

SOCG200 · INTRODUCTION TO RESEARCH DESIGN  
Fall 2017 · Fridays · 12:00 PM -2:50 PM · SSB 101

**NOTE THAT OUR FIRST MEETING IS ON FRIDAY, SEPT. 29  
IN THE SPIRO LIBRARY (SSB 269)**

Professor Isaac Martin · iwmartin@ucsd.edu · Chair's office (SSB 401)  
Graduate office hours · Thursday 2:30-4:30 PM or by appointment

Welcome to sociology. The heart of graduate training in our discipline is the *doing* of social science: you are here, not merely to learn about what other sociologists before you have written, but instead to become one of them, and to learn—and teach the rest of us—something important about the social world that none of us yet knew. The purpose of many other seminars is to equip you with the background knowledge you will need to recognize a new discovery when you make one. The purpose of this seminar is to teach you how to make those discoveries.

This means it is a course in the design and practice of research.

Sociology is distinctive among the social sciences for the diversity of its research practices. From the very beginnings of the discipline, sociologists have characterized their project as one of *synthesis*: because anything that we might call a “society” exceeds the ability of any single human being to observe, we all must learn to take the piecemeal knowledge produced in the course of our investigations and assemble it into the big picture together. Many working sociologists today are professional magpies who collect information produced every which way—official statistics, detailed ethnographic case studies, narrative histories, survey interviews, etc.—and even those of us who specialize in a particular technique for data collection or analysis are expected to understand and appreciate how other techniques might complement our own.

Our aims in this course are, first, to discover general principles of good research practice that may apply to all social science regardless of method, and second, to discover general principles that will help us choose appropriate methods for our particular research purposes. We will focus on a few methods that enjoy professional legitimacy and that are in the most common use in the discipline of sociology.

If a course in principles for choosing among methods sounds dry, trust me: it's not. *All* of the most urgent controversies in sociology concern questions of method. We will read some lively debates. We will also read plenty of vivid exemplars that showcase the promise of particular methods, the challenges of balancing competing priorities, and the sacrifices that some research methods demand.

## EXPECTATIONS: BE PREPARED TO DISCUSS THE READING

Some of our sessions may include writing and reading exercises in class. Some also may include substantial lecture. But all of our sessions will include discussion of the required readings. ***Come prepared to discuss the required readings.*** Do not be surprised if I call on you to speak in this seminar even if you have not raised your hand. You'll want to get comfortable talking about what you've read. It's part of what we do in this profession.

Several of the required readings are books: I have not ordered them at the bookstore, as it is my experience that students can (and often prefer to) get better deals online. Several of them are articles: they are hyperlinked from this syllabus. A few are book chapters or articles that are not currently available online, and those will be made available.

The required readings include (a) texts *about* method, which make arguments about how particular methods can or should be used, and (b) *research exemplars*, which illustrate common research problems and particular methodological solutions to those problems. I chose research exemplars that were relatively recent; that were typical of a certain method; and that were highly regarded by many scholars in the discipline. The last criterion does not mean they are above critique. What it means is that they are worth the time to criticize carefully. None of them should be dismissed lightly.

Think of this reading list not as the end of your education in research design but as the beginning. The recommended readings are more heavily weighted to texts about method. They are mainly introductory texts for practitioners who intend to use particular methods; I list them here for your future reference. I may from time to time supplement this syllabus with more extensive lists of recommended readings on particular topics.

## EXPECTATIONS: GET IN THE PRACTICE OF WRITING AND REVISING A LOT

The course will emphasize the practice of writing and revision both as a tool of inquiry and as a means of communicating about what you have discovered. We will pay attention to the research exemplars that we read as works of writing in a particular *genre*, in which it is our job to learn to communicate. We may, as the occasion arises, do some writing exercises in class. We also will have written assignments due throughout the quarter; some will be revisions of earlier assignments or exercises. You will be expected to ***come to class prepared to write.***

Revision is central to the life of a practicing social scientist. Most published social science that you read has been revised many, many times prior to publication. Learning how to solicit advice and revise effectively is as important to the practice of social science as many of the other skills emphasized in methods classes. Over the course of the quarter, you will be expected to ***have at least three meetings with the Sociology Department Writing Tutor*** (Erica Bender) to discuss your writing practice. Those

sessions may include one-on-one sessions to discuss your writing, either in SSB or at the Writing Hub in Geisel Library. They may include attendance at workshops that the Writing Tutor organizes. The point of this course requirement is to create an opportunity for you to reflect on your writing practice, in the presence of a skilled consultant. *The writing that you discuss with the Writing Tutor need not be the written papers that I have assigned for this course.*

You also will ***complete three written assignments during the quarter, plus a final writing assignment*** that assembles the pieces and revises them. The details of the assignments will be discussed at more length in class. In brief, the assignments are these:

**1. *Frame a research question.*** Pose a research question, and explain *briefly* why it is theoretically important, and why previous studies have not yet settled it satisfactorily (c. 3 pp.) Due to instructor in class, week 4.

**2. *Describe your case selection.*** Identify your cases and the rationale for choosing them, or your sampling frame (if appropriate) and the method you will use to sample from that frame (c. 3-4 pp.) Due to instructor in class, week 7.

**3. *Describe your methods of observing and recording data.*** Explain how these methods answer your question, and how they follow, complement, or improve upon other methods that have been used to answer your question (c. 3 pp.). Due to instructor with final paper.

**4. *Final paper.*** Revise and assemble the pieces into a coherent research proposal that frames a question and a plan to answer it. Due to the instructor on or before December 9, 2016.

You will not be expected to complete a research project of your own for this course. Ten weeks is too short. You will be expected to write a research proposal as your final paper. This is no artificial exercise: it should be a design for a study that you actually could (and, I hope, will) carry out this year and next. I will urge you to think of your job in graduate school as doing research, and to think of coursework as a means to that end—rather than thinking of research as a means to satisfy course requirements, which is precisely backwards.

The assignment is to write a research plan because practice writing a good research plan is itself an important part of your professional training. The preparation of a written research plan is the first step in good research practice. Such plans, even when they are read by no one else, help us guide our own work in the relatively unsupervised research occupations that employ us. The initial written research plan often provides the skeleton of the final research report. And research plans are also stylized documents that circulate as research proposals. The use of research proposals to enlist collaborators and funders is

useful skill to acquire in graduate education, and it is an essential part of the professional life of many, perhaps most, working sociologists.

## SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND READINGS

### 1. Questions and puzzles (9/29)

*All research in sociology begins with a research question. A research question is a tool to guide your decisions. It is also a rhetorical device characteristic of the most common genres of sociological writing; research articles, for example, often begin with a question or puzzle of some kind. But the questions that guide our research at the beginning are sometimes different from those that we present in writing when we are trying to help others make sense of our research at the end. We will consider where research questions and puzzles come from, how they work as tools for guiding research, and how they work as rhetorical devices for communicating about research results. This is also a good time to talk about writing practice and how to use the library.*

Mears, Ashley. 2017. "[Puzzling in Sociology: On Doing and Undoing Sociological Puzzles.](#)" *Sociological Theory* 35 (2): 138-146.

Recommended:

Luker, Kristin. 2008. *Salsa Dancing into the Social Sciences*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

### 2. What are the researcher's obligations? (10/6)

*Sociology is a profession with an ethical code, and we have additional ethical obligations as members of the university community, as legal persons, and as human beings. Many of us would explain our motivations to do research by referring to some moral or ethical purpose. Many of the most profound controversies in our discipline concern real or perceived conflicts among ethical norms. It is a good idea to give some careful thought to your own ethical commitments at the beginning of a research career.*

American Sociological Association. [Code of Ethics](#).

Desmond, Matthew. 2017. *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City*. New York: Broadway Books.

Recommended:

UC San Diego Research Ethics Program, "[Resources for Research Ethics Education: Topics](#)." Web site.

### **3. The uses of comparison (10/13)**

*Most research projects in sociology—perhaps all of them—involve learning from observation by using comparison of some kind. But what sorts of things are compared, to what ends, by means of what analytic techniques? We will discuss several different ways of using comparison, such as its use for analogical inspiration, for causal inference, for analytic clarification, or simply for revealing that things could be otherwise than they are. We'll also discuss an interesting case study to see if we can identify all of the ways that comparison is used even within what might appear to be a single case study.*

Mahoney, James. 2004. "Comparative-historical methodology." *Annual Review of Sociology* 30: 81-101.

Morgan, Stephen L. and Christopher Winship. 2015. *Counterfactuals and Causal Inference: Methods and Principles for Social Research*. Second edition. New York: Cambridge University Press. Chapters 1 and 2 (pp. 3-76).

Hirschman, Daniel, Ellen Berrey and Fiona Rose-Greenland. Forthcoming. "[Dequantifying Diversity: Affirmative Action and Admissions at the University of Michigan](#)." *Theory and Society*.

Recommended:

Vaughn, Diane. 2014. "Analogy, Cases, and Comparative Social Organization." Pp. 61-84 in Richard Swedberg, ed. *Theorizing in Social Science: The Context of Discovery*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

### **4. Sampling and generalization (10/20)**

*The social world we want to know about exceeds our individual experience. We often think of our experiences and observations as examples of other, more abstract or general concepts. How do we determine which sorts of more general conclusions our specific experiences of observation can support? And if we can choose in advance what to observe, what logic should guide our choices, in order to make it possible for us to draw the sorts of general conclusions we want to be able to draw? We will discuss several different logics or rationales for case selection. We will also discuss an exemplary study, to see if we can identify all of the different sampling logics that it employs.*

Small, Mario Luis. 2009. "[‘How Many Cases Do I Need?’ On Science and the Logic of Case Selection in Field-Based Research.](#)" *Ethnography* 10(1): 5-38.

Lucas, Samuel Roundfield. 2016. "[Where the Rubber Meets the Road: Probability and Nonprobability Moments in Experiment, Interview, Archival, Administrative, and Ethnographic Data Collection.](#)" *Socius* 2: 1-24.

Viterna, Jocelyn. 2006. "[Pulled, Pushed, and Persuaded: Explaining Women’s Mobilization into the Salvadoran Guerrilla Army.](#)" *American Journal of Sociology* 112(1): 1-45.

Recommended:

Lucas, Samuel Roundfield. 2014. "[Beyond the Existence Proof: Ontological Conditions, Epistemological Implications, and In-Depth Interview Research.](#)" *Quality and Quantity* 48: 387-408.

Kalton, Graham. 1983. *Introduction to Survey Sampling*. Newbury Park: Sage.

Magnani, Robert, Keith Sabin, Tobi Saidel, and Douglas Heckathorn. 2005. "Review of Sampling Hard-to-Reach and Hidden Populations for HIV Surveillance." *AIDS* 19 (suppl. 2): S67-S72.

Moser, C.A. "Quota Sampling." 1952. *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society. Series A (General)*. 115(3): 411-23.

Glaser, Barney G. and Anselm L. Strauss. 1967. *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. New York: MacMillan.

## **5. Observing people (10/27)**

*For the next several weeks we’ll consider techniques of observation: that is, ways of gathering information. In order to focus our attention on the methods, we are going to consider exemplars that are all concerned in one way or another with versions of the same sociological question—how is inequality reproduced? In particular, how are some people selected for elite positions in society? Because this is a central question in sociology, and because the answer seems to have something to do with universities, the studies we are reading ought to interest all sociologists who work in universities—including all of us in this course—even if it is not a topic in which we otherwise intend to specialize.*

*As we read, we are going to be focusing on how different researchers answer these questions—and in particular, on what is gained, and what is lost, by the choice of a particular method of observing the world.*

*We begin with field observation. Arguably the most direct way of gathering information about the social world is to put ourselves in a social setting and watch social life occur around us. This practice is observational fieldwork, and some of its specific varieties include ethnography and participant observation. We'll consider an exemplary ethnographic study. Pay attention to what it is possible to conclude about selection of an elite college class by virtue of the fact that the observer was there, because being there to observe is the key advantage of this method.*

Stevens, Mitchell. 2007. *Creating a Class: College Admissions and the Education of Elites*. Harvard University Press.

Recommended:

Katz, Jack. 2015. "[Situational Evidence: Strategies for Causal Reasoning from Observational Field Notes](#)." *Sociological Methods and Research* 44(1): 108-144.

Jerolmack, Colin and Shamus Khan. 2014. "[Talk is Cheap: Ethnography and the Attitudinal Fallacy](#)." *Sociological Methods and Research* 43(2): 178-209.

## **6. Asking questions (11/3) - FIRST PAPER DUE**

**NOTE: WE WILL RESCHEDULE THIS MEETING; Isaac's scheduled to attend a conference in Montreal on 11/3.**

*Many people identify social science with survey research. But surveys are a merely a special case of interview research, a method of gathering information about the social world by asking people questions. We'll consider some exemplary interview studies. Our interest is in what is gained and what is lost by the decision to use this particular technique. Pay attention to what it was possible for the researchers to conclude about the selection of an elite by virtue of their decision to interview people who participated in the process. It may be instructive to compare the insights yielded by this method to the insights yielded by ethnographic fieldwork.*

Binder, Amy J., Daniel B. Davis, and Nick Bloom. 2016. "[Career Funneling: How Elite Students Learn to Define and Desire 'Prestigious' Jobs](#)." *Sociology of Education* 89 (1): 20-39.

Rivera, Lauren. 2012. "[Hiring as Cultural Matching: The Case of Elite Professional Service Firms](#)." *American Sociological Review*. 77 (6): 999-1022.

Recommended:

Weiss, Robert. 1994. *Learning from Strangers: The Art and Science of Qualitative Interview Studies*. New York: The Free Press.

Converse, Jean M. and Stanley Presser. 1986. *Survey Questions: Handcrafting the Standardized Questionnaire*. Newbury Park: Sage Publications.

## **11/10 Veterans' Day Holiday**

### **7. Reading records (11/17)**

*Many sociologists draw conclusions about the social world by reading the documentary record—including such records as archived organizational files, personal correspondence, blogs, news reports, and so on. Compared to observing social practices directly (as in ethnographic research), or asking questions (as in interview research or survey research), reliance on the documentary record has characteristic advantages and disadvantages. Consider what these are as you read this study of how an elite educational institution selected its students.*

Soares, Joseph. 2007. *The Power of Privilege: Yale and America's Elite Colleges*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Recommended:

Karabel, Jerome. 2005. *The Chosen: The Hidden History of Admission and Exclusion at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton*. New York: Houghton Mifflin.

Abbott, Andrew. 2014. *Digital Paper: A Manual for Research and Writing with Library and Internet Materials*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

## **11/24 Thanksgiving holiday**

### **8. Classifying things (12/1) - SECOND PAPER DUE**

*What do we do with recorded observations—data—once we have them? Whatever else we do, we have to analyze data, and analysis may require us to typify or classify the observations that we have recorded. We will consider the advantages and disadvantages of different ways of classifying data by reading exemplars together with some methodological statements.*

Epstein, Lee and Andrew Martin. 2005. "[Coding Variables](#)." *Encyclopedia of Social Measurement* 1: 321-7.

Biernacki, Richard. 2014. "[Humanist Interpretation versus Coding Text Samples.](#)" *Qualitative Sociology* 37: 173-189.

Lee, Monica and John Levi Martin. 2015. "[Coding, Counting, and Cultural Cartography.](#)" *American Journal of Cultural Sociology* 3 (1): 1-33.

Pfeffer, Carla. 2014. "[I Don't Like Passing as a Straight Woman: Queer Negotiations of Identity and Social Group Membership.](#)" *American Journal of Sociology* 120 (1): 1-44.

Recommended:

*American Journal of Cultural Sociology*, 3 (3), entire issue. [[link](#)]

Campbell, John L., Charles Quincy, Jordan Osserman, and Ove K. Pedersen. 2013. "[Coding In-Depth Semistructured Interviews: Problems of Unitization and Intercoder Reliability and Agreement.](#)" *Sociological Methods and Research* 42 (3): 294-320.

Abramson, Corey M. and Dan Dohan. 2015. "[Beyond Text: Using Arrays to Represent and Analyze Ethnographic Data.](#)" *Sociological Methodology* 0081175015578740, first published on April 17, 2015 as doi:10.1177/0081175015578740

Grimmer, Justin and Brandon M. Stewart. 2013. "[Text as Data: The Promise and Pitfalls of Automatic Content Analysis Methods for Political Texts.](#)" *Political Analysis* 21 (3): 267-297.

## **9. Measuring averages and inequalities (12/8)**

*Sociologists are sometimes interested in measuring what is typical of a social group or aggregate, and sometimes interested in measuring inequalities within or among groups. We'll familiarize ourselves with basic measurement jargon of the social sciences, and discuss the advantages and disadvantages of some common approaches to measurement.*

Stevens, S. S. 1946. "[On the Theory of Scales of Measurement.](#)" *Science* 103 (2684): 677-80.

Bannigan, Katrina and Roger Watson. 2009. "[Reliability and Validity in a Nutshell.](#)" *Journal of Clinical Nursing* 18 (23): 3237-43.

Brady, David. 2003. "[Rethinking the Sociological Measurement of Poverty.](#)" *Social Forces*. 81 (3): 715-51.

Recommended:

Kalmijn, Wim and Ruut Veenhoven. 2005. "[Measuring Inequality of Happiness in Nations.](#)" *Journal of Happiness Studies* 6: 357-96.

**12/15 FINAL PAPER DUE**