

**Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute
COURSE SYLLABUS**

STSS 2100: Investigating Society

Fall 2019

Monday and Thursday, 12:00-1:50 pm, Sage Lab 2510

Instructor: Abby Kinchy

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Office hours: Wednesday, 1:30-4:30 and by appointment

Catalog Description of the Course:

In this course students receive practical hands-on experience in conducting ethical and theoretically-informed research in the fields of STS and sustainability studies. Throughout the semester students practice a variety of social science research methods through a series of exercises.

Introduction from Professor Kinchy:

Welcome to Investigating Society! This course is designed to provide you with a basic understanding of social science research, which you can apply in your chosen field of study. We will focus on issues such as the logic of research design, conceptualization and measurement, data collection methods available to social scientists, and what social scientists do with data once they have collected it. I have designed the course to be interactive, with the idea that students learn best by doing. For that reason, the course will generally consist of hands-on interactive activities about the course topics, in-class group project work days, and in-class methods workshops.

Student Learning Outcomes:

Students who successfully complete this course will be able to:

- Identify, choose, and use appropriate methods for the collection and analysis of social data.
- Demonstrate the link between theory, research, and analysis;
- Explain the importance of following ethical guidelines in social science research; and
- Critically evaluate the methodology of scholarly articles.

Required Materials:

Dixon, J.C., R.A. Singleton, Jr., and B.C. Straits. 2019. *The Process of Social Research*, 2nd edition. New York: Oxford University Press.

Additional readings and assignments will be provided on the course Blackboard site. You should check this site regularly for announcements and new course materials.

Please bring your laptop computer to class. You will often need to use your laptop for classroom exercises, particularly for units involving quantitative data analysis. I am aware that laptops and other devices can be a distraction from learning, so please only use your laptop as necessary to complete classroom exercises.

You will sometimes be expected to find social science research articles on your own. You can do that by using the JSTOR journal database, which is available through the Folsom Library website. It's a good idea to familiarize yourself with this database on your own. For example, figure out how to narrow your search to: 1) Item Type: Articles, 2) Disciplines: Science & Technology Studies and Sociology. This will allow you to find relevant research articles.

Assignments and Grading:

Grades will be based on student performance in the following assignments:

Exam 1 (October 10)

- Covers all material in the course up to October 10.
- Worth 25% of final grade (125 points)

Exam 2 (November 21)

- Covers all material in the course from October 10 to November 21.
- Worth 25% of final grade (125 points)

Critical Analysis of a Research Paper (due December 9)

- To demonstrate cumulative achievement of student learning objectives.
- Worth 20% of final grade (100 points)
- Late assignments incur a penalty of five points per day.
- Deadline extension will be considered if requested at least two days in advance of the due date and a compelling reason is given for needing more time.

Contributions to In-Class Methods Exercises (Daily)

- Earned by being present and engaged, asking questions, and sharing observations.
- Worth 10% of final grade (50 points)

Contribution to Class Interview Project (several sessions in October and November)

- Earned by completing assigned research tasks both in class and as homework.
- Worth 10% of final grade (50 points)

Chapter Review Questions

- Earned by submitting your answers to the chapter review questions on Blackboard in advance of class.
- Worth 10% of final grade (50 points)
- There are 18 sets of review questions, worth 4 points each. To earn the full 50 points, you must complete at least 13 sets of review questions.
- Late assignments will earn a maximum of half credit.
- No extra credit will be given for completing assignments beyond the maximum 50 points.

Your final letter grade for the course will be based on the scale presented in the table below.

Percentage	Letter Grade	Percentage	Letter Grade
94 – 100	A	73 - 76	C
90 – 93	A-	70 - 72	C-
87 – 89	B+	67 - 69	D+
83 – 86	B	60 - 66	D
80 – 82	B-	< 60	F
77 – 79	C+		

Grade Disputes:

The Rensselaer Handbook provides specific procedures by which a student may appeal a grade. You should speak to the professor before initiating an appeal. If this does not lead to satisfactory resolution, you have the option of appealing your grade by writing to the head of the STS Department no later than 10 days after your grade has been posted.

Attendance and Participation Policy:

This class will primarily follow a discussion and engaged learning format. All students are expected to contribute to classroom discussion and exercises, demonstrating respectful listening to one another and serious consideration of diverse viewpoints. Your full, focused attention is required. Therefore, turn off cell phones and do not use text messaging during class time. Please avoid disruptions such as arriving late or packing your bag before the end of class.

If you must miss class for a sporting event, illness, or other important matter, please make arrangements with your professor *before the missed class* to make up missed work.

Academic Integrity:

The Rensselaer Handbook of Student Rights and Responsibilities define various forms of Academic Dishonesty and procedures for responding to them. All forms are violations of the trust between students and teachers. Student-teacher relationships are built on trust. For example, students must trust that teachers have made appropriate decisions about the structure and content of the courses they teach, and teachers must trust that the assignments that students turn in are their own performance. Acts that violate this trust undermine the educational process.

Intellectual integrity and credibility are the foundation of all academic work. A violation of Academic Integrity policy is, by definition, considered a flagrant offense to the educational process. It is taken seriously by students, faculty, and Rensselaer and will be addressed in an effective manner.

Academic dishonesty is a violation of the Grounds for Disciplinary Action as described in the Rensselaer Handbook of Student Rights and Responsibilities. A student may be subject to any of the following types of disciplinary action should disciplinary action be pursued by the professor: disciplinary warning, disciplinary probation, disciplinary suspension, expulsion and/or alternative actions as agreed on by the student and hearing officer. Violations of academic integrity include, but are not limited to: academic fraud, collaboration, copying, cribbing, fabrication, plagiarism, sabotage, and substitution. Please see the Rensselaer Student Handbook for further explanation of the university's policy on academic integrity.

Students with Disabilities:

Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute strives to make all learning experiences as accessible as possible. If you anticipate or experience academic barriers based on a disability, please let me know immediately so that we can discuss your options. To establish reasonable accommodations, please register with The Office of Disability Services for Students. After registration, make arrangements with me as soon as possible to discuss your accommodations so that they may be implemented in a timely fashion. DSS contact information:

dss@rpi.edu; 518-276-819; 4226 Academy Hall.

Email Tips:

Email to instructors should be polite and appropriate. Please include a clear topic in the subject line, a proper greeting, and sign the message with your complete name. Please take the time to proofread your email and make sure that it is suitable for a professor. You should allow 24 hours for a response to messages, and I will answer email during normal weekday business hours. Email is the most appropriate way to reach me with brief questions, expected absences, and technical questions. For significant substantive questions about course material I encourage you to attend my office hours.

Course Calendar:

8/29	Welcome to Class	
9/3 (Tues)	Why Research Methods Matter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Ch 1: Why Care About Research Methods? • Answer Review Questions • Find either A) a story or article in the media that reports the findings of a social scientific study or B) a contention (e.g. an advertising claim) purportedly based on social scientific evidence, and bring it to class.
9/5	No class – Prof. Kinchy at a conference	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read excerpt of <i>The Stranger Next Door</i> by Arlene Stein • Read “Sex, Truths, and Audiotape” by Arlene Stein • On Blackboard, post your reactions to the readings and respond to at least one other student’s post with a thoughtful reflection.
9/9	Theory and Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Ch 2: Science and Social Research • Answer Review Questions
9/12	Doing What’s Right	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Chapter 3: The Ethics and Politics of Research • Answer Review Questions
9/16	Research Designs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Chapter 4: Research Designs • Answer the Review Questions
9/19	Measurement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Chapter 5: Measurement • Answer the Review Questions
9/23	Sampling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Chapter 6: Sampling • Answer the Review Questions
9/26	Surveys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Chapter 8: Surveys • Answer the Review Questions
9/30	Decolonizing Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read excerpt of <i>Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples</i> by Linda Tuhiwai Smith • Read “The Application of Two-Eyed Seeing Decolonizing Methodology in Qualitative and Quantitative Research for the Treatment of Intergenerational Trauma and Substance Use Disorders” by Teresa Naseba Marsh et al. • Answer the review questions posted on Blackboard
10/3	Analyzing Numerical Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Chapter 12: Quantitative Data Analysis • Answer the Review Questions
10/7	Focus: Climate Change Beliefs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read “Citizens’, Scientists’, and Policy Advisors’ Beliefs about Global Warming” by Toby Bolsen, James Druckman, and Fay Lomax Cook • Apply your knowledge of measurement, sampling, and survey design to analyze this research study. • Apply your understanding of how politics and science interact (ch. 3) to analyze the situation that this study describes.

10/10	EXAM 1	
10/14	No class - Holiday	
10/17	Studying People Qualitatively	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Chapter 9: Field Research and In-Depth Interviews • Answer the Review Questions
10/21	Interviewing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read “Learning to Interview in the Social Sciences” by Kathryn Roulston, Kathleen deMarras, and Jamie B. Lewis • Answer the review questions posted on Blackboard
10/24	Design Ethnography	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Ethnographic Field Methods and Their Relation to Design,” by Jeanette Blomberg et al. • Answer the review questions posted on Blackboard
10/28	Using Existing Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Chapter 10: Existing Data Analysis • Answer the Review Questions
10/31	Finding Existing Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading and homework TBD
11/4	Multiple Method Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Chapter 11: Multiple Methods • Answer the Review Questions
11/7	Community- Based Sustainability Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read “‘We’re not going to be guinea pigs’: Citizen Science and Environmental Health in a Native American Community” by Elizabeth Hoover • Read “Can people talk together about their practices? Focus groups, humour and the sensitive dynamics of everyday life” by Alison L. Browne • Answer the review questions posted on Blackboard • Due date for transcription of interview recorded during previous class meeting. Submit it as a Word document on Blackboard (formatting instructions to be provided).
11/11	Finding Meaning in Observations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Chapter 13: Qualitative Data Analysis • Answer the Review Questions
11/14	Coding Textual Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read additional guidance about coding, to be provided. • Prepare and code the interview transcript from the class project. Bring fully coded transcript to class.
11/18	No class – Prof. Kinchy at NSF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Study for the exam
11/21	EXAM 2	
11/25	Communicating Social Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Chapter 14: Reading and Writing in Social Research • Answer the Review Questions

11/28	No class - Thanksgiving	Tip: Start reading ahead for the critical review essay assignment.
12/2	Evaluating STS Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Choose two of the listed research articles (see assignment for critical review essay) to read in preparation for class discussion. You will subsequently write a critical review essay about one of the articles.
12/5	Writing Workshop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bring your work in progress for the critical review essay to class, for feedback and suggestions from Prof. Kinchy and your peers.
12/9	Wrap-up and Reflections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete your critical review essay, to turn in at the start of class.

Critical Review Essay:

This is a written report about one research paper. The paper should be 2,500 words in length. Each student should **choose one of the research papers** listed below.

- A. Hong, Wei and Zhao, Yandong (2015) "How Social Networks Affect Scientific Performance" *Science Technology and Human Values*, 41(2) pp. 243-273.
- B. Garrison, Nanibaa' A. (2012) "Genomic Justice for Native Americans" *Science Technology and Human Values*, 38(2) pp. 201-223.
- C. Jasanoff, S. and Kim, SH. (2009) "Containing the Atom: Sociotechnical Imaginaries and Nuclear Power in the United States and South Korea" *Minerva*, 47: 119-146.
- D. Vertesi, Janet (2008) "Mind the Gap: The London Underground Map and Users' Representations of Urban Space" *Social Studies of Science*, 38(1): 7-33.
- E. Lee, Sooho and Bozeman, Barry (2005) "The Impact of Research Collaboration on Scientific Productivity" *Social Studies of Science*, 35(5), pp. 673-702.
- F. Taylor, Dorceta E. and Ard, Kerry J. (2015) "Food Availability and the Food Desert Frame in Detroit: An Overview of the City's Food System," *Environmental Practice* 17: 102-133.
- G. Hess, David J., Mai, Quan D., and Brown, Kate Pride (2016) "Red states, green laws: Ideology and renewable energy legislation in the United States," *Energy Research & Social Science* 11: 19-28.

The purpose of the exercise is to write a critical review of a research paper. The review should:

- 1) identify the problem and question studied by the research paper;
- 2) describe the research methods of the paper, using the terms and discussions elaborated in our class and lectures;
- 3) assess the suitability of the methods to answering the research question, considering alternative methods that could have been employed; and finally
- 4) assess whether the evidence provided is sufficient to maintain the paper's central claim.

The critical review must go beyond a mere reading of the paper and should reference background literature mentioned in the paper as well as the literature studied in the course. You must show an ability to break down the stages of the research process and comprehend the choices it involves.

Your paper should be typed, double-spaced, 12 point font, Times New Roman, with standard one-inch margins. References should be cited using Chicago Author-Date style. Turn it in by uploading your Word document on Blackboard by noon on December 9.

Tip: Even if you are an experienced writer, I strongly urge that you take advantage of the research and writing assistance resources available of this campus. Visit the Center for Global Communication + Design and familiarize yourself with the services it offers (info at <https://www.commd.rpi.edu/>).