

Social Research Methods

Sociology 16:920:501¹

Fall 2021

Thursdays, 9am-12pm, Seminar Room in Davison Hall

Professor Norah MacKendrick

Room 107, Davison Hall

Email: norah.mackendrick@rutgers.edu

Office hours: Thursdays after class

This seminar provides a basic introduction to social research. How do sociologists think conceptually and practically as they develop a research idea to producing 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 of, and an empirical familiarity with, the range of methods available to sociological researchers. We will examine several broadly defined methodological approaches to doing sociology: bi- and tri-variate analysis, survey research, qualitative fieldwork and interviews, and historical/comparative studies. These three 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 inspire you to push past the conventional boundaries among the main sociological methods. I 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. Critically analyze sociological research
3. Develop research questions and apply appropriate methods for research
4. 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.

¹ This syllabus builds on previous Social Methods Research syllabi written by Phaedra Daipha, Patricia Roos, Joanna Kempner, Catherine Lee, Steve Brechin, and Hana Shepherd. I thank them for their collective contributions.

COURSE LOGISTICS

Course Readings:

I will upload many of the readings on Canvas, but it's a good idea to invest in some of these books, many of which you can find used.

- Luker, Kristen. 2008 or 2010. *Salsa Dancing into the Social Sciences*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. (Get your own copy)
- Abbott, Andrew. 2004. *Methods of Discovery: Heuristics for the Social Sciences*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company. (assigned chapters will be provided, but I recommend that you read/skim entire book)

Recommended, but Supplementary

- Booth, Wayne, Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams. 2003. *The Craft of Research*. University of Chicago press. (Highly recommend that you read/skim entire book)
- Miller, Jane E. 2005 (or later editions) *Writing About Multivariate Analysis*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Smith, L. T. (2012). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples* (2nd ed.). London, England: Zed Books.
- Becker, Howard. 1998. *Tricks of the Trade: How to think about your research while you're doing it*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Schutt, Russell K. 2011. *Investigating the Social World: The Process and Practice of Research*. 7th. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press. [This is a decent introductory text]

The syllabus will specify additional required readings each week. In addition, I will provide supplementary readings, and most will be available on Canvas.

Course Requirements:

- A successful seminar requires the full participation of all members. I expect you to come to class prepared to discuss the readings and to engage in dialogue with one another. (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 11:00pm two days 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 analytic 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 11:00pm 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 4-5 pages long, and outline your thesis, research questions, data, methods, literature, and 5-7 references (10%).

Note: please talk with me about your proposed final paper prior to the due date. I will hold extra office hours as needed. Each of you is required to make an appointment to formally talk with each of us about your final paper (with a draft of your proposal in hand).

- 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 a 10-15-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, survey, ethnographic or interview; historical/archival). I encourage you to settle on a topic early in the course, so that your assignments will contribute to your final paper. I will provide more detail in class. (25%)

Due dates (Submit via Canvas by 9pm):

September 17th: Deadline for getting IRB/CITI certified. Send a copy of the certificate to me via email.

October 1: Assignment 1 Due: Bivariate / Trivariate tables

October 15th: Assignment 2 Due: Survey Research Assignment

October 25th: Circulate a copy of a methods paper of your choice

November 4th: Discuss student-selected methods papers

November 5th: Assignment 3 Due: Content or Frame Analysis

November 19th: Assignment 4 Due: Comparative/Archival Assignment

November 29th: 1st draft of proposal for final paper due

December 6th: 2nd draft of proposal for final paper due

December 2 & 9th: Student Powerpoint presentations of project/proposal

December 14th: Final paper due (by 11:00pm)

COURSE SCHEDULE
(Subject to change, details to be provided in class)

Week 1
(Sept 2)

Introduction to Social Science Inquiry

- Perspectives and positionality in academic research
- Explanation in social science research
- Basic theoretical debates and methodological practices
- IRB certification and recent controversies in the social sciences
- Choosing a topic and central/originating questions

REQUIRED READINGS:

- *Hill Collins, P. 1986. Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought. *Social Problems* 33(6).
- *Télez, Michelle. Doing Research at the Borderlands: Notes from a Chicana Feminist Ethnographer. *Chicana/Latina Studies*, 4(2), 46-70.
- *Tuck, Eve. 2009. "Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities." *Harvard Educational Review* 79(3): 409-27.
- *Reyes, Victoria. 2017. "Advice for making the most of graduate school." insidehighered.com

Skim/Refer to over the course of the semester:

- *Luker, Chapters 1-2, Pp. 1-39 (Note: only these chapters are provided on Canvas)
- * King, Gary. 2020. "So, you're a grad student now? Maybe you should do this." In Robert Franceze Jr. and Luigi Curini (Eds.), *Sage Handbook of Research Methods in Political Science*.

**** START PROCESS FOR CERTIFICATION FOR IRB****

<https://orra.rutgers.edu/citi>

Week 2
(Sep 9)

The Basics of Social Research, Part I

- Going from a topic to a research question
- Develop a research question
- Thinking about Cause and Effect (Social Inference)
- **Class activity. N.B. Students should come to class with a general idea of a research question they'd like to explore

Required Readings:

- Luker: Chapters 3-4 (Pp. 40-75) (Not scanned/available on Canvas)
- *Maralani V and C Portier. 2021. The Consolidation of Education and Health in Families. *American Sociological Review* 86(4):670-699.
- *Abbott, Methods of Discovery. Chapters 1 & 2.
- *Miller, Jane. Chapter 3. "Causality, Statistical Significance, and Substantive Significance."

Tasks:

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

Week 3
(Sept 16)

The Basics of Social Research, Part 2

- 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
- *Babbie, Earl, “Note on Percentages”
- *Miller, Chapters 2 “Seven Basic Principles” & Chapter 5 “Creating Effective Tables”
- *Schutt, Chapter 14. Quantitative Data Analysis

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>
- Take a look at the kinds of questions asked on the GSS. 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 October 1) and begin looking at variables on GSS web site.
- Continue to workshop questions and topics

**** COMPLETE CERTIFICATION FOR IRB by Sept 17****

Week 4
(Sep 23)

Quantitative Data Analysis

- Descriptive vs. inferential statistics
- Sampling theory/standard error
- Sampling designs
- Elaboration paradigm

Required Readings

- Revisit Luker, Chapters 6-7, Pp. 99-154
 - *Babbie, Earl. “The Elaboration Model.” Ch. 15 in the Practice of Social Research. 10th edition.
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- *Western, Bruce and Jake Rosenfeld. 2011. "Unions, Norms, and the Rise in U.S. Wage Inequality." *American Sociological Review* 76: 513-537.

Supplementary Readings

- Becker, Chapters 1-2
- Miller, Chapter 1

** Assignment #1: Bivariate and Trivariate Tables DUE October 1st**

Week 5
(Sep 30)

Survey Research

- Advantages and limitations of surveys and survey research
- Review of Assignment 2

Required Readings:

- *Czaja and Blair. 2005. *Designing Surveys: A Guide to Decisions and Procedures*. Chapter 2.
- *Inglehart, R. (1981). Post-Materialism in an Environment of Insecurity. *American Political Science Review*, 75(4), 880-900.
- *Materialism and Post-Materialism by Max Roser.
<https://ourworldindata.org/materialism-and-post-materialism/>

Supplementary Readings

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

Tasks:

- Begin working on Assignment #2: Surveys

Assignment #1: Bi/Trivariate Tables DUE October 1st

Week 6
(Oct 7)

Qualitative Methods

- What kinds of research questions can qualitative research answer?
 - The relationship between theory and research in qualitative research
 - Sampling in qualitative research
 - Qualitative field work
 - Ethnography
 - Interviewing
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 Required Readings:

- *Kim, Nadiya, Y. Refusing Death: Immigrant women and the fight for environmental justice in LA. Stanford University Press. Introduction & Chapter 2.
- *Small, Mario Luis. 2009. “‘How Many Cases Do I Need?’: On Science and the Logic of Case Selection in Field Based Research.” *Ethnography*. 10: 5-38.
- *Charmaz, Kathy. 2006. *Constructing Grounded Theory*. Sage Publications. Chapters 1 and 2.

Supplementary Reading:

- Emerson, Writing Ethnographic Field Notes (Esp. Chpts 1 & 2)
- Jerolmack, Colin and Shamus Khan. 2014. “Talk Is Cheap: Ethnography and the Attitudinal Fallacy.” *Sociological Methods & Research* 43:178-209. (N.B. Responses to this article available in the same issue)
- Morse, J. M., Barrett, M., Mayan, M., Olson, K., and Spiers, J. (2002). “Verification strategies for establishing reliability and validity in qualitative research.” *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 1(2), 13-22.
- National Science Foundation. 2004. *Workshop on Scientific Foundations of Qualitative Research*. Report prepared by: Charles C. Ragin, Joane Nagel, Patricia White, for the National Science Foundation: Sociology Program; Methodology, Measurement & Statistics Program; Directorate for Social, Behavioral & Economic Sciences.
- 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
- Weiss, Robert, S. 1994. *Learning from Strangers: The Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies*. Free Press.

Tasks

- Work on Assignment #2. Survey Assignment

Week 7
(Oct 14)

Frame Analysis & Content Analysis

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

Required Readings:

- Luker, Chapter 10, Pp. 198-216
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- *Oleschuk, M. 2020. "In Today's Market, Your Food Chooses You": News Media Constructions of Responsibility for Health through Home Cooking, *Social Problems*, Volume 67(1): 1-19.
 - *Foy, S. and Ray, R. 2019. Skin in the Game: Colorism and the Subtle Operation of Stereotypes in Men's College Basketball *American Journal of Sociology* 125:3, 730-785.

Tasks

- Assignment #2: Survey DUE October 15th
- Begin working on Assignment #3: Frame/Content Analysis

Week 8 (Oct 21)

Comparative/Historical Sociology

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

Required Readings:

- Luker, Chapter 9, *Historical Comparative Methods*, Pp. 190- 197
- *Charles Ragin. 1987. *The Comparative Method: Moving Beyond Qualitative and Quantitative Strategies*. Berkeley and University of California Press, Chapters 1-4.

Supplementary Reading:

- Vallier, Ivan. 1973. *Comparative Methods in Sociology: Essays on Trends and Applications* UC Press (available at library)
- Skocpol, Theda. 1979. Pp. 47-111 in *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia and China*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Craig Calhoun. 1998. "Explanation in Historical Sociology: Narrative, General Theory, and Historically Specific Theory." *American Journal of Sociology* 104: 846-71.
- Clemens, Elisabeth S. 2007. "Toward a Historicized Sociology: Theorizing Events, Processes, and Emergence." *Annual Review of Sociology* 33:527-49.

Tasks

- DUE Oct 24th: 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.
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- Work on Assignment #3: Content or Frame Analysis (Due Nov 5th)
 - Begin Assignment #4: Comparative/Archival Research
 - Begin working on Paper Proposal #1

Week 9

(Oct 28)

Pick your own method

- Student discussions of a research method
→ Pick an empirical article or book chapter demonstrating a research method not already covered in class but of particular interest to you. On November 2nd, circulate this reading via Canvas and be prepared to discuss it in class. 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 19th
- Work on final paper proposal draft #1
- Bring draft of paper proposal to next class

Week 10

(Nov 4)

Workshop Paper Proposals

- *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/> (read all subheadings)

Tasks

- Continue working on Assignment #4: Archival
- Paper Proposal #1 Due November 29th

** Assignment #3: Content or Frame Analysis due November 5**

Week 11

(Nov 11)

Writing a Literature Review

- What is a literature review? How is different from a summary?
- How do I choose sources?
- Linking the literature review with your research question(s)

Required Reading

- Luker, Chapter 5, Pp. 76-98.

***READING TBA**

 Tasks

- Begin working on paper proposal draft #2. Due Dec 6th
- Assignment #4: Archival Due November 19th

Bringing it all together

Week 12
(Nov 18)

- Finding your “hook” (Heuristics)
- Multiple (Mixed) methods research
- Preparing for final presentations and papers

REQUIRED READINGS:

- Luker, Chapter 11, Pp. 217-225.
- Reading TBA

Tasks

- Assignment #4 November 19th
- Paper proposal #2 December 6th
- Prepare for final paper presentations

Week 13
(Dec 2)

Workshopping final proposals
(More detail to be provided in class)

Week 14
(Dec 9)

Final Proposal Presentations

Dec 14

****FINAL PAPERS DUE 6 PM****

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>

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 2014 (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., 2013), 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.

(<http://sda.berkeley.edu/sdaweb/analysis/?dataset=gss14>)

- [World Values Survey](#). This online database focuses on political and sociocultural change across countries. “The WVS Longitudinal 6 wave aggregate includes WVS 1981-1984, WVS 1990-1994, WVS 1995-1998, WVS 2000-2004, WVS 2005-2009 data and WVS 2010-2014” (from the WVS web site, [FAQs](#)). Excellent for those interested in comparative analysis.
 - <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
- 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>
 - National Library of Congress online manuscripts <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/>
 - Penn’s online archives
<http://dewey.library.upenn.edu/sceti/flash.cfm?CFID=2022796&CFTOKEN=14695275>
 - New York Public Library online images:
<http://digitalgallery.nypl.org/nypldigital/>
 - Jack Lynch’s (RU English professor) page on 18th century history
<http://andromeda.rutgers.edu/~jlynch/18th/history.html>
 - Resources listed by ASA comparative-historical section
<http://www2.asanet.org/sectionchs/research.html#databases>