

**BRANDEIS UNIVERSITY**  
**SOCIOLOGY 183A**  
**EVALUATION OF EVIDENCE**

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DAVID CUNNINGHAM

PEARLMAN 207

CLASS: W 2:10-5:00

IN PEARLMAN 203

OFFICE HOURS: M 10:30-11:30

TH 11:00-12:00 & BY APPOINTMENT

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SPRING 2007

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This course introduces, explores, and applies a range of methodological approaches in social science research. It is organized around the usual texts and exemplar cases as well as our own collaborative work on a large-scale research project. While other classes in the Sociology department provide in-depth training in qualitative field methods, we will focus on a number of alternatives, many of which break down traditionally predominant divides between quantitative and qualitative research. Much of our work will be experiential in nature; a central goal is to apply our examination of methodology to concrete projects, which ideally will yield original answers to our agreed-upon research questions. Early in the semester, we will define one or two topics to pursue collectively as a “research team.” This endeavor will require that we coordinate our efforts to define the data necessary to answer specific research questions, gather and code that data, analyze it to generate systematic findings, and collaboratively compose papers in a format suitable for submission to refereed journals. Throughout, we will emphasize engagement with varied forms of data, thinking creatively about how to employ multiple methodologies to examine distinct dimensions of our broad research topic(s).

This course is a joint seminar, which means it enrolls graduate students as well as advanced undergraduates. I realize that some of you have more experience with social science research than others, and we will structure the division of labor in the collective projects to take advantage of the range of skills present in the group. The second half of the course will also cover basic social science statistics, and will include hands-on work with statistical computer software. I assume no prior knowledge of statistics, and our software package (SPSS) is quite user-friendly.

### **Office Hours**

I have scheduled office hours on Monday from 10:30 to 11:30 and Thursday from 11:00 to 12:00. If these times are not convenient for you, we can make other arrangements. I encourage each of you to come to my office to discuss problems with the class, or any other issues that interest or concern you. Additionally, I will generally be available for quick questions immediately after class. If you need to contact me at other times, my phone numbers and e-mail address are listed at the top of this page. You can also leave messages for me in my mailbox outside of the Sociology office on the second floor of Pearlman.

### **Readings**

The following books are required for this course:

*Approaches to Social Research* (4<sup>th</sup> edition), by Royce A. Singleton, Jr. and Bruce C. Straits

*Discovering Statistics Using SPSS* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition), by Andy Field

*The Comparative Method: Moving Beyond Qualitative and Quantitative Strategies*, by Charles C. Ragin

I realize that some of these books are unreasonably expensive, and I assure you that we would be using more affordable alternatives if any of comparable quality existed. To keep expenses from spiraling further, we will distribute an additional book, Edward Tufte's *The Visual Display of Quantitative Information*, through improvised means. All other readings can be found either through Brandeis Library databases or our course WebCT page (noted as 'ct' readings in the course outline below). *Please note that reading assignments should be done by the date listed on the syllabus -- we will generally discuss them during that class period.*

### **Assignments and grading**

Causal mapping exercise	5%
2 SPSS exercises (10% each)	20%
Article critique	25%
Research project (35% total):	
progress (incl. reports)	15%
final papers	20%
Participation (incl. project memo)	15%

#### Causal mapping exercise

To supplement our general discussion of the logic of causal claims and analyses, we will look systematically at the opening chapter of Jason Sokol's recently-published book on "white southerners in the age of Civil Rights," *There Goes My Everything*. As you read, I would like you to map the causal claim(s) made in the chapter, and create a catalogue of the evidence Sokol employs to support his argument. We will talk more about this assignment in class.

#### SPSS exercises

These exercises are intended to provide working knowledge of how to generate basic statistical tests, and especially how to interpret the results of these tests. Throughout the second half of the semester, we will spend time in the computer lab and gain hands-on experience with SPSS. These assignments will apply and reinforce what we do in class as well as provide exposure to the types of common statistical analyses found in many journal articles.

#### Article critique

Sociologists are routinely asked to review colleagues' journal submissions, grant proposals, or conference papers. The critique in this class will provide some practice along these lines, requiring that you read an assigned journal article and comment on issues relevant to particular aspects of the authors' research design and analysis. This critique should not exceed five double-spaced pages.

#### Research project

During our first two class meetings, we will define the collective project(s) that will occupy much of our energy throughout the semester. Each week, we will devote a portion of class time to discussing these projects, reviewing progress to date and clarifying next steps. On February 28<sup>th</sup> and March 21<sup>st</sup>, you will hand in a progress report documenting your own role in the project to that point, as well as an outline of how you see the research progressing and any questions/concerns you might have. Your group's collective final product will be a set of 4-5 papers, each focused on a specific research question and written in the form of an article published in a refereed Sociology journal. Each of you will co-author at least two of these papers. You will also need to submit a final memo, summarizing your overall contribution and

reflecting on the research process. As the “proper” scope, form, and content of research articles is one of our central concerns in this course, we will spend much of our class time discussing these projects, and my expectations for your written contributions, in detail.

### Participation

I greatly value class discussion as a means to improve our understanding of the issues before us. As this class is small, and the material generally focused on narrow methodological details rather than weighty substantive concerns, I hope that discussion adds significantly to each week’s session. More generally, the experiential nature of our research work makes it absolutely essential that you work consistently and diligently to complete necessary project tasks on time. Anything less will have a significant impact on the progress of your research group overall, and potentially place your project at risk of collapse. Given these relatively high stakes, I will monitor participation closely, and take this component of your grade extremely seriously. While I understand that this course makes demands that are not typical of most undergraduate courses, I interpret your decision to enroll as a confirmation that you agree to participate to the full extent required.

**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 see me immediately.**

### Course Outline

#### Wednesday, 17 January:

- Introductory business: Data and inquiry
  - data sources (exemplars):
    - Peter Bearman. 2005. *Doormen*.
    - Jeremy Freese and Sheri Meland. 2002. “Seven-tenths Incorrect: Heterogeneity and Change in the Waist-to-hip Ratios of Playboy Centerfold Models and Miss America Pageant Winners.” *Journal of Sex Research* 39, 2.
    - Jennifer Lena. 2004. “Meaning and Membership: Samples in Rap Music, 1979-1995.” *Poetics* 32, 3-4: 297-310.
    - Kenneth T. Andrews and Michael Biggs. 2006. “The Dynamics of Protest Diffusion: Movement Organizations, Social Networks, and News Media in the 1960 Sit-Ins.” *American Sociological Review* 71, 5: 752-777.
    - Sudhir Alladi Venkatesh and Steven D. Levitt. 2000. “The Financial Activities of an Urban Street Gang.” *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 115, 3: 755-789.
- Deliberation about collective project(s)

#### Wednesday, 24 January:

- Principles of causal analysis
  - reading: Royce Singleton and Bruce Straits, *Approaches to Social Research* (Chs. 2-3)
    - James Coleman. 1994. “A Vision for Sociology.” *Society* (November): 29-34.
    - Andrew Abbott. 1997. “Of Time and Space: The Contemporary Relevance of the Chicago School.” *Social Forces* 75: 1149-1182.
- Research project(s): developing research questions

Wednesday, 31 January: No class (Brandeis Monday)

Wednesday, 7 February:

- Theory and causal relationships
  - reading: Arthur Stinchcombe. 1968. "The Logic of Scientific Inference." Pgs. 15-37 in *Constructing Social Theories* (ct)
  - Stanley Lieberson. 1992. "Einstein, Renoir, and Greeley: Evidence in Sociology." *American Sociological Review* 57: 1-18.
  - David Hackett Fischer, "Fallacies of Causation," in *Historians' Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought* (ct)
- **Causal mapping exercise due: Jason Sokol, "Prelude: In the Wake of War." Ch. 1 of *There Goes My Everything* (ct)**

Wednesday, 14 February:

- Reliability, validity, and sampling
  - reading: Singleton and Straits, *Approaches to Social Research* (Ch. 4-6)
  - Robert J. Sampson and Stephen W. Raudenbush. 1999. "Systematic Social Observation of Public Spaces: A New Look at Disorder in Urban Neighborhoods." *American Journal of Sociology* 105, 3: 603-651.

Wednesday, 21 February: No class ("midterm recess")

Wednesday, 28 February:

- Conceptualization and operationalization: Survey design and index construction
  - reading: Royce Singleton et al., *Approaches to Social Research* (Ch. 9)
  - Edward O. Laumann et al., *The Social Organization of Sexuality* (ct)
  - Richard Lewontin. 2000. "Sex, Lies, and Social Science." Pgs. 229-269 in *It Ain't Necessarily So* (ct)
  - Peter S. Bearman and Hannah Bruckner. 1999. "Promising the Future: Virginity Pledges and the Transition to First Intercourse." *American Journal of Sociology* 106, 4: 859-914.
- **Research project progress report 1 due**

Wednesday, 7 March:

- Comparative historical approaches
  - reading: Charles C. Ragin, *The Comparative Method* (Chs. 1-6)
  - Charles C. Ragin and John Sonnett. 2004. "Between Complexity and Parsimony: Limited Diversity, Counterfactual Cases, and Comparative Analysis." (Available at: <http://www.compass.org/RaginSonnett2004.PDF>)
  - James Mahoney. 1999. "Nominal, Ordinal, and Narrative Appraisal in Macrocausal Analysis." *American Journal of Sociology* 104, 4: 1154-1196.
- **Article critique due: Bert Klandermans and Dirk Oegema. 1987. "Potentials, Networks, Motivations, and Barriers: Steps Toward Participation in Social Movements." *American Sociological Review* 52: 519-531.**

Wednesday, 14 March:

- Case selection:
  - readings: James Mahoney and Gary Goertz. 2004. "The Possibility Principle: Choosing Negative Cases in Comparative Research." (Available at: [http://www.compass.org/Mahoney\\_Goertz2004.pdf](http://www.compass.org/Mahoney_Goertz2004.pdf))
  - David Collier, et al. 2004. "Claiming Too Much: Warnings About Selection Bias." Ch. 6 in *Rethinking Social Inquiry* (ct)
- Research project: Literature reviews
  - readings: Howard S. Becker. 1986. "Terrorized by the Literature." Pgs. 135-149 in *Writing for Social Scientists* (ct)
- Quantitative analysis I: Exploratory analysis
  - reading: Andy Field, *Discovering Statistics Using SPSS* (Chs. 1-3)

Wednesday, 21 March:

- Presenting and representing data
  - reading: Edward R. Tufte, *The Visual Display of Quantitative Information*
- Quantitative analysis II: Tables and graphs
- **Research project progress report 2 due**

Wednesday, 28 March:

- Variance over time and space: Diffusion modeling
  - reading: Kenneth T. Andrews. 1997. "The Civil Rights Movement and Black Electoral Politics." *American Sociological Review* 62: 800-819.
  - Glenn Deane, E.M. Beck, and Stewart Tolnay. 1998. "Incorporating Space into Social Histories: How Spatial Processes Operate and How We Observe Them." *International Review of Social History* 43: 57-80. (ct)
  - Daniel J. Myers. 2000. "The Diffusion of Collective Violence: Infectiousness, Susceptibility, and Mass Media Networks." *American Journal of Sociology* 106, 1: 173-208.
  - Jeffrey Haydu. 1998. "Making Use of the Past: Time Periods as Cases to Compare and as Sequences of Problem Solving." *American Journal of Sociology* 104, 2.
- Quantitative analysis III: Correlation
  - reading: Andy Field, *Discovering Statistics Using SPSS* (Chs. 4, 7, & 8)
- **First SPSS exercise due**

Wednesday, 4 April: No class ("spring recess")

Wednesday, 11 April:

- Social Mechanisms
  - readings: Peter Hedstrom and Richard Swedberg. 1998. "Social Mechanisms." Ch. 1 in *Social Mechanisms* (ct)
  - Charles Tilly. 1995. "To Explain Political Processes." *American Journal of Sociology* 100: 1594-1610.
  - Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly. 2001. "What Are They Shouting About?" Ch. 1 in *Dynamics of Contention* (ct)
- Quantitative analysis IV: Regression (OLS models)
  - reading: Andy Field, *Discovering Statistics Using SPSS* (Ch. 5)

Wednesday, 18 April:

- Social network models I
  - reading: Elizabeth Bott, *Family and Social Network* (ct)
  - Ronald Burt, *Structural Holes: The Social Structure of Competition* (ct)
  - James Moody, PowerPoint presentation
- Quantitative analysis V: Regression (logistic models)
  - reading: Andy Field, *Discovering Statistics Using SPSS* (Ch. 6)
- **Second SPSS exercise due**

Wednesday, 25 April:

- Social network models II
  - reading: Ronald L. Breiger. 1974. "The Duality of Persons and Groups." *Social Forces* 53: 181-190.
  - Peter S. Bearman and Kevin D. Everett. 1993. "The Structure of Social Protest, 1961-1983." *Social Networks* 15: 171-200.
  - James Moody, PowerPoint presentation

Wednesday, 2 May:

- Spillover day and course wrap-up

**Final research projects, with memo reflecting upon contribution, due (tba)**