Sociology 300a. Approaches to Sociological Research
Brandeis University
2013-2014

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Office hours: Tuesdays & Fridays 2-3pm
& by appointment (in Rabb)

Office hours: Wednesdays 2:30-4pm
& by appointment

Class Meetings

We meet on (roughly) alternate Thursdays, from 2:00-3:20pm, in Pearlman Lounge.

For Fall 2013 we will meet on:

August 29
September 12
October 3
October 24
November 14
December 5

We will settle on the Spring 2014 meeting dates later in the semester.

In addition, we expect that you will attend department colloquia, scheduled from 3:30-5:00 on select proseminar 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 a pilot research project, 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) 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, though you will be expected to read your colleagues' workshop papers and, occasionally, other work tied to colloquium visits and our pilot research project. 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 David 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. At or near the start 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 two written assignments in this course. Note that you must complete the first assignment two times, once in the fall and once in the spring.

- The first 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 David – 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 second (i.e. final) assignment, which you can hand it at any point during the academic year but no later than Thursday May 1, 2014, 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 double-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 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? 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 David 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 David of your plan for doing so in advance of its due date.

Professional development

As always, we encourage you to present papers at professional meetings and submit articles for journal review, and to view our proseminar work as a vehicle to assist with your progress. Information about financial support available from the Graduate School to attend the 2014 Eastern Sociological Society meeting (in Baltimore), the 2014 ASA annual meeting (in San Francisco), and associated meetings hosted by SSSI, SSSP, and various ASA section is here:

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

Each year, we recognize papers reviewed by this class that subsequently have been accepted by peer-reviewed social science journals with 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 ☃️!). We’ve also happily had occasion to institute an
augmented 6P award (i.e. insert “Prize-winning” into the 5P title above…) for 5P papers that also receive a graduate student prize after being submitted to conferences or journals.

We will begin each meeting by soliciting good news of this sort, but please also email David so he can keep track of your achievements. Also 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. Given your continued sterling track record on this front, we will depart from the confines of Pearlman for our final spring meeting, to host a dinner party celebrating your collective accomplishments over the year!

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

August 29: *Introductions*

September 12: *Designing Research Projects: Introducing a pilot field project*

October 3: *Guest speaker: Matt Kaliner*
Matt is a department alum (BA '00), currently completing his Sociology dissertation at Harvard under Robert Sampson. He will consider with us Brandeis' longstanding engagement with "Chicago School"-style research, how such research orientations have evolved to shape today's cutting-edge ethnographic work, and how we might productively tackle various challenges associated with the design of our pilot research project. Our discussion will be followed at 3:30 by Matt's colloquium presentation of his dissertation research.

October 24: "*Being a Discussant," and Workshop 1*
Our proseminar workshop session will be followed at 3:30 by a colloquium presentation by Mary Bernstein, Professor of Sociology, University of Connecticut.

November 14: *Workshop 2*
Our proseminar workshop session will be followed at 3:30 by a colloquium presentation by Liah Greenfeld, University Professor of Sociology, Political Science, and Anthropology at Boston University.

December 5: *Workshop 3*
# Proseminar Fall 2013 Workshop Schedule

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<td>October 24</td>
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