

Sociology 300-301: Thesis Workshop
Fall 2009

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Office hours: Tuesdays, 2:00 – 4:00, or by appointment

Overview: This course will guide you through the early stages of the process of writing a thesis: finding and refining a topic and research questions, situating your research within the existing sociological literature, developing a plan for gathering and analyzing data, possibly beginning data-gathering, and producing a detailed research proposal. (You will complete the thesis spring semester, registering for an independent study, SOCI 399, with me or another advisor.)

The heart of this class will be ongoing discussion about your research. It is therefore extremely important that you attend each class, arrive promptly, prepared to discuss the week's reading and your own progress on your research, and complete assignments on time. You will have regular writing assignments, which will include informal memos, literature reviews, and drafts of proposals. At the end of the semester you will turn in a research proposal of approximately fifteen to twenty pages.

Readings: There are three required books, which are available at House of Our Own bookstore (3920 Spruce Street, 222-1576):

- Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams, *The Craft of Research*, 3rd edition, 2008
- Charles Lipson, *How to Write a BA Thesis*, 2005
- Andrew Abbott, *Methods of Discovery: Heuristics for the Social Sciences*, 2004

There will be occasional other assigned readings, but most of the reading you will be doing this semester will be focused on the topic of your thesis and related areas.

Summary of assignments and deadlines:

- 1) Brief memo(s) on possible research topics for appointment—September 17
- 2) Brief presentation on a thesis you've read—September 24
- 3) Second version of statement of research topic and questions; begin compiling reading list—October 1
- 4) Preliminary reading list—October 8
- 5) Memo on research design—October 15
- 6) Annotated bibliography—October 22
- 7) 5-page proposal draft—October 29
- 8) Draft of literature review—November 5
- 9) Draft of complete proposal—November 19
- 10) Final proposal; class presentation—December 3

Grading:

- 20% Class participation (including presentations)
- 20% Assignments 1-5 and 7 (assignments on research topic, questions, and design, reading list, 5-page draft)
- 20% Assignments 6 and 8 (annotated bibliography and literature review draft)
- 40% Final proposal

Schedule:

September 10: Introduction

September 17: no class. Individual meetings as scheduled.

Readings:

- Methods of Discovery*, pp. xi-xii ("To the Reader") and pp. 80-92 (the first two sections of Chapter 3)
- The Craft of Research*, pp. 1-67.
- How to Write a BA Thesis*, Section I (pp. 3-34).

Assignment: Depending on how focused you are in your thinking, do one of the following:

- a) Write at least a one-page memo presenting an idea for a research project. You may write informally and need not have worked out precisely what your question is or how you propose to answer it, though feel free to try. Do explain what interests you about the topic and suggest directions the research might take. You're not committing yourself to a topic at this point.
- b) If you aren't even ready to narrow things down that far, write several separate brief memos, just a paragraph or two each, presenting some possible areas of research. Try not to censor yourself too much. Half-baked ideas are quite acceptable at this point.

September 24:

Readings:

- Senior thesis you chose. (DO NOT WRITE IN IT. DO NOT LOSE IT.)
- Methods of Discovery*, Chaps. 1 and 2 (think of them as good medicine) and the rest of Chap. 3
- BA Thesis*, Chaps 16 and 17

Assignment: brief (5 to 10 minutes) presentation to the class about the thesis you read, describing the research questions, the data collection, and the major findings. Also give your response to the thesis: what did it do well? What was or wasn't persuasive? How does it compare to published sociological work you have read?

October 1:

Readings:

- Excerpts from the American Sociological Association "Code of Ethics"
<http://www.asanet.org/page.wv?section=Ethics&name=Code+of+Ethics+Table+of+Content>
s. Read "General Principles" and the following sections of "Ethical Standards": 1, 3, 11-15.
- Craft*, pp. 273-76
- BA Thesis*, Chap. 4
- Methods*, Chaps. 4 through 6

Assignment: Take Two of a statement of your research topic and questions. Include ideas about the type of method and data you will use. Bring TWO COPIES to class. You should also begin compiling the preliminary reading list which will be due next week.

October 8:

Readings:

- BA Thesis*, review pp. 28-34; read Chap 3.
Refer to handout for detailed information about citing references. We will be using ASA style.
- Craft*, skim Chap. 5; read Chap. 6; look over relevant sections of the "Appendix on Finding Sources"

Assignment: A preliminary reading list of at least 20 items, with complete citation information. Bring TWO COPIES to class.

October 15:

Readings:

- "The Art of Writing Proposals: Some Candid Suggestions for Applicants to Social Science Research Council Competitions," Adam Przeworski and Frank Salomon
http://www.ssrc.org/fellowships/art_of_writing_proposals.page
- BA Thesis*: Chaps. 5, 6, and 7
- Methods*, Chap. 7

Assignment: memo on research design. How do you intend to gather data? What will you do with it? Explain your choices in relation to your research questions. If you plan to conduct interviews or a survey, explain what kinds of people will be your respondents and how you hope to find them and include a draft of the questions you will ask. Bring TWO COPIES to class.

October 22:

Readings: your own

Assignment: annotated bibliography (approximately 8-10 pages). Choose some key readings from your reading list. For each one, give citation information, a summary of key points, and some thoughts about its relevance to your work. If it's an empirical study, note the question, kind of data, and major findings.

October 29:

Reading:

--*BA Thesis*, Chap. 8

Assignment: 5-page proposal. This should include not only your research question and methods, but also some attempt to link your work to current debates. Why should people be interested in your findings? Bring TWO COPIES to class.

November 5:

Readings:

--*Craft*, Prologue to Part III, Chaps.7 and 8

Assignment: Draft of literature review section of your proposal (approximately 5 pages). This should not just be a list of summaries. It should establish the ground you're working on. What questions are current in the literature? What has been said on the subject? What ideas are you drawing on? Hoping to build on? Aiming to contradict?

November 12: No class: individual meetings instead

Readings:

--*Craft*, Chaps. 9, 10, and 11

---*BA Thesis*, Chaps. 13 and 14

November 19:

Reading:

--*BA Thesis*, Chaps. 9, 10, and 11.

Assignment: Draft of complete proposal (15-20 pages)

Tuesday, November 24: Individual meetings as necessary

November 26: THANKSGIVING

December 3:
Class presentations

Assignment: Final proposal (15-20 pp)

Academic integrity and ethical research practices: Please review the University's Code of Academic Integrity, which you will find online at <http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/osl/acadint.html>

Research of any kind would be pointless if it didn't provide trustworthy information. Academic research is a collective enterprise in which scholars build on each other's findings, ideas, and arguments and contribute their own. We therefore need to hold each other accountable for scrupulous honesty and meticulous care about giving others' credit for their work. In the early stages of research it is especially tempting to jot down casual notes in a way that will make it difficult later to trace where you got an idea or piece of information, and it is extremely easy to take notes that combine your own words with direct quotation. You must be vigilant about keeping careful track of sources, double-checking where you should put quotation marks in your notes, and writing down page numbers for specific points and especially for direct quotations. When you use internet sources, keep track of the web addresses and the date you accessed the website (unless you've simply accessed published material online).

Researchers also have serious obligations to the people whose lives they will or could affect through their research practices and their use of data. We will spend time in class discussing the American Sociological Association's Code of Ethics. We will submit research proposals to the University's Human Subjects Review Board for approval if required. (It probably won't be.)