



The University of Western Ontario

Department of Sociology

SOCIOLOGY 3307G-001

Investigating the Social World: Qualitative Research Winter 2026

In-Person

Instructor: Dr Kaitlynn Mendes, Full Professor
Department of Sociology
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Course Description:

Mandatory for third-year Sociology students in an Honours Specialization. Students will learn to investigate the social world using content analysis, various methods of observation, and different types of interviewing. Particular attention will be paid to the relationship between epistemology and qualitative research approaches. Students will participate in research practice exercises. Ultimately, students will learn to think critically about sociological research.

Prerequisite(s): [Sociology 2206A/B](#).

Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

Anti-requisite(s): [Sociology 3310F/G](#), [Family Studies and Human Development 3230A/B](#).

Course Objectives and Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Develop skills around how to collect, manage, analyze, and interpret qualitative research data
- Formulate research questions and choose a qualitative research design to examine those questions
- Understand and meet the ethical standards for conducting research with human subjects, including research in online spaces
- Design and carry out a research project, including conducting in-depth interviews, ethnographic field observations, and content analysis
- Analyze and interpret qualitative data

Demonstrate academic integrity in assessed work through appropriate use of academic citation and referencing conventions.

Course Material:

There is no single textbook students need to purchase, however this course draws heavily from *Social Research Methods: 6th edition* (\$131). Students are welcome to purchase second-hand or earlier editions of this textbook (starting from \$25). While I recommend you access the most recent edition, any edition will do. You can purchase various editions online or through Amazon or access the book through the University Library

Other weekly readings will be assigned and posted on OWL Brightspace at no charge to you.

Communication:

Students are responsible for checking the course [OWL Brightspace](#) site on a regular basis for news and updates. This is the primary method by which information will be disseminated to all students enrolled in the course.

The best way to contact me is by email: kmendes4@uwo.ca. Please note that I might take up to three business days to reply to your email

Course Schedule and Readings:

The reading list and weekly schedule is available on the course Brightspace site.

Jan 7	1	Introduction – What is qualitative research
Jan 14	2	Qualitative research design and processes
Jan 21	3	Research Ethics
Jan 28	4	Interviews and Focus Groups
Feb 4	5	Content Analysis
Feb 11	6	Ethnography and Observational Methods
Feb 18	7	Spring Reading week (Feb 14-22)
Feb 25	8	No class – drop in consultation
March 4	9	pARTicipatory and creative methods
March 11	10	Semiotics and Case Study Research

March 18	11	Analyzing Data: Coding, thematic, and discourse analysis
March 25	12	Writing up and presenting research
April 1	13	No class – drop in consultation

Method of Evaluation:

The evaluation methods described in the course outline are essential requirements for the course.

Class attendance	All Weeks	10%
In-depth interview proposal	4 th Feb 2026	15%
Ethnography Assignment	4 th March 2026	30%
Reflection	25 th March 2026	10%
Interview transcription, analysis and write up	3 rd April 2026	35%

Evaluation Details:

Class Attendance: Class attendance is expected and students must attend at least 70% of class to pass the course. If you cannot attend a class due to illness or other reasons please inform Professor Mendes ahead of time. This course has 10 days of class and 2 optional 1-1 contact times where you are marked as present or absent. If you have 10 contact points (classes or 1-1 meetings during designated weeks), you will get full marks. Academic consideration will not be granted for missed days.

Due: Weekly

Weight: 10%

Where: In Person

In-depth interview proposal: Identify a sociological problem on your own or in a group. Identify research questions. Create a draft interview guide; Describe your recruitment strategy; discuss ethical considerations; produce your letter of information and consent form.

Due: 4th Feb

Weight: 15%

Length: 6-8 pages, double-spaced

Where: OWL Brightspace

Please note that because the submission deadline for this assessment already includes flexibility in the form of grace days [a 48-hour submission window with no academic penalty], Professor Mendes reserves the right to deny academic consideration for assignments which are submitted following the end of the period of flexibility.

Grace days: For each assignment, students are expected to submit the assignment by the deadline listed. Should illness or extenuating circumstances arise, students are permitted to submit their assignment up to 48 hours past the deadline without academic penalty. Should students submit their assessment beyond 48 hours past the deadline, a late penalty of 3% per day will be subtracted from the assessed grade. As flexible deadlines are used in this course, requests for academic consideration will not be granted.

Ethnography Assignment: Spend some time (min 2 hours) observing a specific site; collect field notes. Write a short essay describing your observations, and the challenges of being an observer

Due: 4th March

Weight: 30%

Length: 8-10 pages, double-spaced

Where: OWL Brightspace

Please note that because the submission deadline for this assessment already includes flexibility in the form of grace days [a 48-hour submission window with no academic penalty], Professor Mendes reserves the right to deny academic consideration for assignments which are submitted following the end of the period of flexibility.

Grace days: For each assignment, students are expected to submit the assignment by the deadline listed. Should illness or extenuating circumstances arise, students are permitted to submit their assignment up to 48 hours past the deadline without academic penalty. Should students submit their assessment beyond 48 hours past the deadline, a late penalty of 3% per day will be subtracted from the assessed grade. As flexible deadlines are used in this course, requests for academic consideration will not be granted.

I Used to Think...Now I Think Reflections: Students need to submit reflections for 5 classes over the course of the term. Students will think about what they have learned about the topic that week and complete the following sentence stems:

I used to think...

Now I think...

Due: 25th March

Weight: 10%

Length: 1-2 pages, double-spaced

Where: OWL Brightspace

Please note that because the submission deadline for this assessment already includes flexibility in the form of choosing which 5 classes to reflect upon, Prof. Mendes reserves the right to deny academic consideration for this assignment. It is recommended that you submit your reflections weekly as you go, but all 5 reflections must be submitted by 25th March 2025. The assignment is graded based on a pass/fail and students will receive a fail if they submit less than 5 reflections.

Interview transcription, analysis and write-up: Conduct an interview (over zoom, face-time or phone). Transcribe the interview and analyse it for themes related to your research questions. Write a brief report on your findings. Submit your transcription, your thematic coding notes, and a brief write-up on your findings as well as a reflection on the experience including what worked and what you would change if you could do it again.

Due: 3rd April

Weight: 35%

Length: 10-15 pages, double-spaced

Where: OWL Brightspace

Please note that because the submission deadline for this assessment already includes flexibility in the form of grace days [a 48-hour submission window with no academic penalty], Prof. Mendes reserves the right to deny academic consideration for assignments which are submitted following the end of the period of flexibility.

Grace days: For each assignment, students are expected to submit the assignment by the deadline listed. Should illness or extenuating circumstances arise, students are permitted to submit their assignment up to 48 hours past the deadline without academic penalty. Should students submit their assessment beyond 48 hours past the deadline, a late penalty of 3% per day will be subtracted from the assessed grade. As flexible deadlines are used in this course, requests for academic consideration will not be granted.

Instructors are permitted to designate one assessment per course per term as requiring supporting documentation to receive academic consideration. For this course the following assessment has been designated as requiring supporting documentation: *Interview transcription, analysis and write-up:* Due 3rd April

Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI):

Within this course, students are permitted to use AI tools exclusively for information gathering and preliminary research purposes. These tools are intended to enhance the learning experience by providing access to diverse information sources. However, it is essential that students critically evaluate the obtained information, exercise independent thinking, and engage in original research to synthesize and develop their own ideas, arguments and perspectives. The use of AI tools can serve as a starting point for exploring a topic, with students expected to uphold academic integrity by appropriately attributing all sources of information and avoiding plagiarism. Essays, written assignments and/or lab reports should reflect the student's own thoughts and independent written work. Students should also generate their own figures (e.g., graphs, diagrams) rather than using AI generated ones. By adhering to these guidelines, students contribute to a responsible and effective learning environment that promotes critical thinking, independent inquiry and all them to produce original written contributions. The same principles also apply to the use of translation software to support the writing the essays and other written assessments.

Electronic Devices:

Students may bring and use technology such as laptops in class to take notes, follow along with course material, and access the internet when prompted. Laptops and phones may be used to complete all assignments.

Academic Offences: Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following website: https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

Students must write their assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major scholastic offence.

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (<https://www.turnitin.com/>).

Students are expected to retain all research notes, rough drafts, essay outlines, and other materials used in preparing assignments. In the unlikely event of concerns being raised about the authenticity of any assignment, your instructor may ask you to produce these materials; an inability to do so may weigh heavily against you.

Computer-marked multiple-choice tests and/or exams may be subject to submission for similarity review by software that will check for unusual coincidences in answer patterns that may indicate cheating.

Copyright: Students may not record or distribute any class activity, including conversations during office hours, without written permission from the instructor, except as necessary as part of approved accommodations for students with disabilities. Any approved recordings may only be used for the student's own private use.

Absence from Course Commitments: Students must familiarize themselves with the [Policy on Academic Consideration](#) – Undergraduate Students in First Entry Programs https://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/academic_consideration_Sep24.pdf

Students missing course work for medical, compassionate or extenuating circumstances can request academic consideration by completing a request using the Student Absence Portal (SAP) https://registrar.uwo.ca/academics/academic_considerations/index.html . Students are permitted one academic consideration request per course per term without supporting documentation. Note that supporting documentation is always required for academic consideration requests for examinations scheduled by the office of the registrar (e.g. December and April exams) and for practical laboratory and performance tests typically scheduled during the last week of the term. Students should also note that the instructor may designate one assessment per course per term that requires supporting documentation. This designated assessment is described in the course outline. Supporting documentation for academic considerations for absences due to illness must include the completed Western Student Medical Certificate (SMC) <https://registrar.uwo.ca/academics/pdfs/student-medical-certificate.pdf> or, where that is not possible, equivalent documentation by a health care practitioner. Students must request academic consideration as soon as possible and no later than 48 hours after the missed assessment.

Once the request and supporting documentation have been received and reviewed, appropriate academic consideration, if granted, shall be determined by the instructor in consultation with the academic advisor, in a manner consistent with the course outline. Students with an approved absence from an in-class test or exam will be required to write a makeup exam, unless otherwise specified in the course outline. The course instructor or teaching assistant(s) may not be available to respond to questions during the makeup text/exam. Students should be aware that the make-up test/exam will not necessarily be in the same format, be of the same duration, or cover the same material as the original test/exam.

Note: missed work can *only* be excused through one of the mechanisms above. Being asked not to attend an in-person course requirement due to potential COVID-19 symptoms is **not** sufficient on its own. Students should check the Western website to see what directives for Covid are to be followed. Western has been and will continue to follow directives established by the Middlesex-London Health Unit. That directive will state whether students should or should not come to campus/class and any other requirements (e.g., masks are mandatory). Please check on your own and do not email the instructor, the Department Undergraduate Advisor/Coordinator or the Faculty Academic Counselling Office.

Students who fail to write a make-up test or special examination will receive a grade of zero on that assessment. No other make-up opportunities will be provided unless further academic consideration is granted by the student's Home Faculty Academic Counselling office.

Religious Accommodation: Students should review the policy for Accommodation for Religious Holidays https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_religious.pdf. Where a student will be unable to write examinations and term tests due to a conflicting religious holiday, they should inform their instructors as soon as possible but not later than two weeks prior to writing the examination/term test. In the case of conflict with a midterm test, students should inform their instructor as soon as possible but not later than one week prior to the midterm.

Contingency plan for an in-person class pivoting to 100% online learning: In the event of a COVID-19 resurgence or University approved emergency during the course that necessitates the course delivery moving away from face-to-face interaction, affected course content will be delivered entirely online, either synchronously (i.e., at the times indicated in the timetable) or asynchronously (e.g., posted on OWL Brightspace for students to view at their convenience). The grading scheme will **not** change. Any remaining assessments will also be conducted online as determined by the course instructor.

Code of Student Conduct: It is the responsibility of every student to read the Code and familiarize him or herself with its contents. The Code is available at http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/code_of_conduct.pdf. Sanctions for non-compliance range from a warning or reprimand to expulsion from the University.

Student Responsibility: Students in a degree program must select courses in accordance with the published requirements. Students are responsible for ensuring that their selection of courses is appropriate and accurately recorded, that all course prerequisites have been successfully completed, and

that they are aware of any antirequisite course(s) they may have taken. Students must familiarize themselves with the Student Responsibility for Course Selection policy https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/general/academic_counselling.pdf and the Registration and Progression policy https://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/registration_progression_grad/registration_progression.pdf. Students are responsible for the successful completion of the Graduation Requirements for their degree program https://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/registration_progression_grad/graduation.pdf.

Support Services:

Office of the Registrar Services <http://www.registrar.uwo.ca>

[Faculty Academic Advising](#) - Please visit your Home Faculty Academic advising webpage for information regarding adding/dropping courses, important dates, academic considerations for absences, appeals, exam conflicts, and many other academic related matters https://registrar.uwo.ca/faculty_academic_counselling.html.

[USC services](#) offers information about student the health/dental plan, Bus Pass, food support services, Peer support Centre etc <http://westernusc.ca/services/>.

[Mental health](#) – Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

[Health & Wellness Services](#) – Registered part-time and full-time students can book a physical health appointment at <https://www.uwo.ca/health/shs/index.html>. Additional on-campus services are also available <https://www.uwo.ca/health/shs/services/index.html>.

[Accessible Education](#) provides supports and services to students with disabilities at Western, in all programs and faculties. Students with disabilities or accessibility challenges should work with Accessible Education (formerly SSD) http://academicsupport.uwo.ca/accessible_education/index.html, which provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive testing.

[Gender-Based and Sexual Violence](#) – Western is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence (GBSV) and providing compassionate support to anyone who is going through or has gone through these traumatic events. If you are experiencing or have experience GBSV (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at the following website: http://uwo.ca/health/student_support/survivor_support/get-help.html

[Western Libraries](#) – Visit the many library locations on campus. Western Libraries provide access to material in physical and digital formats <https://www.lib.uwo.ca/catalogue/index.html>. Research support is available <https://www.lib.uwo.ca/research/index.html>.

[Writing support](#) – Online writing resources, writing support and writing modules are available <https://writing.uwo.ca/undergrads/>

Bookstore: Search for Textbook availability and cost <https://bookstore.uwo.ca/textbook-search>