

This suggested syllabus accompanies *Research Exposed: How Empirical Social Science Gets Done in the Digital Age* edited by Eszter Hargittai

## Methods for Studying Internet and Society

### Summary

The Internet, digital media, and new computational tools offer novel opportunities while also raising a unique set of challenges when it comes to methods of studying our social world and the social, political, cultural, and economic aspects of information technologies in particular. The goal of this seminar is to explore rigorous ways of studying the Internet's societal implications empirically using a myriad of social scientific research methodologies.

### Learning Objectives

Formulate a research topic and research question.  
Learn about and engage critically with various social science methods.  
Understand the pros and cons of various methodological approaches to studying Internet use.  
Present project plans to others.  
Provide constructive feedback on others' projects.

### Readings

Hargittai, E. 2021. *Research Exposed: How Empirical Social Science Gets Done in the Digital Age*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

<https://doi.org/10.7312/harg18876> or

<https://cup.columbia.edu/book/research-exposed/9780231188777>

Hargittai, E. & Sandvig, C. (Eds.) (2015). *Digital Research Confidential: The Secrets of Studying Behavior Online*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

<https://mitpress.mit.edu/books/digital-research-confidential>

Optional: Booth, W. C., Colomb, G. G., & Williams, J. M. (1995) [or a previous/later edition]. *The Craft of Research*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

<https://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/C/bo23521678.html>

### Attendance

Attendance is required. The format of this class is interactive. Students will be asked to discuss the readings so class participation is essential.

### Readings

Make sure to read material **before you start working on the written assignments** as the written assignments are all about the readings. For each week (except week 2 when you need to read both chapters), unless you are discussion lead, you will have to read just one of the mentioned readings.

## Weekly writing assignment

Every week, you are required to submit to the instructor reflections on the week's readings in the following format: 4-5 bullet points with observations and/or questions about the reading (in case of Week 2, both readings 4-5 bullet points each). A bullet point should:

- Be 1-2 sentences long, no more than 50 words
- Be succinct and to the point
- *Not* simply summarize what you read
- Reflect critically on what you read
  - Thoughts on what surprised you about the reading or what was new to you
  - Elements of the reading you found confusing
  - Proposals of possible solutions to problems raised by the author/s
  - Critical commentary about the work, should the researcher have done something differently, have addressed a problem differently
  - Questions the reading raises

These assignments are due to the instructor at [XYZ time] before the class meeting. Late assignments will receive no credit. Meeting this deadline is important because the instructor has to have enough time to read your work *before* class. Do not leave the reading and writing assignments to the last minute.

\* You get two free weeks (during Weeks 3-10) when you do not have to submit written reflections on the readings. You do not have to submit written reflections when you are discussion lead (in addition to the two free weeks).

## Submission Specifications

[Details about how instructor prefers to receive the assignments.]

## Discussion lead

You have to sign up for one week (Weeks 3-10) to lead the discussion. In that week, you will have to read all of the readings assigned for the week plus additional ones so that you will have read at least five that you then report on and discuss with the group. The additional article(s) should use the methods that are the focus of that week. A discussion lead role is not a presenter role, the class should remain interactive and be based on discussions. You should prepare some slides to accompany the session. Submit these as an email attachment to the instructor for feedback by no later than two days before the class meeting.

## Project presentation

In preparation for your final paper (see below), you will give a presentation about your project to the class to gather feedback. You will also provide feedback for other people's projects.

## Final paper

You will pick a topic and a research question for the class (see Booth et al. for more on research topics and questions). Your final presentation and paper will concern this research question. You will need to write reflections, one paragraph each, about what opportunities and what challenges three of the six methods (covered in weeks 4-9) pose for your research question. You also have to reflect on the ethical considerations of your project and what a multi-method approach would entail for a total of five paragraphs. The paper should start

with a statement of your research topic and research question. This final paper should be approximately 1000 words long and is due on [X date] [insert preferred delivery method].

## Grades

Evaluation will be based on class participation (20%), weekly writing assignments (20%), discussion lead session (20%), your project presentation and feedback on others' presentations (20%), and your final paper (20%).

**[Additional institutional/instructor specifics about absences/emergencies, academic integrity, respectful environment.]**

## Schedule

Readings are in *Research Exposed* or when in italics are in the *Digital Research Confidential* book. Readings with dotted underlining are available on the course management system.

Week 1. **Introduction**; Types of Methods, Types of Data

Week 2. **The Social and the Technical**: *Sandvig & Hargittai*, Humphreys

Week 3. **Ethical Considerations**: *Bruckman et al*, Redmiles

Also: Submit a one-sentence description of your research topic.

Week 4. **Surveys**: Fordyce et al., Walejko,<sup>1</sup> Williams & Xiong<sup>2</sup>

Also: Submit your research question.

Week 5. **Big Data**: Freelon, Keller & Klinger, *Welles, Shumate & Weber*

Week 6. **Interviews**: *boyd*, Correa & Pavez

Week 7. **Ethnography**: Lane, Marler, Usher, *Leonardi*

Week 8. **Artifacts**: *Gilbert & Karahalios, Shaw, Hecht & Gergle*

Week 9. **Archival Research**: *Ankerson, Molnár & Hsiao*

Week 10. **Mixed Methods**: Klawitter, Hofer, Seo

Week 11. **Student Presentations**

Week 12. **Student Presentations**

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<sup>1</sup> Walejko, G. (2009) Online Surveys. In Hargittai, E. (Ed) *Research Confidential*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press

<sup>2</sup> Williams, D. & Xiong, L. (2009) Herding Cats Online. In Hargittai, E. (Ed) *Research Confidential*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press