Orientation to the Senior Honors Thesis Seminar

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Overview of Topics

- What do we do in a senior 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

- Your Questions
  - What topic is of interest to you?
  - Preliminary research question?
What Do We Do in the Thesis Class?

- 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, with many ups, downs and unexpected turns
- Class is designed to structure/guide your journey
- Intellectually intense experience
- The research is your own project
Organization of Class

- Research process broken down into smaller steps
  - Assignments due every 3 weeks
- First semester assignments:
  - Research statement
    - What is your question
    - Why is it important
  - Annotated bibliography (continuing)
  - Literature review (what is known about your topic)
  - Research methods (what, how, where)
  - Research prospectus (10-15 page research proposal)
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
  - No satisfactory answers
  - Different time frame
  - Different context
- It takes time to narrow an interest in a topic into feasible research question
Viable Research Questions

- Sociologically significant
  - Beware the siren calls of psychology
- Project needs to be empirically grounded
- 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
- If you think you know the 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 different 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

The answer to your research question should

- Add to our knowledge of the topic
- Advance sociological understanding
  - e.g., what case study X tells us about social issue Y
Methods

- You have some idea how you will gather the data you need to answer your question
  - Different methods best address different questions
- Can you get access
  - To an appropriate site
  - People to interview
    - Precautions for Vulnerable Groups
  - Archival material
  - Data bases
Will you enjoy this journey?

- The honors thesis class is a huge commitment!
  - Are you prepared to devote the time the project will need?
  - Are you willing to reduce other commitments?
If you’re ready for the challenge....

- Submit a preliminary proposal for comment and advice
  - Due June 14
- Follow the advice given on your preliminary proposal
- Make an appointment with a librarian
  - Sociology liaison Ann Glusker
  - glusker@berkeley.edu
- Final proposal due July 15