SOAN 240  Methods of Social Research

Instructor Contact Information

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Office Hours: M: 1:00-2:15pm / T: 1:15-2:15pm/ W: 1:30-2:30 pm. Please use the sign-up sheet located on my office door to book an appointment; additional times are available by request.
Course Objectives

How do we construct knowledge about the social world? What makes a knowledge claim “fact”? How does science inform our investigations? To what end do we create facts about the social world? Can scientific understandings of social phenomenon make the world a better place?

In the next ten weeks, we will grapple with these questions while learning some of the key methods that form the “SOAN understandascope.” In reviewing these methods, the underlying logic will be emphasized in addition to the fundamentals of research design, data collection, data analysis, and summary of research findings. By the end of the course you will be more confident about your own research skills, better equipped to assess which methods best answer specific socio-cultural questions, more knowledgeable about the range of challenges researchers encounter in the field, and more capable of sharing your insights to a broader audience.

Student Learning Outcomes

Methods of Social Research is a foundational course in your SOAN career. You will learn several methods sociologists and anthropologists employ in their research while bonding with your fellow majors. The course provides a civic engagement component that provides an opportunity for you to collaborate with a community partner. You will also develop and practice important methodological skills, expanding your intellectual prowess and gaining a better understanding of how SOAN research is conducted.

As a SOAN course, we will concentrate on these four departmental “student learning outcomes”:

- **Formulate** appropriate sociological and/or anthropological research questions about socio-cultural phenomena;
- **Select** appropriate sociological and/or anthropological research methods to study socio-cultural phenomena;
- **Describe** how sociology and anthropology interact with one another and contribute to various interdisciplinary conversations.
- **Engage** the world by drawing upon your understanding of historical and contemporary socio-cultural phenomena.

As a “writing rich course,” these six learning objectives will be emphasized:

- **Understand** writing as a process and develop an effective process for methodological writing;
- **Learn** how to seek and use feedback from a variety of sources;
- **Gain** greater awareness of audience and voice and see yourself as part of a community of scholars;
- **Learn** how to use SOAN forms of citation;
• Understand accepted guidelines for academic honesty;

• Develop confidence in your methodological writing.

As an ACE course, these learning goals will be emphasized:

• Understand issues in the real world complexity

• Recognize and honor different forms of knowledge that may reside in/with community partners

• Become aware of your positionality

• Take course content and do something with it beyond the classroom

Course Texts

Two books are required for this course. Copies of these books are available in the Gould Library and SOAN Department. Additional readings are available on Moodle.


Please complete the assigned readings before class so that you will be prepared to participate in class discussions and activities. Read the material closely, take effective notes, and determine what is clear and what needs further clarification. If a link to a reading does not work, let me know so I can fix it. For every online article, I have provided the full bibliographic information so that you may retrieve a copy of the reading from JSTOR or another database while you wait for me to fix the link.

Course Requirements

Assignments

The assignments in this course will increase your comprehension of the methods and practices used by sociologists and anthropologists. The first assignment, a research proposal, is completed over the term. The second assignment asks you and a classmate to conduct a mini participant observation. The third assignment asks you and a classmate to conduct four interviews and write up the results. The third assignment asks you and a small group of classmates to design a social science survey. The final assignment asks you and a classmate to conduct a multiple regression and present your findings to the class. Be advised that some assignments are due on non-class days. In these instances, a hard copy is required in my SOAN mailbox by 5 pm on the due date. Hard copies of assignments that are due on class days should be submitted in class.
Methods of Social Research is a writing rich course. In keeping with the guidelines of WR courses, you will write short drafts of the research proposal throughout the term. Know that I do not consider requests for a revision on these drafts unless you have earned a “C” or lower. To be eligible for a revision, you must meet with me in a timely manner to discuss the feedback I have provided. In doing so, you are expected to share your plans for rewriting the paper in a manner that ensures your success. Please know that I expect revisions to go beyond correcting surface-level errors.

Participation

Your participation, worth 10 points, will be evaluated according to the following criteria: mandatory class attendance, punctuality, demonstrating that you have completed the assigned readings, and providing comments and asking questions that advance – rather than interrupt or stymie – class discussion. Participation also involves listening when others, both your classmates and professor, are speaking.

You are welcome to use your personal computers to pull up class readings. However, in-class notes should be taken with paper and pen. If you have a personal circumstance that merits exception to this specific “no technology for note-taking” request, please see me to discuss your accommodation. Students who meet the standards of class participation at only the most basic level will receive the “default” participation grade of 5 points. Students who miss two or more classes risk forfeiting their participation grade.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Distribution Date</th>
<th>Due Date*</th>
<th>Points Awarded</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research Proposal</td>
<td>3/28</td>
<td>4/10 (topic &amp; question)</td>
<td>5 points</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3/28</td>
<td>4/24 (exploration of the research literature)</td>
<td>10 points</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3/28</td>
<td>6/4 (methods plan)</td>
<td>25 points</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participant Observation</td>
<td>4/13</td>
<td>4/26</td>
<td>10 points</td>
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<tr>
<td>In-depth interview</td>
<td>4/13</td>
<td>5/10</td>
<td>15 points</td>
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<tr>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>5/9</td>
<td>5/22</td>
<td>15 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple regression</td>
<td>5/16</td>
<td>5/30</td>
<td>10 points</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class participation</td>
<td>3/28</td>
<td>per requirements</td>
<td>10 points</td>
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* 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

3/26 WHAT IS THIS COURSE ABOUT?


3/28 EPISTEMOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS OF SOCIAL RESEARCH

Loseke, Donileen. 2013. *Methodological Thinking*. Chapters 1 and 2


**Questions to consider:**
1) What are the basic principles of methodological thinking?
2) What is the difference between inductive and deductive reasoning?
3) What is positivism?
4) How does positivism differ from interpretivism?

3/30 ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITIES OF SOCIOLOGISTS AND ANTHROPOLOGISTS

Morris, Alan. 2015. *A Practical Introduction to In-Depth Interviewing*. Chapter 2

Principles of Professional Responsibility, [AAA Ethics Blog](#) (read each page)

[American Sociological Association Code of Ethics](#) (know the main points)

[Carleton’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) website](#) (carefully review the sections titled, How Do I Apply, About the IRB, Frequently Asked Questions, and Data Security Resources)

- Guest speaker: Professor Kim Smith, Professor of Environmental Studies and Political Science, Chair of the IRB

**Questions to consider:**
1) What are three ethical principles governing research with human beings?
2) What kinds of harm can come to people who take part in social science research?
3) Who are considered vulnerable populations?
4) What makes some groups of people vulnerable research subjects?

4/2 RESEARCH ETHICS IN THE FIELD


Questions to consider:
1) What ethical issues did Gottlieb and Graham encounter?
2) Would Carleton’s IRB find these studies acceptable?
3) If you were an IRB reviewer, what designation would you give this study: exempt, expedited or full review?

4/4 CONSTRUCTING A RESEARCH QUESTION


Questions to consider:
1) What are the stages of constructing a research question?
2) What makes a research question a good question?
3) What tips does William Julius Wilson provide for constructing a research question? Which tip stood out for you?
4) What research question will guide your methods proposal? Email your question to anierobisz@carleton.edu by noon on 4/5.

4/6 SELECTING A TOPIC AND REVIEWING THE LITERATURE (Library 306)

Loseke, Donileen. 2013. *Methodological Thinking*. Chapter 4


Questions to consider:
1) What research topic interests you?
2) Why are you interested in this topic?
3) Would sociologists and anthropologists be curious about your topic?

4/9

REFINING YOUR RESEARCH QUESTION


Questions to consider:
1) What do I need to know?
2) Why do I need to know this?
3) What kind of data will answer my question?

4/11

SELECTING A RESEARCH DESIGN AND DATA GENERATION TECHNIQUE


Questions to consider
1) What are five primary ways to generate social research data?
2) Which technique are you drawn to and why?
3) What is the best design for establishing causality?
4) What is the best design for establishing how commonly something occurs in the population?
5) What is the difference between a cross-sectional and longitudinal study?

2. Capturing Observed Experience

4/13

QUALITATIVE METHODS


- Participant observation and interview assignment will be distributed

- Guest Speaker: Alex Miller, Sustainability Program Coordinator, Carleton College

4/16  PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION FIELDWORK


You will be assigned one of the following methodological appendices:


4/18  MEASUREMENT AND VALIDITY IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH


4/20 SAMPLING IN THE FIELD


4/23 TAKING NOTES


- Guest speakers: Pamela Feldman-Savelsberg, Broom Professor of Social Demography and Anthropology and Director of Africana Studies, and Wes Markofski, Assistant Professor of Sociology

3. Documenting Reported Experience

4/25, 27 IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWING

4/25

Morris, Alan. 2015. *A Practical Introduction to In-Depth Interviewing*. Chapter 1


- Guest Speaker: Liz Raleigh, Assistant Professor of Sociology

4/27

Morris, Alan. 2015. *A Practical Introduction to In-Depth Interviewing*. Chapters 3, 4 and 5
4/30 MIDTERM BREAK

5/2 DEALING WITH DIFFICULTIES AND THE UNEXPECTED

Morris, Alan. 2015. *A Practical Introduction to In-Depth Interviewing*. Chapters 6 and 7

5/4,7 TRANSCRIBING, ANALYZING, AND PRESENTING RESULTS TO READERS


Morris, Alan. 2015. *A Practical Introduction to In-Depth Interviewing*. Chapters 8


5/9-14 SURVEYS

5/9


Survey assignment will be distributed
5/11

5/14

- Kristin Partlo will visit class to do a 20-minute session on available data

4. Analyzing Numerically Documented Experience

5/16
ANALYZING SURVEY DATA WITH SPSS: FIRST STEPS (Location to be announced)


SPSS Statistics Essential Training at lynda.com. Go to https://wiki.carleton.edu/display/itskb/Lynda.com and log on. Search for the SPSS session with Barton Poulson and watch the two sessions associated with “Getting Started” (“Touring the interface” and “Reading data from a spreadsheet.” Total listening time is approximately 15 minutes).


- Multiple regression assignment will be distributed

5/18
GETTING TO KNOW YOUR DATA BETTER (Location to be announced)

SPSS Statistics Essential Training at lynda.com. Go to https://wiki.carleton.edu/display/itskb/Lynda.com and log on. Search for the SPSS session and watch “5. Descriptive Statistics for One Variable” (total listening time = 15m 14s) and “3. Modifying Data” (total listening time is approximately 44m 45s).

5/21 ANALYZING BIVARIATE RELATIONSHIPS (Location to be announced)


5/23, 25 MODELING RELATIONSHIPS OF MULTIPLE VARIABLES (Location to be announced)

5/23

5/25


5/28, 30 PRESENTING QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS (back to our regular classroom)

5/28
SPSS Statistics Essential Training at lynda.com. Go to https://wiki.carleton.edu/display/itskb/Lynda.com and log on. Search for the SPSS session and watch the following sections in “9. Sharing results: Formatting Tables for
Presentation and Publication & Exporting Charts and Tables” (total listening time approximately 15 minutes).

5/30
Multiple regression presentations

6/5  METHODS PROPOSAL DUE AT 3:00 PM