SOAN 240  Methods of Social Research

Instructor Contact Information

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Course Description

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? Are scientific understandings of social phenomenon even possible? In the next ten weeks, we will grapple with these questions while learning some 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 I hope 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 with a broader audience.

Student Learning Outcomes

*Methods of Social Research* is a foundational course in your SOAN major. You will learn several methods sociologists and anthropologists use in their research while bonding with fellow majors. Additionally, you will develop and practice important methodological skills, expanding your intellectual prowess and gaining a better understanding of how social science research is conducted.

As a SOAN course, we will concentrate on these three 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;
- *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.

Office Hours:

I love seeing students during office hours. A one-on-one visit can clarify course material; provide answers to questions you may have; and help you understand, on a deeper level, my expectations for the work you complete in this course. This term I am holding office hours during the following days and times:
• Mondays (except Mid-term Break) 1:30-2:45 pm

• Tuesdays 3:15-4:30 pm

• Additional times available by appointment (don’t be afraid to ask!)

Visit this Google form to schedule a visit. I meet students on the main floor of the library, close to the circulation desk, in the southeast corner by the windows. Please alert me to your arrival so that I know it’s time to wrap up my meeting with another student.

Course Texts

Please complete the assigned readings before class. Read the material closely, take effective notes, and determine what is clear and what needs further clarification.

Course Requirements

Assignments

There are seven short assignments in this course (see Table 1); each is designed to increase your comprehension of the methods and practices used by social scientists. Because assignments are due on non-class days, a paper copy is required in my SOAN mailbox by 4:30 pm on the due date.

Methods of Social Research is a writing rich course. In keeping with the guidelines of WR courses, you will receive feedback on your writing. Feedback will take place through oral or written comments I may share with you, individual conferences with our course Writing Assistant (Sacha Greenfield), and/or meetings with the Writing Center Associates. I may invite you to revise and resubmit a paper you write for this course. Should you receive and wish to accept this invitation, you will be asked to complete the following tasks:

• Send me an email, within 48 hours after your graded assignment is returned, agreeing that you want to rewrite your paper.
• Accept my invitation to a one-on-one meeting that will be scheduled, if possible, within five days of receiving your request.
• Arrive at our one-on-one meeting with your revision plan. The plan must involve a substantial revision of the paper rather than a simple correction of surface-level errors.
• Append your original graded paper when submitting your revision.

Please understand that your grade for the revised paper will be averaged with your original grade. Thus, revised papers will not receive an A.
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 attentively when others, both your classmates and professor, are speaking.

Your 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 an accommodation. Know that I’m happy to assist you.

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>Table 1. Summary of Class Requirements*</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assignment</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Research topic &amp; question</td>
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<tr>
<td>Literature review reflection</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exploration of literature</td>
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<td>P.O. field notes &amp; reflection</td>
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<td>Survey</td>
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<td>Multiple regression write-up</td>
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<td>Final research proposal</td>
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<td>Class participation</td>
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* Late submissions will have a ½ point deducted for each day late (including Saturdays and Sundays)

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

1. The Fundamentals of Social Inquiry

4/1 WHAT IS THIS COURSE ABOUT?

4/3 EPISTEMOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS OF SOCIAL RESEARCH


Reading Questions:
1) What are the basic principles of methodological thinking? Is there anything you would add to the list provided by Loseke?
2) What is the difference between inductive and deductive reasoning? Can you give an examples of these types of reasoning?
3) What is positivism and when did it emerge?
4) How does positivism differ from interpretivism?

4/5 ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITIES OF SOCIOLOGISTS AND ANTHROPOLOGISTS


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 Kathie Galotti, William H. Laird Professor of Cognitive Science, Director of Cognitive Science, and Chair of the IRB

Reading Questions:
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?

4/8

RESEARCH ETHICS IN THE FIELD


Reading Questions:
1) What ethical issues did the researchers encounter?
2) Would Carleton’s IRB find these studies acceptable?
3) If you were an IRB reviewer, what designation would you give these studies: exempt, expedited or full review? Why would you apply those designations?

4/10

CONSTRUCTING A RESEARCH QUESTION


Reading Questions:
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?

Your Task: What research question will guide your methods proposal? Email your question to anierobisz@carleton.edu by 8:30 a.m. on 4/9.

4/11

Research topic and question due at 4:30 p.m. Please place paper in my SOAN mailbox.
**4/12**  SELECTING A TOPIC AND REVIEWING THE LITERATURE (class will meet in Library 306)


Reading Questions:
1) What research topic interests you?
2) Why are you interested in this topic?
3) Why would sociologists and anthropologists be interested in your topic?

- Guest speaker: Kristin Partlo, Reference and Instruction Librarian for Social Sciences and Data

**4/15**  REFINING YOUR RESEARCH QUESTION


Reading Questions:
1) What do I need to know about my research topic?
2) Why do I need to know this about my research topic?
3) What kind of data will best answer my research question?

**4/17**  SELECTING A RESEARCH DESIGN AND DATA GENERATION TECHNIQUE


Reading Questions:
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?

- Guest speaker: Dr. Liz Raleigh, Associate Professor of Sociology

2. Capturing Observed Experience

4/19 INTRODUCING QUALITATIVE METHODS


4/22 PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION FIELDWORK


You will be assigned one of the following methodological appendices:


4/24  
**THE PRACTICE OF PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION**


Weaver-Hightower, Marcus B. 2019. “Chapter 5, Writing to Show You were There.” *How to Write Qualitative Research*. New York: Routledge. (Moodle)

4/25  
**Literature review reflection and exploration of literature due at 4:30 p.m. Please place papers in my SOAN mailbox.**

4/26  
**RECORDING OBSERVATIONS**


Guest speaker: Meryl Lauer, Visiting Assistant Professor of Anthropology

4/29  
**WRITING ABOUT YOUR OBSERVATIONS**


**Your Task:** What is your favorite ethnography (either a book or an article)? Please bring this ethnography to class and be prepared to discuss the following: why is this your favorite ethnography? What do you notice about how the author writes their ethnography?
3. Documenting Reported Experience

5/1,3 IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWING

5/1


5/3


5/6 MIDTERM BREAK

5/8 DEALING WITH DIFFICULTIES AND THE UNEXPECTED


P.O. field notes and reflection due at 4:30 p.m. Please place paper in my SOAN mailbox.

5/10, 13
TRANSCIBING, ANALYZING, AND PRESENTING RESULTS TO READERS


5/15-20
SURVEYS

5/15

5/17
Andres, Lesley. 2012. "Chapter 4, Survey Formats" (p. 45-60), "Chapter 5, Developing Survey Questions" (p. 61-90), and "Chapter 7, Validity, Reliability, and Trustworthiness" (p. 115-128). In Designing & Doing Survey Research. Los Angeles: Sage. (Moodle)

5/20

- Guest speaker: Kristin Partlo, Reference and Instruction Librarian for Social Science and Data
4. Analyzing Numerically Documented Experience

5/22  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).


5/24  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).

5/27  ANALYZING BIVARIATE RELATIONSHIPS (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 the Correlation, Bivariate Regression, and Two Categorical Variables: Crosstabulations sections of “8. Statistics for Association” (total listening time approximately 17 minutes).

5/28  Survey due at 4:30 p.m. Please place requested material in my SOAN mailbox.
5/29

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 Multiple Regression section of “8. Statistics for Association” (total listening time: 10m 20s)

5/31


6/3,5 PRESENTING QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS (back to our regular classroom)

6/3
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).

6/4 Multiple regression write-up due at 8:30 a.m. Please email to anierobisz@carleton.edu

6/5 Sharing your multiple regression findings

6/7 Final proposal due at 4:30 p.m. Please place paper in my SOAN mailbox.