Faculty of Business
IBH 3AA3
Research in Action: Methods for Social Change and Justice
Fall 2026

Instructor Information

Alpha Abebe
Email: abebea@mcmaster.ca
Office Hours:
By appointment

Course Information

Thursdays 11:30AM - 2:20PM

Course Dates: 09/08/2026 - 12/10/2026
Units: 3.00
Course Delivery Mode: In Person

Instructor-Specific Course Information

Course Overview:

This course covers approaches, theories, and methods in research relevant to global peace and social justice. Students will hone their skills in generating research questions, conducting research, applying and analyzing research methodologies, designing ethical research, understanding and utilizing theoretical concepts, and disseminating their research to an academic and non-academic audience.

Students will have the opportunity to engage in thoughtful discussion about the concepts they encounter in the readings and lectures. The course will also involve assignments and in-class activities that provide hands-on experience engaging with research tools and processes, and we will explore a wide range of traditional and non-traditional approaches to research.

Students will engage with texts from scholars and practitioners who explore both the technical as well as socio-political dimensions of research, including critiques of the colonial and exploitative nature of some of the research on historically marginalized communities. There will be a particular emphasis on developing skills and sensibilities that will help students become ethical and reflexive researchers, which are skills that can be applied both in future academic and industry contexts.

Important Links

- Mosaic
- Avenue to Learn
- Student Accessibility Services - Accommodations
- McMaster University Library
- eReserves
- Open Education Resources

Course Elements

Credit Value: 3
Avenue to Learn: Yes
Participation: Yes
Evidence-Based: Yes

Leadership: No
Ethics: Yes
Innovation: No
Experiential: Yes

IT Skills: No
Numeracy: No
Group Work: Yes
Final Exam: No

Global View: Yes
Written Skills: Yes
Oral Skills: Yes
Guest Speaker(s): Yes

Course Learning Outcomes

- Introduce you to a range of methodological and analytical tools and approaches
- Strengthen your understanding of and commitment to principles of ethical research
- Develop strong research skills and the ability to assess and engage with a range of scholarly and other material

- Sharpen your critical thinking and analytical skills, particularly as it relates to engaging with academic and applied research
- Enhance your written, oral communication, and collaborative skills
- Challenge you to think critically about your position and identities in society, and how this impacts the way you see and examine the world and its issues
- Enhance your understanding of the research cycle, and expose you to some of the predominant approaches to research on issues related to global justice and social change

Required Materials and Texts

Please sign in with your MacID here to view your booklist

There is no textbook for this course. Electronic copies of all required readings will be posted on Avenue to Learn (A2L) and MS Teams. Below is a list of the readings that will be assigned – note that for some sources below only specific chapters are assigned. See lecture schedule below for further details regarding the required reading for each week.

Readings (subject to change)

Fine, M. (2006). Bearing witness: Methods for researching oppression and resistance—A textbook for critical research. *Social Justice Research, 19*(1), 83–108.

Smith, L. T. (2021). Introduction. In *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and Indigenous peoples* (pp. 1–19). Bloomsbury Publishing.

Dawson, C. (2009). How to Prepare a Research Proposal. In *Introduction to research methods* (pp. 57–65). Oxford: How To Books.

Saldaña, J. M. (2015). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.

Fujii, L. (2012). Research Ethics 101: Dilemmas and Responsibilities. *PS: Political*

***Science & Politics, 45*(4), 717–723.**

Kovach, M. (2009). Indigenous and qualitative inquiry: A round dance? In *Indigenous methodologies* (pp. 23–38). University of Toronto Press.

Phillips, N., & Hardy, C. (2002). What is discourse analysis? In *Discourse analysis* (pp. 2–17). SAGE Publications, Inc.

Class Format

In Person

Activity	**Delivery**	**Description**	**Tool**(s)
Lectures	Synchronous in Person	Lectures will be led by the Instructor and will also include in-class activities and discussions.	In Person (via Zoom if there is need to switch to virtual delivery)
Recorded Lectures	Asynchronous	Lectures will be recorded and available to view for the entirety of the course	Uploaded to Microsoft Teams weekly.
Announcements	Asynchronous	Important course information, material, and announcements will be shared on both A2L and MS Teams. Please ensure you have notifications and/or email alerts enabled for both of these platforms.	A2L and Teams

Course Evaluation

OVERVIEW:

Course Evaluation	**Weight**	**Deadline**
Course Engagement (Self-Assessed)	15%	Evaluated end of term

Weekly Reading Reflections	20%	Submitted weekly; due Wednesdays at 5:00 p.m.
Research Artefact Analysis	25%	Friday, October 23, 2026
Research in Action: Semi-Structured Peer Interviews – Submission 1: Interview Plan	15%	Monday, November 9, 2026
Research in Action: Semi-Structured Peer Interviews – Submission 2: Final Research Report	25%	Tuesday, December 15, 2026

Course Evaluation Details

Detailed evaluation frameworks and/or rubrics will be provided for each assignment below once during the course.

1. COURSE ENGAGEMENT – Self Assessed (15%)

Coming to class regularly and being fully engaged is critical to gaining the most out of the content and experience in a course like this and is therefore highly encouraged.

In addition to the general benefits of being a fully engaged member of the class (e.g. value for your time, positive impact on the quality of your assignments), you will also have an opportunity to strengthen your course grade through a self-assessment of your holistic engagement throughout the course.

Here is how it works:

At the end of the course, you will be provided with an assessment tool and asked to provide an honest and accurate evaluation of yourself based on several categories, including how often you come to class prepared and having done the readings, how regularly you attend lectures, how mentally engaged you were in class discussions and activities, how often you contributed thoughts and questions, etc. You will be asked to provide a score for each metric, as well as written thoughts to provide additional context to help me understand your self-assessed grade.

We will then review your assessment and make a final determination of your course engagement grade. In many cases we agree with the assessment and adopt the student's suggested grade. In other cases, we may make adjustments that either lower or increase your grade based on our observations of your engagement in the course overall.

2. WEEKLY READING REFLECTIONS (20%)

Each week you will be invited to share a brief thought or question that was provoked by the reading(s) from that week (4–5 sentences). We will use the Discussions tool on Avenue to Learn (A2L) to post and respond to these reflections, with one discussion topic created for each week. Note that posting to A2L means your classmates can see and respond to your reflections, and these can feed into our in-class discussions about the reading/topic during the lectures.

Each entry should be posted by Wednesday at 5:00pm, the day before the relevant lecture.

Grades will reflect the consistency, depth, and timeliness of your participation over the term. As with other assignments in this course, reflections should be written in your own voice and represent your genuine engagement with the reading. Note that generic or AI-generated responses will be reflected in your grade.

3. RESEARCH ARTEFACT ANALYSIS (25%) ~600-750 words

Research is not only found in journals and laboratories, it is embedded in everyday spaces, objects, and interactions…particularly on a university campus. The things we see on bulletin boards, in hallways, on social media, or in public displays often reveal how research is imagined, communicated, and enacted in the real world. In this assignment, you will select and analyze one such artefact from your surroundings, applying the concepts we have explored in the first weeks of the course to uncover the layers of meaning, power, and decision-making behind it.

By Week 5, you will have explored:

- Critical approaches to research and the role of the researcher
- Researching “the Other”: colonialism, power, and oppression
- How to conceptualize, define, and plan a research project
- Qualitative research methods and thematic coding

This assignment challenges you to apply these ideas to a real-world research artefact that you can find in your surroundings. You will investigate the artefact not just for what it is, but for what it reveals about how research is imagined, communicated, and embedded in everyday contexts.

What Counts as a Research Artefact?

A research artefact is any tangible or visible object connected to a research process. Examples could include the following (printed on paper or online):

- recruitment poster or flyer for a study on campus

- public survey or questionnaire
- data visualization or infographic displayed publicly
- consent form or information sheet
- physical product of a research project (e.g., brochure, pamphlet, zine)
- public-facing research installation, poster board, or exhibition

NOTE: Please note you cannot create your own artefact, and anything you choose for this assignment must be publicly displayed. If it is printed somewhere physically, you must take a picture of it and include it with your submission, if it is online you should screenshot or download it, along with the publicly accessible hyperlink for where you found it.

Your Task

Once you have analyzed your artefact, present your findings in a cohesive, well-structured paper rather than as separate bullet-point answers. While the sections below outline the key components to include, your writing should flow as a continuous piece with clear transitions between ideas.

A. Description (150-200 words)

Provide a detailed, sensory description of the artefact (include text, imagery, materials, layout). Note where, when, and how you encountered the artefact.

Reminder: Include a photo or screenshot or some other replication of the research artefact as an appendix to the assignment submission. This can be copied and pasted into the narrative document, or submitted on A2L as a separate file.

B. Context and Purpose (150-200 words)

Who produced it? Who is the intended audience or participant group?

What stage of the research process is it part of? (e.g., recruitment, data collection, knowledge translation)

What is the artefact trying to accomplish?

C. Course-Linked Analysis (300-350 words)

Using at least two concepts from Weeks 2–5, analyze your artefact. For each concept you use, name the specific reading, author, and week it comes from so your analysis is clearly and explicitly grounded in course material rather than discussed only in general terms. For example, you might consider:

- From Week 2: How does your positionality shape the way you interpret this artefact? How might a different researcher read it differently?
- From Week 3: Does the artefact suggest a researcher-participant power dynamic?
- From Week 4: How clearly is the research topic or problem defined in the artefact?
- From Week 5: What methods of data collection or coding are implied or evident?

4. RESEARCH IN ACTION: SEMI-STRUCTURED PEER INTERVIEWS

This assignment will guide you through the essential stages of a small-scale qualitative research project, with a focus on semi-structured interviewing. Over the term, you will move from developing a research question, to planning and conducting interviews, to coding and analyzing your data, and finally reflecting on your process.

The aim is to give you practical experience with the skills, decisions, and ethical considerations that come with doing qualitative research. You will work with real, original data collected from peers in the class, and your final submission will bring together the different stages into one cumulative research report.

Interview Triads

By Week 4, you will be randomly assigned to a triad by the Instructor (a group of three classmates) Note that 1-2 groups will have four students in it. Within your triad, you will interview each of your two triad-mates once, and each of them will interview you once, so each person conducts two interviews and is interviewed twice, entirely within their triad.

Topic Alignment

Before finalizing your Interview Plan, each member of your triad should independently draft a rough topic idea, then meet with your triad-mates (in your own time, outside of class) to share your proposed topics. This gives your triad-mates the opportunity to confirm that your topic is one they have relevant experience with and feel comfortable discussing, and gives you the chance to adjust your framing if needed, before you finalize your Interview Plan. This step preserves your freedom to design your own topic and questions, while ensuring your interviewees have input into what they will be asked about.

Note: Attendance during Peer Interview Week is **essential** to this assignment and to your triad-mates' ability to complete their own work. Please make every effort to be present and prepared. Absences should be reserved for genuinely unforeseen circumstances, not scheduling convenience. If a triad-mate is unavailable during Peer Interview Week, the remaining two members should interview each other as planned, and coordinate directly to complete the third exchange as soon as possible afterward.

Normally research transcripts are anonymized, but for the purposes of this assignment you will include the name of the interviewer in your transcripts.

Submission 1: Interview Plan (15%)

This first stage focuses on designing your research and preparing the tools you will use to collect data. You are not collecting data yet. This will be submitted mid-way through the term.

A. Research Question and Objectives (1 page)

- Choose a specific topic related to student experience that interests you.
- Write your research question clearly in one sentence.

- Explain your objectives: What do you want to learn from the interviews? Why is this worth exploring?

Keep your topic at a level where your triad-mates can comfortably answer without revealing overly personal or sensitive information.

B. Interview Guide (1–1.5 pages)

- Conduct brief background research on what belongs in a consent script for an interview. Use this to prepare your own consent script that you will read before starting each interview. This consent script should be submitted along with your interview guide. NOTE: if you hope to use a recording device for your interview, this must be included in your consent script. If your interviewee does not consent to being recorded, you can use your detailed notes taken during the interview in lieu of submitting a transcript.
- Create 5-7 open-ended interview questions that directly relate to your research question.
- For each main question, add 1-2 possible follow-up prompts to encourage the interviewee to elaborate or clarify.
- Questions should be phrased to invite stories, explanations, and reflections, not yes/no answers.
- Bring your finalized interview guide to class when we begin interviews.

Submission 2: Final Research Report (25%)

This stage pulls together everything you have done into a single, coherent report including data collection, coding, analysis, and reflection.

A. Summary Document (~500-700 words)

- Restate your research question and objectives. If they changed after your interviews, explain what changed and why.
- Introduce your interviewees (your triad-mates) by name and share any specific information about them that you feel relevant to the interview.
- State how long each interview lasted, where it took place, and any other relevant notes about the process and background of the interviews.
- Present your preliminary observations: patterns, contrasts, or themes you noticed from both interviews. Go beyond description by beginning to interpret what these patterns might mean.

B. Codebook and Data Excerpts

- Use the sample template provided in class.
- Include 4-6 codes, with at least some analytical codes (interpretive categories that look beyond the surface content).
- For each code, include:
    - Code name
    - Definition
    - At least one example quote from each of your interview transcripts (2 total per code)
    - Brief explanation of why the code matters for your research question

C. Reflexive Process Note (~500 words)

- Discuss your experience as an interviewer, analyst, and someone who was interviewed by others.
- Reflect on how your own identity, assumptions, or relationship to your interviewees may have shaped the process and interpretation.
- Note any differences or similarities between the two interviews and how you understood them.
- Identify challenges you faced (e.g., question wording, time limits, participant engagement) and how you responded.
- Explain what you learned about semi-structured interviewing and qualitative research through this assignment.

D. Appendices

1. Final interview guide used
2. Consent script you developed and used
3. Transcripts of both interviews (include interviewer's name as per assignment guidelines). If your interviewee did not consent to being recorded, provide detailed notes that you took during the interview.

Undergraduate Grading Scale

Grade	Equivalent Grade Point	Equivalent Percentages
A+	12	90-100
A	11	85-89
A-	10	80-84
B+	9	77-79
B	8	73-76
B-	7	70-72

Grade	Equivalent Grade Point	Equivalent Percentages
C+	6	67-69
C	5	63-66
C-	4	60-62
D+	3	57-59
D	2	53-56
D-	1	50-52
F	0	0-49

Course Schedule

***NOTES:**

1. Classes will include a mixture of lectures, discussions, multimedia content, interactive activities, and a guest speaker.

2. The readings selected for this course and lecture material reflect a range of perspectives on these topics, however these are certainly not exhaustive or necessarily authoritative. You are encouraged to engage with course material with an open and critical mind, which includes interrogating your assumptions, asking critical questions, and drawing your own informed conclusions.

3. The Instructor may modify elements of the course, including the schedule below, and will notify students accordingly both in class and on the course platforms.

Week	Date	Topic	Deadlines & Info	Required Readings
1	Sept 10	Introduction to course structure and content. Syllabus overview and course expectations	N/A	N/A
2	Sept 17	Examining the examiner and principles of critical approaches to research	Weekly discussion post due on A2L, Wednesday before class	Fine, M. (2006). Bearing witness: Methods for researching oppression and resistance

Week	Date	Topic	Deadlines & Info	Required Readings
3	Sept 24	Researching the 'Other': Colonialism, power, and oppression	Weekly discussion post due on A2L, Wednesday before class	Smith, L. T. (2021). Introduction. In Decolonizing methodologies: Research and Indigenous peoples (pp. 1-19)
4	Oct 1	Conceptualizing, defining and planning a research project	Weekly discussion post due on A2L, Wednesday before class *Interview triads assigned*	Dawson, C. (2009). How to Prepare a Research Proposal. In 'Introduction to research methods' (pp. 57-65)
5	Oct 8	Qualitative research methods and data collection; interviews and thematic coding	Weekly discussion post due on A2L, Wednesday before class	Excerpt from: Saldaña, J. M. (2015). The coding manual for qualitative researchers
Mid-term Recess: October 12 – 18 (No classes or discussion post due)				
6	Oct 22	Research ethics, community-based research design	Weekly discussion post due on A2L, Wednesday before class **ASSIGNMENT DEADLINE**: Oct 23 - Research Artefact Analysis	Fujii, L. (2012). Research Ethics 101
7	Oct 29	TBD	TBD	TBD

Week	Date	Topic	Deadlines & Info	Required Readings
8	Nov 5	Decolonizing research: data sovereignty and Indigenous OCAP principles	Weekly discussion post due on A2L, Wednesday before class **ASSIGNMENT DEADLINE**: Nov 9 - Peer Interview Plan (Submission 1)	Kovach, M. (2009). Indigenous and Qualitative Inquiry: A Round Dance? In Indigenous Methodologies (pp. 23-38)
9	Nov 12	Peer Interview Week: Conducting semi-structured interviews with triad members in class	N/A	N/A
10	Nov 19	Guest Speaker: Dr. Helen Beny Mixed methods in practice: data analysis, visualization, and translating research for public audiences	Weekly discussion post due on A2L, Wednesday before class	TBD
11	Nov 26	Interpreting and translating data: analysis, theoretical frameworks, and research dissemination	Weekly discussion post due on A2L, Wednesday before class	Phillips, N., & Hardy, C. (2002). What is discourse analysis?

Week	Date	Topic	Deadlines & Info	Required Readings
12	Dec 3	Synthesis week: preparing for the Final Research Report	N/A	N/A
13	Dec 10	Final course reflections and overview	**ASSIGNMENT DEADLINE**: Dec 15 - Final Research Report (Submission 2)	N/A

Late Assignments

Unless otherwise stated, all written assignments are due by 11:59pm on the due date indicated on the course outline.

Late assignments will be subject to a 3% per day late penalty (includes weekends and holidays) for up to seven (7) days. After this date, no assignments will be accepted and a grade of zero (0) will be applied.

Extensions for course work that will not incur a late penalty must be approved by the Instructor before the due date. Extensions are generally only granted for illness, emergencies, and extenuating circumstances. Note that this is distinct from the **McMaster Student Absence Form (MSAF)** submission process.

Please note that where extensions are granted, this may come at the expense of detailed written feedback on your work, as grading timelines are compressed.

Turnitin.com

Some courses may use a web-based service (Turnitin.com) to reveal authenticity

and ownership of student submitted work. For courses using such software, students will be expected to submit their work electronically either directly to Turnitin.com or via an online learning platform (e.g. A2L, etc.) using plagiarism detection (a service supported by Turnitin.com) so it can be checked for academic dishonesty.

Students who do not wish their work to be submitted through the plagiarism detection software must inform the Instructor before the assignment is due. No penalty will be assigned to a student who does not submit work to the plagiarism detection software. All submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic integrity have been upheld (e.g., on-line search, other software, etc.). For more details about McMaster's use of Turnitin.com please go to www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity.

Generative AI: Use Prohibited

Students are not permitted to use generative AI in this course. In alignment with McMaster academic integrity policy, it "shall be an offence knowingly to … submit academic work for assessment that was purchased or acquired from another source". This includes work created by generative AI tools. Also state in the policy is the following, "Contract Cheating is the act of "outsourcing of student work to third parties" (Lancaster & Clarke, 2016, p. 639) with or without payment." Using Generative AI tools is a form of contract cheating. Charges of academic dishonesty will be brought forward to the Office of Academic Integrity.

APPROVED ADVISORY STATEMENTS

Academic Integrity

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behaviour in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity. **It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty.**

Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behaviour can result in

serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: "Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty"), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy.

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

- plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one's own or for which other credit has been obtained.
- improper collaboration in group work.
- copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

Authenticity / Plagiarism

Some courses may use a web-based service (Turnitin.com) to reveal authenticity and ownership of student submitted work. For courses using such software, students will be expected to submit their work electronically either directly to Turnitin.com or via an online learning platform (e.g. Avenue to Learn, etc.) using plagiarism detection (a service supported by Turnitin.com) so it can be checked for academic dishonesty.

Students who do not wish their work to be submitted through the plagiarism detection software must inform the Instructor before the assignment is due. No penalty will be assigned to a student who does not submit work to the plagiarism detection software. **All submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic integrity have been upheld** (e.g., on-line search, other software, etc.). For more details about McMaster's use of Turnitin.com please go to www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity.

Courses with an On-line Element

Some courses may use on-line elements (e.g. e-mail, Avenue to Learn, LearnLink, web pages, capa, Moodle, ThinkingCap, etc.). Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of a course using these elements, private

information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in a course that uses on-line elements will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.

Online Proctoring

Some courses may use online proctoring software for tests and exams. This software may require students to turn on their video camera, present identification, monitor and record their computer activities, and/or lock/restrict their browser or other applications/software during tests or exams. This software may be required to be installed before the test/exam begins.

Conduct Expectations

As a McMaster student, you have the right to experience, and the responsibility to demonstrate, respectful and dignified interactions within all of our living, learning and working communities. These expectations are described in the Code of Student Rights & Responsibilities (the "Code"). All students share the responsibility of maintaining a positive environment for the academic and personal growth of all McMaster community members, **whether in person or online.**

It is essential that students be mindful of their interactions online, as the Code remains in effect in virtual learning environments. The Code applies to any interactions that adversely affect, disrupt, or interfere with reasonable participation in University activities. Student disruptions or behaviours that interfere with university functions on online platforms (e.g. use of Avenue 2 Learn, WebEx or Zoom for delivery), will be taken very seriously and will be investigated. Outcomes may include restriction or removal of the involved students' access to these platforms.

Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities who require academic accommodation must contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS) at 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or sas@mcmaster.ca to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. For further information, consult McMaster University's Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities policy.

Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work

In the event of an absence for medical or other reasons, students should review and follow the Policy on Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work.

Academic Accommodation for Religious, Indigenous, or Spiritual Observances (RISO)

Students requiring academic accommodation based on religious, Indigenous or spiritual observances should follow the procedures set out in the RISO policy. Students should submit their request to their Faculty Office ***normally within 10 working days*** of the beginning of term in which they anticipate a need for accommodation or to the Registrar's Office prior to their examinations. Students should also contact their instructors as soon as possible to make alternative arrangements for classes, assignments, and tests.

Copyright and Recording

Students are advised that lectures, demonstrations, performances, and any other course material provided by an instructor include copyright protected works. The Copyright Act and copyright law protect every original literary, dramatic, musical and artistic work, **including lectures** by University instructors.

The recording of lectures, tutorials, or other methods of instruction may occur during a course. Recording may be done by either the instructor for the purpose of

authorized distribution, or by a student for the purpose of personal study. Students should be aware that their voice and/or image may be recorded by others during the class. Please speak with the instructor if this is a concern for you.

Extreme Circumstances

The University reserves the right to change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances (e.g., severe weather, labour disruptions, etc.). Changes will be communicated through regular McMaster communication channels, such as McMaster Daily News, Avenue to Learn and/or McMaster email.