

Autumn 2022 | Tues./Thurs., 11:00am-12:20pm (Section 3), 12:30-pm-1:50pm (Section 4) | Room:  
Cobb Hall, 106

# SOSC 13100: Social Science Inquiry I

**Anton Strezhnev**

Office: Pick Hall 328

Drop-in Hours: Thursdays 3pm-5pm or schedule an appointment by e-mail

[astrezhnev@uchicago.edu](mailto:astrezhnev@uchicago.edu)

<http://www.antonstrezhnev.com>

Updated: 9/4/2022

## Course Overview

The “Social Science Inquiry” sequence explores classic and contemporary points of view about ways of gathering, analyzing, and interpreting information about public policy issues. The course aims to provide the student with an introduction to the principles of social science inquiry, a sense of how that inquiry is conducted, and an understanding of how policy implications can be drawn responsibly from evidence provided by empirical social science. The sequence’s objective is to convey both the promise and the pitfalls of social science and a sense of its uses and abuses.

The Autumn Quarter course, Social Science Inquiry I focuses on introducing students to the fundamentals of social science research design with a focus on understanding how social scientists make inferences about cause and effect from empirical data and use empirical observations to inform theory-building. The Winter Quarter course will introduce you to statistical methodology that is essential to understanding and engaging with scientific research in an informed way. Finally, the Spring Quarter will guide you through the development of your own research project using the tools you’ve learned in the Autumn and Winter.

This course will involve a combination of lectures/discussion sessions and written essay assignments.

## **Logistics**

**Overview:** Attendance at lectures is strongly encouraged and will constitute an important part of your grade through in-class participation. However, due to the ongoing pandemic, this course will remain somewhat flexible with respect to attendance. You may miss one day of class with no questions asked. You may also miss days due to documented illness or other excused reasons (e.g. religious observance), which will not count towards your one free absence. All lecture notes will be made available on the Canvas website.

**Readings:** Course readings will be posted online on the Canvas website. The readings are organized week-by-week in the Modules section of the site. A complete list of the readings is also included in this syllabus. Some readings are will be available digitally through the Library Reserves page while others will be posted as separate PDF files. Apart from the first day of class (September 27th) you should make sure to complete the readings prior to attending class as parts of the lecture and discussion will reference and build on the material in the readings. You also will likely have questions about the material, which you should feel free to bring up during class. In general, I will attempt to keep the amount of weekly reading reasonable given your academic schedules.

**Class meetings:** The course meets Tuesdays and Thursdays from 11:00am-12:20pm (for Section 3) or 12:30pm-1:50pm (for Section 4) in Cobb Hall, 106. Meetings will consist of a combination of lecture and group discussion – with the relative amount of lecturing depending on the topic being covered. My goal is to ensure that lectures are interactive and involve student participation, so please be prepared to ask questions and interrupt me when something seems unclear or confusing. Since sitting for 90 minutes in a room listening to me talk is extremely tedious, we will have a brief 5-10 minute intermission during each class session.

**Online Discussion:** We will be using the discussion board in CANVAS as the primary discussion platform for the course. You should feel free to post questions and comments about the course materials on this forum. For each class meeting day, I will also create a discussion thread related to that day's topics. These threads will occasionally pose follow-up questions regarding the day's material. Asking questions and answering questions posted by your classmates will contribute to your participation grade.

**Drop-in Hours:** You are welcome to come by my office on Thursdays from 3pm-5pm to talk about the readings and course materials and ask any questions that you would like. If you are unable to attend for this block of time, please send me an e-mail and we can schedule an appointment for an alternative time.

## Requirements

Students' final grades are based on two components:

- **Essays (75% of the course grade).** Students will complete a total of four essay assignments throughout the quarter. Essays 1-3 will be worth 50 points each while the final essay will be longer and worth 100 points. Essays will be roughly 500-1000 words and require you to engage with the relevant course material. Length guidelines and scoring rubrics will be posted alongside each assignment on Canvas. In general, you should approach these essay assignments as though they were problem sets – some essay assignments will involve writing shorter essay answers to multiple questions while others will be more open-ended. You should get started early in sketching out your answers and not wait until the day the assignment is due to start writing! Essays will be assigned on Wednesdays and due two weeks later on Tuesdays at 11:59 PM. Late assignments will be penalized by 10% of their full worth for each day that they are late so please be sure to get your assignments in on time. I will exercise some discretion in allowing extensions on the assignment if a valid reason is provided, but please do not rely on an extension when planning your schedule.
  - *Collaboration policy:* Discussion between students on essay assignments 1, 2 and 3 is permitted. You should feel free to discuss course topics that relate to the assignments with other students either directly or via the course's online discussion board. However, each student is expected to submit their own written essay consisting of original work. **Students may not copy each other's words or plagiarize each others' writing.** Any sharing or copying of assignments is considered cheating and will result in an F in the course. Furthermore, Essay 4 will be considered a *take-home final* on which you are **not permitted to collaborate with any other student.**
  - *Office hours and online discussion:* Students should feel free to discuss any questions about the essays with the teaching staff during sections and office hours. I also strongly encourage students to post questions about the essays and the assigned readings on the course discussion board (Canvas) and respond to other students' questions. Responding to other students' questions will contribute to your participation grade.
- **Participation (25% of the course grade).** Students are expected to take an active role in learning and engage with the course. Because there still is a pandemic, I take a very broad view of what engagement means, but your primary mode of participation will be attending class and participating in class discussions. Interactions on the CANVAS discussion board or discussions during office hours

are also taken into consideration. What matters to me is the quality of your participation, not just how often you talk in class. Your comments should demonstrate that you have done the readings, synthesize different course concepts and apply topics from previous sessions, and demonstrate that you are thinking critically about the material. This does not mean that you always need to know the answers. In fact, I am more interested in seeing how you use the in-class material to generate new and interesting questions.

## Schedule and Readings

A schedule of topics and readings is provided below.

### Designing Social Science Research

#### Sep. 27: Introduction: how to think about modern social science

- Podcast: “A Nobel prize for an economics revolution”. October 12, 2021. The Indicator from Planet Money, NPR.
- Mlodinow, Leonard. *The drunkard’s walk: How randomness rules our lives*. Vintage, 2009. Chapter 1

#### Sep. 29: Thinking about social science concepts and asking good empirical questions

- Essay assignment 1 posted
- Freedman, David A. “Statistical models and shoe leather.” *Sociological methodology* (1991): 291-313.
- Friedman, Milton. “The methodology of positive economics.” (1953).

#### Oct. 4: Measurement and description

- Kellstedt, Paul and Guy Whitten. (2009). *Fundamentals of Social Science Research*, 3d edition. selection, Ch5. New York: Cambridge Press.
- Meijers, M. J., & Zaslove, A. (2021). Measuring populism in political parties: appraisal of a new approach. *Comparative political studies*, 54(2), 372-407.

#### Oct. 6: Relationships and Causes

- Angrist, Joshua D., and Jörn-Steffen Pischke. *Mostly harmless econometrics*. Princeton university press, 2008. Chapter 1 - Questions about Questions
- Imbens, Guido W., and Donald B. Rubin. *Causal inference in statistics, social, and biomedical sciences*. Cambridge University Press, 2015. Chapter 1 Causality: The Basic Framework

#### Oct. 11: Ethics in Research

- Hubert, Lawrence, and Howard Wainer. *A statistical guide for the ethically perplexed*. CRC Press, 2012. Chapter 16 - Ethical Considerations of Data Collection.
- Pridemore, William Alex, Matthew C. Makel, and Jonathan A. Plucker. “Replication in criminology and the social sciences.” *Annual Review of Criminology* 1 (2018): 19-38.

## Experiments

### Oct. 13: The importance of randomness

- Essay assignment 1 due Oct. 12 at 11:59 PM
- Essay assignment 2 posted
- Mlodinow, Leonard. *The drunkard's walk: How randomness rules our lives*. Vintage, 2009. Chapter 7 - Measurement and the law of errors
- Angrist, Joshua D., and Jörn-Steffen Pischke. *Mastering 'Metrics: The Path from Cause to Effect* Princeton university press, 2015. Chapter 1 - Randomized Trials

### Oct. 18: Internal and External Validity

- McDermott, Rose. "Experimental methods in political science." *Annual Review of Political Science* 5.1 (2002): 31-61.
- Sears, David O. "College sophomores in the laboratory: Influences of a narrow data base on social psychology's view of human nature." *Journal of personality and social psychology* 51.3 (1986): 515.

### Oct. 20: Lab experiments

- Iyengar, Shanto, Mark E. Peters, and Donald Kinder. (1982). "Experimental Demonstrations of the 'Not-So-Minimal' Consequences of Television News Programs," *American Political Science Review*, 76(4): 848-58
- Zeitzoff, Thomas. "Anger, Exposure to Violence, and Intragroup Conflict: A "Lab in the Field" Experiment in Southern Israel." *Political Psychology* 35.3 (2014): 309-335.

### Oct. 25: Survey experiments

- Wood, Thomas, and Ethan Porter. "The elusive backfire effect: Mass attitudes' steadfast factual adherence." *Political Behavior* 41, no. 1 (2019): 135-163.
- Mutz, Diana C., and Eunji Kim. "The impact of in-group favoritism on trade preferences." *International Organization* 71.4 (2017): 827-850.

**Oct. 27: Field experiments**

- Essay assignment 2 due Oct. 26 at 11:59 PM
- Essay assignment 3 posted
- Butler, Daniel M. and David E. Broockman. (2011). "Do Politicians Racially Discriminate Against Constituents? A Field Experiment on State Legislators," *American Journal of Political Science*, 55(3): 463-77.
- Pager, Devah. "The mark of a criminal record." *American Journal of Sociology* 108, no. 5 (2003): 937-975.

**Nov. 1: Field experiments - part 2**

- Baicker, Katherine, et al. "The Oregon experiment—effects of Medicaid on clinical outcomes." *New England Journal of Medicine* 368.18 (2013): 1713-1722.

**Observational designs**

**Nov. 3: Observational studies – cross-sectional**

- Washington, Ebonya L. "Female socialization: how daughters affect their legislator fathers." *American Economic Review* 98.1 (2008): 311-32.
- Ba, Bocar A., et al. "The role of officer race and gender in police-civilian interactions in Chicago." *Science* 371.6530 (2021): 696-702.

**Nov. 8: Observational studies – differences-in-differences**

- Card, David, and Alan B. Krueger. "Minimum wages and employment: A case study of the fast food industry in New Jersey and Pennsylvania." (1993).
- Miller, S., Johnson, N., & Wherry, L. R. (2021). Medicaid and mortality: new evidence from linked survey and administrative data. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 136(3), 1783-1829.

**Nov. 10: Observational studies – The perils of collider bias**

- Essay assignment 3 due Nov. 9 at 11:59 PM
- Rohrer, Julia M. "Thinking clearly about correlations and causation: Graphical causal models for observational data." *Advances in methods and practices in psychological science* 1.1 (2018): 27-42.
- Elwert, Felix, and Christopher Winship. "Endogenous selection bias: The problem of conditioning on a collider variable." *Annual review of sociology* 40 (2014): 31-53.

**Nov. 15: Observational studies – justifying natural experiments**

- Dunning, Thad. “Improving causal inference: Strengths and limitations of natural experiments.” *Political Research Quarterly* 61.2 (2008): 282-293.
- McCauley, John F., and Daniel N. Posner. “African borders as sources of natural experiments promise and pitfalls.” *Political Science Research and Methods* 3.2 (2015): 409-418.

**Nov. 17: Observational studies – Instrumental variables**

- Angrist, Joshua D., and Jörn-Steffen Pischke. *Mastering 'Metrics: The Path from Cause to Effect* Princeton university press, 2015. Chapter 3 - Instrumental Variables
- Gerber, Alan S., and Donald P. Green. “The effects of canvassing, telephone calls, and direct mail on voter turnout: A field experiment.” *American political science review* 94.3 (2000): 653-663.

**Nov. 29: Observational studies – regression discontinuity**

- **Final essay assignment 4 assigned; Due December 9 at 11:59 PM**
- Eggers, Andrew C., and Jens Hainmueller. “MPs for sale? Returns to office in postwar British politics.” *American Political Science Review* 103.4 (2009): 513-533.
- Bleemer, Zachary, and Aashish Mehta. “Will studying economics make you rich? A regression discontinuity analysis of the returns to college major.” *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* (2020).

**Dec. 1: Computer-assisted learning and computational social science**

- King, Gary, Jennifer Pan, and Margaret E. Roberts. (2013). “How Censorship in China Allows Government Criticism but Silences Collective Expression,” *American Political Science Review*, 107(2): 326-43



## **Schedule of Assignments**

- Essay 1: Assigned September 29, Due October 12
- Essay 2: Assigned October 13, Due October 26
- Essay 3: Assigned October 27, Due November 9
- Essay 4: Assigned November 17, Due December 9 (Thursday of Exam Period)