

SOC 105: Research Design and Sociological Methods
UC Berkeley, Fall 2021

INSTRUCTOR

Caitlin Daniel, PhD (she/her)
Email: cdaniel@berkeley.edu
OH: Monday, 12:30-2 PM; Room 484 Soc Sci Building
Sign-up: <https://www.wejoinin.com/sheets/siwtw>

CLASS MEETING

Dwinelle 187

Tuesdays and Thursdays 11-12:30 PM

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Have you ever felt so curious about the social world that you wanted to study it yourself, but didn't know how to turn a general research interest into a clear research question, and then transform a research question into a project that you could actually carry out? This course will introduce you to the methods and principles of sociological research design that are needed to make this leap, including developing a clear research question; selecting data to answer your question; situating your project in existing scholarship; developing a data-collection plan; and research ethics. Ultimately, you will craft a research proposal that justifies and outlines a plan for studying a sociological research question.

Given the practical nature of conducting research, this course will focus on discussion, with an accent on workshopping your research projects. This class is geared for students who want to formulate a research project to pursue over the summer, for a senior thesis, for a research grant or fellowship, or in graduate school.

PREREQUISITE

SOC 5 or permission from the instructor.

COURSE GOALS

By the end of the course, you should be able to:

- Explain the goals and distinctive features of sociological research
- Translate a general interest into a concrete research question
- Conduct a literature review
- Understand how to build from a research question to a research design
- Appreciate the role of purposeful research design, systematic observation, and careful inference in drawing conclusions about social phenomena
- Assess the strengths and weaknesses of methods used in sociological research
- Identify key ethical issues in social scientific research

This course is all about helping you understand the fundamentals of research design so that you can pursue your own project. As a result, we may change the syllabus to respond better to your needs. This may mean *cutting* readings; spending *more time* on a topic; *adding* readings to address your emerging interests; and/or *moving topics* earlier or later. Be ready for and open to any changes, and please propose changes that you might find helpful. While we need to cover some set material, I want this course to respond to your interests and concerns.

REQUIRED MATERIALS

Readings will be posted on bCourses. Chapters from books will also be available in digital form through e-Reserves at the UC Berkeley library. Note that while some books have unlimited access, others can only be checked out at a time. Your best chance of snagging one of these limited-access e-Reserves is not waiting until the last moment.

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1E-9KYv8fb6nGexY7NKeWF_wK7RoaVR9thx6rfd4NbQA/edit#gid=0

COURSE COMPONENTS AND REQUIREMENTS

Attendance and Participation (15% of final grade)

While listed as a lecture course, this class will combine short lectures with group discussion. Because this will likely be a small, cozy class, we all need to participate actively. To prepare for this active participation, please complete the assigned readings for the day, *in addition to* jotting down any questions or concerns you want to discuss further. These questions and concerns could range from something you're excited about to something you violently disagree with to something that's confusing, among others. We will also use class time for in-class activities and to workshop our proposals-in-the-making. If you feel shy or intimidated about speaking up, let me know, and we can think of ways to support your contribution to class.

Assignments (85% of final grade)

Most of the grade for this course is comprised of assignments that will build up to the final research proposal. These assignments will also help me address your concerns and challenges throughout the semester rather than right at the end, when time's running out. The assignments are as follows.

1) Research Topic/Statement of Interest (5% of final grade)

1 page paper about research topic and purpose of research.

DUE: 9/12 (Sunday)

2) Research Question (5% of final grade)

2 page paper detailing your research question or questions.

DUE: 9/21 (Tuesday)

3) Methods Memo (15% of final grade)

3-5 page paper detailing what method(s) and research site or case.

DUE: 10/7 (Thurs)

4) Design Memo (5% of final grade)

2 page paper outlining research design.

DUE: 10/19 (Tues)

5) Literature Review (15% of final grade)

4-6 page paper discussing relevant literature.

DUE: 10/21 (Tues) [but work on this continuously through Sept. and Oct.]

6) Ethical Issues (5% of final grade)

2 page paper addressing any ethical concerns you might encounter.

DUE: 11/2 (Tues)

7) Data Analysis (5% of final grade)

2 page paper discussing how you will analyze data to draw broader conclusions from empirical observations, and how you will safeguard against possible cognitive biases

DUE: 11/18 (Thurs)

8) Final Research Proposal (30% of final grade)

15-20 page research proposal

DUE: Wed, 12/15

Please note that assignments are not always due on the same day of the week. This is because I want to provide you with enough time to do the assignments, while also trying to space them enough to give you a rest, which sometimes results in different due days.

GRADING

A	94-100%	B+	88%-89.99%	C+	78%-79.99%	D+	68%-69.99%
A-	90-93.99%	B	84-87.99%	C	74-77.99%	D	64-67.99%
		B-	80-83.99%	C-	70-73.99%	F	<63.99%

Assignments worth 5% are graded pass/fail.

Assignment Submission

Assignments are due on bCourses by 11:59 PM the day they are due, unless indicated otherwise. Late assignments lose a letter grade for each day (or fraction thereof) that they are late.

Incomplete Grades: Incompletes are the last resort for students experiencing true medical or other emergencies that make it impossible for them to complete their coursework on time. To be considered for an incomplete grade, students need to speak with me about it DURING the semester, and you must provide documentation of the reason for the request.

If you need **accommodations** for a disability or medical condition, or have a conflict due to university sports or the observance of religious holidays, please email or speak with me early on.

POLICIES

Academic Integrity and Honesty:

Academic dishonesty of any kind (including, but not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, falsification, copying and sharing individual work) will not be tolerated, as specified in UC Berkeley’s Code of Student Conduct: <http://sa.berkeley.edu/conduct/integrity/addressing-misconduct>. All course assignments are checked by Turnitin, a plagiarism detection tool. You will get **no** credit for an assignment with plagiarism. Other instances of dishonesty may result in **zero** points for the **entire** course component. Academic dishonesty will be reported to Student Judicial Affairs. Note: it is possible to plagiarize without intending to do so (e.g., failing to cite references properly; sticking

too closely to an author's original wording). If you have any questions about plagiarism, just contact me.

Email

I will respond to emails once a day, excluding weekends, when I check email infrequently. If your question is answered on the syllabus or a handout, I may not reply. Keep your eyes out for emails from me. They will include announcements, updates, and any changes.

Devices and Distraction

Non-assistive devices like your phone, computer, or tablet compromise your learning by splitting your attention. Keep them out of sight and turned off while class is in session. Studies show that the mere presence of a cell phone can be distracting. You will lose a whole letter grade for attendance and participation FOR THE SEMESTER if I see you using your phone or computer without permission. Let's focus!

Back Up Your Work

Save your paper and exam responses somewhere other than your computer, such a thumb drive, an external hard drive, Dropbox, or Google Docs—or just email yourself a copy when you're done doing a chunk of work. Computers can fail, and we don't want to lose the fruits of our effort. I expect you to back up your work. This means I will not be lenient in grading if you say your computer crashed and you lost what you wrote.

COVID Precautions

Campus COVID policies will be followed and enforced. Everyone must wear a mask covering both nose and mouth. You will be asked to wear a mask if you come without one. Anyone who does not comply must leave the room and will be marked absent. Let me know early in the semester if you have a medical exemptions. Currently, there are no social distancing requirements. COVID protocols may change over the semester. I will keep you apprised of any changes.

Disruptions to the Semester

The world is wacky these days. We may experience disruptions due to COVID, wildfires, or power outages. In this case, we will move to remote learning.

“User Agreement”

A syllabus is like a contract that outlines the rights and responsibilities of instructor and student alike. Students are responsible for understanding the syllabus and its policies, and are responsible for bearing the consequences of not being familiar with the syllabus and its policies.

STUDENT SUPPORT

Office Hours:

Don't be shy, come on by! Office hours can feel intimidating, but don't be scared and don't worry about asking “stupid” questions. There's nothing stupid about wanting to learn or just say “hi.” Research shows that office hours can be especially intimidating for first-gen college students, who often think that academic success comes from toughing it out alone, or who feel unprepared to interact with authority figures. I've been there. I was a first-gen student, too, struggling with money and problems back home. Don't be afraid to come on by.

Student Learning Center

Provides support for writing, various academic disciplines including social sciences, as well as help for transfer and international students. <http://slc.berkeley.edu>

Economic, Food, and Housing Support

If you need economic, food, or housing support, you can find help at basicneeds.berkeley.edu. You may be eligible for money to buy groceries via calfresh.berkeley.edu or our Food Assistance Program: <https://financialaid.berkeley.edu/financial-literacy-and-resources-financial-literacy-and-resources/basic-needs/>. If you need of food immediately, please visit our UC Berkeley Food Pantry at pantry.berkeley.edu/.

Sexual Harassment and Violence Support Services

Survivor Support Services provides information on these issues, including how to file a report and receive support services: <http://survivorsupport.berkeley.edu>. Please note that I am legally required to report incidents of sexual harassment or violence that students disclose to me. To speak to a confidential care advocate: <http://sa.berkeley.edu/dean/confidential-care-advocate/>

Mental Health and Wellness:

Anyone can experience issues that get in the way of learning, like strained relationships, anxiety, depression, alcohol and substance use, difficulties with concentration, sleep, and eating, and/or lack of motivation. Such concerns can affect both academic performance and quality of life. If you need mental health support, or are concerned about a friend, UC Berkeley offers many services, such as free short-term counseling at University Health Services. For links to many resources: <http://recalibrate.berkeley.edu/> For resources addressing mental health issues during the COVID pandemic, see: <https://uhs.berkeley.edu/coronavirus/student-mental-health> **Seeking help is a good and courageous thing to do — both for yourself and for those who care about you.**

SCHEDULE AND TOPICS

Below is a schedule of assigned readings and topics of discussion. Complete readings before class. Our pace and agenda may change somewhat throughout the term. I will keep you informed of any changes

WEEK 1

Aug. 26

Introduction and Overview

- No reading

WEEK 2

Aug. 31

Sociological Thinking

Ragin, Charles C. and Lisa M. Amoroso. 2011. "Chapter 1: What Is (And Is Not) Social Research?" Pp 5-32 in *Constructing Social Research*.

Morris, Lindsay. 2021. The Kids of Camp I Am, a Decade Later. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/08/10/magazine/camp-i-am.html>

Sept. 2 **Examples of Sociological Research**

- What does a sociological perspective add that other perspectives don't?

Becker, Howard S. 1953. "Becoming a Marijuana User." *American Journal of Sociology*.

Sweet, Paige L. 2019. "The Sociology of Gaslighting." *American Sociological Review*: 851-875.

WEEK 3

Sept. 7 **Choosing a Topic**

- What topics excite you?
- What makes them sociological?

Browse issues of the *American Sociological Review* (<https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/loi/ajs>) and/or the *American Journal of Sociology* (<https://journals.sagepub.com/loi/asra>) for inspiration. (Note: You may first need to log in with CalNet ID)

Sept. 9 **Refining Your Focus, Articulating Its Import**

- What makes your topic "interesting"?

Davis, Murray. 1971. "That's Interesting!" *Philosophy of Social Science*

*** DUE Sunday 9/12: Research Topic/Statement of Interest***

WEEK 4

Sept. 14 **From Topic to Research Question**

Booth, Wayne C et al. 2016. "Chapter 3: From Topics to Questions." Pp 33-48 in *The Craft of Research*. Fourth Edition. The University of Chicago Press.

Sept. 16 **Literature Review: Situating Your Question**

UNC Literature Review Guide: <https://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/literature-reviews>

VCU Research Guides: https://guides.library.vcu.edu/ld.php?content_id=1720467,
https://guides.library.vcu.edu/ld.php?content_id=1720462, and
https://guides.library.vcu.edu/ld.php?content_id=1720465

WEEK 5

Sept. 21 **Example of a Literature Review (cracking the code)**

- How are literature reviews structured? What are the principles behind this structure?

Daniel, Caitlin. 2015. "Changing Conceptions of Proper Childrearing among Indigenous Rural-to-Urban Migrants in El Alto, Bolivia." *Sociological Forum* pp. 949-954 only (until Data and Methods. **bCourses**)

- *Read up to Data and Methods. Pay particular attention to “Childrearing and Change.” Note the goals, transitions, and organization, as well as how it differs from the sections “Cultural Models” and “Rural Aymara Parenting.”*

Re-read Sweet, Paige. 2019. (from 9/12) “The Sociology of Gaslighting.” *American Sociological Review* ONLY pp. 851-857 (until Data and Methods)

DUE Tues 9/21: Research Topic/Statement of Interest
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Methods

Sept. 23

Surveys

- *What are the strengths and limitations of surveys?*
- *What kind of research questions are they good for—and not?*

Schuman, Howard. 2002. “Sense and Nonsense about Surveys.” *Contexts* 1 (2):40-47.

Best, Joel. 2001. “Telling the Truth About Damned Lies and Statistics.”
<http://www.statlit.org/cp/2001bestchroniclehighered.pdf>

WEEK 6

Sept. 28

In-Depth Interviews

- What research questions are in-depths interviews good for—and not?
- What are their strengths and limitations?

Weiss, Robert S. 2004. “In Their Own Words: Making the Most of Qualitative Interviews.”
Contexts 3(4): 44-51.

Lareau, Annette and Aliya Hamid Rao. 2016. “It’s about the depth of your data,”
<https://contexts.org/blog/its-about-the-depth-of-your-data/>

Hoang, Kimberly Kay and Rhacel Salazar Parreñas. 2016. “Accessing the Hardest to Reach Population.” *Contexts Blog*. <https://contexts.org/blog/accessing-the-hardest-to-reach-populations/>

Sept. 30

Field Work and Ethnography

- Same questions as for other methods
- What is the relationship between fieldwork, culture, and ethnography?

Van Maanen, John. 2011. “Fieldwork, Culture, and Ethnography,” *Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 1-12.

Adler, Patricia A. and Peter Adler. 2003. “The Promise and Pitfalls of Going into the Field.”
Contexts 2(2): 41-47.

WEEK 7

Oct. 5 **Content Analysis**

- What research questions is content analysis good for and not so good for?
- What are its strengths and limitations?
- Can a mini content analysis aid your main analysis?

Alder, Emily Stier and Roger Clark. 2015. Chapter 13: “Content Analysis,” pp. 309-357 in *An Invitation to Social Research: How It’s Done*.

Oct. 7 **Sampling and Generalization**

- What can I say with my data?
- How do I make sure these claims are sound?

Luker, Kristin. 2008. “Chapter 6: On Sampling, Operationalization, and Generalization” in *Salsa Dancing in the Social Sciences* (p 99-128)

Content warning: chapter discusses how to define “rape.” If you have any concerns about reading this chapter, please let me know.

*** DUE: Thurs. 10/7 Methods Memo ***

WEEK 8

Oct. 12 **Linking Theory and Data**

- How do you go from empirical observations to broader claims?

Adler, Emily Stier and Roger Clark. 2015. “Chapter 2: Theory and Research.” Pp 19-35 in *An Invitation to Social Research: How It’s Done*. Fifth Edition.

Oct. 14 **Using Concepts**

- How and when can concepts aid our analysis (or not)?

Becker, Howard S. 1998. “Chapter 4: Concepts.” Pp 109-145 in *Tricks of the Trade: How to Think About Your Research While You’re Doing It*.

Re-read Daniel, Caitlin. 2015. “Changing Conceptions of Proper Childrearing among Indigenous Rural-to-Urban Migrants in El Alto, Bolivia.” Pp. 952-953 (Cultural Models), 956-961 (Findings to Changing Childrearing Beliefs...)

WEEK 9

Oct. 19 **Methods and Design Workshop**

- Help! What am I doing?!?

No reading. Instead, bring a) two printed copies of your design memo and b) methods and design-related questions you want to discuss further.

*** DUE: Thurs. 10/19 Design Memo *** DUE BY CLASSTIME.

Research Ethics

Oct. 21

Foundations of Ethics

Ragin, Charles C. and Lisa M. Amoroso. 2011. "Chapter 4: The Ethics of Social Research." Pp 79-107 in *Constructing Social Research*.

Fiesler, Casey. 2019. "Scientists Like Me Are Studying Your Tweets—Are You OK With That?" *How We Get To Next*. <https://howwegettonext.com/scientists-like-me-are-studying-your-tweets-are-you-ok-with-that-c2cfdfeb135>

***** DUE Tues 10/21: Literature Review *****

Note: This is due shortly after the design memo, but you should be working on it continuously through Sept. and Oct. Lit reviews take time.

WEEK 10

Oct. 26

Speaking for Others

- How could the researcher have addressed problems of ethics and positionality?

Lewis-Kraus. Gideon. 2016. "The Trials of Alice Goffman." *The New York Times*. January 12.

Data Analysis

Oct. 28

Quantitative Data Analysis

Adler, Emily Stier and Roger Clark. 2015. "Chapter 15: Quantitative and Qualitative Data Analysis." Pp. 414-441 in *An Invitation to Social Research: How It's Done*.

WEEK 11

Nov. 2

Qualitative Data Analysis

Adler, Emily Stier and Roger Clark. 2015. "Chapter 15: Quantitative and Qualitative Data Analysis." Pp. 441-463 in *An Invitation to Social Research: How It's Done*.

*****DUE Tues 11/2: Ethical Issues Memo**

The Non-Rational

Nov. 4

Cognitive Biases

Kahneman, Daniel. 2011. Ch. 1 "The Characters of the Story," and Ch. 7 "A Machine for Jumping to Conclusions," in *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Case of Cognitive Blind Spots:

Daniel, Caitlin. 2016. "A Hidden Cost to Giving Kids Their Vegetables." *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/16/opinion/why-poor-children-cant-be-picky-eaters.html>

...and a Resolution

Excerpt from draft of *Taste and Necessity: Feeding the Next Generation in an Unequal America*
(by Caitlin Daniel)

WEEK 12

Nov. 9 **Emotional Blocks**

Jensen, Joli. *Write No Matter What*. Part 1 (pp. 1-14); Part 3 (pp. 39-73) *EXCEPT* pp. 56-59

Nov. 11 **NO CLASS—Veterans’ Day**

WEEK 13

Nov. 16 Individual meetings

Nov. 18 Individual meetings

*** DUE Thurs. 11/18: Data Analysis Memo ***	
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WEEK 14

Nov. 23 **NO CLASS—Enjoy the break ☺**

Nov. 25 **NO CLASS – THANKSGIVING**

WEEK 15

Nov. 30 **Academic Writing**

- Why it’s so bad and how to do better

Pinker, Steven. 2014. “Why Academics Stink at Writing.” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.

Zinsser, William. 2006. “Simplicity,” and “Clutter,” *On Writing Well*. New York: HarperCollins, pp. 6-16.

Amherst College Writing Center (AWC). “Reverse Outlining”

https://www.amherst.edu/academiclife/support/writingcenter/resourcesforwriters/revision/reverse_outline

Dec. 2 **People’s Choice—You Decide the Topic as Interests Emerge**

Reading TBD

(Possible topics: sampling, inference (going from data to theory), generalization, researcher positionality, reflexivity, designing studies to adjudicate between competing arguments, writing for the public, more on deductive vs. inductive research, data analysis, among others)

Dec. 6-10 **RRR WEEK**

*****DUE 12/15: FINAL RESEARCH PROPOSAL (11:59PM)**