

Sociology 2430
Fields and Methods of Social Research
Fall 2009

Instructor

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Course Description

Sociology 2430 is a graduate seminar on the practice of sociological research. The objective is to facilitate your ability to conduct independent research. This course will familiarize students with sociology as a discipline—its organization, seminars and colloquia, professional meetings, journals, publishing, and research resources. The course will introduce you to strategies used by sociologists to identify sociological questions, and focus on the steps one might take to transform these questions into viable research projects. This course alone cannot prepare you to do research. It is designed to complement your courses in theory, qualitative methods, statistical methods, as well as specialized seminars and regular departmental research colloquia. This goal of the sociology graduate program is to produce researchers and scholars who are conversant with the translation processes between theory and research design, and a range of quantitative and qualitative methods.

The course emphasizes the skills needed to conduct independent research – choosing a research question of appropriate scope, selecting methodological strategies, implementing analyses, and discussing and disseminating results. To develop these skills students will read and discuss research methods and research papers in sociology. They will also synthesize this material through applying it to a specific research project. Themes such as agency, causality, levels of analysis, neighborhoods and networks, and approaches to studying commonalities, diversity, and covariation will be addressed, as will the ethical practice of research.

A key feature of this class will be learning through interaction. Discussion and debate will help to refine your understandings of sociological ideas and research issues. Each week we will have one member of the department visit the class to speak on issues of relevance to your development as a professional sociologist. Please complete all readings prior to the start of class. We will rely heavily on a discussion-format. All seminar participants will be expected to participate in discussion. Each week one student will be designated as overall discussion leader (the guest editor), and one student (journal reviewer) will be responsible for leading a critical discussion and evaluation of each of the readings.

Course Objectives

1. Acting as a “journal reviewer and/or guest editor” develop skills needed to critically evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of research as reflected in the materials read in this course, and formulate recommendations for revisions and/or further research.

2. Demonstrate the ability to translate theoretical ideas into appropriate research designs using a sociological approach.
3. Demonstrate mastery of ethical issues involved in data collection and analysis.
4. Develop a research topic of appropriate scope, draw out testable propositions, and appropriate research methods (design and proposed statistical approach).
5. Demonstrate the ability to present research topics or issues clearly and concisely to an audience of peers through oral presentations and a written prospectus or proposal.

Assessment

Your grade in the course will reflect the extent to which you demonstrate you have met the above objectives. Final grades are determined by:

1. Attendance at Sociology Department presentations (10%).
2. Written two-page essays that review and critique seminar readings (20%).
3. Informed participation in the seminar (including performance as guest editor) (20%).
4. Certification in the responsible conduct of research (10%).
5. Ten-page research proposal and 30 minute presentation (40%).

1. **ATTENDANCE:** Attendance at all class sessions is essential and expected. Careful reading and consideration of all assigned readings is also essential and expected. Each class member needs to make a commitment to do the readings, to be an active, thoughtful participant in discussion, and to be a careful, constructive critic of others' ideas. A requirement of this course is that you attend all of the Sociology Department-wide colloquia, dissertation brown bags, professionalization seminars, and student practice job talks held during the semester. These sociology talks are usually held 12:00-1:00, typically on Tuesdays, in Zimmer Lounge.

2. **ARTICLE CRITIQUES:** You must read all materials assigned for each class. To facilitate discussion, I will ask each of you to write brief, lucid, and insightful critiques of one of the study design/research articles or book chapters we read each week. For these, I ask you to (1) display your understanding of what was done (summarize the context in which the authors place their research, the sample and methods used, the major findings, and what the authors view as their implications), (2) evaluate the contribution this chapter/article makes to fields and methods in social research and to your professionalization as a social scientist, and (3) present your own ideas about how these chapters/articles could be strengthened. These article critiques should be circulated by Sunday evening prior to the Tuesday seminar for other students to examine.

3. **PARTICIPATION:** Each week one student will be identified as the editor-of-the week, who will lead the discussion. Students are asked to take a leadership role in discussing articles on which they have written critiques, but all students are expected to contribute to discussion. During the discussion, the different reviewers will discuss how they assessed the chapters/articles relative to the other reviewers. The editor for that week will try to bring this discussion together for an editor's recommendations about improvements in the chapters/articles.

4. **RESEARCH ON HUMAN SUBJECTS:** Certification in the Responsible Conduct of Research through CITI. All Brown research personnel involved in human subject research are required to take an on-line education course in human research subject protections. Completing this course provides certification that is good for three years. Please obtain your certification by October 9. Please forward a copy of the email verifying your certification to me and to Muriel Bessette on or before October 9.

5. RESEARCH PROPOSAL/PRESENTATION: Each student must complete a proposal for research within the field of sociology. Proposals should be grounded in the current literature on the topic and include construction of testable research hypotheses, a rationale for your research, and a feasible research plan, including appropriate case selection, sample plan, at least a rough notion of measurement of key variables, and the proposed methods for data analysis. You are not expected to actually conduct the research—this is a proposal about how you would do the research. You are encouraged to consider using one of the large national longitudinal data sets if that makes sense; primary data collection efforts (structured, semi-structured, or unstructured) and archival research also are appropriate but will require more detail about data collection strategies. Whatever approach you take, it should be the basis for an actual research project that you will undertake during your first two years at Brown University. Research ideas and design approaches of each seminar participant will be presented periodically to the seminar group for commentary and discussion, as they relate to the discussion of the weekly readings. Written proposals and oral presentations to other seminar members are scheduled for the last two weeks of the semester. All seminar members act as additional constructive critics with the goal of improving these proposals.

Course Materials

Purchase at Brown Bookstore:

William G. Axinn and Lisa D. Pearce. 2006. *Mixed Method Data Collection Strategies*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Robert M. Groves, Floyd J. Fowler, Jr, Mick P. Couper, James M. Lepkowski, Eleanor Singer, and Roger Tourangeau. 2009. *Survey Methodology*. Hoboken N.J.: John Wiley and Sons, Inc.

Charles C. Ragin. 1994. *Constructing Social Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press.

Other readings are listed below on the day scheduled. These are available on OCRA (Library Web Page) and through our course website which you can find at <http://www.mycourses.brown.edu>. (my user name is “dhogan”) All readings listed under a given class meeting should be read before you come to class.

CLASS SCHEDULE

SEPTEMBER 11

SOCIOLOGY: THE DISCIPLINE, GOALS, AND PROCESS OF RESEARCH: AN INTRODUCTION

Introductions

Review of course goals, objectives, requirements, and calendar

Sign-up for editor and reviewer assignments

The design of our weekly meetings

RAGIN: pp. xi-xiii (Preface), pp. 1-30 (What is Social Research?)

BUTZ, William P. et al. 2006. “Some Frontiers in Social Science.” *Science*: 312:1898-1900.

SEPTEMBER 18**COMPONENTS OF RESEARCH DESIGN—QUESTIONS, EVIDENCE, AND STRATEGY**

RAGIN: pp. 31-53 “Goals of Social Research”; pp. 54-76 “Process of Social Research: Ideas and Evidence”

AXINN/PEARCE: pp.1-27 “Motivations for Mixed Methods Research”; pp. 28-53 “Fitting Data Collection Methods to Research Aims”

GROVES: Chapter 1 “An Introduction to Survey Methodology”

11:00-12:00 Carrie Spearin, Choosing a dissertation topic and committee.

SEPTEMBER 25**RESPONSIBLE CONDUCT OF SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH**

AMERICAN SOCIOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION. “Code of Ethics.” Accessed at

<http://www.asanet.org/galleries/default-file/Code%20of%20Ethics.pdf>

IRB PROPOSAL REQUIREMENTS: please review website under the Office of the Vice

President for Research: http://research.brown.edu/rschadmin/hrpo_meetingdates.php

CITI COURSE FOR CERTIFICATION IN HUMAN SUBJECT RESEARCH:

http://research.brown.edu/rschadmin/hrpo_citi.php. Reminder: Complete the CITI program by October 11th!

GROVES: Chapter 11 “Principles and Practices Related to Scientific Integrity”

10:00-12:00 Dan O’Mahony, Printed and electronic research resources at Brown. Hecker Training Classroom (first floor Rockefeller Library).

OCTOBER 2**EXPLANATORY MECHANISMS: DESCRIPTION AND CAUSALITY**

LIEBERSON, Stanley. 1992. “Einstein, Renoir, and Greeley: Some Thoughts about Evidence in Sociology.” *American Sociological Review* 57:1-15.

AXINN/PEARCE: pp. 54-78 “Micro Demographic Community Study Approach”; pp. 79-102 “Systematic Anomalous Case Analysis”

VAUPEL, James, et al. 1998. “Biodemographic Trajectories of Longevity.” *Science* 280:855-860.

BAINBRIDGE, Williams Sims, et al. 2007. “The Scientific Research Potential of Virtual Worlds.” *Science* 317:472-476.

11:00-12:00 Mary Fennell, Developing an independent thesis topic from participation in faculty research.

OCTOBER 9**BIOGRAPHY, CASE STUDIES, AND COMPARATIVE STRATEGIES**

RAGIN: pp. 81-103 “Using Qualitative Methods to Study Commonalities”; pp. 105-130 “Using Comparative Methods to Study Diversity”

MAHONEY, James. 1999. “Nominal, Ordinal, and Narrative Appraisal in Macrocausal Analysis.” *American Journal of Sociology* 104:1154-1196.

HEIMER, Carol A. 2001. "Cases and Biographies: An Essay on Routinization and the Nature of Comparison." *Annual Review of Sociology* 27:47-76.

STREET, Debra, and J.S. Cossman. 2006. "Greatest Generation or Greedy Geezers? Social Spending Preferences and the Elderly." *Social Problems* 53:75-96.

11:00-12:00 Patrick Heller, *The challenges of international field research.*

OCTOBER 16

POPULATION-BASED STUDIES OF INDIVIDUALS

RAGIN: pp. 131-153 "Using Quantitative Methods to Study Covariation"

GROVES: Chapter 3 "Target Populations, Sampling Frames, and Coverage Error"

PREWITT, Kenneth. 2004. "What if We Give a Census and No One Comes?" *Science* 304:1452-1453.

WUCHTY, Stefan, et al. 2007. "The Increasing Dominance of Teams in Production of Knowledge." *Science* 316:1036-1039.

11:00-12:00 Leah VanWey, *Interdisciplinary research: Social, biological, and physical sciences.*

OCTOBER 23

LONGITUDINAL RESEARCH

ELDER, Jr. Glen H., Monica Kirkpatrick Johnson, and Robert Crosnoe. 2003. "The Emergence and Development of Life Course Theory." Pp. 3-19 in *Handbook of the Life Course*, edited by Jeylan T. Mortimer and Michael J. Shanahan. New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers (available as electronic book, JOSIAH, Rockefeller Library).

AXINN/PEARCE: pp. 161-182 "Longitudinal Data Collection"

DUNCAN, Greg J., Martha S. Hill, and Saul D. Hoffman. 1988. "Welfare Dependence Within and Across Generations." *Science* 239:467-471.

CHASE-LANDSDALE, et al. 2003. "Mothers' Transitions from Welfare to Work and the Well-Being of Preschoolers and Adolescents." *Science* 299:1548-1552.

11:00-12:00 J. Timmons Roberts. "Public Sociology: Environmental Research and Action."

OCTOBER 30

MEASUREMENT

WRIGHT, Eric R., et al. 2007. "Stigma and the Social Isolation of People with Serious Mental Illness." *Social Problems* 54:78-98.

AXINN/PEARCE: pp. 103-137 "Neighborhood History Calendars"; pp. 138-160 "Life History Calendars"

GROVES: Chapter 2 "Inference and Errors in Surveys"; Chapter 7 "Questions and Answers in Surveys"; Chapter 8 "Evaluating Survey Questions"

9:00-10:00 Michael White, *Interdisciplinary research centers.*

NOVEMBER 6
NEIGHBORHOODS AND NETWORKS

- BRUCH, Elizabeth E., and Robert D. Mare. 2006. "Neighborhood Choice and Neighborhood Change." *American Journal of Sociology* 112:667-709.
- KEES Keizer, et al. 2008. "The Spreading of Disorder." *Science* 322: 1681-1685.
- LIM, May, et al. 2007. "Global Pattern Formation and Ethnic/Cultural Violence." *Science* 317: 1540-1544.
- DODDS, Peter, et al. 2003. "An Experimental Study of Search in Global Social Networks." *Science* 301:827-829.
- BORGATTI, Stephen P. et al. 2009. "Network Analysis in the Social Sciences." *Science* 323: 892-895.

11:00-12:00: Margot Jackson, *How I became interested in neighborhood effects.*

NOVEMBER 13
COMBINING METHODS

- RAGIN: pp. 155-166 "The Promise of Social Research"
- AXINN/PEARCE: pp. 183-197 "Conclusion"
- SHORT, Susan E., Feinian Chen, Barbara Entwisle, and Zhai Fengying. 2002. "Maternal Work and Time Spent in Child Care in China: A Multimethod Approach." *Population and Development Review* 28:31-57.

11:00-12:00 Jose Itzigsohn, *Studying an immigrant population.*

NOVEMBER 20
LEVELS OF ANALYSIS

- COLLINS, Randall. 2000. "Situational Stratification: A Micro-Macro Theory of Inequality." *Sociological Theory* 18:17-43.
- HUBER, Joan. 1990. "Macro-Micro Links in Gender Stratification." *American Sociological Review* 55:1-10.
- LEICHT, Kevin T., and Mary L. Fennell. 1997. "The Changing Organizational Context of Professional Work." *Annual Review of Sociology* 23:215-231.

11:00-12:00 Ebony Bridwell-Mitchell, *Research on organizations.*

DECEMBER 4
DISSEMINATING RESULTS

- EDITORS' COMMENT. 2007. "Engaging Sociological Audiences." *American Sociological Review* 72: iii-v.
- EDITORIAL COLUMN. 2003. "From Manuscript Submission to Accepted Article: The Process at HSR." *Health Services Research* 38:999-107.
- BURAWOY, Michael. 2005. "For Public Sociology." *American Sociological Review* 70: 4-28.

SUCHMAN, Mark. "Attending the ASA Meetings."

11:00-12:00 Mark Suchman, Attending a professional meeting. Assignment: Before this class, look through a recent ASA program (<http://www.asanet.org/cs/meetings/2009>) and identify (a) sessions in which you could imagine presenting, (b) sessions that you might want to attend as a way of staying current with work in your area of interest, and (c) sessions that you might want to attend out of "avocational" curiosity about either the topic of the presenters.

DECEMBER 4 (1:00-4:00)
STUDENT PRESENTATIONS OF DRAFT PROPOSALS

DECEMBER 11
STUDENT PRESENTATIONS OF FINAL PROPOSALS