Narrative study in sociology is an emerging field of inquiry. While some scholars have identified a narrative turn in sociology, many others find it difficult to define this as an area of concentration, and stumble when trying to cite key texts and major contributions of this subfield. This seminar begins at this epistemological moment when do not yet have a fully codified account of narrative sociology, and seeks to excavate and chart its development, identify core ideas, and consider the myriad of ways its conceptual analyses and methodological interventions enhance sociological scholarship.

Narrative sociology is steeped in the understanding that people construct meaning through the stories that define their everyday lives. Simply stated, narratives are the stories well tell one another. They order and connect events organizing them into meaningful patterns. Stories or narratives (for the moment these terms are interchangeable) occur in a seemingly endless variety of forms including personal accounts, recorded histories, political campaigns, cultural myths, and course descriptions to cite a few examples. As we’ll discover, narrative sociology has had an uneven engagement with more established subfields in sociology. It promises to bridge the humanities-social science divide, yet that potential has yet to be fully realized.

The readings begin with an epistemological roadmap of the field’s development and a discussion of its early texts. We grapple with how best to define narratives. Are narratives and stories synonymous, or are there systematic differences between the two concepts? What characteristics best define different narrative forms and narratives in general? Do narratives invariably represent a chronological sequence of events? Are all narratives also accounts or explanations? What do narratives allow scholars to understand about the self and about identity? We also consider the circumstances that shape the telling of storiees. Are there occasions, for example, that are more likely to produce and/or reproduce the telling of stories, and some stories rather than others? Are there conditions that are more likely to generate silences? How do narrative production, communication, and circulation respond to socio-historical requirements and audience needs? How do repetition and emphasis, omission and silence, translation and transferability operate to define the narratives we write, tell, depict, read, see and hear? And what can the structure of a narrative—its order and disruption, its beginning and ending tell us? Finally, how can we best analyze narratives given our interests in comparison, generalization and applicability, and the analytic tools available to us?

The syllabus lists required reading and optional resources for further exploration. I expect regular attendance and active engagement with the ideas and materials in the course. Each week no later than Sunday at 7 pm, students should with a one- to two-page analytic overview of the assigned readings. These informal papers should highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the materials read, identify points of confusion, questions meriting further discussion, and ideas in conflict or contradiction with one another.
Carefully considered weekly papers and thoughtful participation in seminar discussions are important elements of the seminar’s success. Eight short papers are required throughout the term and six must be completed before the Thanksgiving break.

The final seminar paper is relatively open-ended. It must be based on original research and can take a variety of forms, with . , enables students to select a group of narratives and analyze the context of their creation and distribution, patterns of meaning, and contributions to understanding larger social, cultural and political formations. Research papers are due without exception on Thursday, December 10th and intermediate deadlines for work in progress are noted below in the weekly schedule. Final grades will rely on a composite evaluation of your weekly written and oral contributions, and your final paper. Though weekly work and the research paper are of equal value, if either facet of the work is less substantial than the other, I reserve the right to adjust this percentage in determining final grades in students’ favor.

This class strives to create and sustain an environment that supports and affirms diversity in all manifestations, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, age, social class, (dis)ability, region/country of origin, and political orientation. Everyone must conduct themselves with complete respect for all class members and for the learning process. We will not tolerate any deliberate or unthinking violations of these principles, and will actively seek ways to correct and resolve all such infractions.

All seminar participants with special needs will be accommodated. Students are encouraged to speak with the instructor early during the term. To make appropriate arrangements, please contact the Office of Disability Services at the Kreeger Learning Center, located at 151 College Avenue or access their office through http://disabilityservices.rutgers.edu.

Except under the most extreme circumstances, I will not give incomplete grades. Instead the work completed during the term will be the basis of the evaluation. All work for this course must adhere to the specific practices and ethos of the University’s policy on academic integrity, which should be read in its entirety at http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/integrity.shtml . This requirement includes the practice of not using written work for this seminar completed in other venues without explicit permission of the instructor.

Required Readings

Two books are available for purchase at the New Jersey Books, 39 Easton Avenue, New Brunswick. All other readings are available on the Sakai website for our seminar.


Schedule of Readings and Assignments

September 8   Course Introduction and Overview

September 17  Foundational Issues, Part 1 (N.B. Rescheduled class)


September 21  Foundational Issues, Part 2


September 28  Narrative Accounting


October 5 The Self in Narrative Sociology


October 12 Storytelling Research

*Preliminary statements of proposed final papers due*


October 19  Collective Action, Part 1


October 26  Collective Action, Part 2


November 2  Everyday Life, Social Identity and Narrative Evidence


November 9 Methodological Issues


**November 16 and 23**  Workshop Presentations of Works in Progress

Please email all class members with a preliminary and partial overview statement of or introduction to your project. Include questions and issues you want your colleagues to consider when reading your work. Are you looking for sources and need suggestions? Are you encountering problems not easily resolved? Now is the time to seek advice without penalty or prejudice. Statements should be emailed at least two days prior to your presentation.

**November 30**  Trauma Narratives


December 7    The End: Unfinished Business
             Readings to be assigned

December 10  Final Papers Due

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Additional Recommended Resources:


Centre for Narrative Research. [http://www.uel.ac.uk/cnr/](http://www.uel.ac.uk/cnr/).


N.B. My thanks to Robert Zussman for his wisdom about narratives and his numerous insightful reading recommendations. The Fall 2015 Narrative seminar participants also provided excellent reading suggestions, which have enhanced this syllabus.