SOCI 269

An Introduction to Quantitative Sociology—Culture and Power

*Amherst College*

## **Key Information**

### Instructor

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

### Location

   [Seeley Mudd Room 014](https://www.amherst.edu/offices/it/academic-technology-services/tools/technology-classrooms/classrooms_technology-equipped/classrooms/node/733186)

### Time

 Spring 2025—Tuesdays and Thursdays—2:30 to 3:50 PM

### Office Hours

 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**

How do sociologists define, model, and visualize social phenomena using quantitative tools and statistical software? This seminar will provide a technical, theoretical and practical overview. During the semester, students will learn how to use  and Python  to clean, analyze and visualize data that are suitable for sociological analysis. At the same time, the course will interrogate how social inequality can be masked—and deeply pernicious ideas can be reproduced—if quantitative data analyses are not informed by, or sensitized to, social theory and the hierarchies of power and privilege that structure the social world. To this end, we will engage with recent work in cultural sociology that draws attention to variation within and across social groups (defined in terms of race, gender, class and so on) to understand how social inequalities emerge and endure. Throughout the course, we will scrutinize policy-relevant social issues while discussing topics like race, ethnicity, religion, class, gender and sexuality.

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|  Caveat Emptor |
| Prior knowledge of statistics or programming is not required but may be an asset. |



Figure 2 from Karim (2024b)

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## **Structure**

The course consists of four distinct modules:

* [Module I](#modulei) will provide a comprehensive introduction to the  programming language for statistical computing and visualization, with significant attention paid to data visualization using ggplot2. Classes will largely be hands-on and interactive. That is, students will regularly work on simple coding exercises during lecture sessions. Collaboration will be encouraged.
* [Module II](#moduleii) will shift focus to the substantive realm—i.e., by spotlighting applied quantitative research published in many of sociology’s flagship journals. In [Module II](#moduleii), I will begin with a basic lecture informed by the week’s readings. Then, I will toss the baton over to all of you. Working in small groups, you will respond to the questions or prompts I provide. Each synchronous session will conclude with a plenary discussion, where we will explore the themes that emerged during your small group conversations.
* Returning to statistical computing, [Module III](#moduleiii) introduces the powerful Python  programming language. During the module, we will manipulate tabular data using pandas and polars, visualize data with seaborn, and build basic machine learning algorithms using scikit-learn.
* [Module IV](#moduleiv) will feature a series of in-class presentations related to your term papers.

## **Readings**

### Course Textbooks

*Data Visualization: A Practical Introduction* (Healy 2019)

*Python for Data Analysis: Data Wrangling with Pandas, NumPy, and Jupyter* (McKinney 2022)

*R for Data Science: Import, Tidy, Transform, Visualize, and Model Data* (Wickham, Çetinkaya-Rundel, and Grolemund 2023)

*ggplot2: Elegant Graphics for Data Analysis* (Wickham, Navarro, and Pedersen 2025)

### 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=903791) 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.

## **Evaluations**

### A Bird’s Eye View

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| Task | Description | Weight | Deadline or Evaluative Time Horizon |
| Participation | Students are expected to actively participate in class discussions by raising their hands to share ideas, asking clarifying questions, assisting peers when needed, and providing constructive feedback during final presentations. | 10% | All Semester |
| Coding Assignment | Students are required to submit a short coding assignment in early March. For this assignment, they will clean a dataset in R, report basic descriptive statistics, and create simple data visualizations. Students must also include their script file (i.e., a .R document) as part of their submission. Additional assignment instructions can be accessed [here](http://soci269.netlify.app/#codingassignment). | 10% | Monday, March 10th at 8:00 PM. |
| Midterm Assignment | For their midterm assignment, students must—either individually or in groups of 2-3—submit a relatively complex data visualization; an annotated script file or Quarto/RMarkdown document featuring their underlying code; and a 5–10-page reflection memo (double-spaced) where they interpret their results and establish connections between their visualization and recent social scientific scholarship. Additional assignment instructions can be found [here](http://soci269.netlify.app/#midtermassignment). | 30% | Tuesday, April 8th at 8:00 PM. |
| Final Presentations | In Module IV of the class, students will deliver a 7–10-minute presentation based on, or informed by, their term paper. A rubric detailing my basic expectations can be found [here](http://soci269.netlify.app/#termpaper). | 15% | During Module IV |
| Final Project | Drawing on the applied examples featured in Module II, students must submit a term paper on a topic related to (i) race, ethnicity and nation; (ii) gender and sexuality; or (iii) culture. To earn an A, students must also submit a companion data visualization using the *General Social Survey*. Students are free to create this visualization in either R or Python. Additional assignment instructions can be accessed [here](http://soci269.netlify.app/#termpaper). | 35% | Tuesday, May 13th 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 midterm assignment; the final presentation; and the term paper—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, I am aware that you are all human beings whose lives are often fraught with uncertainty. If something comes up, please let me know and I will do my best to be as accommodating as possible. Extended absences may, however, require additional documentation (e.g., note from a physician).

### Electronics

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

### E-Mail

On weekdays and non-holidays, I will respond to e-mails within 48 hours. If I fail to meet this standard, please send me a follow-up message with a gentle reminder. On weekends[[1]](#footnote-1) and breaks, I 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.[[2]](#footnote-2) However, as noted, I am well aware that life can present unexpected challenges. If you anticipate missing a deadline or have an emergency, please let me know 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 me 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=903791) on our course website. |

# **Reading List**

Readings underlined below are recommended but optional.

### **Module I: An Introduction to**

#### Week 1: Introduction to the Course and Setting Up

######  January 28th & January 30th

*R for Data Science: Import, Tidy, Transform, Visualize, and Model Data* (Wickham et al. 2023)

* [Chapter 1: Introduction](https://r4ds.hadley.nz/intro)

*Transcending General Linear Reality* (Abbott 1988)

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

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

*What Is Your Estimand? Defining the Target Quantity Connects Statistical Evidence to Theory* (Lundberg, Johnson, and Stewart 2021)

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

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

#### Week 2: Cleaning and Data Analysis in

######  February 4th & February 6th

*R for Data Science: Import, Tidy, Transform, Visualize, and Model Data* (Wickham et al. 2023)

* [Chapter 2—Workflow: Basics](https://r4ds.hadley.nz/workflow-basics)
* [Chapter 3: Data Transformation](https://r4ds.hadley.nz/data-transform)
* [Chapter 4—Workflow: Code Style](https://r4ds.hadley.nz/workflow-style)

#### Week 3: Data Analysis in  II; Data Visualization with ggplot2

######  February 11th & February 13th

*R for Data Science: Import, Tidy, Transform, Visualize, and Model Data* (Wickham et al. 2023)

* [Chapter 5: Data Tidying](https://r4ds.hadley.nz/data-tidy)
* [Chapter 6—Workflow: Scripts and Projects](https://r4ds.hadley.nz/workflow-scripts)
* [Chapter 7: Data Import](https://r4ds.hadley.nz/data-import)

*ggplot2: Elegant Graphics for Data Analysis* (Wickham et al. 2025)

* [Chapter 1: Introduction](https://ggplot2-book.org/introduction)
* [Chapter 2: First Steps](https://ggplot2-book.org/getting-started)

#### Week 4: Data Visualization with ggplot2 II

######  February 18th & February 20th

*Data Visualization: A Practical Introduction* (Healy 2019)

* [Preface](https://socviz.co/)
* [Chapter 2: Get Started](https://socviz.co/gettingstarted.html)
* [Chapter 3: Make a Plot](https://socviz.co/makeplot.html#makeplot)

*R for Data Science: Import, Tidy, Transform, Visualize, and Model Data* (Wickham et al. 2023)

* [Chapter 1: Data Visualization](https://r4ds.hadley.nz/data-visualize)

#### Week 5: Data Visualization with ggplot2 III

######  February 25th & February 27th

*R for Data Science: Import, Tidy, Transform, Visualize, and Model Data* (Wickham et al. 2023)

* [Chapter 9: Layers](https://r4ds.hadley.nz/layers)
* [Chapter 10: Exploratory Data Analysis](https://r4ds.hadley.nz/eda)
* [Chapter 11: Communication](https://r4ds.hadley.nz/communication)

*Data Visualization: A Practical Introduction* (Healy 2019)

* [Chapter 7: Draw Maps](https://socviz.co/maps.html#maps)

*ggplot2: Elegant Graphics for Data Analysis* (Wickham et al. 2025)

* [Chapter 6: Maps](https://ggplot2-book.org/maps)

### **Module II: Applied Examples**

#### Week 6: Race, Ethnicity and Nation

######  March 4th & March 6th

*Contraction as a Response to Group Threat: Demographic Decline and Whites’ Classification of People Who Are Ambiguously White* (Abascal 2020)

*The Partisan Sorting of “America”: How Nationalist Cleavages Shaped the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election* (Bonikowski, Feinstein, and Bock 2021)

*The Politics of Police* (Donahue 2023)

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

*Separate from Class? Toward a Theory of Race as Resource Signal* (Torres 2024)

*Reclaiming the Past to Transcend the Present: Nostalgic Appeals in U.S. Presidential Elections* (Bonikowski and Stuhler 2022)

*The Curious Case of Black ‘Conservatives’: Assessing the Validity of the Liberal-Conservative Scale among Black Americans* (Jefferson 2024)

*Administrative Records Mask Racially Biased Policing* (Knox, Lowe, and Mummolo 2020)

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|  Coding Assignment Deadline |
| Your coding assignments are due by **8:00 PM** on Monday, March 10th. |

#### Week 7: Gender and Sexuality

######  March 11th & March 13th

*School, Studying, and Smarts: Gender Stereotypes and Education Across 80 Years of American Print Media* (Boutyline, Arseniev-Koehler, and Cornell 2023)

*Abortion and Women’s Future Socioeconomic Attainment* (Everett and Taylor 2024)

*Has There Been a Transgender Tipping Point? Gender Identification Differences in U.S. Cohorts Born between 1935 and 2001* (Lagos 2022)

*Money, Birth, Gender: Explaining Unequal Earnings Trajectories Following Parenthood* (Machado and Jaspers 2023)

*Intersecting the Academic Gender Gap: The Education of Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual America* (Mittleman 2022)

*Sexual Orientation Identity Mobility in the United Kingdom: A Research Note* (Hu and Denier 2023)

*Marriage, Cohabitation, and Institutional Context: Household Specialization among Same-Sex and Different-Sex Couples* (Yang 2025)

#### Week 8: Spring Break— NO CLASSES

#### Week 9: Culture

######  March 25th & March 27th

*Pluralistic Collapse: The ‘Oil Spill’ Model of Mass Opinion Polarization* (DellaPosta 2020)

*Mapping Shared Understandings Using Relational Class Analysis: The Case of the Cultural Omnivore Reexamined* (Goldberg 2011)

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

*Life-Course Transitions and Political Orientations* (Keskintürk 2024)

*Change in Personal Culture over the Life Course* (Lersch 2023)

*Theoretical Foundations and Limits of Word Embeddings: What Types of Meaning Can They Capture?* (Arseniev-Koehler 2024)

*Cultural Schemas: What They Are, How to Find Them, and What to Do Once You’ve Caught One* (Boutyline and Soter 2021)

*Party, Race, and Neutrality: Investigating the Interdependence of Attitudes toward Social Groups* (Brensinger and Sotoudeh 2022)

### **Module III: An Introduction to Python**

#### Week 10: Cleaning and Data Analysis in Python

######  April 1st & 3rd

*Python for Data Analysis: Data Wrangling with Pandas, NumPy, and Jupyter* (McKinney 2022)

* [Chapter 1: Preliminaries](https://wesmckinney.com/book/preliminaries)
* [Chapter 5: Getting Started with pandas](https://wesmckinney.com/book/pandas-basics)
* [Chapter 6: Data Loading, Storage, and File Formats](https://wesmckinney.com/book/accessing-data)
* [Chapter 7: Data Cleaning and Preparation](https://wesmckinney.com/book/data-cleaning)

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#### Week 11: A **Very** Gentle Introduction to Machine Learning in Python

######  April 8th

*No required readings*.

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

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

*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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|  Midterm Assignment Deadline |
| Your midterm assignments are due by **8:00 PM** on Tuesday, April 8th. |

#### Week 12: Data Visualization with seaborn

######  April 15th & 17th

*Python for Data Analysis: Data Wrangling with Pandas, NumPy, and Jupyter* (McKinney 2022)

* [Chapter 9: Plotting and Visualization](https://wesmckinney.com/book/plotting-and-visualization)

### **Module IV: The Final Stretch**

#### Week 13: Final Presentations I

######  April 24th

#### Week 14— NO CLASSES

#### Week 15: Final Presentations II

######  May 6th

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|  Term Paper Deadline |
| Your term papers are due by **8:00 PM** on Tuesday, May 13th. |

# **References**

Abascal, Maria. 2020. “Contraction as a Response to Group Threat: Demographic Decline and Whites’ Classification of People Who Are Ambiguously White.” *American Sociological Review* 85(2):298–322. doi: [10.1177/0003122420905127](https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122420905127).

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Donahue, Samuel Thomas. 2023. “The Politics of Police.” *American Sociological Review* 88(4):656–80. doi: [10.1177/00031224231173070](https://doi.org/10.1177/00031224231173070).

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