

SOSC 13100: Social Science Inquiry

Fall 2014

T/R 10:30-11:50 AM

Green Hall 117

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Office Hours: By Appointment

What does it mean to study social life scientifically? In the fall Quarter, this course seeks to answer this question by examining some of the methods of the social sciences. Using prominent examples from Anthropology, Economics, History, Political Science, Psychology, and Sociology, we will explore the major epistemological approaches underlying contemporary social science including: experimental methods, deductive methods (such as rational choice models and game theory), and inductive methods (“quantitative” and “qualitative” approaches).

In weeks one and two, we will explore the “what” and “why” of social science. What is social science research? What does it mean to study society “scientifically? Is it even possible to do so? If it is possible, why should we study social life? For the remainder of the course, we will discuss the “how” of social science. How do people attempt to understand the social world scientifically? How do the assumptions underlying the various methodological approaches limit our analyses?

Grading and Requirements

In-class participation is very important in this class, and it is weighted just as heavily as assignments in the calculation of your final grades. I expect students to come to class having completed and prepared to discuss the assigned readings. To facilitate this process, each student is required to email two discussion questions or comments on the reading by **8:00 AM** the morning of class (though I prefer them the night before whenever possible). There will also be pop quizzes on the reading from time to time. These quizzes should be VERY easy if you have completed the reading, as they are simply meant to assess whether students have understood the main arguments and concepts. In addition to class participation there will be five short papers (2-5 double spaced pages each) due throughout the quarter. The due dates are indicated in the syllabus, and I will provide question prompts one week before each of the papers is due. Your final grades will be calculated as follows:

- Five short papers (10% each)
- In-class participation and discussion (25%)
- Completion of readings- based on discussion questions and quizzes (25%)

House rules:

Laptops, tablets, and cellphones are not allowed in class.

Paper assignments must be handed in electronically before the beginning of class. Late papers will lose one letter grade for each day they are late (ex: A becomes A- etc...)

Reading Materials

There are two books for the class:

- Chalmers, Alan F. *What is this Thing Called Science?* Hackett Publishing, 2013.
- Venkatesh, Sudhir. *Gang Leader for a Day: A Rogue Sociologist Takes to the Streets.* Penguin Books, 2008.

Both books are available at the Seminary Coop Bookstore. All other readings are available in the Course Reserves section of the Chalk site or elsewhere online.

Course Schedule

Introduction: The What and Why of Social Science

9/29/14: Course Introduction; should we study society?

- Hill, Kashmir. "OKCupid Lied to Users About Their Compatibility as an Experiment." *Forbes*, July 28, 2014. Access online: <http://www.forbes.com/sites/kashmirhill/2014/07/28/okcupid-experiment-compatibility-deception/>
- Bercovici, Jeff. "OKCupid's Christian Rudder on Human Experiments." *Forbes*, September 9, 2014. (Just read from beginning up to and including the answer to the question that starts "A lot of topics you take on here are hot buttons...") Access online: <http://www.forbes.com/sites/jeffbervovici/2014/09/09/okcupids-christian-rudder-on-human-experiments-and-getting-ugly-people-dates/>
- Hsu, Jeremy. "Facebook Users Get Worse Grades in College." *Live Science*, April 13, 2009. Access online: <http://www.livescience.com/3495-facebook-users-worse-grades-college.html>

10/2/14: What is Science?

- Chalmers, A.F. 1999. *What is this Thing Called Science?* Intro, Chapters 1, 4, 5

10/7/14: Criticism of Science?

- Chalmers, A.F. 1999. *What is this Thing Called Science?* Chapters 7
- Anderson, W.T. "Science and the Creative Brain" in *Reality isn't What it Used to Be*, Chapter 3
- (Optional) Feyerabend, P. 1975. *Against Method*. Introduction, Chapters 1-6, 19

10/9/14: Applying Science to Social Questions

- McIntyre, L. 2010. "A Science of Human Behavior," *Dark Ages: The Case for a Science of Human Behavior*, Chapter 2.
- King, G., R. O. Keohane, and S. Verba. 1994. *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton University Press. Chapters 1-3 (Ch. 3 pp. 75-84 only)

PAPER #1 DUE 10/14 BEFORE CLASS

Deductive Methods

10/14/14: Introduction to Deductive Social Science

- Friedman, M. 1954/1966. "The Methodology of Positive Economics." *Essays in Positive Economics*. pp. 3-16, 30-43. University of Chicago Press.
- Downs A. 1964. *An Economic Theory of Democracy*. Chapter 7,8. Addison-Wesley

10/16/14: Game Theory

- Schelling, T. C. 1984. "What is Game Theory?" *Choice and Consequence*. Harvard University Press.
- Axelrod, R. and W. Hamilton 1982. "The Evolution of Cooperation" *Science*, 211: 1390-1396.

10/21/14: Bounded Rationality

- Simon, H. 1995. "Rationality in Political Behavior" *Political Psychology*, 16: 45-61.
- Tversky, A. and Kahneman, D. 1974. "Judgment Under Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases" *Science*, 185: 1124-1131

10/23/14: Criticisms of Rational Choice Theory

- Ariely, D. 2004. "Tom Sawyer and the Construction of Value" *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization*.
- Shapiro, I. *The Pathologies of Rational Choice Theory*, Chapter 3.

PAPER #2 DUE 10/28 BEFORE CLASS

Experiments

10/28/14: Introduction to Social Science Experiments: What Makes a Good Experiment?

- McDermott, R. 2002. "Experimental Methods in Political Science" *Annual Review of Political Science*, 5: 31-61.
- Sears, D. 1986. "College Sophomores in the Laboratory - Influences of a Narrow Database on Social-Psychology View of Human Nature." *Journal of Personality And Social Psychology* 51(3): 515-530.

10/30/14: Classic Experiments in Social Psychology

- Darley, J and Latane, B. 1968. "Bystander Intervention in Emergencies: Diffusion of Responsibility." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 8: 377-383.
- Milgram, S. 1963. "Behavioral Study of Obedience." *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*.

11/4/14: Field Experiments

- Gerber, A. S. and D. P. Green. 2012. *Field Experiments: Design, Analysis, and Interpretation*, W.W. Norton & Company, pp. 7-15.
- Rosenthal R and Jacobson. 1966. "Teachers' Expectancies: Determinates of

- Pupils' IQ gains." *Psychological Reports*, 19: 115-18.
- Butler, D. 2014. *Representing the Advantaged: How Politicians Reinforce Inequality*, Cambridge University Press, ch 6.

11/4/14: Natural Experiments

- Dunning, T. 2008. "Improving Causal Inference: Strengths and Limitations of Natural Experiments." *Political Research Quarterly* Vol. 61, No. 2., pp. 282-293.
- Di Tella, R., S. Galiani, and E. Schargrodsky. 2007. "The Formation of Beliefs: Evidence from the Allocation of Land Titles to Squatters." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 122: 209-241.

PAPER #3 DUE 11/11 BEFORE CLASS

Inductive Methods- Quantitative

11/11/14: The Pitfalls of Collecting Data

- Asher, H. 1992. *Polling and the Public*, Washington, DC: CQ Press, Chapter 3.
- Bishop, G. (2005). *The Illusion of Public Opinion*. Preface, Chapter 1.

11/13/14: Upending Conventional Wisdom

- Frank, T. 2004. "Lie Down for America" *Harper's*, 1-15.
- Bartels, L. 2006. "What's the Matter with What's the Matter with Kansas?" *Quarterly Journal of Political Science*, 1: 201-26.
- Frank, T. "Class is Dismissed."
- Bartels, L. "Who's Bitter Now?"
(http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/17/opinion/17bartels.html?_r=0)

11/18/14: Correlation versus Causation

- Taubes, G. 2007. "Do We Really Know What Makes Us Healthy?" *New York Times Magazine*, 1-15.
- Levitt, S. 2004. "Understanding Why Crime Fell in the 1990s: Four Factors That Explain the Decline and Six That Do Not." *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 8: 163-90.

11/20/14: Testing Alternative Hypotheses

- Bartels, L. M. 2008. *Unequal Democracy: The Political Economy of the New Gilded Age*, Princeton University Press, ch 2-3.

PAPER #4 DUE 11/25 BEFORE CLASS

Inductive Methods- Qualitative (Ethnography as One Example)

11/25/14: Ethnographic Methods

- Geertz, C. 1973. "Thick Description" in *The Interpretation of Cultures*. (On the Chalk site)
- Discussion of ethnography assignments

11/27/14: NO CLASS: Thanksgiving break

12/2/14: Ethical Issues in Ethnography

- Venkatesh. S. 2008. *Gang Leader for a Day*, London: Penguin Press (All)

12/4/14: READING PERIOD

PAPER #5 DUE 12/9 11:59 PM