

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 in sociology 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. You will learn about the scientific method, the complexities of applying methods to social research, ethics and bias, and research design; study seven approaches to data collection and analysis and have opportunities to try out several of them; and write a proposal for your Senior Comprehensives project.

GRADE BREAKDOWN

<u>Assignment</u>	<u>Points</u>	<u>% of Grade</u>
Attendance	50	10
CITI program certification	50	10
Exploring Your Research Idea	50	10
Outline of Literature Review	50	10
Literature Review	75	20
Exploring Your Methods	50	10
Methodology	75	20
Final Research Proposal	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. *The Art and Science of Social Research* (available at the college bookstore).

Course Reader. Various readings accessed through Moodle (<http://moodle.oxy.edu/>).

CONTENT WARNING

The content of this course may include topics that are difficult for some students to confront or discuss. I cannot always anticipate what those topics are, or who will be affected, but I can do my best to be sensitive and work with students who let me know of their needs. If there is a topic that you are unable to discuss or need to be warned about, please notify me so that we can make arrangements for your work. However – for reasons related to both intellectual growth and the unpredictable nature of classroom discussion – I cannot, nor do I always want to, prevent all students from being exposed to topics or ideas that they find objectionable or offensive.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Mon., Jan. 22 – Welcome to class

Readings: None.

Wed., Jan. 24 – What is sociology?

Readings: *Art and Science* Chapter 2 (all)
Wade, “Doing Casual Sex”
ASA Code of Ethics

DUE: ♦ **CITI Certificate of Completion**

Mon., Jan. 29 – What are sociological research methods?

Readings: *Art and Science* Chapter 3 (all)
Art and Science Chapter 4 (all)

Wed., Jan. 31 – Picking a research question

Readings: *Art and Science* Chapter 17 (pp. 581-599)
Graff & Birkenstein, “Introduction”
Graff & Birkenstein, “They Say”

Mon., Feb. 5 – One-on-one meetings

Readings: None.

Wed., Feb. 7 – One-on-one meetings

Readings: None.

Mon., Feb. 19 – President’s Day

Methods Workshops

Mon., Feb. 12 – Survey research

Readings: *Art and Science* Chapter 6 (all)
Art and Science Chapter 5 (pp. 133-176)

DUE: ♦ **Exploring Your Research Idea**

Wed., Feb. 14 – Survey research

Readings: Wade, “The Incidental Orgasm”

Mon., Feb. 19 – President’s Day (no class)

Readings: None.

Wed., Feb. 21 – Materials-based methods

Readings: *Art and Science* Chapter 12 (all)

Mon., Feb. 26 – Materials-based methods

Readings: Wade, “Defining Gendered Oppression”

Wed., Feb. 28 – Reviewing the Literature

Readings: None.

Mon., Mar. 5 – One-on-one meetings

Readings: None.

Wed., Mar. 7 – One-on-one meetings

Readings: None.

DUE: ♦ **Outline of Literature Review**

SPRING BREAK

Mon., Mar. 19 – In-depth interviewing

Readings: *Art and Science* Chapter 11 (all)
Art and Science Chapter 5 (pp. 183-188)

Wed., Mar. 21 – In-depth interviewing

Readings: Wade, “The Politics of Acculturation”

Mon., Mar. 26 – Ethnography

Readings: *Art and Science* Chapter 10 (all)
Art and Science Chapter 5 (pp. 176-183)

Wed., Mar. 28 – Ethnography

Readings: Wade, “The Emancipatory Promise of the Habitus”

DUE: ♦ Literature Review

Mon., Apr. 2 – Designing your methodology

Readings: None.

Wed., Apr. 4 – Designing your methodology

Readings: None.

Mon., Apr. 9 – One-on-one meetings

Readings: None.

Wed., Apr. 11 – One-on-one meetings

Readings: None.

DUE: ♦ Methodology

Mon., Apr. 16 – Putting it all together

Re-read: Graff & Birkenstein, “Introduction”
Graff & Birkenstein, “They Say”

Wed., Apr. 18 – One-on-one meetings

Readings: None.

Mon., Apr. 23 – One-on-one meetings

Readings: None.

Wed., Apr. 25 – One-on-one meetings

Readings: None.

Mon., Apr. 30 – Conclusion and Q&A

Readings: None.

Final Exam Hour

DUE: ♦ Revised Research Proposal

ASSIGNMENTS

CITI Program Certification

Occidental college has made arrangements to offer training in the Responsible Conduct of Research to members of the campus community through a program called the "Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative," which is run by the University of Miami. This respected program is used by numerous colleges and universities.

To participate, please visit: <https://www.citiprogram.org/>

Steps:

- Select: "Create an Account" (not "Log in through my institution")
- When you register, you select Occidental (enter that name in the search box) as your affiliated institution. The college pays the cost for you to complete this program if you take this step.
- Complete the rest of the information as requested with your own name and email, etc.
- You will get to a point where it asks you to "Select your Curriculum." Occidental has pre-selected a variety of courses for our users. Not all of them will apply to all of you! So, please read the choices carefully. You will see the choices listed as:
 - Question 1: Human Subjects Research—*Select Not at this time*
 - Question 2: Laboratory Animal Research—*Do NOT select any options*
 - Question 3: Biosafety/Biosecurity Course—*Select Not at this time*
 - Question 4: Responsible Conduct of Research—*Select Social Sciences*
- When you have finished and passed (average score of 80% required) your modules (all 5 of them), you should print and save (or save to.pdf) a copy of your certificate of completion.

Submit a .pdf of your Certificate of Completion by email to lwade@oxy.edu.

Exploring Your Research Idea

Questions:

1. What is your topic?
2. What hole in the literature are you trying to fill?
3. What is your research question?
4. How is this research project sociological?

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 descriptive data are not in themselves sociological.

*Your final document should be one to two pages long, single-spaced.
Submit a .doc by email to lwade@oxy.edu.*

Outline of Literature Review

Before reading this prompt, carefully read the prompt for the next assignment: "Literature Review."

The most common mistake in writing literature reviews is getting lost in the topic and losing sight of one's research question. This assignment, then, should act as a guide for the next assignment that will keep you on track.

Remember that the main point of the literature review is NOT to summarize everything we know about your topic, but to make a convincing case that your research question is worth asking in light of the existing state of the literature. You will need to demonstrate that you:

- Know the literature in question
- Can see a weakness (or "hole")
- Have an idea about how to strengthen our knowledge in that area (or fill the "hole")

Or, to put it another way, you need to say:

- This is where we're at
- This is what we need
- And I plan to deliver it (hint: in the next section—Methodology—you explain *how*)

For this assignment, then, write an outline of your literature review that serves as an argument in favor of the necessity of your research question. Each line of your outline should be able to serve as a "topic sentence" for each paragraph (that is, the sentence telling the reader what the paragraph is about). For example,

Cats are wonderful. They are sweet and sleep with you when you're sick. They're furry and soft. They're happy to see you when you come home. They're pretty to look at. And, yes, you *can* teach them tricks.

Each topic sentence should be logically connected to the sentences before and after—use transitional words and phrases (in italics) to help your reader see how—and lead readers to your research question. Here is an example:

1. Existing research suggests that cats are wonderful.
 - a. *For example*, researchers have said they're sweet (citations).
 - b. Researchers have said they're furry (citations).
 - c. Researchers have said they're pretty (citations).
 - d. Researchers have said they can be taught tricks (citations).
2. *But* researchers disagree as to whether cats are as friendly as dogs.
 - a. Some say they are (citations).
 - b. Some say they aren't (citations).
3. Whether cats are as friendly as dogs, *then*, is still an unanswered question.
4. *One reason why is* because the existing research only studies dogs' and cats' relationships with their owners (e.g., citations).
5. *This is a problem because* it doesn't account for friendliness with strangers, an important component of friendliness (citations).
6. *Accordingly*, my research question is: Are cats and dogs equally friendly to strangers?

Notice the logic, the clear transitions, and the case for the research question. By the time you get to the end, you should be thinking: “Well, yes, it does seem like this would be a nice thing to know.”

Here's how NOT to write an outline of a literature review:

7. Existing research suggests that cats are wonderful.
 - a. *For example*, researchers have said they're sweet (citations).
 - b. Researchers have said they're furry (citations).
 - c. Researchers have said they're pretty (citations).
 - d. Researchers have said they can be taught tricks (citations).
1. There is also research on friendliness, which is mixed (citations).
2. Cats also sometimes have hairballs, which is an issue with cats (citations).
3. People still like cats though (citations).
4. There are approximately 500 billion cat owners (citations).
5. I read an article on cat toys that said a thing and I will tell you about it (citation).
6. Cat owners are disproportionately video game lovers, no one knows why (citations).
7. I really like cats.
8. I want to study cats.
9. Cats cats cats cats cats.

Include parenthetical citations. Your outline shouldn't be a *guess* as to what's in the literature; it should be an account of it. If you have fewer than 12 academic sources, you probably haven't read enough literature and are unlikely to be backing up your claims sufficiently. 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.

Include a bibliography with your literature and format it *perfectly* according to the American Sociological Association citation Style Guide:
<http://www.asanet.org/Quick%20Style%20Guide.pdf>. Almost 100% of students fail to do this on the first try. Don't be one of them.

*Your outline should fit on one page with a separate bibliography.
Submit a .doc by email to lwade@oxy.edu.*

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 get 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.
- *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 bibliography.* At the end of your paper, you should include a citation list.

Your final literature review should be 3-5 double spaced pages and include a separate bibliography.

Submit a .doc by email to lwade@oxy.edu.

Exploring Your Methods

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 an 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 213,000 results for the Google search "sociological research methods" to learn more.

*Your final document should be 1 to 2 pages long, single-spaced.
Submit a .doc by email to lwade@oxy.edu.*

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 213,000 results for the Google search "sociological research methods" to learn more.

*Your methods section should be 2-4 double-spaced pages.
Submit a .doc by email to lwade@oxy.edu.*

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) and polish the writing and argumentation in the entire document.

When revising the Literature Review and Methodology, attend to the concerns and suggestions that I offered as feedback. Return to the original prompts 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 four sections in order in a single document with the following sections:

- Introduction
- Literature Review
- Methodology
- Bibliography

Remember that almost all of your citations should be found in the Literature Review (and, as necessary, the Introduction). The only exception is citations that you are using to describe and justify your methodological choices (which can appear in the Methodology section). If you find yourself introducing new topic-relevant citations in the Methodology section, it’s a sign that you’re getting off track and need to re-organize.

Polish 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 acts as an argument for the specific research question you propose (and excludes material relevant to your topic but not your question)
- that the method you chose will get you the kind of data that you need to answer that research question
- the introduction exactly describes your question, literature review, and methodology

Your research question should be stated twice (at the end of the Introduction and as the transition between the Literature Review and your Methodology) and should be worded identically in both instances.

Your final paper should be between 6 and 8 double-spaced pages (1 page introduction, 3 to 5 page literature review, and 1 to 2 page methods section), followed by a single-spaced bibliography, though lengths may vary. The goal is to be concise, clear, and convincing, not to hit a certain page length or include a specific number of references.

Submit a .doc by email to lwade@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.
- *Technology.* Existing research shows that taking notes on laptops and using cell phones during class interrupts learning and translates into lower academic performance. Unless there is an accessibility need, laptops and cell phones are not allowed.
- *The Writing Center:* Located on the Ground Floor of the Academic Commons, the Writing Center offers students from all disciplines two types of support to work on their writing: peer-to-peer, drop-in consultations with knowledgeable Writing Advisers, Sunday through Thursday from 7:00-11:00 p.m., and appointments with Faculty Writing Specialists from the Writing and Rhetoric department. Information about the Writing Center and a link to the appointment system is on the WC website: <https://www.oxy.edu/writing-center>.
- *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 inquiries/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).