Sociology 300a. Approaches to Sociological Research  
Brandeis University  
2014-2015

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Office hours: By appointment

Office hours: Tuesdays 2-3:30pm & by appt

Class Meetings

We meet on (roughly) alternate Thursdays, from 2:00-3:20pm, in Location TBA. For Fall 2014 we will meet on:

September 4  
September 18  
October 2  
October 23  
November 6  
November 20  
December 4

We will agree on the Spring 2014 meeting dates later in the semester. We also expect that you will attend department colloquia and job talks, likely scheduled (TBA) from 3:30-5:00 on Thursdays.

Course Description and Learning Goals

This course is designed to make you more skilled consumers and producers of sociological knowledge. It is built around engagement with individual research projects, visits from outside speakers, and primarily on you presenting your research in progress. With the latter, research at all stages is welcome – from initial ideas to data analysis in progress to full drafts of articles. We intend to meet you where you are, providing a supportive environment in which you receive constructive feedback on your work. This course is required for all Ph.D. students during their first three years in the program.

Students in this class will:
1) Develop their knowledge and understanding of sociological research methods;
2) Receive feedback from faculty and peers on their work in progress;
3) Contribute to their classmates’ ongoing research, though constructive review and discussion;
4) Develop knowledge of the basic process of writing an empirically based article for submission to a sociology journal.

Readings

Each week will include one short reading in addition to the material submitted by your classmates for discussion as described below. All readings are available on the class Latte site.

Course Requirements for the Academic Year

1. Attendance is required. Please be on time out of respect for all of us. This class only works if everyone is present and prepared to participate. If you cannot attend class for religious or health reasons, please email Wendy ASAP. While we don’t expect issues with unexcused absences, poor attendance may result in withdrawal of credit for this course.

2. Participation is required. We will divide each class session in half focusing on a substantive topic related to research and writing journal articles for the first half of class and a student project in progress for the second half. In the first half of class, we hope to gain nuts and bolts knowledge from the reading as well as from our collective experiences. We will not have formal discussants in the second half of class as in previous years but hope all of you will be actively engaged in providing your colleagues with feedback about their projects.

3. Presentation of research in progress is required for all students at least once during the academic year – and ideally twice given our small numbers this year but that is your call. Please circulate your materials by 5pm on the Thursday before the Thursday you will be present. Anything can be circulated – outlines, proposals, data with appropriate identifies removed, memos, etc. It helps if you include a note explaining what you are sending to the group and what kind of feedback would be most helpful.

4. Written Assignments. There are two written assignments in this course.

   • By the last day of classes of the first semester (December 8, 2014), please submit the first assignment - a short summary (2-3 pages single spaced) of a project or paper you are working on that you hope will eventually be published. Give me a sense of where you are with the paper and what you hope to accomplish by the end of the spring semester. It will likely help to include some discussion of the pieces of a journal article we have been talking about this semester. If you don’t have a project that fits in here, let me know early in the semester so we can think about one or develop a slightly different assignment for you.

   • The second assignment, which you can hand it at any point during the academic year but no later than April 28, 2015, is an analytic memo that updates your first
assignment focusing on key issues in a research project you hope will be published. It can be a draft of the paper you are working on OR an analytic memo that addresses the following questions:

1) What are your main research question(s)?
2) In what areas or sub-areas of the discipline are your research located?
3) What is your study design/research methodology? Consider describing your hypotheses or theoretical foci, sample, selection of cases or subjects and level(s) of analysis.
4) What is the structure of your argument? Is it interpretive or causal?
5) Who is your intended audience? If you have primary and secondary audiences in mind, explain how you might reach each of them and whether you will be able to do so with the same document?
6) What progress have you made in developing this project this year?

This should be 8-10 pages double-spaced. If you have questions or concerns, please let me know early in the semester so we can work on this assignment together.

Grades

Credit for the course will be earned by your participation in class (including attendance, contributions to discussion, and engagement with both your own and your classmates’ intellectual endeavors) and the timeliness, completeness, and quality of your written assignments. You will not receive credit for the course unless you complete all the assignments.

More than grades, we will present 5Ps awards at the end of the year for “Published Papers Previously Presented in Proseminar.” The prize is a can of peas and your name in lights in Pearlman ☺

Academic Integrity

You are expected to be familiar with and to follow the University’s policy on academic integrity: http://www.brandeis.edu/studentaffairs/sdc/ai/index.html. If anything is unclear, please ask.

Reasonable Accommodations

If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please talk with Wendy as soon as possible. If you have questions about documenting a disability, please contact Katharine Linnehan (klinneha@brandeis.edu, x63418)
Fall Course Outline

September 4: Introductions

Practical approaches to researching and writing journal articles – an overview
  • Howard S. Becker. 1998. Tricks of the Trade: How to Think About Your Research While Doing It. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (c. 2 Imagery)

Student presentation: ___Charlestown/South Boston Project____

September 18:

Asking and motivating good research questions
  • Booth, Wayne, Gregory Colomb and Joseph Williams. 1995. The Craft of Research. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (c. 3 From Topics to Questions and c. 4 From Questions to Problems)

Student presentation: ______________________

October 2:

Practical ways to approach “the Literature”

Student presentation: ______________________

October 23:

Reading and discussion in preparation for the Department Colloquium today
  • Please read one of the more academic articles available here (or part of Winant’s most recent book – up to you!) http://www.soc.ucsb.edu/faculty/winant/

Possible class visit from Howard Winant, Professor of Sociology, University of California Santa Barbara

Student presentation by: ______________________

November 6

Nuts and bolts of analyzing observational and interview data
  OR

Student presentation by: ______________________

**November 20**

Interpreting what you see

Student presentation by: ______________________

**December 4**

Writing for social scientists….getting it done

Student presentation by: ______________________