

## **PRINCIPLES OF SOCIOLOGICAL RESEARCH<sup>1</sup>**

Sociology 30002, Autumn 2020 (Hybrid)

Tuesdays – 9:30AM – 12:20PM

Zoom Links Posted in Canvas

(occasional, optional, in-person, meetings will be held in SS 404 or in a tent outside)

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Office Hours: Tuesdays 3--5pm, please sign up using my wejoinin page:

<https://www.wejoinin.com/sheets/cvllm>

How do you make knowledge in sociology? That's what this class is about. We are going to look at issues of research design and process while also exploring the diversity of methods of sociological analysis. Further, we will be doing this in a way that helps you work towards an original research paper.

We will be doing three sorts of things in this all-too-brief quarter. We will be reading about and discussing general issues of research design. We will be reading exemplary works that use different sorts of methods. And we will be doing exercises related to our own research agendas, trying out different methods and seeing what kinds of things we can learn using them. I hope that at the conclusion you understand (1) how to choose a sociological research project that will not be a dead end; (2) how to choose a method that will help you answer your questions and will also be fun for you; (3) how to critically evaluate the presentation of evidence in support of theoretical claims.

*Principles of Sociological Research* is intended to provide an introduction to the craft of original sociological research—this involves not simply rules and recipes, but also deep familiarity with exemplary research that provides models for solving new problems. Over the course of this quarter, we will focus on three different skills: how to ask and motivate interesting questions, how to pursue those questions using different methods and kinds of evidence (specifically historical or documentary evidence; surveys, interviews, and secondary data analysis; and ethnographic and observational methods), and how to choose or combine methods in the most effective ways. This course presumes that you will go on to take advanced methods courses that will take you much further into each approach to producing sociological knowledge.

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<sup>1</sup> Syllabus Acknowledgement Statement: This syllabus benefitted greatly from syllabi/materials for courses taught by Sara Yeatman, jimi adams, Ashton Verdery, Sarah Hayford, John Levi Martin, and Robert Vargas. I'd like to acknowledge their help and influence in the development of materials for this course.

## Course Goals

The goal of the class is take you through the first stages of designing and in producing an original piece of research. Ideally, the result would be a research proposal for what might become your qualifying paper. But it is equally possible that the result is a research proposal that leads you to decide that you don't want to do, after all. I ask that you stick with one general research question this the quarter (you just don't have time to switch gears), but this is in no way binding on your ultimate choice of a topic for your qualifying paper.

Specifically, the course goals are:

- 1) To learn the fundamentals of commonly used methods of sociological research;
- 2) To make informed decisions between different research designs;
- 3) To understand the practical aspects of implementation of sociological research methods;
- 4) To critically evaluate how our own and others' methods can provide answers to sociological research questions.

## Course Learning Objectives

Students should cultivate a sophisticated understanding of how to use evidence to answer research questions. The following items are critical components of achieving this goal.

- Motivation: an informed perspective regarding the research motivations for engaging with different sociological methodologies.
- Breadth: a familiarity with numerous methodological approaches to social research that will enable participants to evaluate the appropriateness of particular approaches for given substantive inquiries ("the educated reader" standard).
- Critique: a capacity to recognize the limitations of different methodological approaches in the context of different lines of social inquiry.
- Connections: an understanding of how different methodological approaches relate to each other in the context of different inquiries, including as complements, substitutes, or alternatives.
- Tradeoffs: a recognition of the methodological compromises inherent in real-world social research and an appreciation for the ethical, moral, and legal considerations that must guide our work.
- Horizons: a process of identifying and appreciating new and diverse methods used in the social sciences that may address inadequacies among established and emerging empirical and theoretical challenges in social inquiry.

## **Assessments: What are you required to do?**

1) Attendance and active participation. This means (a) coming prepared (having done all the reading); (b) discussing the works and the results of the exercises; (c) the quality of your participation. Quality has to do with both content, engagement, and collegiality and consistency across all three. A “sophisticated” student who reads carefully and is interrupts other students isn’t enhancing the quality of the class discussion. My standard for “quality” is: *Active and respectful participation in class discussions period + active and respectful attention is required during other periods of class*. A student who engages deeply one week and has nothing to say the next failing on the consistency front. You will prepare for class by reading, but please also prepare yourself mentally for active participation each week.

2) Completion of weekly exercises. You will have to carry out a number of projects that contribute to the fleshing out of your question and the formation of a research proposal at the end. You should thus be working on your final paper, in different ways, all through the class. It may be that portions of (some of) your exercise(s) can be incorporated in your final research proposal, although it might be that they only are food for thought. Do **not** leave the entire proposal for the last week of class!

3) Research Proposal: Write a research proposal that states a sociological question and a plan for answering it. Your proposal should be as clear as possible regarding: (1) what your question is; (2) why it is important; (3) how you plan to study it (what general methodological approach); (4) your choice of site or data source; (5) your choice of methods and proposed line of investigation; (6) possible challenges and potential ways to address them. Page limit: 5 single-spaced pages.

Your grade in this course is determined by a weighted average of these three elements:

Participation 25%  
Weekly Assignments  
Proposal 25%

At the end of the quarter I will assign whole letter grades:  
90+ is an A, 80-89 B, 70-79 C. Below 70 is a failing grade.

## **Required Books**

None. I have used the challenges of this quarter as an opportunity to re-think how we source and read and have designed this course to have no. All materials are available through the Library and Library Course Reserves.

## **Essential Digital Tools for Virtual Quarter**

Zoom, Canvas, Email, Zotero

## Optional books

I have assigned one or more chapters each from Andrew Abbott's *Methods of Discovery*, Howard Becker's *Tricks of the Trade*, Kristin Luker's *Salsa Dancing into the Social Sciences*, Glenn Firebaugh's *Seven Rules for Social Research*, and John Levi Martin's *Thinking Through Methods*. These books are personal and idiosyncratic takes on how to think about sociological research from four very distinguished and very different scholars. They all have something useful to say – I would recommend that you buy the one that seems most in tune with your approach to research, based on the required chapters, and read through the rest of it when you have a chance.

Jessica Calarco's brand-new book *A Field Guide to Graduate School* promises to help students understand the "hidden curriculum," and I've selected portions for us to read together.

Sociologists often teach methods classes using one of several famous textbooks. If you didn't study sociology as an undergraduate and are approaching this material for the first time, you might want to pick up a copy of one of these to help. Yes, these are written for undergraduates, but I will consult them from time-to-time.

Bernard, H. Russell. 2012. *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. 2nd ed. SAGE Publications.

Babbie, Earl R. 2012. *The Practice of Social Research, 13th Edition*. 13th edition. Belmont, Calif: Wadsworth Publishing.

Creswell, John W. 2014. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches*. Sage.

Khan, Shamus, and Dana R. Fisher. 2013. *The Practice of Research: How Social Scientists Answer Their Questions*. 1st Edition. New York: Oxford University Press.

## Logistics

### Course Website

Course materials will be posted in Canvas. Please submit your assignments using the Canvas system each week. Check Canvas regularly or set up Canvas notifications to forward to the email account you check regularly.

### Zoom Access

The class will be held remotely by Zoom. You can access the links in Canvas.

### Communication

I hold office hours each week on Tuesdays (see header). Students may come to office hours for any reason. Please use the sign-up link (see header) 1 to set an appointment. You are welcome to email me with simple questions; however, please know that my email burden is very high this time of year, and I may take up to two business days (48 hours) to respond to your email.

## Course Policies

- *Students with Disabilities*: I will be happy to discuss appropriate academic accommodations that you may require as a student with a disability or ongoing medical condition and make reasonable accommodations. If you need any class-related accommodations, please follow the procedures outlined here: <http://disabilities.uchicago.edu/accommodations>
- *Academic Integrity*: This paragraph is probably unnecessary; still, I want to be very clear about my expectations. All the work you submit should be your own. Any suspected academic dishonesty in the form of cheating, plagiarism, and/or fraud will be reported to the DGS in Sociology and the Office of the Dean of Students in the Social Sciences Division. The University's policies regarding academic honesty and plagiarism and academic fraud are clearly stated here: <http://studentmanual.uchicago.edu/Policies>
- *Class notes*: I do not provide notes on class material for missed classes. If you miss class, it is your responsibility to locate notes from one of your classmates.
- *Incompletes*: According to university policy, incompletes are reserved for exceptional circumstances; to be eligible students must be passing the course and must meet the other criteria outlined here: <http://collegecatalog.uchicago.edu/thecollege/takingcourses/#incompletes>
- During our class sessions, I ask that you close your email client and other browsing windows and silence electronic communication devices other than the machine you are using for class. Interruptions are distracting to me and to your fellow students.
- Students should be prepared to read challenging materials on these topics and should come with a firm commitment to engage one another in respectful, open and rigorous discourse. The University's recent "Report of the Committee on the Freedom of Expression" will be our guide on this point. The Report guarantees to members of this community the "*broadest possible latitude to speak, write, listen, challenge, and learn.*" Find the full Committee Report here: <https://provost.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/documents/reports/FOECommitteeReport.pdf>.
- To ensure the free and open discussion of ideas, students may not record classroom lectures, discussion and/or activities without the advance written permission of the instructor. Any such recording properly approved in advance can be used solely for the student's own private use. Students who wish to record lectures or class activities for study purposes must inform the faculty member first. Students with approved accommodations from the Office of Disability Resources permitting the recording of class meetings must present the accommodation letter to the instructor in advance of any recording being done. On any days when classes will be recorded, the instructor will notify all students in advance. Distribution or sale of class recordings is prohibited without the written permission of the instructor and other students who are recorded. Distribution without permission is a violation of educational privacy law.

**///Class Structure ///**  
**Each week we will:**

1. Read something together about sociological research methods, memo it, and discuss it
2. Read some sociological research – these readings may not always be identical for all students. Memo it for yourself in your bibliography. Come ready to share-out in class about what you read.
3. Read something about the craft of research – with an emphasis on writing. (If you can't get through all the reading in a particular week, skip this one. You'll learn about it from your classmates in the discussion. Worst-case, I will summarize it for you.)
4. Write and memo about our reading and research ideas. Begin to treat memo-ing – a form of writing that is both preliminary and public -- as scholarly practice.

**Overview of Topics**

Week 1, September 29, Introductions

Week 2, October 6, Research Epistemologies

Week 3, October 13, Experimental Approaches and Causation

Week 4, October 20, Observational Research

Week 5, October 27, Sampling

Week 6, November 3, Ethics & Elizabeth Foster from Library & Election Day (3Es)

Week 7, November 10, Measurement & Validity

Week 8, November 17, Mapping Subfields in Sociology

Week 9, November 24, NO CLASS THANKSGIVING BREAK

Week 10, December 1, Grantsmanship & Publishing

\*\*\*Weekly memos/assignments are due at noon on Mondays.

## Detailed Reading List

### Week 1, September 29, Introductions

Chambliss, Daniel F. 1989. "The Mundanity of Excellence: An Ethnographic Report on Stratification and Olympic Swimmers." *Sociological Theory* 7(1):70–86.

Smith-Lovin, Lynn, and Cary Moskovitz. 2016. *Writing in Sociology: A Brief Guide*. 1st Edition. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. (Preface, Chapter 1 & Chapter 2). Free access thru Library Collection

Abbott, Andrew. 2014. *Digital Paper: A Manual for Research and Writing with Library and Internet Materials*. University of Chicago Press. (Excerpt: Modes of Reading)

Turn in: Nothing to turn in during our first meeting.

Do it for yourself: (Do it today!) Set up a free Zotero account. Download the stand-alone application. (Browser extension optional). Play around with feeding in a few papers and setting up libraries.

### Week 2, October 6, Research Epistemologies and Asking Questions

Abbott, Andrew Delano. 2004. *Methods of Discovery: Heuristics for the Social Sciences*. New York: W.W. Norton. Ch1 Explanation & Ch 2 Basic Debates (p. 1-79). Free e-book available through Regenstein Library Hathi Trust Emergency Access.

Clemens, Elisabeth S. 2015. "Organizing Powers in Eventful Times." *Social Science History* 39(1):1–24.

Shore, Zachary. 2016. *Grad School Essentials: A Crash Course in Scholarly Skills*. First Edition. Oakland, California: University of California Press. Chapter 2, How to Read. [Free e-book through Library Catalog]

Turn in: I will assign to each student 1 particular issue of ASR and 1 particular issue of AJS from the past 10 years. Skim the empirical articles (skip book reviews and commentary) and write-up a brief paragraph about what methods the article uses and the kind of epistemological stance it seems to take. You do not have to read these articles carefully. You are just skimming the articles to be able to "file" them in the appropriate categories. Read both Abbott and Shore and give yourself enough time to DIGEST those readings before you begin this exercise. Use the vocabulary and categories from Abbott's sections about Methods and Debates as your criteria. In addition to memo-ing these 2 issues of each journal, include Clemens in the exercise. This is our "common" sociological reading for the week.

### Week 3. Experimental Approaches

Calarco, Jessica McCrory. 2020. *A Field Guide to Grad School: Uncovering the Hidden Curriculum*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press. (Introduction and Chapter 2, Building Your Team.)

Baldassarri, Delia, and Maria Abascal. 2017. "Field Experiments Across the Social Sciences." *Annual Review of Sociology* 43(1):41–73.

Pager, Devah, and Lincoln Quillian. 2005. "Walking the Talk? What Employers Say Versus What They Do." *American Sociological Review* 355–80.

Willer, Robb, Christabel L. Rogalin, Conlon, and Michael T. Wojnowicz. 2013. "Overdoing Gender: A Test of the Masculine Overcompensation Thesis." *American Journal of Sociology* 118(4):980–1022.

+1 experimental paper of your choosing from a sociology journal.

You will probably start with google scholar; but please try to move towards using more professional tools. You will present a critical summary of this paper to the class, and your presentation should accomplish two things.

- (1) Briefly present the study to the class, including the basic research question, general approach, hypotheses (if relevant), and results (if available).
- (2) Describe in more detail one decision about research design that the researchers made, how they might have decided differently, and what the implications of that decision are. You could describe a positive innovation (e.g., the researchers chose a different measurement approach than is common in the literature, and that allowed them more precision) or a limitation (e.g., the researchers analyzed a restricted sample and that limited generalizability). In many (if not most) cases, the decision could have both positive and negative implications.

You may focus on some of the basic elements of research design (approach to causality, sampling and generalizability, operationalization and measurement) or decisions particular to the method. The more specific you can be, the better. Your presentation should last 8-10 minutes. You should practice your presentation to make sure you get to the required points within this time limits. (I will cut you off at 10 minutes; I expect that most people will be able to cover the required material in less time.) You should plan to cover point (1) in 3 minutes at most and spend most of your time on point (2). You should be prepared to answer some questions from other students, though it is not expected that you necessarily be able to answer every question.

Turn in: Memo your reading (500-750 words) with a focus on the criteria for causation. Include your +1 paper in this write-up, including an explanation for how you settled on this one, as opposed to others you could have read.

Do it for yourself: Summarize/react to articles within your Zotero file. Copy/paste the best portions of your memo into your notes and reflections.



#### Week 4. Observational Research (Ethnography, Surveys, In-Depth Interviews)

Our topic for this week is migration at the US/Mexico border. Students will read 4 papers on this topic; all use a different method.

Massey, Douglas S., Jorge Durand, and Karen A. Pren. 2016. "Why Border Enforcement Backfired." *American Journal of Sociology* 121(5):1557–1600.

Menjívar, Cecilia, and Sarah M. Lakhani. 2016. "Transformative Effects of Immigration Law: Immigrants' Personal and Social Metamorphoses through Regularization." *American Journal of Sociology* 121(6):1818–55.

Shapira, Harel. 2013. *Waiting for José: The Minutemen's Pursuit of America*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. [excerpts]

Flores, René D. 2017. "Do Anti-Immigrant Laws Shape Public Sentiment? A Study of Arizona's SB 1070 Using Twitter Data." *American Journal of Sociology* 123(2):333–84.

Luker, Kristin. 2009. *Salsa Dancing into the Social Sciences*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. (Chapters 4 & 5; What is This a Case Of? Reviewing the Literature.) [Access through Library Collection free e-book]

Turn it in: Write a memo <1000 words that synthesizes the findings from these articles at the border and reflect on the methodological choices these authors made. Two areas to focus on include: 1) applying the vocabulary of methods and debates in your analysis (just like you did last week).

Do it for yourself: Free-write about what you're interested in for a few minutes (30) at least 2x this week, with a focus on the topics. After writing, go back through what you wrote and try to convert those topics into research questions – a la Jeopardy – stated as questions.

## Week 5. Sampling

Bernard, H. Russell. 2012. *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. 2nd ed. SAGE Publications. (Chapters 5, 6, 7 on Sampling).

Firebaugh, Glenn. 2008. *Seven Rules for Social Research*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. (Chapters 1 & 2).

Small, Mario Luis. 2009. “‘How Many Cases Do I Need?’ On Science and the Logic of Case Selection in Field-Based Research.” *Ethnography* 10(1):5–38.

+1 (x4) of your own readings, curated to focus on a specific topic

Turn it in: Applied Example

This list of readings for this week is short and does not contain any exemplars of sociological research. That's because you will select your own substantive readings for this week. Each students will generate their own applied example by identifying papers that using different observational methods to approach a similar topic or research questions. Your goal is to curate a set of papers like the one I put together for Wave 4. You can select any combination of four articles, books, conference presentations, or other scholarly products. In <1500 words, briefly describe the research question and research design of the examples. Compare and contrast the research questions, the research design, and how the two fit together. How does the design match the question in each case? In keeping with our topic for the week, make sure you specifically address the issue of sampling. Please provide complete citation information. I recommend that you select from top-tier journals in sociology. We'll talk in class about what that means.

Do it for yourself: Keep freewriting this week. And go back over the text and questions you developed last week. See if you can improve them, make them sharper.

Week 6, November 3, Ethics & Elizabeth Foster from Library & Election Day (3Es)

\*\*\*Elizabeth Foster – visiting from Library

The Commission. 1979. *The Belmont Report: Ethical Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research*. Bethesda, MD.

Blee, Kathleen M., and Ashley Currier. 2011. "Ethics Beyond the IRB: An Introductory Essay." *Qualitative Sociology* 34(3):401.

Erikson, Kai T. 1967. "A Comment on Disguised Observation in Sociology." *Social Problems* 14(4):366–73.

Martin, John Levi. 2017. *Thinking Through Methods: A Social Science Primer*. University of Chicago Press. Chapter 6, Ethics in research.

Khan, Shamus. 2019. "The Subpoena of Ethnographic Data." *Sociological Forum* 34(1):253–63.

**Turn in: Do your CITI training; upload a certificate. Draft a short, substantive memo (500-750 words) about ethics in relation to your own research agenda, reflecting on the readings.**

## Week 7, November 10, Operationalization & Measurement of Complex Ideas

Horne, Christine, F. Nii-Amoo Dodoo, and Naa Dodua Dodoo. 2013. "The Shadow of Indebtedness: Bridewealth and Norms Constraining Female Reproductive Autonomy." *American Sociological Review* 78(4):503–20. (Reproductive Autonomy)

Review Chambliss from Week 1 and read the 1992 exchange with Tia DeNora (1992) in *Sociological Theory*. This will allow us to continue the conversation we started about Chambliss during Week 1. (Excellence, Talent.)

Bell, Joyce M., and Douglas Hartmann. 2007. "Diversity in Everyday Discourse: The Cultural Ambiguities and Consequences of 'Happy Talk.'" *American Sociological Review* 72(6):895–914. (Diversity).

Trinitapoli, Jenny, and Sara E. Yeatman. 2011. "Uncertainty and Fertility in a Generalized AIDS Epidemic." *American Sociological Review* 76(6):935–54. (Uncertainty)

+1 paper that addresses a complex idea you plan to engage in your own research

Eco, Umberto, and Francesco Erspamer. 2015. *How to Write a Thesis*. MIT University Press. (excerpts thru Library Reserves)

Turn in two things this week: Short memo about operationalization that focuses on internal and external validity. Outline of your research proposal. This can be drafty, but I need to see where you are with your project. Submissions will be visible to other students, who will be asked to comment on your proposal. Structure for the outline will be distributed during Week 6.

Week 8, November 17, Mapping Subfields and Understanding Debates  
Read on Your Own using the Mapping subfields assignment in Canvas

Calarco, Jessica McCrory. 2020. *A Field Guide to Grad School: Uncovering the Hidden Curriculum*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press. (Chapter 6: Doing and Funding your Research & Chapter 8: Publishing and Promoting Your Work).

Turn it in: Mapping subfields assignment  
Comment on 2 colleague's outlines [I will assign you specific people to review during week 7.]

Week 9, November 24, NO CLASS THANKSGIVING BREAK

Week 10, December 1, Empirical Perspectives on Current Trends in the Discipline:  
Reading, Publishing, Funding, and the Craft of Research

Warren, John Robert. 2019. "How Much Do You Have to Publish to Get a Job in a Top Sociology Department? Or to Get Tenure? Trends over a Generation." *Sociological Science* 6:172–96.

Abbott, Andrew. 2016. "The Demography of Scholarly Reading." *The American Sociologist* 47(2):302–18.

Leahey, Erin. 2008. "Methodological Memes and Mores: Toward a Sociology of Social Research." *Annual Review of Sociology* 34(1):33–53.

May, Matthew, and David Smilde. 2018. "Does Funding Impact Our Research? Causality, Normativity, and Diversity in 40 Years of U.S. Sociology of Religion." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 57(3):432–49.

Turn it in: Memo on reading, funding, publishing, and the craft of research – tie the readings to where you see your own work going. <1000 words

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Final Papers (Research Proposals) are due on December 15 at 10am

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