Sociology 497: Proposal Writing

Class Meeting: Winter 2013: Tuesday 3:00 - 5:00 pm, 4155 LSA
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Office Hours:

Course Description

This seminar is the first course in a three-course sequence leading to the completion of an honors thesis in sociology. It is designed as a workshop for juniors who have been accepted to the honors thesis program. The main objective of the workshop is to help you produce a written plan, called a prospectus, which will guide your research and writing during your senior year. A well-crafted prospectus makes it easier to write a good thesis. In this first course, you will:

• Learn how to pose and motivate your own sociological question.
• Be exposed to a variety of sociological research designs and methods.
• Construct a research design that will allow you to answer your research question credibly.
• Prepare and submit a request for University of Michigan Behavioral Sciences Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval of your project. IRB approval is required for most research projects involving human subjects at the University.
• Work to build relationships with a faculty member who will serve as your thesis advisor during your senior year.
• Workshop your project with your peers.
• Provide feedback, comments, and critique to your peers on their projects.

This workshop will require a great deal of independent work and personal commitment to a serious academic research endeavor. We will work through assigned readings to provide some basic guidelines and vocabulary that will allow you to begin your project on firm footing. However, the bulk of your work will be solitary, as you skim, read, abstract, and re-read many books, articles, or other materials in pursuit of a research question and eventually, a prospectus draft. You will not labor in isolation, however; the real benefit of the workshop will be the intensive back-and-forth you will experience with your colleagues in the class as you work together with guidance from me. You are also strongly encouraged to consult with me individually as frequently as necessary, and to seek input from other faculty in the department as appropriate.
Readings

**Required** (books available at campus bookstores)

3. Additional articles and chapters are available in Resources/Course Readings on the CTools site. (CT)

**Recommended:**
For those of you who consider doing qualitative methods (in-depth interviewing or ethnography) I strongly recommend you read these two books.


For general research support and problem solving see:


There are also a plethora of books designed to help you with what is sometimes the most challenging of tasks: getting your writing done. These are some that come highly recommended.


Some quite useful, but not required, writing references include:

- ASA Style Guide
Course Requirements and Evaluation

Grading
Active class participation and in-class presentations (15%)
Short assignments and peer commentaries (25%)
Partial prospectus draft (20%)
Final prospectus draft (40%)

No late assignments will be accepted.

Class attendance is required and will be monitored – participating means preparing the readings assigned for a given class period and using this and other material to offer comments and questions that move us toward a meaningful conversation about the issues for the day. Of course, I expect you to be respectful and to offer constructive commentary and critique. Your active participation and engagement with your classmates will be essential to formulating your research question, argument, and research design. Everyone in the workshop is here because they are intelligent and creative – it is in your interest to take advantage of their commentary.

Assignments are due and should be posted on CTools by 5pm on the Sunday before class – the dates are all included on the syllabus for your convenience. They will be available to your classmates.

Part of your grade will be based on your reading and commentary on the assignments and in-class presentations of your classmates. Each week I will randomly assign you to one of several groups, and you will comment on the work of the other members of your group. You will be expected to view their memos and prepare comments (and questions, where appropriate) on their work, and your commentary will be due by our class meeting at 3pm on Tuesday. Please post your peer commentaries on CTools and bring 2 hard copies to class: one for me and one for each of the students whose work you have evaluated. The appropriate length of these commentaries will vary from week to week, with more extensive commentary as the semester progresses.

A 7-10 page partial prospectus draft will be due on March 12 by 3 pm. It will include an introduction of your research question, the motivation behind the project, and a focused discussion of the relevant literature and how it relates to your question. This deadline falls directly after “Spring” break to give you as much time as possible.

The final 15-20 page draft of your prospectus will be due on April 23 by 5pm. No late prospectuses will be accepted, so please align your schedules accordingly. The final draft of the prospectus should include a revised introduction, motivation for your project, review of the relevant literature, and the addition of a proposed methods section and timeline for your thesis project over the next year. Further information about expectations for this final draft of the prospectus will be provided as we progress through the semester.

****Please Note:**** Reading assignments or due dates for assignments are subject to change in response to the progress of the class.
# COURSE SCHEDULE

## Part I: Introduction

**January 15**  
Course Purpose and Introductions  
Read BWC: Prologue, Chapters 1 & 2  
Edwards, “Overview of Writing a Research Paper” CT

## Part II: Finding, Formulating, and Motivating a Research Question

**January 22**  
Settling on a Topic  
Read Alford: Chapter 2

Due  
(1/20) Assignment 1: Choosing a Thesis Topic  
(1/22) Commentary on Assignment 1

**January 29**  
Formulating a Research Question  
Read BWC: Chapter 3  
Edwards, “Turning Ideas into Research Questions” CT

Due  
(1/27) Assignment 2: Formulating a Researchable Question  
(1/29) Commentary on Assignment 2

Susan Turkel will join the class to discuss library resources for lit reviews.

**February 5**  
Starting the Literature Review  
Read BWC: Chapters 5 & 6  
Howard Becker, *Writing for Social Scientists*, “Terrorized by the Literature” CT  
Edwards, “Borrowing Well from the Literature”

Due  
(2/3) Assignment 3: Starting to Review the Literature  
(2/5) Commentary on Assignment 3

## Part III: Identifying and Constructing a Suitable Research Design

**February 12**  
Imagining Answers to Your Research Question  
Read BWC: Chapters 7  
Alford: Chapter 3

Due  
(2/10) Assignment 4: First thoughts on answering the research question  
(2/12) Commentary on Assignment 4

**February 19**  
Research Design:  
Alford: Chapter 5

Due  
(2/17) Assignment 5: Refining Your Research Question and Second Thoughts on Answering It  
(2/19) Commentary on Assignment 5
February 26  
**Research Ethics**—IRB, Guest speaker from the human subjects committee  
Read  

ASA Code of Ethics

Due  
(2/19) PEERRS certification (go to http://my.research.umich.edu/peerrs/) – complete the “Behavioral and Social Sciences” module. Show me proof that you’ve completed this certification – usually you can email your proof to me.

March 5  
*Winter Break: No Class*

Edwards, Ch 7 “The Literature Review”—will help with lit review assignment

March 12  
**Research Design:**  
Read  
Alford: Chapter 4,  
Adam Przeworski and Frank Salomon, "On the Art of Writing Proposals"

Due  
(3/12) Assignment 6: Partial prospectus draft

Senior Honors students will talk with the class about strategies for success.

March 19  
**Research Design:**  
Read  
Alford: Chapter 6

Due  
(3/19) Commentary on Assignment 6

March 26  
**Identifying a Research Design**  
Read  
Alford: Chapter 7

Due in class:  
Have talked with another faculty member about your project and provide a short summary of your conversation.

Those who need to submit an IRB application will work through the process with me in class.

April 2  
**Refining a Research Design & Setting a Timeline**  
Read  
Alford: Chapter 8

Due  
(3/31) Assignment 7: Identifying and Developing a Research Design  
(4/2) Commentary on Assignment 7
Part IV: Finalizing a Prospectus

Students will meet individually with the instructor in April for feedback on the prospectus draft, presentation, timeline, and IRB forms.

April 9   Student Presentations I
Due       (4/7) Prospectus draft (for presenters)
          (4/9) PowerPoint Presentation (presenters)
          (4/9) Detailed timeline (for everyone)
          (4/9) IRB forms submitted

April 16  Student Presentations II
Due       (4/14) Prospectus draft (for presenters)
          (4/16) PowerPoint Presentation (presenters)
          (4/16) Commentary on presenters’ drafts (as appropriate)

April 23  No Class: Final Prospectus Due by 5pm. No late assignments will be accepted

May 3    Attend Senior Honors Presentations: for a preview and model of what you’ll do next year.