

Orientation to the Senior Honors Thesis Seminar

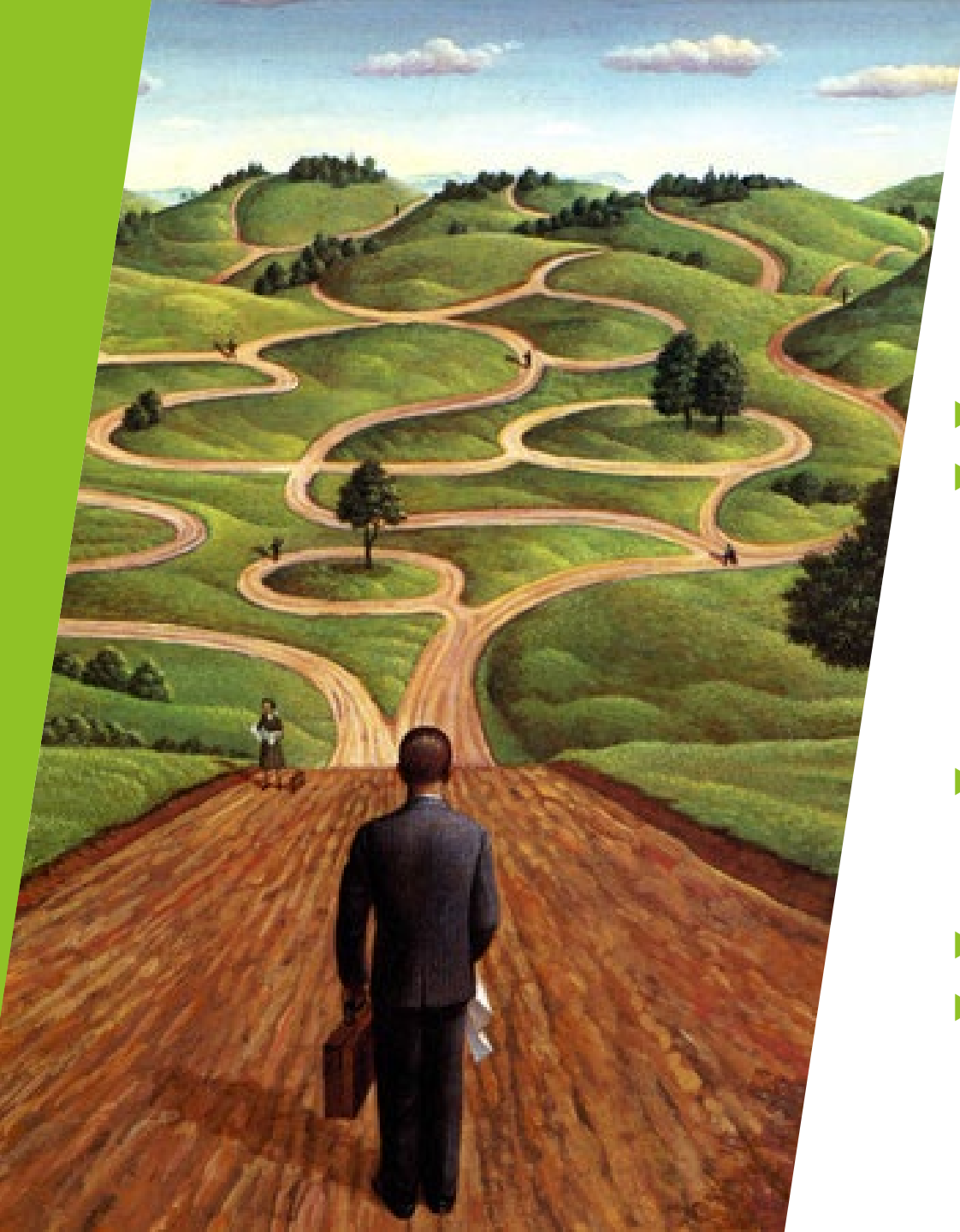
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Overview of Topics

- ▶ 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?



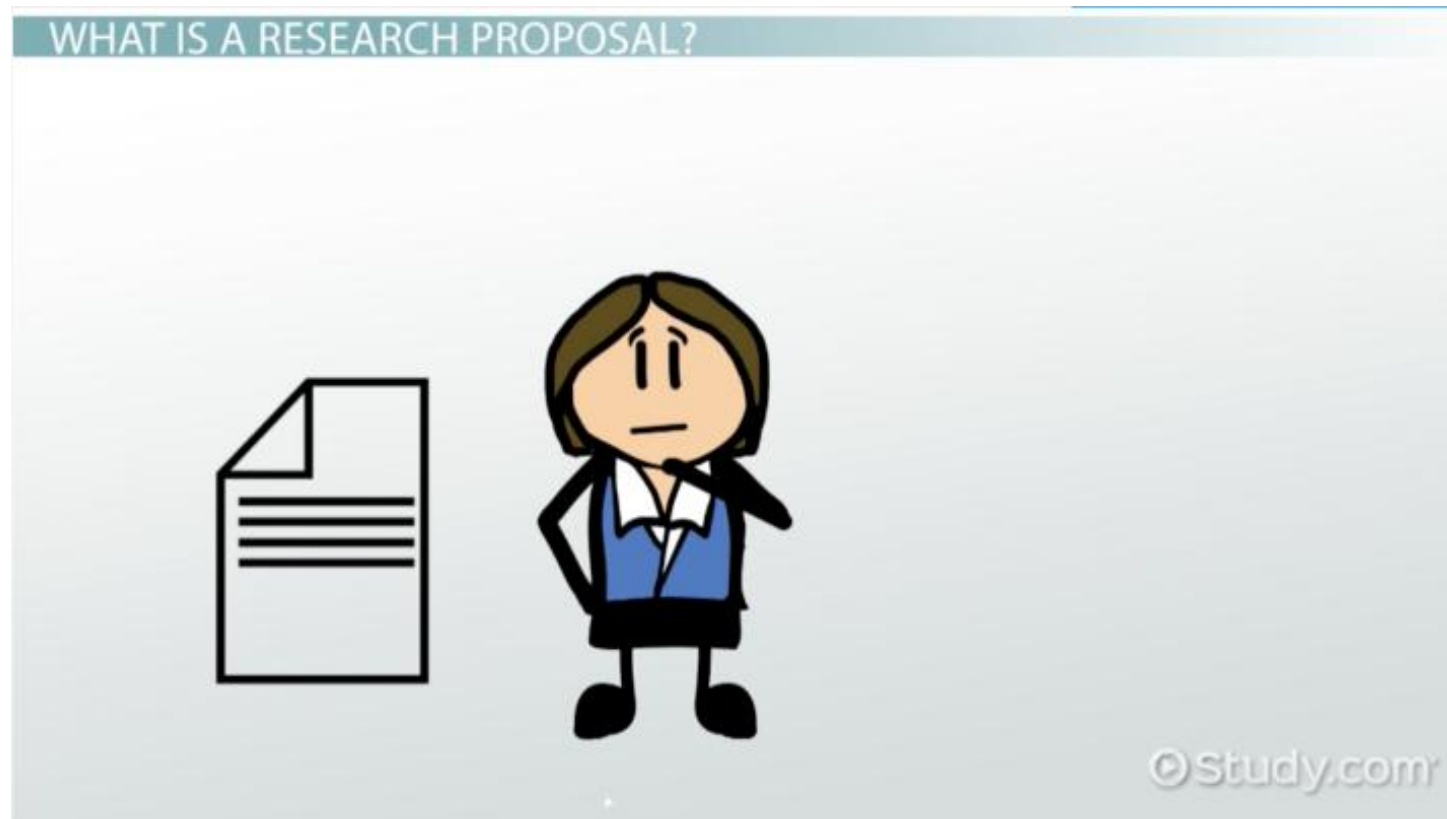
What Do We Do in the Thesis Class?

- ▶ 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, down 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

Viabile 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**

A woman wearing a brown hijab and a dark blue long-sleeved shirt is sitting on a white ledge in a library. She is holding an open book and reading it. Behind her is a bookshelf filled with books. The lighting is warm and soft, suggesting a quiet study environment.

The Role of Literature In Shaping Your Question

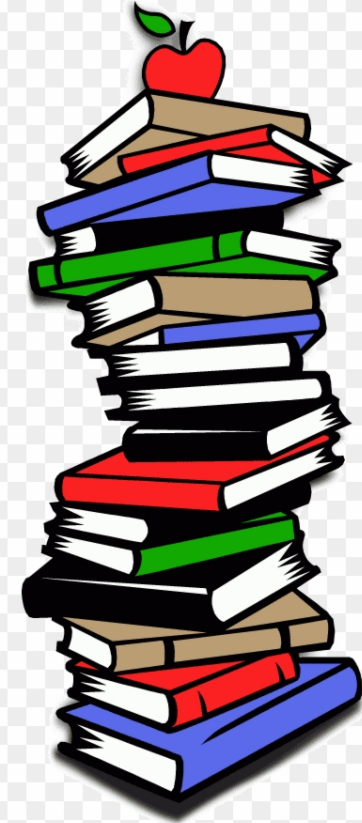
Research question should enter a larger sociological conversation

- ▶ 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

