

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY
Senior Thesis Seminar
Fall 2018/Spring 2019

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Course time: Thursdays, 12:10-2 p.m.
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Website: <https://courseworks2.columbia.edu/courses/65568>
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Course Description:

This seminar is an opportunity to conduct original sociological research. Over the next two semesters you will formulate a research question, design a research strategy, collect and analyze your data and write up your findings. At the end of the year, you will hand in a scholarly study that contributes to sociological knowledge and present this study to an audience of students and faculty in sociology.

The class is intended to support you in what sometimes feels like a lonely and challenging process. We have broken down the parts of your thesis into a small number of assignments, and you must complete all the assignments on time. It is very hard to catch up on thesis work once you have fallen behind. Throughout the year you will be required to read and comment on the work of other students, and in return you will receive feedback from your classmates. As you move through the steps of the thinking, research and writing process, we will discuss and address relevant issues and inevitable challenges that arise when we study the social world. By design, the assigned readings will be heavier in the Fall term to give you all the knowledge you need to confidently execute your project and very little in the Spring term to give you as much time as you need to work on your thesis.

This is a two-semester course. Your participation in the Spring semester is contingent on your having satisfactorily completed the assignments from the Fall semester. Our goal is to provide you with enough structure to facilitate your research, but also enough freedom so that you can develop your projects independently.

Course Objectives:

This course is organized with four objectives in mind:

1. Give you basic trainings in conducting research.
2. Learn how to collect, analyze, and interpret data.
3. Examine the ethical responsibilities of researchers.
4. Think critically about the presentation of findings.

Course Requirements:

The course grade for Fall term is based on the following components. The course grade for Spring term is based solely on the quality of your final thesis.

1. Class participation (10% of final grade)
2. Leading discussion (10% of final grade)
3. Proposal presentation (10% of final grade)
4. 8 reading memos (20% of final grade)
5. Final research proposal (50% of final grade)

Class Participation

Your active participation in class is strongly encouraged. Please complete assigned readings before each class and come prepared to discuss them. Everyone should join in, even those who are naturally shy. The quality of your comments is more important than the quantity. There will also be time to discuss your research and to share these experiences with the class.

Eight Reading Memos

These weekly reading memos will be based on the assigned readings. These memos should be about 300 words. In these memos, you could: (1) highlight the most important insight or idea from the readings; (2) share your assessments on both the strengths and weaknesses of the readings; and (3) raise questions that you particularly like to discuss in class. The memos will be due on **Mondays at 5 p.m.** via the course website. These reading memos also serve as the starting point for our in-class discussion. Recognizing that we all lead busy and complex lives, you will be required to submit eight reading memos out of the eleven weeks. It is up to you to decide which of the eight weeks you would like to submit a memo.

Leading Discussion

One student will be responsible for leading the discussion each week by making a brief presentation (about **10 minutes maximum**) at the beginning of each class. Your responsibility will include: (1) providing a brief critique (*not* a summary) of the readings; (2) highlighting the themes from the reading memos; and (3) summarizing the remaining questions to be discussed.

Final Research Proposal (Fall term)

You will be expected to submit a final research proposal by the end of the Fall term. It should not exceed 15-20 pages in length (double-spaced), plus appendices and bibliography. There will be a **series of 10 assignments** throughout the semester to help you work towards your final paper. These assignments are not graded, but you will receive comments from your response-pair (more details below) and from us. The final proposal will be due on **Monday, December 10 at 5 p.m.** and should include the following components:

- 1) A problem statement, supported by some references to the research literature.
- 2) What is the puzzle? What is this a case of?

- 3) Review of the literature: What research literature(s) are you speaking to?
- 4) A description of the research site, including people and activities involved.
- 5) A description of your data-gathering activities.
- 6) A description of your method for gaining access and establishing field relationships.
- 7) A discussion of observer effects on the data and any ethical problems encountered.
- 8) A description of your approach to data analysis.
- 9) Your preliminary findings. These might be exploratory and tentative, but should be grounded in the data you will have collected. How do the findings relate to your original problem statement? Do they confirm, refute, or suggest a reformulation of the research problem?
- 10) A discussion of your research implications. What do these early findings suggest about what you would need to do to continue this research? What are the implications of these findings?

Final Thesis Submission (Spring term)

The Spring term will be focused entirely on your independent thesis research. We will meet to discuss issues that you encounter in the data collection, analysis, and writing process. We will be joined by doctoral students on occasions who are conducting their own dissertation research who will share their experiences and insights about the thesis writing process with you. We will have individual meetings to tackle issues and challenges that are unique to your project. The final thesis will be due on **Monday, April 15 at 5 p.m.** You will also be expected to present your thesis research in a poster session in our department. The date for this will be in early May.

Course Policies:

1. Our weekly seminar will be discussion-based. We will begin with the discussion leader, who will provide the starting point for our discussion. I will also try to place the readings in context or to provide background information that will help frame the materials.
2. Doing the reading is essential for your understanding of the topics. Some questions to ponder for each reading assignment include: What data and methodology is employed by the author? What is the main argument or thesis? What claims are being made by the author? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the author's argument? Do you agree or disagree with the author? If so, why? How does the reading relate to your research? How does it relate to current events or public opinion? Thinking about and answering these questions will help prepare you for class discussions and assignments.
3. The main component of the class involves a thesis project that you will launch. The success of this project will require you to be committed to its execution, so it will require significant creativity and engagement from each of you.
4. You will be asked to form response-pairs for all assignments following the presentation of your ideas. You are responsible to help your paired classmate with his/her thesis by providing candid and constructive feedback on the research question, design, and execution.
5. I am happy to meet with you and to answer any questions about the course. To that end, please feel free to come to my office hours. I will try to stay a few minutes after each class. If

you have any “small” questions, then this will be an excellent time to approach me. I would like you to do as well as you can in my course, so do not hesitate to ask questions and to get feedback on your work. Our TA, Francisco Lara-Garcia, is also a great resource for you, so I recommend that you reach out to him early and often to get his advice on your project.

6. Technology in the classroom can be both a blessing and a distraction. If you would like to use your laptop during class, you should turn off your internet browsers and email clients. Laptops and other electronic devices should be used strictly for note-taking purposes only. We will rely on the honor code for reinforcement, so please help me and your classmates in our effort to create a classroom environment that is conducive to learning and sharing.

Outline of the Course:

Week 1 (Sep. 6):	Introduction
Week 2 (Sep. 13):	From Research Topics to Research Questions
Week 3 (Sep. 20):	Situating Your Research in the Literature
Week 4 (Sep. 27):	Entering the Field
Week 5 (Oct. 4):	IRB and the Ethics of Research
Week 6 (Oct. 11):	Thinking about Methods, Part 1
Week 7 (Oct. 18):	Thinking about Methods, Part 2
Week 8 (Oct. 25):	Workshopping Research Instruments
Week 9 (Nov. 1):	Introduction to Atlas.ti and Stata
Week 10 (Nov. 8):	Analyzing your Data
Week 11 (Nov. 15):	Writing and Evaluation
Week 12 (Nov. 22):	Thanksgiving break
Week 13 (Nov. 29):	Proposal presentations
Week 14 (Dec. 6):	Proposal presentations

Course Readings

Books to purchase

Available for purchase at Book Culture and also on reserve at Lehman Social Sciences Library.

Luker, Kristin. 2010. *Salsa Dancing into the Social Sciences: Research in an Age of Info-glut*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Participant Observations:

Emerson, Robert, et al. 2011. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Qualitative Interviews:

Weiss, Robert S. 1994. *Learning from Strangers: The Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies*. New York: Free Press.

Quantitative Analyses:

Miller, Jane E. 2013. *The Chicago Guide to Writing about Multivariate Analysis*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Recommended books:

Waters, Mary C., Elizabeth Heger Boyle, Deborah Carr, Benjamin Cornwell, Shelley Correll, Robert Crosnoe, and Jeremy Freese. 2017. *The Art and Science of Social Research*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.

Becker, Howard. 1986. *Writing for Social Scientists: How to Start and Finish Your Thesis, Book or Article*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Miles, Matthew and A. Michael Huberman. 2013. *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook*. Sage Publications, Third Edition.

Articles and chapters

Other readings include journal articles and book chapters that will be made available on the course website in PDF.

COURSE SCHEDULE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

Fall 2018

September 6 Introduction

Luker, Kristin. 2010. *Salsa Dancing into the Social Sciences: Research in an Age of Info Glut*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Chapters 1-3, pages 1-50

September 13 From Research Topic to Research Question

Guest speaker: Julius Wilson (CC'18)

Bloemraad, Irene. 2012. "What the Textbooks Don't Tell You: Moving from a Research Puzzle to Publishing Findings." Pp. 502-520 in *Handbook of Research Methods in Migration*, edited by Carlos Vargas-Silva. London: Edward Elgar Publishing.

You will also read samples of senior theses from previous years.

Assignment #1 will be due on Monday, Sep. 10 at 5 p.m. Submit Research Question.

September 20 Situating Your Research in the Literature

Luker, Kristin. 2010. *Salsa Dancing into the Social Sciences: Research in an Age of Info Glut*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Chapter 4-5, pages 51-98.

Assignment #2 will be due on Monday, Sep. 17 at 5 p.m. Submit Research Statement.

September 27 Entering the Field

Luker, Kristin. 2010. *Salsa Dancing into the Social Sciences: Research in an Age of Info Glut*. U.C. Press, Harvard University Press. Chapter 6-8, pages 99-190.

Assignment #3 will be due on Monday, Sep. 24 at 5 p.m. Submit Annotated Bibliography.

October 4 IRB and the Ethics of Research

American Sociological Association. 1999. *Code of Ethics and Policies and Procedures of the ASA Committee on Professional Ethics*. Washington, DC: ASA.

Fine, Gary Alan. 1993. "Ten Lies of Ethnography: Moral Dilemmas of Field Research." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 22: 267-294.

Assignment #4 will be due on Monday, Oct. 1 at 5 p.m. Submit Literature Review.

October 11 Thinking about Methods, Part 1

Small, Mario Luis. 2009. "How Many Cases Do I Need: On Science and the Logic of Case Selection in Field-Based Research." *Ethnography* 10 (1): 5-38.

Qualitative Interviews

Weiss, Robert S. 1994. *Learning from Strangers: The Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies*. New York: Free Press. Preface and Chapters 1-5, pp. vii-150.

Participant Observations

Emerson, Robert, et al. 2011. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Chapters 1-5, pp. 1-170.

October 18 Thinking about Methods, Part 2

Quantitative Analyses

Miller, Jane E. 2013. *The Chicago Guide to Writing about Multivariate Analysis*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Chapters 1-6, pp. 1-156.

Historical & Comparative Research

Luker, Kristin. 2010. *Salsa Dancing into the Social Sciences: Research in an Age of Info Glut*. U.C. Press, Harvard University Press. Chapter 9, pages 190-198.

Mixed-Methods Research

Small, Mario Luis. 2011. "How to Conduct a Mixed Methods Study: Recent Trends in a Rapidly Growing Literature." *Annual Review of Sociology* 37: 57-86.

Assignment #5 will be due on Monday, Oct. 15 at 5 p.m. Submit Data and Methods.

October 25 Workshopping Your Research Instruments

Waters, Mary C. 1999. *Black Identities: West Indian Immigrant Dreams and American Realities*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation. Appendix.

Hoang, Kimberly Kay. 2015. *Dealing in Desire: Asian Ascendancy, Western Decline, and the Hidden Currencies of Global Sex Work*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press. Introduction & Appendix.

We will be conducting practice interviews and will be testing your survey instruments in class.

Assignment #6 will be due on Monday, Oct. 22 at 5 p.m. Submit IRB application.

November 1 Introduction to Atlas.ti and Stata

Link to Atlas.ti tutorials: <http://atlasti.com/video-tutorials/>

Link to Stata tutorials: <http://www.stata.com/links/video-tutorials/>

Assignment #7 will be due on Monday, Oct. 29 at 5 p.m. Submit Research Plan.

November 8 Analyzing your Data

Luker, Kristin. 2010. *Salsa Dancing into the Social Sciences: Research in an Age of Info Glut*. U.C. Press, Harvard University Press. Chapter 10-11 & Appendices, pages 198-242.

Qualitative Interviews

Weiss, Robert S. 1994. *Learning from Strangers: The Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies*. New York: Free Press. Preface and Chapter 6, pp. 151-182.

Participant Observations

Emerson, Robert, et al. 2011. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Chapter 6, pp. 171-200.

Quantitative Analyses

Miller, Jane E. 2013. *The Chicago Guide to Writing about Multivariate Analysis*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Chapters 7-11, pp. 157-250.

Assignment #8 will be due on Monday, Nov. 5 at 5 p.m. Submit Working Hypotheses.

November 15 Writing and Evaluation

Erikson, Kai. 1989. "On Sociological Prose." *Yale Review* 78 (1): 525-538.

Qualitative Interviews

Weiss, Robert S. 1994. *Learning from Strangers: The Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies*. New York: Free Press. Preface and Chapter 7 & Appendices, 183-222.

Participant Observations

Emerson, Robert, et al. 2011. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Chapters 7-8, pp. 200-248.

Quantitative Analyses

Miller, Jane E. 2013. *The Chicago Guide to Writing about Multivariate Analysis*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Chapters 12-15, pp. 253-338.

November 22 Thanksgiving break

November 29 Proposal presentations

Assignment #9 will be due on Monday, Nov. 28 at 5 p.m. Submit Prospectus Slides.

December 6 Proposal presentations

Assignment #10 will be due on Monday, Dec. 10 at 5 p.m. Submit Research Prospectus.

A final note on academic integrity and collaboration at Columbia:

The intellectual venture in which we are all engaged requires of faculty and students alike the highest level of personal and academic integrity. As members of an academic community, each one of us bears the responsibility to participate in scholarly discourse and research in a manner characterized by intellectual honesty and scholarly integrity.

In practical terms, this means that, as students, you must be responsible for the full citations of others' ideas in all of your research papers and projects; you must be scrupulously honest when taking your examinations; you must always submit your own work and not that of another student, scholar, or internet agent. If you have any questions about what constitutes a primary source to be cited, please come to see me during my office hours and we can talk in more details. For further information, please see: <http://www.college.columbia.edu/academics/integrity>

Spring 2019	In-class activities	All assignment due on Mondays at 5 p.m.
January 24:	Progress Updates	
	Miles, Michael and A. Michael Huberman. 2013. <i>Qualitative Data Analysis</i> . Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Chapter 4.	
January 31:	Coding Your Data	Empirical Analyses
	Miles, Michael and A. Michael Huberman. 2013. <i>Qualitative Data Analysis</i> . Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Chapters 5-7.	
February 7:	Analyzing Your Data	
	Miles, Michael and A. Michael Huberman. 2013. <i>Qualitative Data Analysis</i> . Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Chapters 8-10.	
February 14:	Draft of Analysis	Draft of Empirical Findings
	Miles, Michael and A. Michael Huberman. 2013. <i>Qualitative Data Analysis</i> . Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Chapters 11-12.	
February 21:	Individual Meetings	
February 28:	Individual Meetings	Revised Literature Review
March 7:	Going Back to the Literature	
March 14:	Making Sense of It All	First Draft of Thesis
March 21:	Spring Recess	
March 28:	Individual Meetings	
April 4:	Individual Meetings	
April 11:	Paper Presentations	Final Draft of Thesis
April 18:	Paper Presentations	Thesis Poster
May 2:	Thesis Poster Presentation	

Full List of Assignments & Deadlines Fall 2018/Spring 2019

What is a Senior Thesis? In short, it is an original piece of research that contributes to sociological knowledge. In the Fall semester, you will write a research proposal and begin your research. In the Spring semester (and over the winter break), you will finish the data collection, analyze your findings and write your thesis based on your findings.

We have broken down the steps of developing a research question and writing a research proposal into a series of smaller assignments. *You must complete all assignments on time.* Working each week on your thesis will help ensure that you are making regular progress.

Assignment 1: Research Question (1-page) Due: September 10

Your first assignment is to start thinking about and writing down research questions. In the coming weeks, you will need to narrow down your research *interests* into a succinct, answerable research *question*. But for now, I want you to think broadly about the kinds of social issues and problems that interest you. Please submit two paragraphs (no more than 250 words) that include: 1) A description of your thesis research interests; and 2) A list of possible research questions.

Assignment 2: Research Statement (2-3 pages) Due: September 17

The goal of this assignment is to help you clarify your ideas. The process of writing this should move you forward toward making the decision. The statement should include:

- (1) *A statement of your research question:* Phrase your question in 25 words or less. The important thing is to make an attempt at moving from a research topic to a research question, a statement of a specific puzzle to be solved or question to be answered by your research.
- (2) *A rationale for why this question is worth answering:* Explain why your research question is important and what theoretical implications it might have. Imagine someone asking “So What?” when you tell them your research question. Answer the question for them.
- (3) *An initial sense of the literature you will be engaging:* What are the first two things you think you should read? Why? If you have already done some reading, discuss briefly how your ideas fit in with what you have read so far. What different sociological literatures might be relevant to your project?
- (4) *Your initial hypotheses:* What argument would you love to be able to make? Thinking about this can be a useful way of getting your agenda out into the open.
- (5) *Your unit of analysis:* What is the main *unit of analysis* for your project (i.e. individuals, households, families, organizations, neighborhoods, nations, etc.)?
- (6) *Your strategy of investigation:* What kind of evidence are you going to try to gather? Try and be specific here, even if your ideas are hypothetical at this stage. If you want to do fieldwork, name a specific site, and describe the ways you might get access. If you are thinking about interviews, discuss how many people and whom you might interview, as well as the types of questions you might ask. If you are

Assess where you are and write out a work plan for the semester. The goal of this assignment is to: 1) report on the research you have completed so far, if applicable (1-2 pages) and 2) create a research and writing plan that you will follow for the break and for next semester (1 page). As you create your plan, be specific as to what you will accomplish each week. Set target dates for yourself, and be sure to include reading and class assignments, for this class and others, in your timeline. Be realistic about what you hope to accomplish and assume that everything will take longer than you think it will.

Assignment 8: Working Hypotheses (3-4 pages) Due: November 5

For this assignment, you will articulate what you expect to find in your research. In other words, you will think about your *hypotheses*. Write out your hypotheses, clearly and concisely. Then write out what you would need to find – in your interviews, through your search of documents, in your surveys – to *support* your hypotheses, and what you could find that could *falsify* your hypotheses. This is a good way to figure out exactly what your hunches are, and to make connections between more abstract hypotheses and concrete findings. We will talk more about this assignment in class.

Assignment 9: In-class presentations Due: Nov. 28/Dec. 5

You will give a 10-minute presentation based on your prospectus. Submit an electronic copy of your presentation to CourseWorks.

Assignment 10: Final Prospectus (15-20 pages) Due: December 10

The final prospectus should present your research question and explain its importance. It should also include a literature review. How will your thesis specifically address questions within the existing literature? You should state what you hope your research will uncover (some working hypotheses) and why your results might be significant. Then discuss the research methods you will use to gather your evidence as well as your plan to gain access to the relevant sources, sites and/or people needed to gather this information.

The final prospectus should be about 15-20 pages in length (typed, double-spaced) and should include an introduction (what your problem is and why we should care about it), a literature review (not only what other people have said, but also your own assessment of the literature and what gaps you identify from this literature), a description of research methods, and a description of progress made to date along with some indication of what you have found so far. You should also include all relevant citations and a full bibliography (consult the ASA style guide).

Your final prospectus should address all the following questions, as applicable to your project.

1. A problem statement and specific research questions that are grounded in prior research.
2. What is the puzzle? What is this a case of? What are you trying to learn?
3. Review of the literature: What research literature(s) are you speaking to?
4. A description of the research site, including people and activities involved.

5. A description of your data-gathering activities, including data strengths and limitations.
6. A description of your method for gaining access and establishing fieldwork relationships.
7. A description of observer effects on the data and any ethical problems encountered.
8. A description of your approach to data analysis.
9. A description of your research progress to date, including IRB approval or data collected.
10. A discussion of your research implications for the literature or for the broader society.

Submit one paper copy and an electronic copy to CourseWorks.

Assignment 11: Empirical Analyses (3-5 pages) Due: February 4

For this assignment, you will present and analyze some of your preliminary findings. There are two parts to the assignment: 1) present a sample of your data and 2) conduct an analysis of your data (1-2 pages). If you are doing interviews, transcribe an interview (a new one). If you are analyzing documents or something else (text messages, Facebook postings, etc.), present some of your data in an organized way. If you are collecting surveys or gathering quantitative data, include some surveys or some tables. Then analyze the data you presented in two pages. What did you learn from the interview transcript or set of field notes or documents(s)? What is interesting about this particular sample of your data? Does it support the hypotheses you wrote for the last assignment? How does it help you (or does it help you?) in starting to think about possible answers for your research question?

Assignment 12: Empirical Findings (4-6 pages) Due: February 18

This is your first opportunity to present your empirical findings to date. What patterns are you finding? How do you know that you are finding them? What surprised you? How would you answer your research question in light of your empirical findings? For this assignment, you will need to present an argument (or arguments) and use data (interview quotes, examples from your observations, parts of texts, etc.) to prove your arguments. We will talk more about this assignment in class.

Assignment 13: Revised Literature Review (6-8 pages) Due: March 4

In light of what you are learning from your data, rewrite your literature review. Remember, a literature review includes an overview of key arguments and sources that pertain to your topic. Whereas last semester most of you included in your proposal literatures that were *not* directly relevant to your research question, this literature review should be much more tailored to your question and to your findings (to date). Before re-writing your literature review, re-read Kristin Luker's chapter on literature reviews in *Salsa Dancing in the Social Sciences*.

Assignment 14: First Draft of Thesis Due: March 18

Write a complete draft of your thesis. Your thesis should include an introduction (what is your problem and why should we care about it), a literature review, a description of research methods, your research findings (this will be the bulk of your thesis) and a conclusion. You should also include citations, where appropriate, and a full bibliography (consult the ASA style guide). Note that *the more complete your draft, the better your feedback will be*.

