

Paradigms of Social Inquiry (Soc 128)

Tue/Thur 10-11:30, 213 Server Hall

Instructor

David Gibson
564 William James Hall
dgibson@wjh.harvard.edu
5-3825

Office hours: Wed. 1-3

Teaching Fellows

Alison Denton Jones
Office hours: Thur. 4-6,
609 WJH

Jundai Liu
Office hours: Thur. 2-4,
576 WJH

Description: As a science, sociology uses various tools to establish knowledge about the social world, including knowledge about the causal connection between variables, how people think and respond to their life circumstances, and how conjunctures of historical conditions precipitate particular events. The purpose of this course is to introduce students to different methods, focusing on the assumptions behind each, and the kind of information each yields. These methods include quantitative/statistical analysis, interviewing, ethnography, comparative-historical and archival research, content analysis, experimentation, and computer simulation. Requirements include three written assignments, two examinations, and section attendance and participation. The class is a prerequisite to Sociology 156, and is open to Sociology concentrators.

Course web page: www.courses.fas.harvard.edu/~soc128/

- Readings
- Assignments
- Writing resources
- Sociology links
- Announcements
- Exam preparation
- Sociologists in the news

Required books (available at the Harvard Coop, and on reserve at Lamont):

Conley, Dalton. *The Pecking Order: Which Siblings Succeed and Why* (Pantheon, 2004).

Duneier, Mitchell. *Sidewalk* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999).

Fischer, Claude, et al. *Inequality by Design: Cracking the Bell Curve Myth* (Princeton University Press, 1996).

Gould, Roger. *Insurgent Identities: Class, Community, and Protest in Paris from 1848 to the Commune* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

Lamont, Michele. *Money, Morals, and Manners* (University of Chicago Press, 1992).

Also on reserve: Babbie, Earl. *The Practice of Social Research* (Wadsworth, 2000).

Additional readings are available on the class web site, as .pdf files or links.

Requirements

• **Paper #1: Quantitative and qualitative methods in Conley's *The Pecking Order*** (maximum of 10 points). Conley's conclusions are based on a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. Write an essay on the kinds of claims he makes based on each. Summarize both the main findings associated with each method, and then, at the end, discuss in more general terms the sorts of things one can learn from each approach. Note that Conley is not always explicit in saying how he reached a given conclusion; you should acknowledge such ambiguities. Expected length: 5-8 pages.

• **Paper #2: Interviewing** (maximum of 15 points). You will conduct two interviews with Harvard undergraduates, in an effort to explore what critical factors and life events that, in their view, brought them to Harvard. Avoid students in Soc 128, and select your subjects with an eye for diversity in background. More details will be provided later. Expected length: 8-10 pages.

• **Midterm** (maximum of 20 points). This will be an in-class exam, with format ranging from short definitions to medium-length essays.

• **Final exam** (maximum of 25 points). This will be a cumulative exam, of the same format as the midterm, only longer.

• **Mini-research proposal** (maximum of 20 points). You will write a short research proposal including a research question and a description of the methods you propose to use to address it. A good proposal is one that (a) poses an interesting sociological question; (b) makes judicious use of methods and concepts from the readings and lectures; (c) is feasible (i.e., doesn't require any super-human [or unethical] feats of data collection); and (d) is logically organized and well-written. More detailed guidelines will be posted on the web site. You are urged to consult with the instructor and/or TF about this project prior to the end of the semester. Expected length: 8-10 double-spaced pages.

• **Section attendance, participation, and assignments** (maximum of 10 points). Because of the sheer quantity of material that must be covered during the semester, optimal use must be made of the sections, as a venue for discussion, clarification, and, on occasion, the presentation of new material. Attendance is thus required, and a high attendance/participation grade will further require regular participation manifestly informed by your study of the required texts and lecture notes, and completion of any assignments issued by the TF (e.g., reading memos). The TF will coordinate section scheduling, with the expectation that sections will begin 1-2 weeks after the start of the semester.

All assignments are due on the dates given below, in paper form. Late assignments will be docked ½ point per day late, inclusive of weekends. No work will be accepted after the end of the examination period, unless you have successfully petitioned the Administrative Board.

Other issues:

Writing: Your written assignments will be graded not only for content but for logic, clarity, and mechanics. Remember to proofread your work carefully. When assignments are returned, take note of any corrections or recommendations, and incorporate these into later writings. Help with writing can be obtained from the Writing Center. Additional writing resources can be found on the course web page. Some tips:

1. All papers should have introductory and concluding paragraphs.
2. Write plainly, and avoid rhetorical flourishes.
3. Avoid moral evaluations.
4. Avoid claims that you cannot back up. Only state something as a fact if you have supporting evidence, or you can cite someone reputable who does, or it is something truly self-evident.
5. In your final proposal, do not write as if you already have the results in hand, or know for sure what they're going to be.

6. Use the thesaurus sparingly. So-called synonyms are rarely truly synonymous, and you should never use a thesaurus in an attempt to create the impression that your vocabulary is larger than it actually is.
7. Quote written sources sparingly.
8. Use in-text citations of the format (Gibson 2004, p. 12) or (Gibson 2004:12), and then provide full bibliographic information at the end of the paper. (The format of the bibliography is up to you – the important thing is that you give me enough information that I can locate your sources if I’m so inclined.)
9. DON’T FORGET PAGE NUMBERS!

Academic honesty: Any work submitted must be your own, and all sources must be carefully documented. Harvard requires that cases of suspected plagiarism be reported, with severe consequences for anyone found guilty. Consult *Writing with Sources*, available from the Writing Center (there’s a link on the course web page), for advice and guidelines.

Final grades

93-100% = A	87-89% = B+	77-79% = C+	67-69% = D+
90-92% = A-	83-86% = B	73-76% = C	63-66% = D
	80-82% = B-	70-72% = C-	60-62% = D-
			< 60% = E

Note that *all final grades are final*, unless a calculation error was made. Under no other circumstances will a course grade be changed.

Course schedule

Date	Lecture topic	Reading	Exams & due
Sept. 21	Introduction		
Sept. 23	Variables & causation	Conley, <i>The Pecking Order</i> , including Appendix.	
Sept. 28			
Sept. 30			
Oct. 5			
Oct. 7			
Oct. 12	Measurement, surveys	Fischer et al., <i>Inequality by Design</i> . Appendix 1, Chs. 1-4.	Assignment #1
Oct. 14		"Sense and Nonsense about Surveys"*	
Oct. 19			
Oct. 21			
Oct. 26	Interviewing	Lamont, <i>Money, Morals, and Manners</i> . Prologue, chs. 1-7, Appendix 3.	Midterm
Oct. 28			
Nov. 2	Interviewing (cont.)		
Nov. 4			
Nov. 9			
Nov. 11	Veterans' Day		
Nov. 16	Ethnography	"The Promise and Pitfalls of Going into the Field"*	
Nov. 18		Duneier, <i>Sidewalk</i> . Introduction, parts 1-5, Appendix.	
Nov. 23			
Nov. 25	Thanksgiving		
Nov. 30	Historical	Gould, <i>Insurgent Identities</i> . Chs. 1-7.	Assignment #2
Dec. 2			
Dec. 7			
Dec. 9	Content analysis	Griswold, "American Character and the American Novel"‡	
Dec. 14	Experiments	"The Power of Experiments"* Katz et al., "Leadership Stability"*	
Dec. 16	Computer simulation	Rauch, "Seeing Around Corners" †	
Dec. 21	Conclusion		
Winter Recess			
Jan. 14			Proposal due by 5:00
TBA			Final exam

* To be distributed

† Online under "readings"

‡ Online under "WWW Links"