

# Information About the Honors Thesis Seminar

Laleh Behbehanian ([lalehb@berkeley.edu](mailto:lalehb@berkeley.edu))

Mary Kelsey ([mkelsey@berkeley.edu](mailto:mkelsey@berkeley.edu))

Cristina Rojas (Student Advisor) ([cmrojas@berkeley.edu](mailto:cmrojas@berkeley.edu))

A painting of a man in a dark suit, seen from behind, walking on a wide, reddish-brown dirt road. The road is highly unusual, as it winds and loops through a lush green, hilly landscape. The road starts as a straight path in the foreground, then curves and loops back on itself multiple times as it goes up the hills. In the distance, another person is visible on the road. The sky is blue with some white clouds.

# Honors Thesis Seminar

## Our Expectations

- ▶ We understand that for most, this is your first lengthy research project
  - ▶ The path of research is not straight and narrow, but a winding road
- ▶ Class is designed to structure/guide your journey
  - ▶ The research is your own project
  - ▶ Intellectually intense experience
  - ▶ Rewarding experience

# Overview

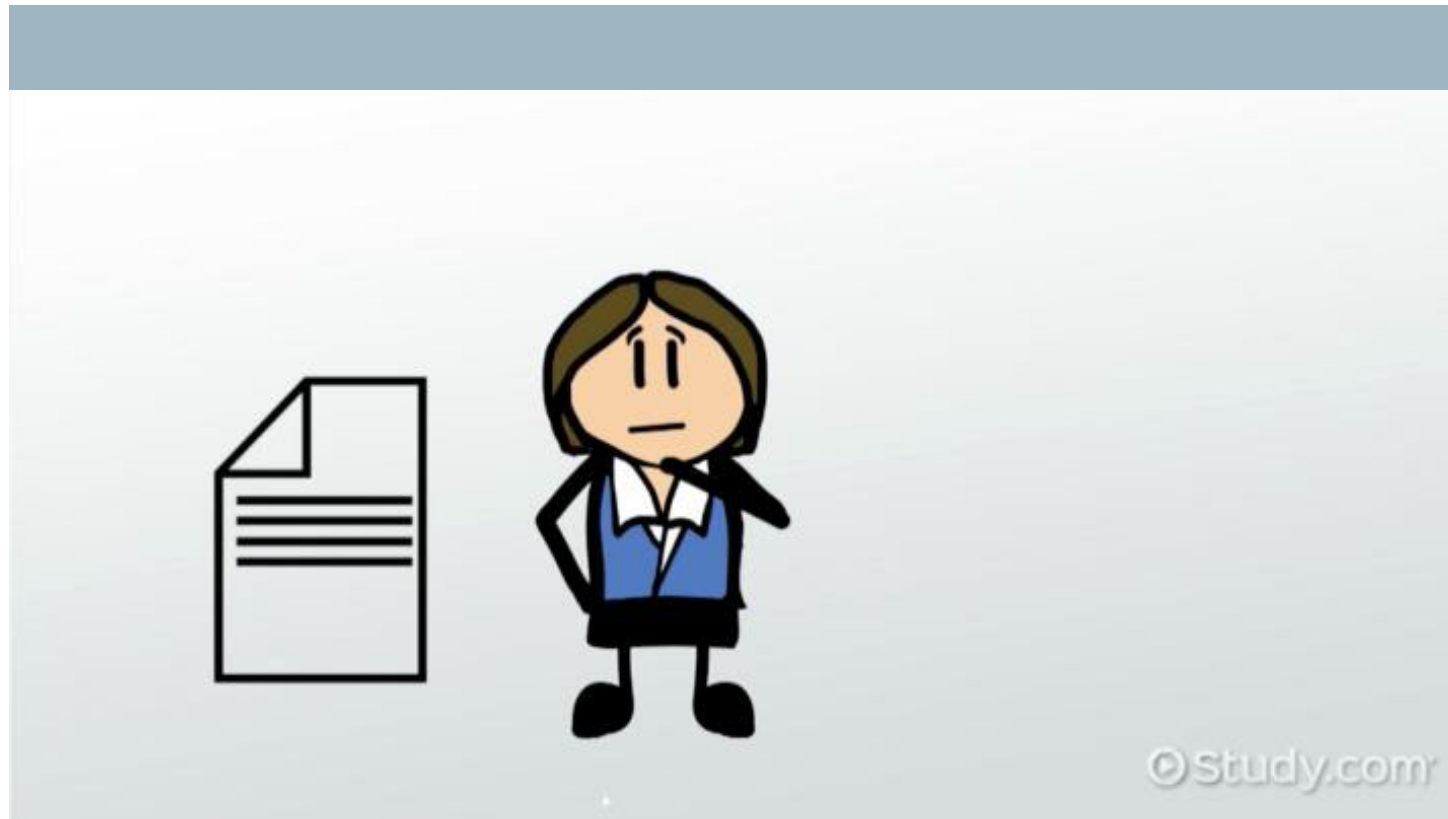
- ▶ What is research?
- ▶ What do we do in an honors thesis class?
- ▶ What does a strong research proposal look like?
  - ❖ Viable Research Question
  - ❖ Academic Literature and the Sociological Conversation
  - ❖ Methods: Access to Research Sites, Interviewees, Data
- ▶ Questions about you
  - ▶ What topic is of interest to you?
  - ▶ What might be your preliminary research question?

# What is research?

Research involves

- ▶ Identifying a topic of interest
- ▶ Asking a question about it (this is your research question)
- ▶ Gathering data through sociological methods to answer your question (this is your methodology)
  - ▶ Methods include
    - ▶ Interviews
    - ▶ Ethnography
    - ▶ Document analyses
    - ▶ Statistical analyses
- ▶ Writing up your findings
- ▶ Findings should add substantive knowledge to your field of inquiry

# Elements of a Strong Research Proposal



# Initial Research Question

- ▶ Most students begin with an interest in a topic
- ▶ Initial question may be very broad
- ▶ Read! READ!! READ!!!

As you learn more about your topic

- ❖ Ask yourself questions about the topic
- ❖ Look for gaps in the literature, e.g.,
  - Is there a question without a satisfactory answer?
  - Is there earlier research that should be updated?
  - Is there research from one context that could be explored in a new context?
- ▶ It takes time to narrow an interest in a topic into feasible research question

# Viabile Research Questions

- ▶ Sociologically significant
  - ▶ What are the social issues/questions embedded in your research topic?
  - ▶ Beware the siren calls of psychology
- ▶ Project needs to be empirically grounded
  - ▶ Purely theoretical questions are not honors thesis research questions
- ▶ Make sure you can find the resources/data to answer your question
- ▶ Project can be completed in 9 months
- ▶ Project needs 30 - 50 pages to be fully explored
  - ▶ Not 10 pages, not 300 pages
- ▶ How, Why, What questions are more promising than Do questions
  - ▶ Simple, straightforward questions are often the best starting point
- ▶ **If you think you know the full answer to your research question now, find another question**



## The Role of Literature In Shaping Your Question

Research question should enter a larger sociological conversation

- ▶ What fields inform your question?
- ▶ What do other scholars say about your topic?
- ▶ What *don't* other scholars say about your topic?
- ▶ What is your topic a case of?
  - ▶ May frame your research as a case study of a larger issue
- ▶ Narrow your question by looking for gaps, silences, inconsistencies/disagreements in the literature
- ▶ What are the sociological implications of your topic? (the last step)

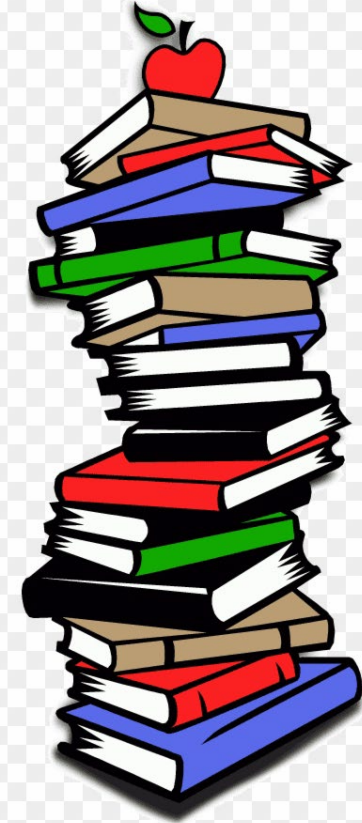


# Read broadly to figure out what interests you specifically

Talk to a librarian about your topic of interest, get references

Check out the “Subject Librarians” under the “Get Help” tab on the UCB library homepage

- Ann Glusker (Sociology) [glusker@Berkeley.edu](mailto:glusker@Berkeley.edu)
- Corliss Lee (Ethnic Studies) [clee@library.berkeley.edu](mailto:clee@library.berkeley.edu)
- Lillian Castillo-Speed (Chicanx/Latinx Studies) [csl@library.berkeley.edu](mailto:csl@library.berkeley.edu)
- Margaret Phillips (Gender and Women’s Studies) [margaret.phillips@berkeley.edu](mailto:margaret.phillips@berkeley.edu)



# Methods



- ▶ You should have some idea how you will gather the data you will need to answer your question
  - ▶ Different methods best address different questions
    - ▶ Interviews best capture what people think
    - ▶ Ethnographic studies best capture what people actually do
- ▶ Can you get access
  - ▶ To an appropriate site
  - ▶ People to interview
    - ▶ Precautions for Vulnerable Groups
  - ▶ Archival material
  - ▶ Data bases

# First Semester (H190A)

- ▶ Research process broken down into smaller steps
  - ▶ Assignments due every 2-3 weeks
- ▶ First semester assignments:
  - ▶ Research statement
    - ▶ What is your question
    - ▶ Why is it important
  - ▶ Annotated bibliography (brief summaries of relevant literature, submitted every 2 weeks)
  - ▶ Literature review (what is known about your topic)
    - ▶ Helps identify what is *not* known about your topic and what you want to discover
  - ▶ Research methods (what, how, where)
  - ▶ Research prospectus (12-15 page research proposal)

H190B meets on **Thursdays**

# Second Semester (H190B)

- ▶ Must complete a research proposal of acceptable quality in H190A to be admitted to H190B
- ▶ Conduct research (gather data)
- ▶ Write an analysis of your findings
- ▶ H190B is a 5-unit class
  - ▶ Intensity of work increases
  - ▶ Be prepared to take a lighter load of classes or lessen outside commitments
- ▶ H190B meets on **Tuesdays**

# Grade based on quality of thesis but also on your class performance

- ▶ Attend class (get there on time)
- ▶ Timely submission of work
- ▶ “Seminar Culture”
  - ▶ Collaborative classroom
  - ▶ Listen to and respect classmates
  - ▶ Take your own and your classmates work seriously
    - ▶ Peer editing

# Will you enjoy this journey?

- ▶ **The honors thesis class is a commitment!**
  - ▶ Almost all students successfully complete their theses
  - ▶ But, are you prepared to commit to your project?
  - ▶ Are you willing to reduce other commitments?
  - ▶ Be honest!



## If you're ready for the challenge....

- ▶ **Submit a preliminary proposal for comment and advice**
  - ▶ 3 - 5 pages
  - ▶ Includes at least 3 academic references
  - ▶ Due June 6
- ▶ Follow the advice given on your preliminary proposal
- ▶ Make an appointment with a librarian
- ▶ Final proposal due July 15

