Sociology 300a. Approaches to Sociological Research
Brandeis University
2012-2013

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Class Meetings

We meet on alternate Thursdays, from 5:00-6:20pm, in Pearlman 202.

For Fall 2012 we will meet on:
September 6
September 27
October 11
October 25
November 8
November 29

We will settle on the Spring 2013 meeting dates later in the semester.

Course Description and Learning Goals

This course is designed to make you more skilled consumers and producers of sociological knowledge. It is built around written exercises, visits from outside speakers, and primarily on you presenting your research in progress. 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.

Each year the readings and assignments in this course not connected to your own research are loosely organized around a sub-theme. Previous themes have included, “the structure of sociological arguments,” “engaging with appropriate literatures,” “audiences and public sociology,” “collaboration,” and “selecting and developing research topics.” This year’s theme is designing research projects: the nuts and bolts
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) Become a part of the department’s culture of collective cooperative engagement with research (including, as possible and appropriate, identifying opportunities for collaboration).

Readings

There are no required books for this class. Those of you coming to sociology from other disciplines and/or looking for an overview and/or history of the discipline might want to consult:
• And/or the resources available through LTS:
  http://brandeis.libguides.com/sociology
  http://brandeis.libguides.com/policy
• Introduction to Sociology textbooks for undergraduates can also be very helpful. Wendy has a stack she can loan to you.

If you are looking for more information about research design or writing, you might try:

Course Requirements for the Academic Year

1. Attendance is required. Please be on time out of respect for all of us. The proseminar 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. Presentation of research in progress is **required for second and third year students** at least once during the year. This presentation is optional for first year students. On the first day of each semester, you will sign up for a specific class meeting during which you will present your research in progress. **By 5pm on the Thursday the week before you present** you must distribute by email to the class the materials you would like us to read for your session. This may be a research proposal, field notes, an interview, an analysis plan, a rough or revised draft of an article or something else. Consider adding a brief cover note telling us where you are with this project and how we can be most helpful. Please protect the confidentiality of subjects involved in your research making sure to remove any uniquely identifying information (first and last names, addresses, etc.) before distributing data or analysis. **It is your responsibility to send your work out on time.** We expect that all students and faculty members will carefully read and offer constructive comments on materials they receive on time.

3. Written Assignments. There are three written assignments in this course. Note that you **must complete the second assignment two times**, once in the fall and once in the spring.

- The **first assignment** asks you to consider how sociologists frame research questions and design research projects and what implications their research designs have on the arguments they can make. Please read Catherine Turco’s article “Cultural Foundations of Tokenism: Evidence from the Leveraged Buyout Industry” 2010. *American Sociological Review* 75(6):894-913. Then write a 2-3 double-spaced page memo, in which you answer the following questions:
  - What are Turco’s main research questions?
  - How did she design the project to answer these questions? Why did she design it this way? What are the strengths and weaknesses of this design?
  - What are her central empirical and theoretical arguments?
  - Please spend at least one page outlining a different way she might have designed this project to answer the same or similar research questions. What would be the strengths and weaknesses of this alternative approach?

- The **second assignment** asks to you review the work of one of your peers and share your review orally and in writing. **You must complete this assignment twice – once during the fall semester and once during the spring semester.** On the first day of each semester, you will sign up for the date you wish to review that semester. Based on the manuscript or materials provided by one of the presenters that day, this assignment requires you to provide a set of written comments for the author that address at least the following aspects of the paper: What do you understand to be the author’s central argument? Who is its audience? How might it contribute to relevant literatures? What are the strengths of the paper’s theoretical framing, orientation to relevant literatures, methodology, analysis, and conclusions? How might the author improve any of these aspects? If the presentation is based on a proposal or research notes rather than a complete paper draft, please provide detailed thoughts about how the author might best extend
his/her ideas into a full paper. A typical review is between 500 and 700 words (1-1.5 single-spaced pages). Please bring two copies of your review – one for the author, and one for Wendy – to the class session in which we discuss the paper. Be prepared to summarize your remarks for the author and class in a five minute presentation.

- The third assignment, which you can hand it at any point during the academic year but no later than Friday May 3, 2013 at noon, is an analytic memo that addresses key issues in one of your current research projects. It should be no more than 10 pages doubled spaced and should address the following questions:
  1) What are your main research question(s)?
  2) In what areas or sub-areas of the discipline is 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 descriptive 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? Is it connected to one of your QPDs? What are your plans for moving the project forward in the coming months?

Please submit an electronic copy via email to Wendy by the due date/time listed above. We appreciate you following disciplinary norms when providing citations and references (for questions and guidelines about those, see the American Sociological Association’s webpage: www.asanet.org).

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. If you are unable to complete an assignment on time, please be sure to advise Wendy of your plan for doing so in advance of its due date.

And to facilitate your professional development….the 6th Annual Soc 300a Challenge

To encourage you to present papers at professional meetings and submit articles for journal review, we offer the following challenge: If the entire class earns 100 or more points as of April 15, 2013, we will throw a dinner party for the class to celebrate!
How do you gain points?

You gain 5 points for every paper that is submitted for presentation to a session of the 2013 Eastern Sociological Society meeting (in Boston) or the 2013 ASA annual meeting (in New York), including papers submitted for presentation at SSSI, SSSP, or ASA section workshops. Information about financial support to attend these meetings available from the Graduate School is here:

http://www.brandeis.edu/gsas/fellowships/internal-funding/travel_funds/index.html

You gain 15 points for every paper you submit to a peer-reviewed journal in the social sciences.

You gain an additional 25 points for every paper that is accepted by a peer-reviewed journal in the social sciences. Accepted papers that were reviewed by this class in previous semesters also qualify authors for the prestigious 5P award, for “Published Papers Previously Presented in Proseminar!” The prize is a can of peas and your name in lights in Pearlman 😊

You gain another 25 points for receiving a graduate student prize for any paper submitted to conferences or journals. 5P award-winning papers that win prizes merit an augmented 6P award (insert “Prize-winning” into the 5P title above).

We encourage you to help each other and collaborate. Authors on co-authored papers each receive full points for their submissions (e.g., a paper submitted by Cadge, Cunningham, and Shostak would be worth 45 points).

We will begin each meeting by soliciting good news of this sort, but please also email Wendy so she can keep track of the class’ points. Check out the Department webpages for news of recent graduate student publications – some of which were initially presented in this class:

http://www.brandeis.edu/departments/sociology/grad/accomplish.html

Presenting at meetings and publishing papers develops your scholarly profile and helps the Department by enabling more people to learn about the good research being conducted by graduate students here. Keep up the good work!

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 6: Introductions

September 27: Designing Research Projects
*Assignment 1 due*

October 11: Actual Research Designs: A Panel Discussion

- Casey Clevenger, PhD Candidate, Sociology, Brandeis University. “’Women with Hearts as Wide as the World:’ Gender, Race and Inequality in Women’s Transnational Religious Organizations.”

- Nicky Fox, PhD Candidate, Sociology, Brandeis University. “Moving Beyond Violence: The Role of Memory and Nationalism in Post-Genocide Rwanda.” (tentative)

- Tom Mackie, PhD Candidate Sociology and Social Policy, Brandeis University. “Extending psychotropic medication oversight for children in foster care: A sociological and econometric examination of organizational determinants and their impact on service use and safety.”

October 25: “Being a Discussant” and Workshop 1

November 8: Workshop 2

November 29: Workshop 3
### Proseminar Fall 2012 Workshop Schedule

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