
Soc 304: Sociological Inquiry

Fall 2014

TR 1:30-2:55

Fowler 309

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Office hours: TR 4:30-6:00

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Welcome to Sociological Inquiry

What would the world be like if all questions were answered and all problems solved, it would be a world without scope for the imagination or depth for the soul.

– Barbara Michaels

CLASS DESCRIPTION

Other classes you have taken, both in sociology and other disciplines, had the goal of teaching you *what* we know. In this class, you will learn *how* we know what we know. We will look at the ways sociologists collect information about social phenomena with a special emphasis on what can be done to yield information that is trustworthy and useful for our theoretical understanding of social life. It assumes no background in research methods or statistics. We will talk about the scientific method, the complexities of applying methods to social research, ethics and bias, and research design. You will also study four approaches to data collection and analysis and have opportunities to try out these methods.

GRADE BREAKDOWN

Assignment	Points	% of Grade
<i>Attendance and Participation:</i>		
Contributing Questions	75	15
Pop Quizzes	25	5
<i>Proposal Question and the Literature:</i>		
Exploring Your Research Idea	50	10
Literature Review	100	20
<i>Proposal Methodology:</i>		
Exploring Your Methods	50	10
Methods	100	20
<i>Final Research Proposal</i>	100	20
Total	500	100

SENIORS: If you are concurrently enrolled in Senior Comprehensives, this class will be most useful to you if you follow an alternative timeline for assignment deadlines. Let's talk.

REQUIRED READING

Textbook. *Making Sense of the Social World: Methods of Investigation* by Daniel Chambliss and Russell Schutt. Available at the Occidental College Bookstore.

Course Reader. The course reader can be accessed through Moodle (<http://moodle.oxy.edu/>).

COURSE POLICIES

- *Office Hours:* I encourage you to make an appointment outside of office hours or come by my office anytime. I am happy to discuss class concepts, college more generally, musings about majors, future planning, or graduate school.
- *Feedback:* I love getting feedback on my teaching and how the class is going. I value your input and I am willing to make changes to the class according to your preferences. Please share with me any comments, suggestions, and ideas you may have, and help me make this a great class. If you would like to do so anonymously, you can type and print out a note and drop it in my mailbox in Swan.
- *Class Demeanor:* As a student at Occidental and as a member of this class you must hold yourself and your peers to the highest standards of civil engagement and discourse. Chatting with your neighbor is frowned upon when I am lecturing and it is absolutely impermissible when other students are trying to participate. While we may find ourselves disagreeing, we must do so with respect, a commitment to hearing what others have to say, and a willingness to think and rethink our own positions. Personal insults have no place in the college classroom.
- *Special Accommodations/Learning Differences:* If you require assistance for classes or exams, please let me know as soon as possible. I will do whatever I can to help. If you have questions or concerns about what constitutes a learning disability, I encourage you to contact the friendly folks over at the Center for Academic Excellence.
- *Accessibility:* I want my course to be as accessible to as many different people as possible. If there is any reason why the standard approach to college classrooms or coursework is difficult for you to accomplish, please come talk to me. This includes those of you with a learning or physical disability (as discussed above), those of you who have other emotional or psychological challenges, those of you who have had past experiences that make college attendance or class content anxiety-producing, those of you whose parents did not go to college (and can't help you understand the system as well as other parents might), those of you who are too shy to actively participate, those of you who have more responsibility than the typical college student (such as dependent parents, children, or an especially heavy workload outside of school), and other situations I can't anticipate. The earlier you come to see me, the more I can do to try to work with you to alleviate the unique disadvantages you might face. I prefer that you come in the first two weeks but, if you do not and you decide you would like to, please do not hesitate to come to me at any time.
- *Grading Inquires:* All inquires/disagreements regarding grades will be handled during my office hours or at another mutually agreeable time.

- *Make-up Exams:* Make-up exams will generally not be given without appropriate official documentation excusing the absence. Bring documentation with you to my office when you inquire about a make-up.
- *Assignments:* Papers/assignments must be handed in at the scheduled time and by the assigned mode. Late assignments are docked ½ grade per day. Computer and printing problems are not a good excuse for missing a deadline; make sure to print your papers early to avoid any such problems. Keep a paper and electronic copy of everything you hand in until you receive your course grade.
- *Academic Integrity:* Academic integrity violations, including plagiarism, will be taken very seriously. If you are not sure about what constitutes a violation of academic integrity, please see me as soon as possible. A description of Occidental's academic ethics policies is available in the Student Handbook and on the following webpage: www.oxy.edu/student-handbook/academic-ethics
- *Flexibility:* This syllabus only provides an approximate schedule for the course. I will discuss changes to the syllabus in class. It is your responsibility to keep up to date on class events and requirements. In addition, I reserve the right to give in-class quizzes on the readings if necessary (and re-calculate the distribution of graded material in accordance with this change).

LETTER GRADES

Letter grades in this class have the following meaning:

- A *Outstanding performance.* You have demonstrated very thorough knowledge and understanding of all the material, truly superior critical thinking, and expressed insightful and original thoughts clearly. You have completed all required assignments and they have been among the best in the class.
- B *Good performance.* You have demonstrated solid knowledge and understanding of the material and good critical thinking. You have also shown the ability to express your ideas clearly. You have completed all required assignments and they have been of good quality.
- C *Satisfactory performance.* You have demonstrated basic knowledge and understanding of the major concepts taught in the class and some critical thinking. You have completed all or most of the required assignments and they have routinely been free of significant problems.
- D *Deficient performance.* You have only acquired a limited understanding of the class material. You have failed to complete all the required assignments and they have routinely had serious problems.
- F *Failure.* You have failed to learn a sufficient proportion of the basic concepts and ideas taught in the class. You have failed to complete many required assignments and they have routinely had serious problems.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Thursday, Aug. 28th – Introduction

No readings.

Tuesday, Sept. 2nd – What is Sociology?

Group 1: Wade, *The Social Control of Mothers*

Group 2: Sharp and Wade, *What is “Indian Art”?*

Group 3: Wade and Sharp, *Skull Face and the Self-Fulfilling Stereotype*

Group 4: Sharp and Wade, *Social Struggle and the American Mustang*

Thursday, Sept. 4th – What are Sociological Research Methods?

All: C&S, Chapter 1: Science, Society, and Social Research (all)

C&S, Chapter 2: The Process and Problems of Social Research (pp. 21-31)

Tuesday, Sept. 9th – Exploring Our Case Study: Civilian Fatalities at the Hands of Police

All: Using our library website, find Sociological Abstracts. Using the database, find, print, and read two articles of your choosing that you deem relevant to our case study. Come to class with your articles and be prepared to discuss the research questions, research methods, and findings.

Methods Workshops

Thursday, Sept. 11th – Content Analysis

All: Schitt, *Secondary Data Analysis and Content Analysis* (pp. 469-483)

C&S, Chapter 4: Conceptualization and Measurement (pp. 73-79)

Wade, *Defining Gendered Oppression*

DUE: ♦ One question about the methods in *Defining Gendered Oppression*.

Tuesday, Sept. 16th – Content Analysis

All: TBD: a previous student’s Senior Comprehensives paper

Group 1: Zurbriggen & Sherman, *Race and Gender in the 2008 US Presidential Election*

Group 2: Pruitt & Krull, *Escort Advertisements and Male Patronage of Prostitutes*

Group 3: Malone et al., *Science in the News*

Group 4: Barron and Kimmel, *Sexual Violence in Three Pornographic Media*

DUE: ♦ One question about the methods in your assigned reading.

♦ One question about the methods in the Senior Comprehensives paper.

Thursday, Sept. 18th – Content Analysis

All: Three newspaper articles of your choice about the killing of Mike Brown by Darren Wilson in Ferguson, MO or the aftermath.

DUE: ♦ **A research question about civilian fatalities at the hands of police that could be answered with content analysis.**

Tuesday, Sept. 23rd – Surveys

All: Wade, *The Incidental Orgasm*
C&S, Chapter 4: Conceptualization and Measurement (pp. 79-101)
C&S, Chapter 5: Sampling (all)
C&S, Chapter 7: Survey Research (all)

DUE: ♦ **One question about the methods in *The Incidental Orgasm*.**

Thursday, Sept. 25th – Surveys

All: TBD: a previous student's Senior Comprehensives paper
Group 1: Tuch & Hughes, *Whites' Racial Policy Attitudes in the Twenty-First Century*
Group 2: Freese et al., *Rebel without a Cause or Effect*
Group 3: Hannon, *Race, Victim Precipitated Homicide, and the Subculture of Violence Thesis*
Group 4: Ellison et al., *Gender, Marital Status, and Alcohol Behavior*

DUE: ♦ **One question about the methods in your assigned reading.**
♦ **One question about the methods in the Senior Comprehensives paper.**

Tuesday, Sept. 30th – Surveys

No readings.

DUE: ♦ **A research question about civilian fatalities at the hands of police that could be answered with surveys.**

Thursday, Oct. 2nd – Interviews

All: C&S, Chapter 9: Qualitative Methods (pp. 221-223, 235-244)
All: Wade, *The Politics of Acculturation*

DUE: ♦ **One question about the methods in *The Politics of Acculturation*.**

Tuesday, Oct. 7th – No class.

Thursday, Oct. 9th – Interviews

- All: TBD: a previous student's Senior Comprehensives paper
Group 1: Eck, *Nudity and Framing*
Group 2: Edin, *What Do Low-Income Single Mothers Say about Marriage?*
Group 3: Wilkins, *Puerto Rican Wannabes*
Group 4: Weinberg & Williams, *Fecal Matters*

DUE: ♦ **One question about the methods in your assigned reading.**
 ♦ **One question about the methods in the Senior Comprehensives paper.**

Tuesday, Oct. 14th – No class.

Thursday, Oct. 16th – Interviews

No readings.

DUE: ♦ **A research question about civilian fatalities at the hands of police that could be answered with interviews.**

Tuesday, Oct. 21st – No class.

Thursday, Oct. 23rd – No class.

Tuesday, Oct. 28th – Ethnography

- All: C&S, Chapter 9: Qualitative Methods (pp. 223-235)
All: Wade, *The Emancipatory Promise of the Habitus*

DUE: ♦ **One question about the methods in *The Emancipatory Promise of the Habitus*.**

Thursday, Oct. 30th – Ethnography

- All: TBD: a previous student's Senior Comprehensives paper
Group 1: Desmond, *Becoming a Firefighter*
Group 2: Salzinger, *Manufacturing Sexual Subjects*
Group 3: Warren, *Pride, Shame and Stigma in Private Spaces*
Group 4: Dordick, *More than a Refuge*

DUE: ♦ **One question about the methods in your assigned reading.**
 ♦ **One question about the methods in the Senior Comprehensives paper.**

Tuesday, Nov. 4th – Ethnography

No readings.

DUE: ♦ **A research question about civilian fatalities at the hands of police that could be answered with ethnography.**

Writing a Research Proposal

Thursday, Nov. 6th – Picking a Research Question

All: Graff & Birkenstein, Introduction
 Graff & Birkenstein, “They Say”

Tuesday, Nov. 11th – Reviewing the Literature

All: C&S, Chapter 12: Reviewing, Proposing, and Reporting Research (pp. 312-325)
 C&S, Appendix A: Finding Information (all)

DUE: ♦ **Exploring Your Research Idea**

Thursday, Nov. 13th – Individual Meetings

No readings.

Meetings available Tuesday and Thursday 1:30-6:00 and Wednesday 2:30-5:30.

Tuesday, Nov. 18th – Designing the Methodology

All: C&S, Chapter 3: Ethics in Research (all)
 ASA Code of Ethics

Optional: C&S, Chapter 8: Elementary Quantitative Data Analysis
 C&S, Chapter 10: Qualitative Data Analysis
 C&S, Appendix B: Secondary Data Sources

DUE: ♦ **Proposal Literature Review**

Thursday, Nov. 20th – Individual Meetings

No readings.

Meetings available Tuesday and Thursday 1:30-6:00 and Wednesday 2:30-5:30.

DUE: ♦ **Exploring Your Methods**

Tuesday, Nov. 25th – Individual Meetings

No readings.

Meetings available Tuesday and Thursday 1:30-6:00 and Wednesday 2:30-5:30.

Thursday, Nov. 27th – Individual Meetings

No readings.

Meetings available Tuesday and Thursday 1:30-6:00 and Wednesday 2:30-5:30.

DUE: ♦ Proposal Methodology

Tuesday, Dec. 2nd – Individual Meetings

No readings.

Meetings available Tuesday and Thursday 1:30-6:00 and Wednesday 2:30-5:30.

Final Exam Hour

DUE: ♦ Final Research Proposal (at the beginning of the final exam period)

ASSIGNMENTS

Assignment #1: Exploring Your Research Idea

Answer question (1), then spend some time in the library looking at the existing literature. Use the Sociological Abstracts database accessible through the Occidental College Library. You should skim at least 30 articles in an effort to discover what we already know and what might be a new question to ask. This is just the beginning of your effort to understand the existing literature.

After some exploration of the literature, answer questions (2) as best you can.

Question (3) should be one sentence; up to three, maybe. Don't try to explain your research question, just ask it. As we will have discussed in class, a good research question is specific, rich, humble, and foolproof.

In question (4), convince me that your project will be distinctly sociological with references to what makes sociology a unique field of study. Hint: social justice concerns, the study of something we know nothing about, and the descriptive data are not in themselves sociological.

Your final document should be one to three pages long, single-spaced.

Questions:

1. What is your case?
2. What hole in the literature are you trying to fill? Is it a descriptive or theoretical hole? How so?
3. What is your research question?
4. How is this research project sociological?

Assignment #2: Literature Review

The literature review portion of your research proposal is designed to convince the reader that:

- (1) you are familiar with the existing research,
- (2) the existing research is inadequate, and
- (3) your particular research question will help strengthen our understanding.

A strong approach to this assignment will include:

- *Picking a topic/theoretical question you're interested in.* Go into the assignment with an idea of what you're interested in, but be willing to revise and reconsider as you go.
- *Exploring the existing academic literature.* Academic literature includes journal articles and books published by academic presses. Begin with searches for your topic or

theoretical concern in Sociological Abstracts. Use the abstracts of journal articles to give you an idea as to whether it will be useful to read the entire article.

- When you come across useful articles, pay special attention to *their* literature reviews. These summaries will help you gain a better understanding of the existing literature and help you find the literature that you need to make your argument. The most efficient and useful way to find the literature you need may involve following the bibliographies of other scholars.
 - When you figure out central figures in the literature, you may want to search for their names or their curriculum vitae online so that you can consider their entire body of work.
 - Wikipedia, by the way, is a great place to start, but follow those hyperlinks and do your own research, too. By the time you're writing your paper, you should have outgrown Wikipedia.
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- *Figuring out a system for remembering what you read and being able to find it again.* Whether you use existing software or devise your own system, make sure that you have a way of organizing the literature you're collecting so that you can easily find what you need to find later on.
 - *Figuring out the "hole" in the literature.* If you read enough literature, you will be overwhelmed by how much we already know. New knowledge, though, inevitably leads to new questions. What do we not yet/now need to know? Hint: Sometimes scholars include "future research" suggestions at the end of their papers.
 - *Picking a research question related to this "hole."* Once you've found this "hole" in the literature, it's time to articulate a research question that will help fill it. As we discussed in class, a good research question is specific, rich, humble, and foolproof.
 - *Collecting the literature that is related directly to your research question.* By this time you will have read a lot of literature. This is not the time, however, to show me how much you read. Instead, you need to figure out what existing findings are directly related to your research question. Pare down what you've read to the truly relevant stuff. Make sure you're not overly dependent on a single author or source.
 - *Synthesizing the literature.* Now that you have a sub-set of the literature that you've decided is relevant, put it all together and describe the state of the literature. This means that your paragraphs and subsections should address *ideas*, not specific articles. So, don't summarize each article separately and put them all in a column in your paper. Instead, use the individual articles to back up an argument in favor of your research question. (In other words, talk about the forest, not the trees.) See the American Sociological Association Style Guide ([link below](#)) for instructions as to how to include in-text citations.
 - *Convincing me that your research question is an important/interesting one.* The point of all this reading and synthesis is to convince your reader that the research question you've

chosen is an interesting and important one to ask. By the end of the literature review, I should be saying “Hey, that makes me think about X,” where X is your question.

- *Presenting a research question.* The very end of your literature review should pose your research question.
- *Writing and re-writing as you go.* Putting things down in black and white often is clarifying. When we write, we often realize that the ideas that seemed clear in our minds aren’t as clear on paper. Writing will force you to be critical about your own thoughts. Sometimes this means that we change our minds. So, be prepared to write, change your mind, and write again.
- *Reading and re-reading the entire document.* Once you’ve completed a draft of your literature review, read through it again, editing and revising as necessary. Edit to ensure high quality writing, concision and clarity, and a logical and compelling argument. If you need to revise your research question or tweak the ideas you’re working with, do it.
- *Completing a properly formatted citation list.* At the end of your paper, you should include a citation list. With few exceptions, all citations should be of academic sources (journal articles and books published by academic presses). You can talk with me about exceptions. See the American Sociological Association Style Guide (link below) for instructions as to how to format your bibliography.

Your final literature review should be 5-8 double spaced pages and include a bibliography of at least 12 academic sources formatted according to the American Sociological Association citation Style Guide: <http://www.asanet.org/Quick%20Style%20Guide.pdf>.

Assignment #3: Exploring Your Methods

In question (1), provide the newest version of your research question.

In answering question (2), make sure that you think through exactly why the type of data you’re collecting/using—probably survey data, interview transcripts, observation, or text/video—can actually help you understand the thing you are trying to understand.

To answer question (3), you’ll want to explore whether the data you want is available (whether you can access an existing data set, find people to survey or interview, collect the content you want to explore, or get access to the place/event that you want to study).

No matter what method you use, there will be concepts you need to think through. What are those? List them in the answer to question (4) and write as careful a definition of those concepts as possible.

For question (5), don't try to argue that your research will do no harm. Try to think of ANY possible harm that might come from your research, take this seriously and discuss what you're going to do to minimize harm and why you still think it's okay to go forward with your study.

Your final document should be one to three pages long, single-spaced.

Questions:

1. What is your research question?
2. What method of data collection do you plan to use? Why this one and not another?
3. How will you get access to the materials/individuals you'll need to carry out this project? Be specific.
4. What concepts will you need to operationalize?
5. Are there any possibilities that your research will harm anyone or anything? Identify these possible harms, explain how you will try to mitigate them, and justify the possibility of harm with the potential of your research to do good.

Assignment #4: Methodology

The methods portion of your research proposal will include:

- (1) the method you have chosen;
- (2) a description of your sample (including its size, characteristics, and a plan for how you will attain it);
- (3) operationalization of important concepts;
- (4) a plan for analysis
- (5) a discussion of the ethics of your study;

Writing a really excellent methods section will require:

- *Thoroughness.* Your methods section should include sub-sections addressing each of the topics listed above.
- *Specificity.* Your discussion of your study design should be painfully specific. In simple, plain language, tell me everything in excruciating detail. Have you ever read the technical instructions for putting together a piece of furniture or installing software? A methods section should be like that.
- *Coherence.* Your research question should match your methods should match your sample should match your concepts should match your instrument. All the pieces should fit together. Craft it as beautifully as you can.
- *A plan for analysis.* Once you have your data, how will you go about making sense of it? A plan for analysis is a description of the steps you plan to take to pull knowledge out of the information you've collected. What will you look at first? What will you compare it to? Why? What kind of graphs or tables might you present to your reader?

- *An argument that your approach will be effective.* Aim to convince your reader that the method you chose and the way you've decided to carry the project through is appropriate to the research question and has a strong chance of yielding interesting, relevant results.

Do further research! The brief encounters we've had with methods this far is only a beginning point. Use your textbook for this class, some of the 66 books in the library about social science research methods, and a handful of the 2,300,000 results for the Google search "sociological research methods" to learn more. Do it.

Your methods section should be 3-5 double-spaced pages.

Assignment #5: Final Research Proposal

By now you should have written and received feedback on the Literature Review and Methodology portions of your research proposal. For your final paper, your task is to:

- (1) revise both the Literature Review and the Methodology according to the feedback received,
- (2) write an Introduction to the research proposal,
- (3) polish the writing and argumentation in the entire document, and
- (4) deliver a hard copy to my office.

When revising the Literature Review and Methodology, attend to the concerns and suggestions that I offered as feedback. Return to the original prompts (Assignment #2 and #4) to ensure that the segments accomplish what they need to accomplish for a strong research proposal.

Your Introduction should be no more than four paragraphs. In the first paragraph or paragraphs, explain to the reader that there is a "hole" in the literature that needs filled and introduce your research question. In the final paragraph, briefly explain the methodology you will use to fill that hole. Remember, this is just a teaser for the remainder of the proposal; since you explain, defend, and extrapolate in the Literature Review and Methodology sections, you don't need to do so here. In classic "Introduction 101" fashion, you simply need to say what you are going to say.

When you have revised the Literature Review and Methodology and written an Introduction, arrange the three sections in order in a single document (Introduction, Literature Review, Methodology) and begin polishing the final document. This will include ensuring that the writing is clear, concise, and grammatically correct. It will also mean attending to whether your proposal "hangs together." In other words, make sure that the review of the literature does, in fact, act as an argument for the specific research question you propose; make sure that the method you chose will get you the kind of data that you need to answer that research question. Your research question should be stated twice: in the Introduction and as the transition between the Literature Review and your Methodology.

Finally, pat yourself on the back and deliver a hard copy of your research proposal to me in our regular classroom at the beginning of the final exam period.

Syllabus Acknowledgement Contract
For: Sociological Inquiry with Lisa Wade, PhD

- I have read and understand the requirements for completion of this course.
- I know the test and/or assignment dates specified in the syllabus and understand that a documented medical emergency or prior consent of the instructor are the only reasons I may be allowed to make up for a missed deadline.
- I have read and understand the course policies.
 - I promise not to engage in academic misconduct of any sort.
- I know that I should contact the instructor for all course-related concerns.

Name (Print): _____

Date: _____

Signature: _____