

Sociology 503: TECHNIQUES AND METHODS OF SOCIAL SCIENCE

Fall 1997

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[|Synopsis|](#)[|Course Requirements|](#)[|Week 1|](#)[|Week 2|](#)[|Week3|](#)[|Week 4|](#)[|Week 5|](#)[|Week 6|](#)[|Week 7|](#)[|Week 8|](#)[|Week 9|](#)[|Week10|](#)[|Week11|](#)[|Week 12|](#)

Synopsis

This course covers the fundamentals of social science research design. Emphasis is placed on principles that are applicable in all kinds of research, from surveys to participant observation, from comparative historical study to demographic analysis. We begin with some philosophy of science, and the course focuses on such practical matters as how to distinguish a theory from a political program or a philosophical assertion, how to derive a falsifiable hypothesis from a theory, how to design a research project to test an hypothesis, how to carry out research, and how to write up results. The course also delves into current methodological controversies in several arenas.

I have tried to avoid redundancy with other courses in the department, hence the course gives relatively little attention to data analysis techniques, field methods, Comptean positivism, and current methodological issues in the study of culture.

Course Requirements

Students should come to class prepared to discuss the week's readings. Each week there will be a short assignment (1-3 pages) that will serve as the basis for an in-class exercise. While brief, most assignments will require a fair amount of thought and preparation. By the end of the semester, students will complete a 10-15 page research proposal.

WEEK 1

Metatheory, Theory, and Hypotheses

- 1 Stinchcombe, Arthur L. 1968. *Constructing Social Theories*. New York: Harcourt. Pages 1-56.
- 1 Popper, Karl R. 1959. "Predictions and Prophecy in the Social Sciences." Pp. 275-285 in *Theories of History*. Edited by Patrick Gardiner. London: Macmillan.
- 1 Hempel, Carl G. 1974. "Reason and Covering Laws in Historical Explanation." Pp. 90-105 in *The Philosophy of History*. Edited by Patrick Gardiner. London: Oxford University Press.
- 1 Davis, Kingsley and Wilbert E. Moore. 1945. "Some Principles of Stratification." *American Sociological Review* 10:242-249.

Assignment:

- 1 Drawing on Stinchcombe's discussion of hypotheses, derive formal hypotheses from the article by Davis and Moore.

WEEK 2

How to Prove Things

- | Durkheim, Émile. 1966 [1938]. *The Rules of Sociological Method*. Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press. Chapter 6.
- | Weber, Max. 1978. "Basic Sociological Terms." Pp. 3-62 in *Economy and Society*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- | Goel, M. Lal. 1988. *Political Science Research: A Methods Handbook*. Ames: Iowa State University Press. Chapter 1.
- | Guthrie, Douglas. 1997. "Between Markets and Politics: Organizational Responses to Reform in China." *American Journal of Sociology* 102: 1258-1304.

Assignment:

For the article by Guthrie, derive formal hypotheses as you did in the first week. Then using Durkheim's principles for establishing sociological proofs, provide a brief outline of the evidence Guthrie present to test his hypotheses. Assess the paper in Durkheim's terms.

WEEK 3

Causality

- | Schutt, Russell. 1996. *Investigating the Social World*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge. Chapter 4.
- | Stinchcombe, Arthur L. 1968. *Constructing Social Theories*. New York: Harcourt. Pages 57-129.
- | Marini, Margaret M. and Burton Singer. 1988. "Causality in the Social Sciences." Pp. 347-410 in *Sociological Methodology*, Volume 18. Edited By Clifford C. Clogg. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Assignment:

Select a data set from those for which code books are available at Data and Statistical Services in Firestone Library. Prepare a brief research outline using the data set. Detail several, preferably competing, hypotheses; review how you will operationalize causal factors and outcomes; propose analytic techniques.

WEEK 4

Research Design

- | Babbie, Earl. 1986. *The Practice of Social Research*, Fourth Edition. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth. Chapters 4, 8, 10, 11.
- | Mayo, Elton. 1984 [1949]. "Hawthorne and the Western Electric Company." Pp. 279-292 in *Organization Theory: Selected Readings*. Edited by D.S. Pugh. New York: Penguin.
- | Davis, Gerald F., and Henrich R. Greve. 1997. "Corporate Elite Networks and Governance Changes in the 1980s." *American Journal of Sociology* 103: 1-37.

Assignment:

For the Davis and Greve paper, outline the theory and hypotheses presented and propose a research design to test the same hypotheses using different methods.

WEEK 5

The Unit of Analysis: Sampling

- 1 Schutt, Russell. 1996. *Investigating the Social World*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge. Chapter 5.
- 1 Rossi, Peter. 1988. "On Sociological Data." Pp. 131-154 in *Handbook of Sociology*. Edited by Neil Smelser. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- 1 Lukes, Steven. 1968. "Methodological Individualism Reconsidered." *British Journal of Sociology* 19:119-29.
- 1 Meyer, John, John Boli, and George Thomas. 1987. "Ontology and Rationality in the Western Cultural Account." Pp. 1-37 in George Thomas, John Meyer, Ramirez Francisco, and John Boli, eds. *Institutional Structure: Constituting State, Society, and the Individual*. Newbury Park: Sage Publications.
- 1 Berger, Peter, and Thomas Luckmann. 1966. *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise on the Sociology of Knowledge*. Garden City: Doubleday. Pp. 1-17 and 169-173.

Assignment:

Draw a stratified random sample (N=40) using sources available in the library. You may sample hospitals, schools, architects, nation-states, or whatever you please. Please stratify the sample on two dimensions (e.g., size and location). Bring 8 copies of your assignment to class.

WEEK 6

Survey Design

- 1 Converse, Jean M. and Stanley Presser. 1986. *Survey Questions: Handcrafting the Standardized Questionnaire*. Beverly Hills: Sage. Pp. 9-75.
- 1 Schutt, Russell. 1996. *Investigating the Social World*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge. Chapter 8.

Assignment:

Outline several hypotheses about the opinions of Princeton undergraduates. Draft a questionnaire that could be used to test these hypotheses. Bring 8 copies of the questionnaire to class.

WEEK 7

Interpretive Methods

- 1 Strauss, Anselm. 1987. *Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Pages 1-49 and 241-248.
- 1 Geertz, Clifford. 1983. "From the Native's Point of View: On the Nature of Anthropological Understanding." Pp. 55-72 in *Local Knowledge*. New York: Basic.
- 1 Van Maanen, John. 1988. *Tales of the Field*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Pages 1-44 and 125-144
- 1 Kunda, Gideon. 1992. *Engineering Culture: Control and Commitment in a High-Tech Corporation*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press. Pages 1-25, 217-240.

Assignment:

You have been asked to review a paper by the American Sociological Review. You will receive a copy of the paper in class. Write a review of the paper (1-3 pages, single-spaced) and fill out the reviewer's evaluation form.

WEEK 8

Comparative Design and the Problem of Small Numbers

- 1 Skocpol, Theda and Margaret Somers. 1980. "The Uses of Comparative History in Macrosocial Inquiry." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 22:174-197.
- 1 Tilly, Charles. 1984. *Big Structures, Large Processes, Huge Comparisons*. New York: Russell Sage. Chapter 4.
- 1 Goldthorpe, John H. 1997. "Current Issues in Comparative Macrosociology: A Debate on Methodological Issues." *Comparative Social Research* 16: 1-26.
- 1 Lieberman, Stanley. 1992. "Small N's and Big Conclusions: An Examination of the Reasoning in Comparative Studies Based on a Small Number of Cases." Pp. 105-118 in *What is a Case? Exploring the Foundations of Social Inquiry*. Edited by Charles C. Ragin and Howard S. Becker. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- 1 Ragin, Charles. 1987. *The Comparative Method: Moving Beyond Qualitative and Quantitative Strategies*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Pages 85-163.
- 1 Esping-Andersen, Gösta. 1978. "Social Class, Social Democracy, and the State." *Comparative Politics* 11: 43-58.

Assignment:

Each student will meet with me during this week to discuss topics for the research proposal she will write as the final project for the course.

Assess Esping-Andersen's methods from the perspective of one of the other readings for this week.

WEEK 9

Historical Design and Sequencing

- 1 Tuma, Nancy Brandon and Michael T. Hannan. 1984. *Social Dynamics: Models and Methods*. New York: Academic. Pp. 3-40.
- 1 Isaac, Larry W. and Larry J. Griffin. 1989. "Ahistoricism in Time-Series Analyses of Historical Process: Critique, Redirection, and Illustrations from U.S. Labor History." *American Sociological Review* 54: 873-890.
- 1 Lustick, Ian S. 1996. "History, Historiography, and Political Science: Multiple Historical Records and the Problem of Selection Bias." *American Political Science Review* 90: 605-618.

Assignment:

Prepare a short (1-2 page) outline of the research proposal you will submit as the final written product for the course, based on the guidelines passed out in week 8.

WEEK 10

Critiques of Normal Science

- 1 Freedman, David A. 1991. "Statistical Methods and Shoe Leather." Pp. 291-314 in *Sociological Methodology*, Volume 21. Edited By Peter V. Marsden. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- 1 Lieberman, Stanley. 1985. *Making it Count: The Improvement of Social Research and Theory*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Pp. 171-235.
- 1 Berk, Richard A. 1988. "Causal Inference for Sociological Data." Pp. 155-172 in *Handbook of Sociology*. Edited by Neil Smelser. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Assignment:

You have been asked to review a paper by the American Sociological Review. You will receive a copy of the paper in class. Write a review of the paper (1-3 pages, single-spaced) and fill out the reviewer's evaluation form.

WEEK 11

Nonempirical Explanations: Neoclassical Economics and Political Theory

- 1 McCloskey, Donald N. 1985. *The Rhetoric of Economics*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press. Pp. 1-35.
- 1 Sowell, Thomas. 1974. *Classical Economics Reconsidered*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Pp. 112-148.
- 1 Samuelson, Paul A. 1980. *Economics*, Eleventh Edition. New York: McGraw-Hill. Pages 355-374.
- 1 Ashcraft, Richard. 1986. *Revolutionary Politics and Locke's Two Treatises of Government*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Preface and Introduction.
- 1 Locke, John. 1965. *Two Treatises of Government*. New York: Mentor. Pp. 305-318.

Assignment:

The first draft of your 10-15 page research proposal is due by 5 p.m. on Monday. Each student will give her draft to two other class members for suggestions, and will provide suggestions to two classmates.

WEEK 12

Writing Up Results

- 1 Strunk, William, Jr., and E.B. White. 1979. *The Elements of Style*. Third Edition. New York: Macmillan. Chapter 2.
- 1 Strauss, Anselm. 1987. *Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Pages 249-264.
- 1 Becker, Howard. 1986. *Writing for Social Scientists: How to Start and Finish Your Thesis, Book, or Article*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Chapters 1, 5, 7, 8.

Assignment:

The final draft of your research proposal is due on Friday at 5 p.m.

[Back to Schedule](#)



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