

# THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

WASHINGTON, DC

Department of Sociology  
SOC 4195W: Senior Research Seminar

Meeting:

Location:

## INSTRUCTOR:

Professor Kaitlyn DaVisio

Email: [k.davisio@email.gwu.edu](mailto:k.davisio@email.gwu.edu)

Office Hours:

## GRADUATE INSTRUCTIONAL ASSISTANT:

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

This research seminar is a senior capstone course intended to deepen students' knowledge of sociology and social science research methods. The course provides students the opportunity to hone their analytical skills by producing an original empirical research paper. It is expected that students bring to the course strong backgrounds in sociological theory and research methods. It is not advised that students are enrolled in theory or methods concurrently with this seminar. The centerpiece of the course is the preparation of an academic thesis in which students demonstrate their ability to pose a sociological research question, synthesize existing literature on the chosen topic, analyze data appropriate for the project, and make an evidence-based argument addressing the research question. Students will present their projects in a professionally-prepared presentation at the end of the semester.

Each student will be free to choose their own topic for their final project using *open-source data*, using a variety of qualitative and quantitative methodologies during the course. **This course is fast-paced and time-intensive; students enrolled should be prepared to rise to the challenge.**

## PREREQUISITES

Completion of SOC 2101 or SOC 2101; SOC 2103 and/or 2104; completion of at least one WID course prior to this semester; and senior class standing are prerequisites for this class.

## COURSE LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Throughout this course, students will...

1. Expand their capacity for critical thinking through the careful reading, discussion, and critique of published social science research;
2. Increase their data literacy through rigorous use of open-source data to examine the selected thesis topic;
3. Expand their knowledge of sociological research design and methodology with applications to real world data;
4. Improve their understandings of sociological theory and its use in sociological analysis;
5. Expand their capacity to make an evidence-based argument in the context of a sociological inquiry;
6. Sharpen their written communication skills through the writing of an original research thesis; and
7. Increase their skills and experiences in oral communication by presenting their research to the class.

### **GPAC – Oral Communication**

This course meets the Oral Communication component of the GPAC Communication element: “the effective interpretation, composition, and presentation of information, ideas, and values to a specific audience.” As such, students must present at least two graded oral presentations (the final oral presentation and the video elevator pitch) that, in total, fulfill the following learning objectives:

- engage with a significant topic;
- develop a clear thesis and persuasive argument;
- demonstrate facility with topical and disciplinary knowledge through well-crafted and audience-appropriate language;
- demonstrate vocal and physical qualities that augment content and maintain audience interest.

### **WID: Writing in the Disciplines**

This course is a Writing in the Disciplines course. As such, it fulfills the Written Communication component of the GPAC Communication element. “The effective use of language to express critical thinking that evaluates rhetorical situations, identifies significant lines of inquiry, investigates and analyses available knowledge, and develops rigorous arguments appropriate to the intended audience.”

### **TEXTBOOKS**

We will read portions of a handful of texts throughout this course. PDF versions will be linked through Blackboard. These textbooks are:

Chen, V., Leon-Perez, G., Honnold, J., and Aytar, H. (2024). *The Craft of Sociological Research: Principles and Methods of Collecting, Analyzing, and Presenting Social Science Data*. Fairfax: Virtual Library of Virginia.

Massengill, R. P. (2015). *Writing Sociology: A Guide for Junior Papers and Senior Theses*. Princeton, NJ; Princeton University.

### **COURSE EXPECTATIONS**

### *Class Time:*

Classes occur every Tuesday from 3:30 to 6:00pm. Because we will only meet once a week, missing one day is equivalent to missing approximately 8% of the course content. Thus, it is incredibly important for you to attend every class, save for illness or extenuating circumstances. Please make every effort to attend each class. Should unforeseen interferences arise, please notify your professor.

### *Outside Class:*

You are expected to dedicate time outside of class weekly to complete the required readings and any other assignments prior to attending class. You may struggle to grasp core course content or participate in discussions without actively reading all assigned materials.

According to school policy, students are expected to spend a minimum of 100 minutes doing out-of-class work for every 50 minutes of direct instruction. This 3-credit course has 150 minutes of in-class instruction, which would equal 5 hours weekly of independent learning. Find more information here: <https://provost.gwu.edu/resources>.

## **GRADED REQUIREMENTS**

Rubrics for all assignments will be posted onto Blackboard. Your grade will be made up of the following:

| Category                           | Assignment                                           | Due Date                   | % of grade |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|------------|
| Attendance & Engaged Participation |                                                      | <i>Ongoing</i>             | 5%         |
| Essay Planning                     | Topic Proposal                                       | <i>January 23</i>          | 5%         |
| Rough Draft                        | RD1: Introduction & Literature Review                | <i>February 6</i>          | 10%        |
| Rough Draft                        | Methods Section                                      | <i>February 20</i>         | 5%         |
| Rough Draft                        | RD2: <i>Revised</i> Intro & Lit Review + Methodology | <i>March 6</i>             | 10%        |
| Essay Planning                     | Analysis Meetings                                    | <i>Meetings Mar. 16-20</i> | 5%         |
| Rough Draft                        | Results Section                                      | <i>April 3</i>             | 10%        |
| Final                              | Oral Project Presentation                            | <i>April 21 &amp; 28</i>   | 20%        |
| Final                              | Senior Thesis                                        | <i>May 4</i>               | 30%        |

### *Grading Scale:*

#### Acceptable

A = 93+

A- = 90-92

B+ = 85-89

B = 80-84

#### Unacceptable\*

C+ = 75-79

C = 70-74

D+ = 65-69

D = 60-64

#### Extenuating Circumstances\*

F = <59

Z = Withdraw

I = Incomplete (*with contract*)

\* *Should your grade (on any assignment or in the class overall) fall in the Unacceptable or Extenuating Circumstances category, please meet with me as soon as possible! I am here to help you succeed, but I can't help if I don't know what is going on.*

### **Attendance & Engaged Participation:**

This seminar-style course will rely on active, engaged, and productive classroom discussion. To that end, I expect all students to be present, on time, and prepared to discuss the readings and actively participate. Your participation grade will be made up of attendance & engaged participation, for a total of 5% of your grade.

Attendance will be taken each class through “exit tickets” – you will be asked to briefly respond to a question related to the lecture material. These responses will not be graded except for completion. Should you miss a class and want to make up your attendance point, you can choose from the list of bonus assignments to regain lost points. No more than **3** bonus assignments can be completed in a semester, and each assignment type can only be used **once**. Please submit all bonus assignments via Blackboard.

#### *Bonus Assignments*

- (1) Attend your professor’s office hours for a discussion of the missed content.
- (2) Attend your TA’s office hours for a discussion of your current thesis draft.
- (3) Read an academic journal article that relates to your essay topic and write a critique of the methodology used – should be no less than 350 words.
- (4) Read a recent news article (within the semester) and write a reflection connecting the content to your essay topic or to research design in the social sciences – should be no less than 350 words.
- (5) Record a podcast-style discussion with a friend or family member about something you have learned in class for at least five minutes and submit the recording.
- (6) Go for a walk outside (should be at least 15 minutes) and send photo evidence of your walk.

Because this course will prioritize class discussion, it is also important to be *engaged* with as well as present at the lectures. Engaged participation includes, but is not limited to, asking questions, sharing thoughtful responses in discussion, and being prepared to provide weekly updates on the status of your ongoing research project. This will be included as a component of your attendance and participation grade throughout the duration of the semester.

However, I understand that not all students may feel comfortable speaking in class. Should you have concerns about in-class participation, please reach out to me so that we can arrange a suitable alternative.

#### **Essay Planning:**

Because the focus of this course is to build a senior thesis, we will have several assignments designed to prompt reflection on how to structure your essay and research design. This will include two components: the Topic Proposal and Individual Analysis Meeting, for a combined total of 10% of your overall grade.

#### *Topic Proposal:*

The Topic Proposal will be worth 5% of your grade. You should use this assignment to present a rough sketch of your thesis Introduction section. As such, it should include your research question(s) and an explanation of why the topic is interesting, important, and relevant *now*.

#### *Analysis Meeting:*

The Analysis Meeting is worth 5% of your grade. The purpose of this meeting is to ensure you have a feasible and comprehensible data analysis plan to answer your research question.

You will sign up for a 15-minute meeting slot with your professor to discuss your analysis plan. Should you not be available this week, please reach out to me as soon as possible to schedule an alternative meeting; **late Analysis Meetings will not be allowed.**

These meetings are **not** intended to be a brainstorming session; you should come to the meeting prepared – this includes having your data downloaded, ensuring it is accessible via Excel, SPSS, R, etc., and having some idea of the plan to analyze your data to answer your research question.

### **Rough Draft:**

Throughout the semester, several rough drafts of your senior thesis will be due. This is to allow you the opportunity for continued feedback on your project and keep you on track for the final submission. There will be four drafts: 1) Introduction and Literature Review, 2) Methods Section, 3) Revised Introduction & Literature Review + Methodology, and 4) Results Section, as well as a Peer Review assignment. These five components will comprise 40% of your overall grade.

#### *Introduction and Literature Review:*

Your first essay rough draft will contain the Introduction and Literature Review portion of your essay. It will be worth 10% of your grade. These two sections should be above 1,500 words, and literature should be properly cited using APA formatting.

#### *Methods Section:*

The Methods Section should clearly present your research question, comprehensively outline your data (including how the data were collected and what variables you will be analyzing), and overview how you will use these data to address your research question. This section should be approximately 500 – 1,000 words and will be worth 5% of your overall grade.

#### *Revised Introduction and Literature Review + Methodology:*

Your second essay rough draft will contain an updated version of your Introduction and Literature Review essay portions (revised after receiving feedback), as well as a Methodology section. It is worth 10% of your grade. These three sections should be above 2,000 words, and should be properly cited with APA formatting.

#### *Results and Discussion Section:*

The Results and Discussion section should present findings from your data analysis. It should summarize and discuss only the results, connect these results to relevant literature, and include tables or figures. It is worth 10% of your overall grade. This section should be approximately 1,500 words (+/- 10%).

### **Final Submissions:**

This class counts for both the GPAC Oral Communication and WID requirements. As such, your final submissions will include both an in-person, oral project presentation (15%) and the final senior thesis (30%). These two final submissions comprise 45% of your overall grade and should be undertaken with the requisite importance.

### *Oral Project Presentation:*

The Project Presentation is worth 20% of your grade. You will present your full senior thesis project, which should include an Introduction, Background, Methods (including data and measures), Results, and Conclusion/Implications.

Please come prepared to actively engage in other's presentations and offer critiques – everyone should leave the presentations with new ideas on how to “fine tune” your final paper!

### *Final Senior Thesis:*

The Final Senior Thesis is the centerpiece of this course. It is worth 30% of your grade. It should include 5 sections: Introduction, Literature Review, Methodology, Results, and Conclusion/Implications. Your Senior Thesis should be between 4,000 – 6,000 words, use at least 20 sources, and properly use APA citation formatting. While not required, you should consider professionally formatting your thesis – such as including a cover page, double-spacing, 12 pt. font and 1-inch margins, etc.

## **COURSE POLICIES**

### *Classroom Etiquette:*

We will generate classroom community guidelines in the first week for both the students and the professor. These guidelines are intended to ensure the classroom remains a safe and comfortable environment for everyone involved. It will be expected that students adhere to these guidelines throughout the duration of the class, in-person and virtually. The agreed upon classroom community guidelines will be posted to the course Blackboard page. Though unexpected, students who behave unacceptably may be asked to leave.

### *Late Work Policy:*

I allow a 24 hr. grace period following assignment deadlines (*excluding the Analysis Meetings and Attendance Makeup Assignments*). However, any assignments submitted after the grace period ***without prior approval from your professor*** will lose 10 points for every additional day it is late. Further, **I will not accept any assignment that is more than 1 week late** without prior communication. This course's assignments are fast-paced and cumulative – it is exceedingly important that you do not fall behind. If at any point you have concerns about managing this course's workload, please reach out to me as soon as possible.

### *Academic Integrity:*

The rule of thumb here is: “If you didn't write it, you must cite it” (Malet, 2023). Violations of academic integrity occur when students fail to cite research sources properly, engage in unauthorized collaboration, falsify data, or use artificial intelligence (AI) to create text for a written submission. Academic integrity is an essential part of the educational process, and all members of the GW community take these matters very seriously. Any violations of this Academic Integrity policy will result in a zero for the assignment and will be considered as violations of the university's Academic Integrity Code of Conduct.

### *The Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI):*

With the recent developments of AI, it has become a useful technological tool; but it is incredibly important to remember that it is just that – a *tool*. Over the duration of the semester, we will discuss the responsible use of artificial intelligence as a student.

However, **using AI to draft a written submission (in whole or in part) is strictly prohibited.** Should a submitted assignment be suspected of inappropriate AI usage, an in-person meeting with your professor will be required to discuss how to proceed – this may include, but is not limited to, receiving a 0 on the assignment or escalating the matter to investigation for Academic Integrity Code of Conduct violation.

My expectations for the quality of your work is much higher than what any current large language model can produce – why even risk it?

#### *Diversity and Inclusion:*

I am committed to creating a learning environment and experience that is accessible, safe, and comfortable to all students, regardless of their gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, abilities, etc. Should you require any accommodations throughout the course, such as for learning differences or religious observances, please communicate them to me as early as possible.

How you identify and your personal experience is integral to forming your view of the world and of yourself, so it is recognized and encouraged that each individual will bring something wonderful and unique to the classroom! Students should feel comfortable to discuss how their identity shapes their world views and stances on what we are learning, but you should not feel pressured to disclose anything you do not wish to. If you do wish to share parts of your identity (i.e., your preferred name or nickname, pronouns, sharing personal experiences, etc.), this classroom will be a safe space to do so.

#### **TIPS FOR SUCCESS!**

1. Come to class and pay attention!
2. Do the readings thoroughly and ahead of time.
3. Ask questions – you're here to learn and it is more than okay to not know or understand everything. Chances are someone else has the same question! Don't be afraid of being wrong or changing your views, these are a part of the academic journey.
4. Know your work style. If you prefer to take notes in class, do that! If you prefer to listen in class and return to lecture slides later, do that! You know yourself best.
5. Enjoy it! Education is one of the best things you can do for yourself – it truly is a privilege! Knowledge is the one thing no one can take from you.

## CLASS SCHEDULE

*Should any changes be necessary, your professor will communicate them with you via Blackboard.*

| Week      | Day  | Topic                                                                   | Readings                                     | Assignments                             |
|-----------|------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| 1         | 1/13 | Introductions<br>Social Science and the Research Process                |                                              |                                         |
| 2         | 1/20 | From a Topic to a Literature Review                                     | Massengill, Ch. 3<br>Chen et al., Ch. 3      | <b>Topic<br/>Proposal Due<br/>1/23</b>  |
| 3         | 1/27 | Writing Literature Review<br><i>Guest Speaker – Literature Searches</i> | Massengill, Ch. 1                            |                                         |
| 4         | 2/3  | Designing a Research Plan<br><i>Guest Speaker – Career Development?</i> | Massengill, Ch. 2<br>Chen et al., Ch. 5      | <b>Rough Draft<br/>1 Due 2/6</b>        |
| 5         | 2/10 | Open-Source Research & Finding Data                                     | Massengill, Ch. 4                            |                                         |
| 6         | 2/17 | Conducting Research: Statistics 101                                     | Chen et al., Ch. 14                          | <b>Methods<br/>Section Due<br/>2/20</b> |
| 7         | 2/24 | Conducting Research: Document Analysis                                  | Chen et al., Ch. 11<br>Chen et al., Ch. 15   |                                         |
| 8         | 3/3  | Writing Research: Methodology Sections                                  | Massengill, Ch. 5<br>Massengill, Ch. 6       | <b>Rough Draft<br/>2 Due 3/6</b>        |
|           | 3/10 | <b>Spring Break</b>                                                     |                                              |                                         |
| 9         | 3/17 | Individual Analysis Meetings                                            |                                              |                                         |
| 10        | 3/24 | Conducting Research: Statistics 201                                     |                                              |                                         |
| 11        | 3/31 | In-Class Analysis<br><i>Laboratory Day</i>                              |                                              | <b>Results<br/>Section Due<br/>4/3</b>  |
| 12        | 4/7  | Writing Research: Results and<br>Discussions                            | Massengill, Ch. 7                            |                                         |
| 13        | 4/14 | Presenting Research                                                     | Chen et al., Appendix A<br>Massengill, Ch. 7 |                                         |
| 14        | 4/21 | Final Presentations – Slate A                                           | - -                                          |                                         |
| 15        | 4/28 | Final Presentations – Slate B                                           | - -                                          |                                         |
| Exam Week |      | <b>FINAL SENIOR THESIS DUE MAY 4</b>                                    |                                              |                                         |

## **University Policies**

### *Academic Integrity Code*

Academic integrity is an essential part of the educational process, and all members of the GW community take these matters very seriously. As the instructor of record for this course, my role is to provide clear expectations and uphold them in all assessments. Violations of academic integrity occur when students fail to cite research sources properly, engage in unauthorized collaboration, falsify data, and otherwise violate the Code of Academic Integrity. If you have any questions about whether particular academic practices or resources are permitted, you should ask me for clarification. If you are reported for an academic integrity violation, you should contact Student Rights and Responsibilities (SRR) to learn more about your rights and options in the process. Consequences can range from failure of assignment to expulsion from the University and may include a transcript notation. For more information, refer to the SRR website at [studentconduct.gwu.edu/academic-integrity](http://studentconduct.gwu.edu/academic-integrity), email [rights@gwu.edu](mailto:rights@gwu.edu), or call 202-994-6757.

### *University policy on observance of religious holidays*

Students must notify faculty during the first week of the semester in which they are enrolled in the course, or as early as possible, but no later than three weeks prior to the absence, of their intention to be absent from class on their day(s) of religious observance. If the holiday falls within the first three weeks of class, the student must inform faculty in the first week of the semester. For details and policy, see [provost.gwu.edu/policies-procedures-and-guidelines](http://provost.gwu.edu/policies-procedures-and-guidelines).

### *Use of Electronic Course Materials and Class Recordings*

Students are encouraged to use electronic course materials, including recorded class sessions, for private personal use in connection with their academic program of study. Electronic course materials and recorded class sessions should not be shared or used for non-course related purposes unless express permission has been granted by the instructor. Students who impermissibly share any electronic course materials are subject to discipline under the Student Code of Conduct. Contact the instructor if you have questions regarding what constitutes permissible or impermissible use of electronic course materials and/or recorded class sessions. Contact Disability Support Services at [disabilitysupport.gwu.edu](http://disabilitysupport.gwu.edu) if you have questions or need assistance in accessing electronic course materials.

## **Academic Support**

### *Academic Commons*

Academic Commons is the central location for academic support resources for GW students. To schedule a peer tutoring session for a variety of courses visit [go.gwu.edu/tutoring](http://go.gwu.edu/tutoring). Visit [academiccommons.gwu.edu](http://academiccommons.gwu.edu) for study skills tips, finding help with research, and connecting with other campus resources. For questions email [academiccommons@gwu.edu](mailto:academiccommons@gwu.edu).

### *GW Writing Center*

GW Writing Center cultivates confident writers in the University community by facilitating collaborative, critical, and inclusive conversations at all stages of the writing process. Working alongside peer mentors, writers develop strategies to write independently in academic and public settings. Appointments can be booked online at [gwu.mywconline](https://www.gwu.edu/mywconline).

### *Disability Support Services (DSS)*

202-994-8250

Any student who may need an accommodation based on the potential impact of a disability should contact Disability Support Services at [disabilitysupport.gwu.edu](https://disabilitysupport.gwu.edu) to establish eligibility and to coordinate reasonable accommodations.

### *Student Health Center*

202-994-5300, 24/7

The Student Health Center (SHC) offers medical, counseling/psychological, and psychiatric services to GW students. More information about the SHC is available at [healthcenter.gwu.edu](https://healthcenter.gwu.edu). Students experiencing a medical or mental health emergency on campus should contact GW Emergency Services at 202-994-6111, or off campus at 911.

## **GW Campus Emergency Information**

### *GW Emergency Services*

202-994-6111

For situation-specific instructions, refer to [GW's Emergency Procedures guide](#).

### *GW Alert*

GW Alert is an emergency notification system that sends alerts to the GW community. GW requests students, faculty, and staff maintain current contact information by logging on to [alert.gwu.edu](https://alert.gwu.edu). Alerts are sent via email, text, social media, and other means, including the Guardian app. The Guardian app is a safety app that allows you to communicate quickly with GW Emergency Services, 911, and other resources. Learn more at [safety.gwu.edu](https://safety.gwu.edu).

### *Protective Actions*

GW prescribes four protective actions that can be issued by university officials depending on the type of emergency. All GW community members are expected to follow directions according to the specified protective action. The protective actions are Shelter, Evacuate, Secure, and Lockdown (details below). Learn more at [safety.gwu.edu/gw-standard-emergency-statuses](https://safety.gwu.edu/gw-standard-emergency-statuses).

#### Shelter

- Protection from a specific hazard
- The hazard could be a tornado, earthquake, hazardous material spill, or other environmental emergency.
- Specific safety guidance will be shared on a case-by-case basis.

Action:

- Follow safety guidance for the hazard.

### Evacuate

- Need to move people from one location to another.
- Students and staff should be prepared to follow specific instructions given by first responders and University officials.

Action:

- Evacuate to a designated location.
- Leave belongings behind.
- Follow additional instructions from first responders.

### Secure

- Threat or hazard outside of buildings or around campus.
- Increased security, secured building perimeter, increased situational awareness, and restricted access to entry doors.

Action:

- Go inside and stay inside.
- Activities inside may continue.

### Lockdown

- Threat or hazard with the potential to impact individuals inside buildings.
- Room-based protocol that requires locking interior doors, turning off lights, and staying out of sight of corridor window.

Action:

- Locks, lights, out of sight
- Consider Run, Hide, Fight