Sociology Honors Seminar

Part I (Fall)
Wednesdays, 1-3:50, SSB 414

The Sociology Honors Program gives students the opportunity to do original research over two quarters. The main goals are to develop a specific research question; critically confront other scholars' efforts to answer it; collect the necessary data to answer it yourself; and present your findings in an article-length paper. Along the way, you'll get plenty of help. Each student should discuss their ongoing work with their faculty adviser on a regular basis. You'll also meet frequently (about every other week, or more if you'd like) with me to discuss problems and progress. And, as an optional add-on, I will try to match you up with a grad student working in your general area and interested in consulting with you, as schedules allow. At our seminar meetings, we'll explore the various steps of a research project, as illustrated by work each of us has underway.

There are two books that provide guidance and useful tips over the two quarters of the seminar.

The Sociology Writing Group, Guide to Writing Sociology Papers (Seventh edition)
Wayne Booth, et al., The Craft of Research (Third edition)

I've ordered the first through the Price Center bookstore and also put a copy on reserve at Geisel library. The second is available online through the library. I hope to also have one desk copy of each to loan out (short term only) for photocopying. If you have a different edition of either book from another course, we should consult to make sure you're reading the right parts.

The main work for the course, naturally, will be researching and writing your thesis. Both to highlight the different stages of research and to keep you on track, I will ask you to hand in "pieces" of the thesis at various points (see schedule below). I will also ask you to exchange drafts and to read, comment on, and help edit one another's work. That sort of collaboration is a good way to learn, to support one another, and to rehearse what you will be doing in an academic career, should you choose one.

Grades: You will receive an "In Progress" (IP) grade for the fall quarter. At the end of the winter quarter, I will award a grade for both quarters. This will be based primarily on the quality of the thesis, with your faculty adviser adding his or her assessment to mine. I will also take into account seminar participation -- particularly the peer reviews in the Fall (weeks 5-6 and 8) and Winter (weeks 8-9) -- and completion of assignments on time. Assuming you maintain the required major and overall GPA, students who receive an "A-" for the seminar graduate with honors; an "A" means graduation with high honors, and an "A+," highest honors.

Schedule

October 4.
Meeting: Introductions; your research interests (vs. research questions)
October 11.
**Meeting:** Discuss research questions.

**Reading:** *The Craft of Research*, ch. 3-4

*A Guide to Writing Sociology Papers*, pp. 10-12, 22-27

**DUE IN CLASS:** Bring to class one typed page in which you (a) define your research question, as best you can at this point; identify at least two possible answers that a sociologist might predict, depending on his/her theoretical perspective; and describe the kinds of empirical evidence you might find that would support each of these answers. Yes, all in **ONE** page.

October 18.
**Meeting:** Library workshop. We'll gather at Geisel Library to meet with a library bibliographer to get guidance on search techniques. We'll also talk about how you can use bibliographic databases (e.g., Sociological Abstracts) to refine and narrow research topics.

**Reading:** *A Guide to Writing Sociology Papers*, ch. 4

*The Craft of Research* ch. 5

October 25.
**Meeting:** Literature reviews. We'll discuss the goals and form of literature reviews, with a look at some samples.

**Reading:**

1. *The Craft of Research* ch. 6
2. ANY TWO articles that interest you from the *American Journal of Sociology* (any online issue), scanning them NOT for their arguments but for their format -- how they (a) introduce and justify the question, (b) review the literature, (c) describe their methods, (d) present their evidence and (e) draw their conclusions. Pay particular attention to points #1 and #2 and be prepared to describe these for one article when we meet.

**DUE IN CLASS:** a bibliography of at least a few scholarly articles and at least a few books directly relevant to your research project. The format of the list doesn't matter at this point. What counts as "scholarly"? For the purpose of this assignment, they must be listed in the Sociological Abstracts database. That is also the database you should be starting with in your hunt for relevant literature.

November 1.
**Meeting:** Peer review of draft introductions.

**DUE BY 5PM THE DAY BEFORE CLASS:** A rough draft of your introduction, in which you describe your research question and explain why the rest of us should care about the answer (relevance to larger scholarly debates and, if appropriate, social policies). Everyone should get me these drafts, in doc, docx, or pdf format, no later than 5 pm on the day before class. I will circulate them to the group; please read them and be prepared to discuss them in class. We'll move through each draft in turn; for each one, the rest of us will offer constructive comments -- identifying strengths as well as weaknesses in matters of clarity, organization, how well the research question is justified in terms of larger debates, etc. Be prepared to also make suggestions for how the weaknesses might be corrected.

November 8.
**Meeting:** Matching questions and research methods; research ethics.

**Reading:** *A Guide to Writing Sociology Papers*, ch. 7-9. You can pay more attention to ch. 8 (on quantitative research papers or 9 (on qualitative ones), as appropriate for your project.

**DUE IN CLASS:** a substantially expanded bibliography.

November 15.
**No meeting:** Be working on that literature review!
November 22.

**Meeting**: Managing "data" and citations in scholarly research; peer review of literature reviews.

**Reading**: *A Guide to Writing Sociology Papers*, ch. 5, on managing and acknowledging sources

**DUE BY 5PM THE DAY BEFORE CLASS**: A rough draft of your literature review. This time I will assign each of you TWO or THREE (depending on length) drafts. At our meeting we'll divide into two groups, each of which will discuss each group member's draft. The focus should be on how the literature review could better identify the main issues and debates and better link those issues and debates to the specific research topic.

November 29.

**No seminar meeting**: Be working on your methodology section.

December 6.

**Meeting**: Reports on progress and plans. Be prepared to talk about a specific, week-by-week schedule for completing the thesis in the winter quarter.

**Reading**: none

**DUE IN CLASS**: A rough draft of your methodology section.
Part II (Winter)
Mondays, 3-5:50, SSB 414

During the second quarter of the Honors Program, the main tasks will involve finishing your data collection (conducting and transcribing interviews, administering surveys and tabulating the results, collecting statistical data, etc.), analyzing it with reference to your research question, and writing and rewriting drafts of the thesis as a whole. The main milestones are week 4 (when I ask for a revised version of the sections you drafted in the fall quarter), week 6 (when I ask for a draft of the thesis as a whole - the major additions being your Results and Conclusion), and the end of the quarter (when the final draft is due).

In contrast to the first quarter, we'll be meeting more towards the end of the winter quarter than during the beginning. For the first 4 weeks or so, you should be engaged in intensive data collection and preliminary analysis, in regular consultation with me and with your adviser. We'll meet together week 4 to talk about preliminary results. Later in the quarter we'll be reading and discussing one another's work. At the very end, there will be a mini-research conference at which you'll present your work.

Reminder about grades: You received an "In Progress" (IP) grade for the fall quarter. At the end of the winter quarter, I will award a grade for both quarters. This will be based primarily on the quality of the thesis, with your faculty adviser adding his or her assessment to mine. I will also take into account seminar participation and completion of assignments on time. Students who receive an "A-" for the seminar graduate with distinction; an "A" means graduation with high distinction, and an "A+," highest distinction.

Required reading for the quarter:

Greta Krippner, "Making A Sociological Argument." I will circulate a copy.
A Guide to Writing Sociology Papers, ch. 3, on writing and revising

Recommended:

Another good source of advice on organizing, writing, and revising is Booth et al., The Craft of Research, ch. 12-17.

And if you've never done so, or haven't since middle school, read the old classic by Strunk and White, Elements of Style. Their rules of thumb for clear writing (mainly in the last part of the book) hold up very well.

Schedule

January 8
Meeting: Reports on all we got done over the holiday break. Schedule appointments for week 2 or 3.

January 15, 22
No group meetings. You should be in regular contact with me and with your adviser(s) about your data collection -- how it's going, problems that come up and how to handle them, what the results appear to show, is more data needed, etc.

January 29
Meeting: Another informal round of reporting, this time focused on your preliminary results. What are the general patterns in people's responses to surveys or interviews, in archival records you examined, in your sample of visual materials, etc.? And what, accordingly, does it look like your answers are to your research question? If there is interest, I'll ask a few grad students to come and talk about grad school.

DUE: Revised (and knit together) Introduction, Lit Review, & Methods sections due (doc or docx file preferred over hard copy)

February 5
No group meeting

February 12
Meeting: Open-ended discussion of things that aren't coming together, and celebration of those that are.

February 19
No group meeting.

DUE: Full draft of thesis due to me and to your adviser (I prefer doc or docx file; ask your advisers what they prefer)

February 26, March 5
Meetings: For these two meetings, I will circulate thesis drafts (the version submitted week 6) and assign everyone a few theses to read. Each week, we'll divide the class time into blocks, and in each of those blocks we'll break into two groups of presenters and critics. This way you'll end up giving comments and constructive suggestions to several peers each week and end up receiving comments and suggestions from several peers. Everyone should also send a written-up version of their comments (at least a long paragraph) to the students whose drafts they read, with a cc: to me. Note that praise and support are great but not nearly as useful at this point as constructive suggestions for improvements. I'll arrange the schedule of who goes which week in consultation with you all.

March 12
Meeting. Honors mini-conference: 10-15 minute presentations of your research to a (somewhat) wider audience. Light refreshments!

March 19: FINAL DRAFT OF THESIS DUE BY 4 PM. (doc/docx file is fine for meeting the deadline, and that's what I'll read, but please print out a copy for the department.)