1. 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, reading and discussion, 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.

To help you in this endeavor, the first half of this (year long!) course is structured around several key issues impacting sociological research today, including theory, causality, mechanisms, inference, case studies and argument. Presumably at least one (and probably many or all) of these issues affects or will affect your research in some way. The goal of the course is therefore for you to draw from what we read

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1 This document serves as a general plan for the course and will likely change throughout the semester. Any deviations from the current document will be announced in class and on the course website.
and discuss together in class about these issues and think about how they might impact (and hopefully improve!) your current research project.

Through this process, students in this class will...

(1) Develop their knowledge and understanding of sociological research methods.

(2) Receive feedback from faculty and peers on current research projects.

(3) Contribute to their classmates’ ongoing research, through constructive review and discussion

(4) Develop knowledge of the basic process of writing an empirically based article for submission to a sociology journal.

2. Readings

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

3. Course requirements

Attendance
This is required for each class meeting. This class will only work, be interesting and productive for you if everyone is present and prepared to participate. Please try to be on time out of respect for all of us. If you cannot attend class for religious or health reasons, please email Wendy or Mike ASAP.

Participation
This is also required. What will essentially happen each time we meet in class is that the first half of class will be spent discussing the substantive topic ("issue") that the assigned reading is about; the second half will be spent discussing a research project in progress and asking how the topic relates to the project and how it might improve it.

Presentation
Yep, that’s right... this is also required! Students will be asked to present their research at least once during the year (and maybe twice, given our small numbers). When thinking about when to present (especially during the fall semester) you might consider whether one of the topics we’ll be discussing is particularly relevant or problematic for your research topic and present on that day. (However, the hope
is that all of these topics impact your research in some way... so never fear! We’ll make the day’s topic relevant for your project.

Please circulate your materials by 5pm the Thursday before the Thursday you will present. Anything can be circulated—outlines, proposals, data, memos, etc—as long as it relates to an ongoing research project. It would also be helpful to include a note explaining what you are sending to the group and what kind of feedback would be most helpful.

Assignments
In addition to presenting, there will be two written assignments for this class...

**Due Date: December 3**
Please submit 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 us a sense of where you are with the paper and what you hope to accomplish by the end of the spring semester. It could be helpful to include some discussion of the readings 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.

**Due Date: April 28**
Please submit 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 a 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 us know early in the semester so we can work on this assignment together.
4. 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 of 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 😊*

5. Other things

**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](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 Linnihan ([klinneha@brandeis.edu](mailto:klinneha@brandeis.edu), x63418)

6. Course schedule

**September 3 – What do sociologists do?**

**Required reading:**

- Mayer Zald, “Sociology as a discipline: quasi-science and quasi-humanities”
- Stephen Turner, “What can we say about the future of social science?”
- Art Stinchcome, “Making a living in sociology in the 21st century”

**Optional reading:**

- Karl Popper, ”Three theses on epistemology and the third world”
- John Levi Martin, “Having an awesome CV!”
September 17 – Theory

Required reading:

• Gabriel Abend, “The meanings of ‘theory’”

Optional reading:

• Risto Heiskala, “Evidence and interest in social theory”
• Stefan Timmermans and Iddo Tavory, “Theory construction in qualitative research: from grounded theory to abductive analysis”

October 1 – Causality

Required reading:

• John Goldthorpe, “Causation, statistics and sociology”
• Gabriel Abend, Caitlin Petre, and Michael Sauder, “Styles of causal thought: an empirical investigation”

Optional reading:

• Daniel Hirschman and Isaac Reed, “Formation Stories and Causality in Sociology”

October 15 – Colloquium Day

Required reading:

No reading


Class discussion with Dr Porsdam will follow

October 29 – Mechanisms
Required reading:

- James Mahoney, “Beyond correlational analysis: recent innovations in theory and method”

Optional reading:

- Peter Hedstrom and Richard Swedberg, “Social mechanisms”

November 11 – Explanation and inference

Required reading:

- Lyn Spillman, “Mixed methods and the logic of qualitative inference”

Optional reading:

- Mario Small, “How many cases do it need?”

December 3 – Making an (interesting) argument

Required reading:


- Murray Davis, “That's interesting! Toward a phenomenology of sociology and a sociology of phenomenology”