Social Research Methods
Sociology 920:501
Rutgers University
Fall 2019
Wednesdays 4:10-6:50 Davison Seminar Room

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This seminar provides an introduction to social research. How do sociologists think conceptually and practically as they develop a research idea into a publishable product? It is a process of both art and craft that every scholar must learn to navigate. In addition, this seminar will impart a critical perspective on, and an empirical familiarity with, the range of methods available to sociological researchers. We will examine several broadly defined methodological approaches to doing sociology: quantitative analysis, survey research, qualitative analysis, and historical/comparative studies. These methodological approaches correspond to distinct conceptualizations of social life and the science dedicated to studying it. As you get your hands dirty trying to figure out the specifics of each method, you should keep in mind that no single approach can adequately account for the richness and complexity of human interaction and social structures. The ultimate goal of this course is to learn how to match the goals of your research questions and theories with particular methodological approaches. We encourage you to appreciate the potential and limits of each method through required readings and exercises and by having you conduct your own multiple/mixed methods research project as your final paper.

LEARNING GOALS
1. Develop foundational knowledge of key sociological methods
2. Learn to critically analyze sociological research
3. Learn to develop research questions and apply appropriate methods for research
4. Learn to conduct original research using quantitative, qualitative, and historical research methods

DIVERSITY STATEMENT
The Rutgers Sociology Department strives to create an environment that supports and affirms diversity in all manifestations, including race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, age, social class, disability status, region/country of origin, and political orientation. We also celebrate diversity of theoretical and methodological perspectives among our faculty and students and seek to create an atmosphere of respect and mutual dialogue. We have zero tolerance for violations of these principles
and have clear and respectful procedures for responding to such grievances.

**COURSE LOGISTICS**

**Course Readings:**
I will upload many of the readings on Canvas, but please buy a copy of:

- Luker, Kristen. 2008 or 2010. *Salsa Dancing into the Social Sciences*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. (You can buy it via the usual online book vendors or see Better World Books if you are looking for alternatives to mega-online stores. I have requested that this be placed on reserve in the Douglass library.)

We will also be using this book in Week 6 (Oct 9):

- Kang, Milliann. 2010. *The Managed Hand: Race, Class, Gender in Beauty Service Work*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. (You can buy a copy or it is available as an e-book on the Rutgers Library website.)

There are a number of excellent texts on research methods. It is a great idea to take a look at some of these through the semester and find ones that particularly help you. For example:


**Course Requirements:**

- A successful seminar requires the full participation of all members. We expect you to come to class prepared to discuss the readings and to engage in dialogue with one another. My goal for class discussions is for us to learn and grow together. Really good learning happens out loud and in collaboration, but this often requires thinking about talking in groups differently than most of us have in the previous stages of our education. Please adopt this goal and remind yourself of it when you feel intimidated or like you need to “prove” yourself. (5%)

- For each class, students should submit two discussion questions related to one of the assigned readings. For empirical pieces (marked with an asterisk on the syllabus), try not to focus on topic or findings; instead your questions should touch on something theoretical or methodological about the reading. Your question can also address issues of the article’s structure, purpose and organization (e.g.
comment on the research question and whether the article answers this question). Questions are due by 6:00pm the day before class. Submit questions using the Discussion function on Canvas. (5%)

- A set of four assignments meant to deepen both conceptually and empirically your comprehension of the course material and develop your analytical writing abilities. If you think ahead, you can use several of these assignments to explore topics and conduct analyses for your final paper. All assignments must be submitted to Canvas by 6pm the day they are due (to submit, use the “Assignments” section of Canvas). (40%).

- Two drafts of a proposal for your final paper. The final paper is for a multiple (mixed) methods research project. (Refer to the description for the final paper)

The first proposal should be approximately 2 pages long, and describe your thesis, research questions, and the methods you will use (include 3-5 references) (10%).

The second proposal should build on the first, be 3-5 pages long, and outline your thesis, research questions, data, methods, literature, and 5-7 references (10%).

Note: I will talk with each of you about the proposed final paper before the first proposal is due and after the second proposal. Please expect to be in touch with me at these points in the semester.

- In-class presentation of final paper. Plan for a 10-minute PowerPoint presentation, followed by a 5 minute Q&A session. (5%).

- Final paper. Each student is expected to write an approximately 15-page paper for a multiple (mixed) methods research project. For this paper, you must use at least two of the three broad social science research methods we discuss in the course (quantitative analysis, qualitative analysis, or comparative/historical analysis). We encourage you to settle on a topic early in the course, so that your assignments will contribute to your final paper. We will provide more detail in class. (25%)

Due dates (Submit via Canvas):

September 13th: Deadline for getting IRB/CITI certified. Send a copy of the certificate to me via email.
September 27th: Assignment 1 Due: Bivariate / Trivariate tables
October 14th: Assignment 2 Due: Survey Research Assignment
October 22nd: Circulate a copy of a methods paper of your choice
October 30th: Discuss student-selected methods papers
November 1st: Assignment 3 Due: Content or Frame Analysis
November 14th: Assignment 4 Due: Comparative/Archival Assignment
November 22nd: 1\textsuperscript{st} draft of proposal for final paper due
December 6th: 2\textsuperscript{nd} draft of proposal for final paper due
December 4th and 11th: Student Powerpoint presentations of project/proposal
December 14\textsuperscript{th}: Final paper due (by 6:00pm)

\textbf{COURSE SCHEDULE}
\textit{(Subject to change, details to be provided in class)}

\textbf{Week 1}  
\textbf{(Sept 04)}  
\textbf{Introduction to Social Science Inquiry}
- Explanation in social science research
- Basic theoretical debates and methodological practices
- Brief introduction to multiple (mixed) methods
- IRB/CITI certification and controversies in the social sciences
- Choosing a topic and central/orignating questions

\textbf{REQUIRED READINGS:}
- Luker, Chapters 1-2, Pp. 1-39
- Victoria Reyes. 2017. “Advice for making the most of graduate school.” insidehighered.com
- Gary King. Forthcoming, 2020. “So you’re a grad student now? Maybe you should do this.” In Robert Franceze Jr. and Luigi Curini (Eds.), \textit{Sage Handbook of Research Methods in Political Science}.

** \textbf{START PROCESS FOR CERTIFICATION FOR IRB**}
\url{https://orra.rutgers.edu/citi}

\textbf{Week 2}  
\textbf{(Sept 11)}  
\textbf{The Basics of Social Research, Part I}
- Going from a topic to a research question
- Develop a research question (class activity)
- Thinking about Cause and Effect (Social Inference)

\textbf{REQUIRED READINGS:}
- Luker: Chapters 3-4 (Pp. 40-75)

**Tasks:**
- Come in with a topic & research question
- Workshop questions & topics in class

**COMPLETE CERTIFICATION FOR IRB by SEPT 13**

**Week 3**  
**The Basics of Social Research, Part 2**  
(Sept 18)
- Conceptualization and Operationalization
- Thinking about Relationships between Variables: Bivariate and trivariate tables
- Descriptive Analysis: Cross-Tabulation
- Intro to GSS

**REQUIRED READINGS**
- Luker, Chapters 6-7, Pp. 99-154
- Babble, Earl, “Note on Percentages”

**TASKS**
- Bring laptop or tablet to class to have access to the GSS website
- Before class: Take a look at the GSS web site: [http://sda.berkeley.edu/sdaweb/analysis/?dataset=gss14](http://sda.berkeley.edu/sdaweb/analysis/?dataset=gss14)
  Take a look at the kinds of questions that GSS asks. Just browse to get a sense of what the website looks like and what is there. Creating an account is optional, but it will allow you to save your work.
- After class, read through assignment #1 (due Sept. 27) and begin looking at variables on GSS web site.
- Continue to workshop questions and topics
Week 4  Quantitative Data Analysis  
(Sept 25)  
- Descriptive vs. inferential statistics  
- Sampling theory/standard error  
- Sampling Design  
- Elaboration Paradigm  

REQUIRED READINGS:  
- Revisit Luker, Chapters 6-7, Pp. 99-154  

** Assignment #1: Bivariate and Trivariate Tables due SEPT 27**

Week 5  Quantitative Methods: Survey Research  
(Oct 02)  
- Advantages and limitations of surveys and survey research  
- Review of Assignment 2  

REQUIRED READINGS:  
- Materialism and Post-Materialism by Max Roser  
  https://ourworldindata.org/materialism-and-post-materialism/  

TASKS:  
- Look at GSS, World Values Survey or others; identify questions of interest to you, begin working on Assignment #2 (due Oct 14th).

Week 6  Qualitative Methods  
(Oct 09)  
- What kinds of research questions can qualitative research answer?  
- The relationship between theory and research in qualitative research  
- Sampling in qualitative research
Interviewing: Protocol and Etiquette
Ethnography
Qualitative field work

REQUIRED READINGS:

- Luker, Chapter 8, Pp. 155-189.

TASKS

- Begin working on Assignment #3: Interviews Coding and Analysis (due Nov. 1st).

** Assignment #2: Surveys due Oct. 14**

**Week 7**
(Oct 16)

**Analyzing Qualitative Data: Coding and Content Analysis**

- How to code: Manual coding vs. qual. data analysis software
- Open coding, selecting themes, focused coding
- Introduction to content / frame analysis

REQUIRED READINGS:

- Luker, Chapter 10, Pp. 198-216

TASKS

- Work on Assignment #3, Interview Coding and Analysis (due
Week 8  Comparative/Historical Sociology
(Oct 23)

- Comparing across time and place
- Small N- and large N-analysis
- The negative case and counterfactual analysis
- Doing archival research
- Tracing social change over time
- Theorizing past events
- Denaturalizing categories
- Discussion of comparative/archival assignment

REQUIRED READINGS:
- Luker, Chapter 9, Historical Comparative Methods, Pp. 190-197

TASKS:
- DUE Oct 22: Circulate your choice of an empirical article or book chapter demonstrating a research method not already covered in class (e.g., experimental, discourse analysis, network analysis) but of particular interest to you. Do this via Canvas and be prepared to discuss it in class next week.
- Work on Assignment #3: Interview Coding and Analysis (due Nov. 1)
- Begin Assignment #4: Comparative/Archival Research (due Nov. 15)
- Begin working on Paper Proposal #1 (due Nov. 22)

Week 9  Exploration of other Research Methods
(Oct 30)

- Student discussions of a research method of their choice.
  This is meant to be an informal presentation as part of broadening our understanding of the breadth of methods that can be used in sociology and the social sciences. In class, you can
talk about why you chose this method, what appeals to you about it, what are the strengths and limitations of that method, and how you envision being able to use this method in your future research.

TASKS:
- Continue working on Assignment #4 Due November 15 at 6PM
- Work on final paper proposal draft #1 (Due Nov 22)
- Bring draft of paper proposal to next class

** Assignment #3: Content or Frame Analysis due Nov. 1**

Week 10 Workshop Paper Proposals
(Oct 06)
- Bring a printed draft of your first paper proposal to class. Be prepared to circulate your work and provide feedback as a peer reviewer.

REQUIRED READING:
- How to write a paper outline: [https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/544/02/](https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/544/02/) (read all subheadings)

TASKS:
- Continue working on Assignment #4 due Nov. 14th
- Paper Proposal #1 due Nov. 22th

Week 11 Writing a Literature Review
(Oct 13)
- What is a literature review? How is different from a summary?
- How do I choose sources?

REQUIRED READING:
- Luker, Chapter 5, Pp. 76-98.


TASKS
- Begin working on paper proposal draft #2. Due December 6th.

** Assignment #4: Comparative Design due Nov. 15**
**Week 12**  
(Nov 20)  
**Bringing it all together**  
- Finding your “hook” (Heuristics)  
- Multiple (Mixed) methods research  
- Preparing for final presentations and papers

**REQUIRED READINGS:**  

**Final Paper Proposal Draft #1: Due Nov. 22**

**Week 13**  
(Nov 27)  
**Thanksgiving Break NO CLASS**  
- Prepare for Presentation  
- Revise Proposal draft

**Week 14**  
(Dec 4)  
**Final Paper Presentations**  
**Final Paper Proposal Draft #2: Due Dec. 6**

**Week 15**  
(Dec 11)  
**Final Paper Presentations**

**Dec 16**  
**FINAL PAPERS DUE 6 PM**
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Thinking about public sociology


Additional General Methods Guidance/Thinking about Methodological Questions

• Miller, Jane E. 2005. Writing About Multivariate Analysis. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. (Excellent for quantitative analysis)

Resources on Survey Research

• Dillman, Don. 2007. Mail and Internet Surveys: The Tailored Design Method 2nd Edition. (Best text on these survey research methods)
• Fowler, Floyd. 1995. Improving Survey Questions: Design and Evaluation (excellent text regarding details in wording questions)

Readings on Qualitative Research


- Emerson, Writing Ethnographic Field Notes (Esp. Chpts 1 & 2)
  - General Guidance for Conducting Qualitative Research
  - The Distinctive Contributions of Qualitative Research, by James Mahoney
  - A Note on Science and Qualitative Research, by Sudhir Venkatesh

**Frame and Content Analysis**


**Comparative/Historical**


- Hill, Archival Strategies and Techniques, chapters 1-6

MISCELLANEOUS

**IRB certification:**
All students are required to complete the Collaborative IRB Training Initiative (CITI) Basic Course. After passing this course, your certification is good for 3 years. You should complete this course no later than week 3.

It is an online course, and we will go over the logistics on the first day of class. For further details on how to complete the course see: [https://orra.rutgers.edu/citi](https://orra.rutgers.edu/citi)

**Choosing data sets:**
- **SURVEY DATA**
  - General Social Survey (GSS). You will use the GSS to do various assignments for this course, and (if you so choose) for your final paper. The GSS data and codebook are available online. These are cross-sectional samples of the U.S. population from 1972 to 2016 (the data are available yearly in the early years, every other year later on). You’ll probably want to focus on one year (e.g., 2012), but feel free to use multiple years as you move into your final project. Talk with
us if you have a dataset you’d prefer to use other than the GSS. For example, there are other online datasets you can choose, such as the ones listed immediately below, or you may have access to your own data. 


- [https://www.icpsr.umich.edu/index.html](https://www.icpsr.umich.edu/index.html) ICPSR Survey Research Institute, University of Michigan

- Roper Center for Public Opinion Cornell University: [https://ropercenter.cornell.edu/](https://ropercenter.cornell.edu/)


- [http://sda.berkeley.edu/archive.htm](http://sda.berkeley.edu/archive.htm). This site includes several surveys, in the same easy-to-use format as the GSS: American National Election Study, IPUMS (Integrated Public Use Microdata Series), American Community Survey 2006-08 (Census Microdata for US), as well as a few others

- Google Dataset Search: [https://toolbox.google.com/datasetsearch](https://toolbox.google.com/datasetsearch)

  ➢ HISTORICAL DATA (NB. It’s possible that some of these links may have changed. If you can’t find them, try a Google search and please alert us. Also let us know if you find any new web site links).

  - Rutgers Special Collections and University Archives [http://www.libraries.rutgers.edu/rul/libs/scua/scua.shtml](http://www.libraries.rutgers.edu/rul/libs/scua/scua.shtml)


  - Penn’s online archives [http://dewey.library.upenn.edu/sceti/flash.cfm?CFID=2022796&CFTOKEN=14695275](http://dewey.library.upenn.edu/sceti/flash.cfm?CFID=2022796&CFTOKEN=14695275)

  - New York Public Library online images: [http://digitalgallery.nypl.org/nypldigital/](http://digitalgallery.nypl.org/nypldigital/)

  - Jack Lynch’s (RU English professor) page on 18th century history [http://andromeda.rutgers.edu/~jlynch/18th/history.html](http://andromeda.rutgers.edu/~jlynch/18th/history.html)

  - Resources listed by ASA comparative-historical section [http://www2.asanet.org/sectionchs/research.html#databases](http://www2.asanet.org/sectionchs/research.html#databases)

**Research, Thinking, and Writing:**

York: Oxford University Press.
American Sociological Association, "Writing an Informative Abstract"
American Sociological Association, “Publishing Option: An Author’s Guide to
Becker, Howard S. 1986. Writing for Social Scientists: How to Start and Finish
Clarke, Lee. "Notes on Proposing" and "On Writing and Criticism"
Education, April 22, 2005.
Jasper, James. "Why So Many Academics are Lousy Writers"
Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Peters, Mark. "Like a Bowl in a China Shop." Chronicle of Higher Education,
August 9, 2006.
Rockquemore, Kerry Ann. 2010. “Writing IS Thinking.” Inside Higher Education,
21, 2010]
Rosenfield, Sarah. "Some Things to Think About While Reading Papers"
Stein, Arlene. 2009. “Discipline and Publish: Public Sociology in an Age of
Professionalization.” Pp. 156-71 in Bureaucratic Culture and Escalating
Problems: Advancing the Sociological Imagination (edited by David Knottnerus

More examples of good methods, from Scatterplot:

Helpful writing resources from University of Southern California:
http://libguides.usc.edu/content.php?pid=83009&sid=615849

Sociology Blogs
http://www.bestsociologyprograms.com/top-30-sociology-blogs/
http://crookedtimber.org/
http://www.wipsociology.org/about/
https://culturecog.blog/author/culturecog/

Twitter #soctwitter