should also consult the instructor and the document on plagiarism (*What is Plagiarism*, by S. E. Van Bramer) provided by the Faculty of Arts. The Faculty of Arts also reserves the right to submit student work that is suspected of being plagiarized to Internet sites designed to detect plagiarism.

Disruptions due to excessive talking or departures from the classroom are very distracting to students and the instructor. Please be considerate and respectful of the needs and rights of others in the class, especially during class presentations. Students should be aware that persistent disruptions may result in disbarment from the course.

The University of Manitoba acknowledges the right of students to observe recognized holidays of their faith that fall within the academic year. With instructor discretion, necessary arrangements can be made to ensure that studies are not jeopardized. The instructor should be notified of a student’s intended absence in advance (and at least three weeks notice should be normally be given where special arrangements are necessary).
**Breakdown of Assignments and Graded Tasks/Grading Schedule**

1) 5 short written assignments (due in class) 20%
2) presentations (of weekly seminar readings, thesis proposal and drafts) 25%
3) class participation when not presenting (including 5 exercises) 25%
4) Honours Thesis (due **April 9, 2009**) 30%
   (supervisor’s evaluation = 20%, class presentation = 10%)

**Last date for Voluntary Withdrawal from this course is March 19, 2009.**

The following letter/percentage scale will be used in this course:

- A+ = 90-100 exceptional
- A = 80-89 excellent
- B+ = 75-79 very good
- B = 70-74 good
- C+ = 65-69 satisfactory
- C = 60-64 adequate
- D = 50-59 marginal
- F = 49-0 failure

**Schedule of Topics, Readings and Assignments**

All readings are required and must be read by everyone in the class. Readings not in the course text will be available in yellow file folders in the SOC 4450 mail slot in the mail/photocopy room at least one week before they are examined in class. Readings for later weeks are available from the instructor if students want to read ahead.

NOTE: the reading and assignment schedule provided below is not necessarily final; the instructor may provide additional or replacement readings and/or assignments. Students are responsible for attending classes and making themselves aware of any adjustments made to the syllabus.

**TERM 1**

**WEEK 1**  
Overview: organization & content of course/presentations assigned  
(Sept. 4) what is an Honours Thesis? how does the Honours Thesis differ from an MA thesis or a doctoral dissertation? defining some basic terms. identifying high quality research: originality, individuality and rigour identifying patterns and social/generative mechanisms

**Readings:**

**Preparation/Written Assignments/Class Exercises/presentations:** none
WEEK 2  From topics to questions/from questions to problems
(Sept. 11) research objectives/transforming your ideas and interests into researchable questions/what is a variable?/problems/posing research questions ontological & epistemological assumptions

Readings:
Booth, Wayne C., Gregory G. Colomb and Joseph M. Williams, The Craft of Research, chapters 3-4 (pp. 31-67).


Preparation/Exercise 1
Using Booth et al.(2003) and Cone and Foster (1995) formulate one research problem to discuss in class. Identify the ontological and epistemological positions implicit or explicit in your research problem. The research problems should be typed up and submitted to the instructor. Come to class prepared to talk about your own sociological interests and engage in group work to create more research problems.

Presentations:______________________________________________

WEEK 3  Developing hypotheses/framing research questions
(Sept. 18) exploratory, descriptive and explanatory research questions theoretical, operational, statistical hypotheses making ‘predictions’, the scientific approach linking hypotheses to theories and models

Readings:


Coupland, Douglas (2002) “‘Strong and Free”: According to author Douglas Coupland, Canadians and Americans have never been more different. But there is that potential US invasion to worry about’, Macleans, November 25, pp. 23-25.


Preparation/Written Assignment 1
Write a short report (3-4 pages) critically examining the opposing arguments made in the pair of articles from Macleans (Gatehouse & Coupland) and from Inroads (Resnick & Poschmann) in the readings above. Identify the central arguments they make. Indicate whether their arguments can be considered scientific? (How do they support their contentions? Do they provide factual, empirical evidence or only unsupported conjecture and anecdote? etc.) Develop a research hypothesis that would allow you to address their dispute and test the arguments they mount. What theories or models might you employ to do this? What kind of data would be useful? Group work on hypothesis development in class.

Presentations: ________________________________________________

WEEK 4  Theory I: issues and approaches
(Sept. 25) Review of theoretical approaches (macro/meso/micro, structure/agency)

Readings:
Sears, Alan A Good Book in Theory: A Guide to Theoretical Thinking, chapters 1-3 (pp.15-88).


Democracy 6 (1):65-78.


Preparation/Written Assignment 2
Write a short, critical paper (3-4 pages) contrasting the theoretical approaches taken by Putnam (‘social capital’) and Milner (‘civic literacy’), identifying where and how they use theory to formulate and pursue their research questions. What role does structure and/or agency play in their theories or approaches? Is one approach more convincing than the other? Why? Develop hypotheses that critique and challenge their approaches.

Presentations: ____________________________

WEEK 5 Theory II: applying theory to focus a research question
(Oct. 2) issues: the nature of the media: competing theoretical positions
the impact of media on values and ideologies

Readings:
Sears, Alan A Good Book in Theory: A Guide to Theoretical Thinking, chapter 4-6 (pp. 89-156).


Preparation/Written Assignment 3
Write a short paper (3-4 pages) critically contrasting two theoretical accounts of the role and nature of the media in capitalist society, focusing upon Canada and the US. Do the media play a central role in shaping our opinions, values and ideologies? Are there cross-national differences in the organization and impact of the media? Construct a research hypotheses that could test this idea. Everyone should come to class prepared to talk about the media portrayal of a salient sociological issue (e.g., homelessness, taxes, gay marriage, gun laws). The students leading the discussion this week should place students into two groups and organize a class debate based on two or more of the theoretical accounts of the nature of the media covered in the readings.

Presentations:______________________________________________

WEEK 6 Identifying data sources
(Oct. 9) primary sources, secondary sources, tertiary sources
‘hypotheses on probation’

Readings:
Booth, Wayne C., Gregory G. Colomb and Joseph M. Williams, The Craft of Research, chapters 5-6 (pp.68-101).

Preparation/Exercise 2 (a&b):
Exercise (a)
Identify one data sources that might be employed to address a research problem for an Honours Thesis. Provide a short (1 page) description of each data set – how and where it can be accessed, the kind of data it provides, and the kinds of research questions/problems it might be used to address, and so on – that can be distributed to the class. Be prepared to present some basic information about the nature of the data set in class, briefly reviewing some of the variables that it includes.

Possible sources of secondary data sets include polling agencies and institutes such as the Canadian Institute for Public Opinion (CIPO), Decima Research, EKOS, Environics, Gallup Canada, Ipsos-Reid and Pollara. The World Values Survey and over 1000 other public opinion polls from myriad nations around the world (including Canada) are also available through the International Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR), the world’s largest archive of computer-based research and instructional data for the social sciences. Cross-national data on attitudes and values are also available through the International Social Survey Program (ISSP). Other relevant and useful data sets are provided through organizations
and institutions such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the International Labour Organization (ILO), World Health Organization (WHO), United Nations Development Program (UNDP), Eurostat, Statistics Canada, the Social Security Administration (SSA), World Development Report, UNICEF: The State of the World’s Children, the Luxembourg Income Study (LIS), Luxembourg Employment Study (LES) and Luxembourg Wealth Study (LWS).

**Exercise (b)**
Through a brief interview, and a bibliographical search, find out about the research interests and projects of one member of our department (or a faculty member outside of our department). Provide a short (1 page) report on your findings. Find out if they have any data sets that they are prepared to share with students. Be prepared to present your findings to the class.

**Guest Speakers on readily available secondary data sources:**
1. Gary Strike, Data Librarian (Dafoe) - aggregate, survey, and spatial data sources.
2. Departmental speaker(s) on new or existing available data sets they are involved with

WEEK 7  Doing a literature review  
(Oct. 16)

**Readings:**


**Preparation/Exercise 3**
Identify a research question (or broader area/topic) that interests you. Closely review the
readings on conducting a literature review, making note of their useful suggestions. Your ‘in class’ task will be to conduct a preliminary literature search (electronically and/or in the library) on any one topic, identifying key authors, studies, journals and books. Provide a listing of these sources (10-15), organizing them into sub-sections where appropriate, and identify the most important ones. Be prepared to discuss your search and hand in your search by the end of the class. Identify one key researcher working in your area of interest at another university or research institute and write her/him to find out if she/he has written any other studies on your research topic. If so, request a reprint from the author. If not, ask for references to other relevant studies. Submit a brief written account of your attempts next week.

Presentations: ____________________________________________________________

WEEK 8  Qualitative and quantitative approaches
(Oct. 23)

Readings:


Preparation/Written Assignment 4
Write a short paper (3-4 pages) which critically summarizes and contrasts the conclusions
reached in the quantitative study by Johnston and Baer (1993) with those reached in the more qualitative account given by Lipset. Identify the kinds of ‘data sources’ used by these researchers. Critically evaluate the two studies and indicate how both quantitative and qualitative data can be effectively utilized.

Presentations:______________________________________________

**WEEK 9  The comparative perspective I: classical/foundational approaches**
(Oct. 30)

*Comparative sociology is not a special branch of sociology; it is sociology itself, in so far as it ceases to be purely descriptive and aspires to account for facts*. (Emile Durkheim, *The Rules of Sociological Method*, 1895).

Readings:


Presentations:______________________________________________

**WEEK 10  The comparative perspective II: cross-national/cross-cultural studies**
(Nov. 6)  taxonomies and typologies, models
‘most similar’ and ‘most different’ research designs

‘Nations can be understood only in comparative perspective’ (emphasis added, Seymour Martin Lipset, Continental Divide: The Values and Institutions of the United States and Canada, p.xiii,1990).

‘Modernization is the great transforming force in the world today, but it is not a uniform, mechanical process. It takes different forms, evokes different reactions. This is why sociology, the discipline par excellence for seeking to understand modernity, must of necessity be comparative’ (emphasis added, Peter Berger, Transaction: Social Science and Modern Society, 30(1):16, 1992).

Readings:


Preparation/Exercise 4
Be prepared to discuss the advantages of a comparative approach? (i.e., what gains do we make by using the comparative method?). Construct a cross-national research hypothesis in an area of interest to you focusing upon at least three nations. Submit a short account briefly indicating which nations you have chosen and your rationale? (i.e., what is the historical background and/or reasons for including the nations you have included). Be mindful of the ‘most similar’ and ‘most different’ approaches. Be prepared for group work to create other cross-national studies in class.

Presentations:______________________________________________

WEEK 11 Presenting Research I
Readings:


Preparation
Sociologists are evaluated not only on the soundness of their research and scholarship but on their ability to effectively communicate their work orally and visually at professional conferences and meetings and public talks. Weeks 11-12 will be spent developing these skills. Summarizing arguments clearly, presenting quantitative and qualitative data in tabular and graphical form, and the use of power point are among the skills that will be explored. Classes these weeks may be held in the computer room (336 Isbister).

There are a number of useful books which students may wish to examine, including, M. J. Platrow, *Giving Professional Presentations in the Behavioral Sciences*, New York: Psychology Press, 2002, Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses and Dissertations* (6th ed), Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996. A useful article on how to write a critical review of a book (or shorter study), which provides a detailed example, is also available on line; see ‘Critical Book Review’ at [http://www.arts.uwaterloo.ca/~gboychuk/psci431/example-review.html](http://www.arts.uwaterloo.ca/~gboychuk/psci431/example-review.html).

Preparation/ Written Assignment 5:
Select a study, article or chapter that you are interested in and already know well. **Write up a short, critical review of it (4-5 pages)** to submit and present to the class. Your paper and presentation should conclude with suggestions for future research and point to possible research questions/problems. Social scientists rarely have unlimited time to present their research at conferences and meetings and must be able to work within a given time frame. For this exercise, students will have 15 minutes to present their chosen research, followed by a 5-minute question-and-answer session. Presentations will be organized into thematic sessions (if possible) chaired by a student who is not presenting a paper in the session. And, as at most professional meetings and conferences, ‘time cues’ will be used by the chair to inform presenters when they have 5, 2 and 0 minutes remaining before the floor is open to questions.

Presentations:______________________________________________
WEEK 12  Presenting research II  
(Nov. 20)

Readings:
There are no new readings to present.

Preparation/ Written Assignment 5
Student presentations continue.

Presentations:_____________________________________________________

WEEK 13  Tying up loose ends  
(Nov. 27/Dec2)

NOTE: Everyone must have identified a research problem, a thesis supervisor and their data sources by the last class.
WEEK 1  Research hypotheses/developing and writing proposals/literature review
(Jan. 8)

Readings:


Preparation/Exercise 5
Prepare a brief (one paragraph) abstract summarizing your proposed study (topic and rationale for your study, research problem and hypothesis), a general outline of the proposed study (the number of chapters and the content, structure, and purpose of each chapter).

The thesis may take the following format:
Chapter 1: Introduction,  Chapter 2: Literature Review,  Chapter 3: Method (identify all sources of data),  Chapter 4: Results/Findings/Discussion,  Chapter 5: Conclusion
However, depending upon the study, chapters 1 & 2 may be combined; chapters 4 & 5 too.
Abstract, outline and bibliography to be submitted in class and distributed to everyone in class to facilitate discussion when proposals are presented over the next two weeks.

Presenters:_________________________________________________

Assignments:
Students will present their proposals in class and comment on each other’s work. Students will have 10-15 minutes to present their proposals followed by a 5-minute question period.

Presenters:______________________________________________

WEEK 3    Presentation of proposals II
(Jan. 22)

Assignments
Student presentations of proposals continue.

Presenters:______________________________________________

WEEK 4    Work on chapter one
(Jan. 29)

Readings:


In Class Assignments
Discussion and work on chapter one.

Presenters:______________________________________________

WEEK 5    Work on chapter one
(Feb. 5)
Readings:


In Class Assignment
Prepare a short summary/outline of chapter to be submitted to the instructor and all class members.

Presenters:______________________________________________

WEEK 6 Presentation of chapter one I
(Feb. 12)

Assignments:
Students present chapter one (in progress) of their theses.

Presentations:______________________________________________

READING WEEK(mid-term break) February 16-20

WEEK 7 Presentation of chapter one II
(Feb. 26)

Assignments:
Students continue presentations of first chapter of their theses.

Presentations:______________________________________________

WEEKS 8-10 Work on thesis: no formal class
(Mar. 5/12/19)
Assignments:
Individual meetings with instructor/advisor and supervisor

**WEEK 11**  Presentation of Honours Theses I  
(March 26)

Assignments:  
Students present completed thesis.

Presentations:______________________________________________

**WEEK 12**  Presentation of Honours Theses II  
(April 2)

Assignments:  
Students continue presentations of completed thesis.

Presentations:______________________________________________

**WEEK 13**  Completed Honours Theses Due  
(April 9)

Completed theses must be submitted to supervisors by the last class, **April 9** at the latest). Final, corrected version of theses must be submitted to the instructor by **April 16**.