Methods of Social Research

There are neither good nor bad methods but only methods that are more or less effective under particular circumstances in reaching objectives on the way to a distant goal. For this reason a general, in science as in warfare, is lost if his thinking is rigid. He must be a master of timing; what has served him well in the past may get in his way now.

- Homans 1949: 330

Course Objectives

How do we know what we know about socio-cultural phenomena? This course is broadly directed toward understanding how the research methods used by sociologists and anthropologists shape our perceptions of the world. As we review some of the key research methods used, the underlying logic will be emphasized as well as the fundamentals of research design, data collection, and data analysis. In acquiring greater insight into the tools used to translate theoretical questions into empirically testable propositions, you will ultimately be able to make informed judgments about which research methods are most suitable for particular socio-cultural questions.

This course satisfies one of the requirements for the SOAN major. The skills acquired in this course will help you conceptualize and complete your comps research, and provide you with the tools to evaluate empirical evidence and navigate claims made in the socio-cultural world.

Student Learning Outcomes

The Department of Sociology and Anthropology has specified six student learning outcomes (SLOs) that we want our students to acquire (http://apps.carleton.edu/curricular/soan/major/slos/). In this course, we focus on these two SLOs:

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;
Course Texts

Four books are required for this course:


These books are available in the College bookstore. A series of journal articles and book chapters also are on e-reserve or available online (JSTOR, Google books, etc.). 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 discussion, please complete the assigned readings for each class before class.

Course Requirements

Your grade in this course will be calculated according to your performance on four 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 and you will be working on this assignment throughout the term. Assignment 2 asks you to design a survey that will eventually be administered to Carleton alums living in Northfield, MN. Assignment 3 asks you to write up your findings from a multiple regression analysis that we will conduct in class. Assignment 4 asks you to conduct qualitative interviews with Carleton alums living in Northfield, MN.

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 makes for a wonderful learning experience from which we will all benefit. Students are, however, asked to refrain from using cell phones and other disruptive technology during class time. I 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 also essential. Students who are consistently tardy and/or miss 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.).
Table 1. Summary of Class Requirements*

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Distribution Date</th>
<th>Due Date*</th>
<th>Points Awarded</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Comps Proposal</td>
<td>April 4</td>
<td>April 12 (topic &amp; question)</td>
<td>5 points</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>May 1 (literature review)</td>
<td>10 points</td>
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<td>May 17 (methods plan)</td>
<td>10 points</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>May 29 (complete proposal)</td>
<td>10 points</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Creating a survey</td>
<td>April 16</td>
<td>May 8</td>
<td>20 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Multiple regression paper</td>
<td>May 2</td>
<td>May 22</td>
<td>15 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. In-depth interview paper</td>
<td>May 11</td>
<td>June 4</td>
<td>20 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Class participation</td>
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<td>10 points</td>
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</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%

Accommodations

Students who require disability accommodation should meet with me privately to discuss their needs. The office of Disability Services for Students will also help coordinate reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities; please visit this URL to learn more: 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. I expect my students to practice academic honesty so please review these documents to understand what practices constitute academic dishonesty.
Course Outline

1. The Fundamentals of Social Inquiry

3/26  Introducing Methods of Social Research

- Singleton and Straits, Chapter 1: Introduction
- Miller, Chapter 1: Why Write About Numbers

3/28: Getting Started: The Scientific Underpinnings of Social Research

- Singleton and Straits, Chapter 2: The Nature of Science

3/30: “Science, Meet Research Ethics”

- Singleton and Straits, Chapter 3: Research Ethics

4/2: The Ethical Requirements of Social Research: Where the Rubber Hits the Road

- Please review Information about the IRB at Carleton. Available at [https://apps.carleton.edu/governance/institutional_review_board/Info/](https://apps.carleton.edu/governance/institutional_review_board/Info/)
- American Sociological Association. ASA Code of Ethics. ([http://www.asanet.org/about/ethics.cfm](http://www.asanet.org/about/ethics.cfm))

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1 Please note that this syllabus is subject to change.
4/4: **Elements of Research Design**

- Singleton and Straits, Chapter 4: Elements of Research Design
- Assignment 1 distributed

4/6: **Measurement**

- Singleton and Straits, Chapter 5: Measurement
- You will be assigned one of the following articles, which you will present to your classmates:

4/9: **Sampling**

- Singleton and Straits, Chapter 6: Sampling
- Workshop: Critiquing a Journal Article

4/11: **Reviewing the Literature Review** (class will meet in Library 306)

- Singleton and Straits, Chapter 17: Writing Research Reports
- Miller, Chapter 2: Seven Basic Principles
2. Quantitative Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

4/13: Experiments

- Singleton and Straits, Chapter 7: Experimentation
- Singleton and Straits, Chapter 8: Experimental Designs (read pages 235-243 and 250-258)
- Miller, Chapter 3: “Causality, statistical significance and substantive significance”

4/16-23 Surveys

4/16
- Singleton and Straits, Chapter 9: Survey Research

- Assignment 2 distributed

4/18
- Singleton and Straits, Chapter 10: Survey Instrumentation
- Miller, Chapter 4: “Technical but important: Five more basic principles”

4/20

4/23 Accessing Survey Data (class meets in Library 306)

- Singleton and Straits, Chapter 15: Data Processing and Elementary Data Analysis (read pages 497-509).

- Singleton and Straits, Chapter 15: Data Processing and Elementary Data Analysis (read pages 510-532)
- Miller, Chapter 4: Technical but Important, Five More Basic Principles
- Miller, Chapter 5: Types of Quantitative Comparisons

4/30: MIDTERM BREAK

5/2: Analyzing Survey Data II: Bivariate Analyses (class meets in CMC110)

- Allison, Chapter 1: What is Multiple Regression
- Assignment 3 distributed

5/4, 7: Conducting Multivariate Analyses (class meets in CMC110)

5/4
- Singleton and Straits, Chapter 16: Multivariate Analysis
- Allison, Chapter 2: How Do I Interpret Multiple Regression Results?

5/7
- Allison, Chapter 3: What Can Go Wrong with Multiple Regression?
- Allison, Chapter 4: How do I Run a Multiple Regression?
- Allison, Chapter 5: How does Bivariate Regression Work?
- Allison, Chapter 6: What are the Assumptions of Multiple Regression?

5/9: Presenting Statistical Findings (class meets in CMC110)

- Miller, Chapter 8: Choosing effective examples and analogies
- Miller, Chapter 9: Writing about distributions and associations
- Miller, Chapter 10: Writing about data and methods
### 3. Qualitative Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

**5/11:** The Logic of Qualitative Research

- Rubin & Rubin, Chapter 1: Listening, Hearing, Sharing
- Assignment 4 distributed

**5/14-18:** In-depth Interviewing

**5/14**

- Rubin & Rubin, Chapter 2: Research Philosophy and Qualitative Interviews
- Rubin & Rubin, Chapter 3: Qualitative Data Gathering Methods and Style
- Rubin & Rubin, Chapter 4: Designing Research for the Responsive Interviewing Model
- Rubin & Rubin, Chapter 5: Designing for Quality

**5/16**

- Rubin & Rubin, Chapter 6: Conversational Partnerships
- Rubin & Rubin, Chapter 7: The Responsive Interview as an Extended Conversation

**5/18**

- Rubin & Rubin, Chapter 8: Structure of the Responsive Interview
- Rubin & Rubin, Chapter 9: Designing Main Questions and Probes
- Rubin & Rubin, Chapter 10: Preparing Follow-up Questions

**5/21:** Focus Groups and Interviews in Cross-Cultural Context

5/23: **Participant Observation Fieldwork**


5/25: **Analyzing Qualitative Data**

- Rubin & Rubin, Chapter 12: Data Analysis in the Responsive Interviewing Model

5/28: **Presenting Qualitative Data**

- Rubin & Rubin, Chapter 13: “Sharing the Results”

5/30: **Wrapping up Methods of Social Research**