SOAN 240. Methods of Social Research

How do we know what we know about the social world? In this course you will learn some of the key research methods that form the sociological and anthropological “understandascope.” In reviewing these methods, the underlying logic will be emphasized in addition to the fundamentals of research design, data collection, and data analysis. By the end of the course you will be better equipped to assess which research methods are most suitable for specific socio-cultural questions.
Methods of Social Research

*I’d say that the ability to do research, the confidence that I have the skills to size up, tame, and synthesize a big mountain of data, is one enduring legacy of my training at Carleton. When I got to graduate school I felt completely prepared for the work load, and I thank my SOAN seminars for that readiness.*

– Alex Robertson Textor ’92, Travel Writer and Editor

Student Learning Outcomes

As the quote above suggests, Methods of Social Research is a formative course in your SOAN development. You will gain a number of skills over the next ten weeks but in particular, we will focus on two student learning outcomes (http://apps.carleton.edu/curricular/soan/major/slos/). These are:

1. Formulate appropriate sociological and/or anthropological research questions about socio-cultural phenomena;

2. Select (and apply) appropriate sociological and/or anthropological research methods to study socio-cultural phenomena;

Through our conversations, readings and assignments, we will also begin to cover a third SLO: “describe how sociology and anthropology interact with one another, interact with other liberal arts disciplines, and contribute to various interdisciplinary conversations.”

Course Texts

Three books are required for this course:

These books are available in the College bookstore. A series of journal articles and book chapters are also available electronically. This material is provided to enhance your understanding of course topics, sharpen your methodological thinking, and further class discussion. So that you can participate in informed discussion, please complete the assigned readings for each class before we meet.

**Important Information About the Assigned Readings**

I will not necessarily review all of the reading material in class but you will typically be expected to practice what you have learned in the readings during class time. For these reasons, be sure to conduct a close reading of the assigned material. To get the most out of your readings, Paul and Elder (2008) recommend asking asking the following questions:

1. Can I summarize the meaning of this text in my own words?
2. Can I give examples from my own experience of what the text is saying?
3. Can I generate metaphors and diagrams to illustrate what the text is saying?
4. Can I connect the core ideas in this text to other core ideas I understand?
5. What is clear to me and what do I need clarified?

**Course Requirements**

Your grade in this course will be calculated according to your performance on four major assignments and class participation. See Table 1 for a summary of due dates, points awarded, etc.

**Assignments**

Assignment 1 asks you to write your comps proposal; you will be working on this assignment throughout the term. Assignment 2 asks you to design a survey. Assignment 3 asks you to write up your multiple regression findings. Assignment 4 asks you to conduct two in-depth interviews. In addition to these assignments, you will also be responsible for introducing one assigned article to the class. You will learn more about all of these assignments on the first day of class.

**Participation**

Student participation is vital to learning research methods and will be considered when computing your final grade. The participation grade is based on a combination of involvement in the class and professional conduct. I encourage you to share your intellectual insights during class discussions, even if you are uncertain or nervous about doing so. A lively and animated class always makes for a wonderful learning experience from which we will all benefit. You are, however, required to refrain from using cell phones and other disruptive technology during class time. I also expect all students in the class to be present, both in body and mind, and to be actively engaged in the creation of an intellectually stimulating experience for all. Given the highly technical content of this course, punctuality and class attendance is essential. Students who are consistently tardy and/or miss

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three or more classes will forfeit their class participation grade. No exceptions will be made unless appropriate formal documentation is presented (e.g. note from a doctor, class dean, athletic coach, etc.). Please note that the “default” participation grade is 5 out of 10, which allows students who actively and productively contribute to class to substantially increase their grade.

**Accommodations**

Carleton College is committed to providing reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities. Students seeking accommodations should contact the Coordinator of Disability Services, Andy Christensen, at 222-4464 or anchrist@carleton.edu, to begin the process. I will wait for official notification of accommodations before modifying course requirements for students. For more information on Carleton’s disability accommodations, please visit this URL: https://apps.carleton.edu/campus/wellness/disability_services/

**Academic honesty**

Carleton’s procedures and regulations regarding academic honesty are available at this URL: http://apps.carleton.edu/campus/dos/asc/academic_regs/?policy_id=21359. Please review these documents to understand what practices constitute academic dishonesty.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Distribution Date</th>
<th>Due Date*</th>
<th>Points Awarded</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comps Proposal</td>
<td>1/10</td>
<td>1/20 (topic &amp; question)</td>
<td>5 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2/3 (literature review)</td>
<td>7.5 points</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2/20 (methods plan)</td>
<td>7.5 points</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3/11 (complete proposal)</td>
<td>20 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>1/25</td>
<td>2/14</td>
<td>10 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple regression</td>
<td>2/8</td>
<td>2/28</td>
<td>15 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-depth interview</td>
<td>2/20</td>
<td>3/17</td>
<td>20 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article introduction</td>
<td>1/6</td>
<td>Throughout the term</td>
<td>5 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class participation</td>
<td>1/6</td>
<td>Every single day!</td>
<td>10 points</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* No extensions will be provided. Late submissions will have a ½ point deducted for each day late.

Grade range: "A" = 90-100%; "B" = 80-89%; "C" = 70-79%; "D" = 60-69%; "F" <= 59%
Course Outline

1. The Fundamentals of Social Inquiry

As a SOAN student at Carleton, I learned to think of myself as a researcher. When I studied the long-term reintegration of former guerrilla fighters for my Comps project, I didn't realize that this was just the first of many research projects I would undertake in my career.”

– Laura Heideman ’03, Assistant Professor of Sociology

What is this Course About?


Scientific Underpinnings of Social Research


Theoretical Underpinnings of Social Research


○ Comps proposal assignment will be distributed

Ethical Requirements of Social Research

- American Sociological Association Code of Ethics. Available at: http://www.asanet.org/about/ethics.cfm

2 Please note that this syllabus is subject to change.
1/15 Selecting a Topic, Creating a Question

  - Question: What is the research question in your comps project? Email your question to me by 5 pm on 1/14.

1/17 Reviewing the Literature (class meets in Library 306)


1/20 Elements of Research Design


1/22 Conceptualization and Measurement

1/24  Sampling


2. Quantitative Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

I use social statistics and social theory every day in my consulting work. For example, I recently completed an enrollment model for a small liberal arts college that was designed to predict which admitted students would enroll at the college. This model was grounded in a sociological understanding of how geographic, demographic and socioeconomic variables influence decision making and was built using advanced statistical techniques which I first learned at Carleton.

- Rich Majerus ’07, Higher Education Researcher

1/27-31 Surveys

1/27


Survey assignment will be distributed

1/29-31

2/3 **Accessing Survey Data** (class meets in Library 306)


2/5 **Analyzing Survey Data with SPSS: First Steps** (class meets in CMC 110)

- SPSS Statistics Essential Training at lynda.com. Go to [http://go.carleton.edu/lynda](http://go.carleton.edu/lynda) and log on. Search for the SPSS session and watch the two sessions associated with “Getting Started” (“Taking a first look at the interface” and “Reading data from a spreadsheet.” Total listening time = 19.0 minutes).

2/7 **Getting to Know Your Data Better** (class meets in CMC 110)

- Allison, Chapter 1: What is Multiple Regression
- SPSS Statistics Essential Training at lynda.com. Go to [http://go.carleton.edu/lynda](http://go.carleton.edu/lynda) and log on. Search for the SPSS session and watch “5. Descriptive Statistics for One Variable” (total listening time = 22.14 minutes) and “3. Modifying Data” (total listening time = 33.10 minutes)
  - **Multiple regression assignment will be distributed**

2/10 **MIDTERM BREAK**

2/12 **Analyzing Bivariate Relationships** (class meets in CMC 110)

- Allison, Chapter 5: How does Bivariate Regression Work?
- SPSS Statistics Essential Training at lynda.com. Go to [http://go.carleton.edu/lynda](http://go.carleton.edu/lynda) and log on. Search for the SPSS session and watch
the first five sessions of: “8. Descriptive and Inferential Statistics for Two Variables” (total listening time = 33.51 minutes).

- Kimball, Miles and Noah Smith. 2013. “There’s one Key Difference between Kids who Excel at math and Those Who Don’t.” Quartz Available at:

2/14,17  Modeling Relationships of Multiple Variables (class meets in CMC 110)
2/14
- Allison, Chapter 3: What Can Go Wrong with Multiple Regression?
- Allison, Chapter 4: How do I Run a Multiple Regression?
- SPSS Statistics Essential Training at lynda.com. Go to http://go.carleton.edu/lynda and log on. Search for the SPSS session and watch: “10. Descriptive Statistics for Three or More Variables – Calculating Multiple Regression” (total listening time = 9.3 minutes)

2/17
- Allison, Chapter 2: How Do I Interpret Multiple Regression Results?
- Allison, Chapter 6: What are the Assumptions of Multiple Regression?

2/19  Presenting Quantitative Findings (back to our regular classroom)


3. Qualitative Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

Working in international public health there is a tendency to adhere only to the statistical evidence. However, when managing a program dealing with individual’s personal and health choices there are many cultural considerations that cannot be quantified. Being perceptive of alternative interpretations or perceptions is critical to creating a program that really addresses the needs of those it is meant to serve.

- Seth Proctor ’08, Public Health Program Manager in Malawi.
2/21  The Logic of Qualitative Research
• Weiss, Chapter 1: Introduction
  ○ In-depth interview assignment will be distributed

2/24-28  In-depth Interviewing
2/24  Weiss, Chapter 2: Respondents: Choosing Them and Recruiting Them
• Weiss, Chapter 3: Preparation for Interviewing
• Weiss, Appendix C: Sources of Bias and Their Control
• Weiss, Appendix D: Consent Forms

2/26  Weiss, Chapter 4: Interviewing

2/28  Weiss, Chapter 5: Issues in Interviewing

3/3  Participant Observation Fieldwork

3/5  Writing Field Notes
3/7  Analyzing Qualitative Data
- Weiss, Chapter 6: Analysis of Data
- Weiss, Appendix E: Quantitative Coding of Qualitative Interview Data

3/10 Presenting Qualitative Data
- Weiss, Chapter 7: Writing the Report

3/11 Wrapping up Methods of Social Research