SOCI 316

Social Research

*Amherst College*

## Key Information

### Instructors

### Leah C. Schmalzbauer

[Leah C. Schmalzbauer](https://www.amherst.edu/people/facstaff/lschmalzbauer)  
   [lschmalzbauer@amherst.edu](mailto:lschmalzbauer@amherst.edu)

### Sakeef M. Karim

[Sakeef M. Karim](https://www.sakeefkarim.com/)  
   [skarim@amherst.edu](mailto:skarim@amherst.edu)

### Location

[Barrett Hall Room 105](https://www.amherst.edu/offices/it/academic-technology-services/tools/technology-classrooms/classrooms_technology-equipped/classrooms/node/681449)

### Time

Spring 2025—Tuesdays and Thursdays—11:30 AM to 12:50 PM

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| An Important Exception |
| In [Part IV](#partiv) of this course, we will only be meeting ***once a week on Thursdays***. |

### Office Hours

### Leah C. Schmalzbauer

Tuesdays, 2:00-4:00 PM in Morgan Hall (Room 306) or *by appointment*.

### Sakeef M. Karim

Fridays, 2:30-5:00 PM in Morgan Hall (Room 203 A) or during a [*Zoom Open Slot*](https://calendar.google.com/calendar/u/0/appointments/schedules/AcZssZ3kgPGNGY6XFfokZx0e7NFjTEgA11ucUVKKJNXBQG2jtPd-Sk8tE9yL70z-VTLqSLTqPAbus-c4).

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| Sakeef M. Karim’s Appointment Policy |
| All meetings, *even during office hours*, *must* be scheduled in advance via [Google Calendar](https://calendar.app.google/ovKJyNwi7aVVQr418). |

## Course Description

This course introduces students to the range of methods that sociologists use to understand humans as social beings. It explores the strengths and weaknesses of these methods, emphasizing the general logic of social inquiry and research design rather than narrowly defined techniques and statistical proofs. With this knowledge in hand, students will collaborate on a large-scale survey and design an original research project this term.



Image can be retrieved [here](https://platform.vox.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/chorus/uploads/chorus_asset/file/19539913/GettyImages_862457080.jpg?quality=90&strip=all&crop=2.0283576211107%2C0%2C95.943284757779%2C100&w=1440)

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## Structure

### Design of Synchronous Class Sessions

[Parts I](#parti), [II](#partii) and [III](#partiii) of the class will follow a simple structure. On most days, we[[1]](#footnote-1) will begin with a basic lecture informed by the week’s readings. Then, we will toss the baton over to all of you. Working in small groups, you will respond to the questions or prompts we provide. These prompts will encourage you to connect lecture material to the research proposal you are developing throughout the term. Each synchronous session will conclude with a plenary discussion, where we will explore the themes that emerged during your small group conversations.

In [Part IV](#partiv) of the class, ***we will meet only once per week, on Thursdays,*** with each session dedicated to independent work. During the first half of class, you will focus on refining your research proposals. In the second half, you will (i) share updates on your progress and (ii) provide constructive feedback to peers as they develop projects of their own.

[Part V](#partiv) of the class will feature in-class presentations.

### Distribution of Topics & Readings

This course is meant to provide a broad, streamlined overview of the logic of sociological inquiry—with the goal of familiarizing students with the epistemological foundations of quantitative and qualitative research methods as deployed in sociology and kindred fields. The course itself can be partitioned into five major “parts.”

* [Part I](#parti) provides a basic introduction to the course.
* [Part II](#partii), led by Leah C. Schmalzbauer, delves into qualitative research in sociology.
* [Part III](#partii), led by Sakeef M. Karim, shifts focus to quantitative and computational methods.
* [Parts IV](#partiv) and [V](#partv) will not feature readings or lectures. Rather, students will work on their research proposals in [Part IV](#partiv) of this class.
* In [Part V](#partv), students will deliver a 10-15-minute presentation on the project they have developed throughout the semester.

## Readings

### Course Textbooks

*Qualitative Literacy: A Guide to Evaluating Ethnographic and Interview Research* (Small and Calarco 2022)

*Data Analysis for Social Science: A Friendly and Practical Introduction* (Llaudet and Imai 2023)

### Other Required (and Optional) Readings

Supplemental readings are available through the mystifying power of Moodle. As you plan for the semester, it may be useful to bookmark the [eReserves page](https://moodle.amherst.edu/mod/lti/view.php?id=903801) on our course website. New readings may be introduced as the world around us evolves, whether via the incremental march of science or in response to social, economic and political shocks that warrant further reflection or empirical scrutiny.

#### Recommended Readings

As a forewarning: readings underlined in the [Weekly Schedule](#weekly) section are recommended but **optional**.

## Evaluations

### A Bird’s Eye View

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| **Task** | **Description** | **Weight** | **Deadline or Evaluative Time Horizon** |
| Participation | This is a small research seminar. Ergo, class participation is vital. **Students must actively engage in class discussions**—sharing their thoughts, providing constructive feedback to peers, asking clarifying questions, and keeping us (i.e., the course instructors) informed of any developments vis-à-vis their final research proposals. | 30% | All Semester |
| Memo:  Research Interests | Students are required to submit a concise, 500-word reflection detailing their research interests. In this reflection, students should specify the kinds of social phenomena—e.g., population processes, sexuality, political polarization, ethnic boundaries, digital media, cultural consumption, international migration, economic inequality, carceral policy and so on and so forth—they would like to scrutinize in their final proposal. | 7.5% | Friday, February 21st at 8:00 PM. |
| Annotated Bibliography | Students must submit an annotated bibliography before spring break. This annotated bibliography will, in principle, directly inform—or serve as the foundation for—the literature review they include in their final research proposal. In the bibliography, students must identify at least 10 sources germane to their topic of interest. For each source, students must provide a 100–150-word summary of the key argument(s) proffered by the author(s). Other expectations can be found [here](https://soci316.netlify.app/#annotated). | 15% | Friday, March 14th at 8:00 PM. |
| Memo:  Five Survey Questions | Towards the end of the semester, we will conduct a large-scale social survey (with an approximate *N* of 500) using a survey recruitment firm. This will be a collaborative undertaking: i.e., each student will ideally contribute at least one question to the survey. With this goal in mind, students are required to submit a response memo proposing five potential survey questions. For each question, students must include a 100-word rationale explaining how the proposed item addresses a significant sociological question. | 7.5% | Friday, March 28th at 8:00 PM. |
| Final Presentation | In Part V of the class, students will deliver a 10–15-minute presentation on the research project they have developed over the term. A rubric with grading criteria can be accessed [here](https://soci316.netlify.app/#finalpresentation). | 10% | Part V  of the semester. |
| Final Research Proposal | Students are required to submit a detailed research proposal (15-25 pages, double-spaced) on a topic of their choice, subject to the approval of the two course instructors. The chosen topic must be related to the study of human societies and fall within sociology’s broad intellectual mandate. A more detailed set of expectations can be found [here.](https://soci316.netlify.app/#finalproposal) | 30% | Friday, May 9th at 8:00 PM. |

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### Guidelines for Key Deliverables

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| Guidelines for Major Assignments |
| Guidelines for the three key deliverables—i.e., the annotated bibliography; the final presentation; and the final research proposal—will be gradually rolled out (or uploaded online) as deadlines come into focus. |

## Norms, Rules & Regulations

### Honor Code

Please review the ***Amherst College Honor Code***, which can be accessed in its entirety [here](https://www.amherst.edu/offices/student-affairs/community-standards/college-standards/honor-code).

Violations of the *Honor Code* will be promptly reported to the Dean of Students. As Section 1.1 of the *Honor Code* indicates, plagiarism is a serious offense. In most cases, students who plagiarize the work of others will fail this class and may face additional disciplinary penalties. Moreover, as detailed in Sections 1.2 to 1.4 of the *Honor Code*, students must respect others in the classroom, including those whose views deviate from their own. Failure to do so will prompt disciplinary action.

### GAI Policy

There is no reason to pretend like generative artificial intelligence (GAI) does not exist in the world out there. These systems have arrived, and they *may* revolutionize how higher education “works.” With this in mind, you are free to use ChatGPT and its analogues for class assignments—but you have to **cite** the GAI you are using. *Failure to do so amounts to plagiarism*.

To reiterate:

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| Generative AI Policy |
| If you use a GAI tool (like ChatGPT) and do not cite it, it is a form of plagiarism. |

### Attendance

**You are expected to attend each and every class. If you do not, you will lose points for participation**. That said, we are aware that you are all human beings whose lives are often fraught with uncertainty. If something comes up, please let us know and we will do our best to be as accommodating as possible. Extended absences may, however, require additional documentation (e.g., note from a physician).

### Electronics

Provisionally, we have decided to allow students to use laptops and tablets in class. This is, however, highly conditional. If we observe students using their electronic devices for non-academic pursuits (e.g., shopping, consuming social media and so on), we will institute a sweeping ban on electronics. Do not be the one to contravene our social contract.

### E-Mail

On weekdays and non-holidays, we will respond to e-mails within 48 hours. If we fail to meet this standard, please send us a follow-up message with a gentle reminder. On weekends[[2]](#footnote-2) and breaks, we will not respond to e-mails unless you have an emergency. If you do, please include EMERGENCY in the subject line.

### Late Assignments

Assignments must be submitted on time. A late submission will result in a penalty of 5% for each day beyond the deadline.[[3]](#footnote-3) However, as noted, we are well aware that life can present unexpected challenges. If you anticipate missing a deadline or have an emergency, please inform us soon as you can. Extensions may be granted on a case-by-case basis.

## Accessibility and Accommodations

If you require accommodations, please contact Student Accessibility Services as soon as possible and [submit an application through the new AIM Portal](https://www.amherst.edu/offices/student-affairs/accessibility-services/students/applying-for-an-accommodation). More generally, if you have any suggestions about how this class can be more accessible and inclusive, please let us know via e-mail or during office hours.

## Weekly Schedule

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| Course Readings |
| As noted, non-textbook readings can be accessed via the [eReserves page](https://moodle.amherst.edu/mod/lti/view.php?id=903801) on our course website. |

# Reading List

**LS** indicates class led by Leah C. Schmalzbauer

**SK** indicates class led by Sakeef M. Karim

**J** indicates joint session

**★** indicates external speaker

Readings underlined below are recommended but optional.

### **Part I: Course Overview**

#### **Week 1: An Introduction to Social Research**

###### January 28t**hJ** & January 30th**J**

*Islam and the Transmission of Cultural Identity in Four European Countries* (Karim 2024a)

*Meanings of Mobility: Family, Education, and Immigration in the Lives of Latino Youth* (Schmalzbauer 2023)

* Chapter 3: The Price of Mobility
* Appendix B: A Methodological Roadmap

#### **Week 2: Using the Library; Linking Theory & Method**

###### February 4th**★** & February 6th**SK**

*Transcending General Linear Reality* (Abbott 1988)

*The Art and Science of Social Research* (Carr et al. 2020)

* Chapter 2:Research Foundations
* Chapter 4: From Concepts to Models

*Inequality without Groups: Contemporary Theories of Categories, Intersectional Typicality, and the Disaggregation of Difference* (Monk 2022)

*Sequence Analysis: New Methods for Old Ideas* (Abbott 1995)

### **Part II: Qualitative Research**

#### **Week 3: Ethics and Qualitative Literacy I**

###### February 11th**LS** & February 13th**LS**

*Spies Like Us: When Sociologists Deceive Their Subjects* (Allen 1997)

*ASA Code of Ethics* (American Sociological Association 2018)

*The Trials of Alice Goffman* (Lewis-Kraus 2016)

*Qualitative Literacy: A Guide to Evaluating Ethnographic and Interview Research* (Small and Calarco 2022)

* Chapter 1: Cognitive Empathy

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#### **Week 4: Qualitative Literacy II to V**

###### February 18th**LS** & February 20th**LS**

*Qualitative Literacy: A Guide to Evaluating Ethnographic and Interview Research* (Small and Calarco 2022)

* Chapter 2: Heterogeneity
* Chapter 3: Palpability
* Chapter 4: Follow-Up

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| Research Interest Memo Deadline |
| Your first memo (detailing your research interests) is due by **8:00 PM** on Friday, February 21st. |

* Chapter 5: Self-Awareness

#### **Week 5: An Example; Social Scientific Writing**

###### February 25th**LS** & February 27th**★**

*When Birds of a Feather Don’t Flock Together: An Intersectional Approach to the Study of Friendship at an Elite Liberal Arts College* (Margolis 2019)

### **Part III: Quantitative Research**

#### **Week 6: Quantitative Research—The Broad View**

###### March 4th**SK** & March 6th**★**

*The Organization of Ethnocultural Attachments Among Second-Generation Germans* (Karim 2024b)

*Measuring Meaning Structures* (Mohr 1998)

*Endogenous Selection Bias: The Problem of Conditioning on a Collider Variable* (Elwert and Winship 2014)

#### **Week 7: Survey Research and Experiments**

###### March 11th**SK** & March 13th**SK**

*The Art and Science of Social Research* (Carr et al. 2020)

* Chapter 6: Sampling Strategies
* Chapter 7: Survey Research
* Chapter 8: Experimental Research

*Data Analysis for Social Science: A Friendly and Practical Introduction* (Llaudet and Imai 2023)

* Chapter 2: Estimating Causal Effects with Randomized Experiments
* Chapter 3: Inferring Population Characteristics via Survey Research

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| Annotated Bibliography Deadline |
| Your annotated bibliographies are due by **8:00 PM** on Friday, March 14th. |

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#### **Week 8: Spring Break— NO CLASSES**

#### **Week 9: Social Statistics and Machine Learning**

###### March 25th**SK** & March 27th**SK**

*Data Analysis for Social Science: A Friendly and Practical Introduction* (Llaudet and Imai 2023)

* Chapter 4: Predicting Outcomes Using Linear Regression

*Researcher Reasoning Meets Computational Capacity: Machine Learning for Social Science* (Lundberg, Brand, and Jeon 2022)

*Machine Learning for Sociology* (Molina and Garip 2019)

*Data Analysis for Social Science: A Friendly and Practical Introduction* (Llaudet and Imai 2023)

* Chapter 6: Probability
* Chapter 7: Quantifying Uncertainty

*Computational Grounded Theory: A Methodological Framework* (Nelson 2020)

*Leveraging the Alignment between Machine Learning and Intersectionality: Using Word Embeddings to Measure Intersectional Experiences of the Nineteenth Century U.S. South* (Nelson 2021)

*Predictability Hypotheses: A Meta-Theoretical and Methodological Introduction* (Loon 2022)

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| Deadline for Memo on Survey Questions |
| Your second memo (where you propose five survey items) is due by **8:00 PM** on Friday, March 28th. |

### **Part IV: Independent Work**

#### **Week 10: Independent Work on Proposals**

###### April 3rd**J**

#### **Week 11: Independent Work on Proposals**

###### April 10th**J**

#### **Week 12: Independent Work on Proposals**

###### April 17th**J**

#### **Week 13: Independent Work on Proposals**

###### April 24th**J**

### **Part V: Final Presentations**

#### **Week 14: Final Presentations I and II**

###### May 1st**LS**

#### **Week 15: Final Presentations III**

###### May 6th**SK**

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| Research Proposal Deadline |
| Your final research proposals are due by **8:00 PM** on Friday, May 9th. |

### **References**

Abbott, Andrew. 1988. “Transcending General Linear Reality.” *Sociological Theory* 6(2):169–86. doi: [10.2307/202114](https://doi.org/10.2307/202114).

Abbott, Andrew. 1995. “[Sequence Analysis: New Methods for Old Ideas](https://www.jstor.org/stable/2083405).” *Annual Review of Sociology* 21:93–113.

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American Sociological Association. 2018. “[ASA Code of Ethics](https://www.asanet.org/wp-content/uploads/asa_code_of_ethics-june2018a.pdf).”

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Lewis-Kraus, Gideon. 2016. “[The Trials of Alice Goffman](https://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/17/magazine/the-trials-of-alice-goffman.html).” The New York Times.

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Small, Mario Luis, and Jessica McCrory Calarco. 2022. [*Qualitative Literacy: A Guide to Evaluating Ethnographic and Interview Research*](https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520390676). University of California Press.

1. Prof. Karim and/or Schmalzbauer. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Concretely, Friday at 5:00 PM to Monday at 8:00 AM. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. If an assignment is due at 8:00 PM and you submit it at 8:03 PM, you will be considered late. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)