

SENIOR HONORS THESIS SEMINAR

University of California, Berkeley (Fall 2021)

Laleh Behbehanian, Ph.D.

Thursday 12:00 - 2:00 (225 Dwinelle)

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Office Hours: Thursday 2:30 – 3:30 (434 Social Sciences)

Sign up at wejoinin.com/LalehBehbehanian

The senior honors thesis seminar gives students an opportunity to experience firsthand what it means to do sociological research. Over the next nine months, you will formulate a research question, design a methodology, collect data, and write up your findings and analysis. The first semester focuses primarily on the preparation of a research proposal, while the second semester emphasizes data collection and analysis. The culmination of the seminar will be a research paper (35-50 pages) that contributes to sociological knowledge.

A thesis project can seem daunting—especially at its inception. To help you incrementally build your research skills, the seminar is organized around a series of smaller assignments that contribute to the larger project. There are deadlines for each of these assignments and it is *very* important for you to meet these deadlines. There are a few assigned readings for this class, all of which are available on bCourses (along with other important material including writing and citation guides and samples of prior students' work). However, your primary work will be to read extensively on your chosen topic of research. You must do at least 1-2 readings on your topic every week, for which you will be regularly submitting an annotated bibliography. This will build your expertise in your field, enabling you to produce a literature review and design a research project that makes an original contribution to existing research.

You will receive an In-Progress (IP) grade for the successful completion of your work this semester. Completion and timely submission of all assignments in the fall is required for advancing into the spring semester. A final letter grade for the nine units of the senior honors thesis seminar will be awarded at the end of the spring semester.

PART I: FROM TOPIC TO RESEARCH QUESTION

Week 1: August 26

Introduction to class, classmates, thesis topics, and writing rituals

Assignment:

- 1) Anne LaMott, “Getting Started,” “Small Assignments,” and “Shitty First Drafts” (Ch.1-3) in *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life*

Week 2: September 2

How to develop a research question out of a research interest

Assignments:

- 1) Submit Annotated Bibliography entries for 2 sources (upload to bCourses)
- 2) Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, Joseph M. Williams, “What Research Is and How Researchers Think about it” (Ch.1) in Kate L. Turabian’s *A Manual for Research*
- 3) Kristen Luker, “What Is This A Case Of, Anyway,” (Ch.4) in *Salsa Dancing Into the Social Sciences*

Suggested Additional Reading:

Skim “Moving from Topic to Question” (Ch.2) in Turabian’s *A Manual for Research*

PART II: THE LITERATURE REVIEW

Week 3: September 9

What is a literature review? Why does a project need a literature review?

Assignments:

- 1) Assignment #1: Preliminary Proposal (3-4 pages). Submit hard copy in class and upload to bCourses.
- 2) Kristin Luker, “Reviewing the Literature” (Ch.5) in *Salsa Dancing into the Social Sciences*
- 3) Re-read p. 98 of Luker’s text and bring an image of your own “bedraggled daisy” to class
- 4) Read example of a literature review – “Don’t Be Ratchet!”

Week 4: September 16 (Joint Session: Meet at Moffitt Library)

Meet with Ann Glusker, the librarian assigned as liaison to the Sociology Department, to learn about tools and techniques for research using the libraries extensive electronic databases.

Ann is also willing to meet individually with students. You can set up an appointment by emailing her directly at glusker@berkeley.edu

Assignments:

- 1) [Wayne C. Booth](#) et al., “Finding Useful Sources” (Ch.3) in Turabian’s *A Manual for Research*

- 2) Stack Browsing Exercise: Before our library session, use the library website to find the call number of a book on your topic (try to find a book in either Moffitt or Main library). After our library session, go and find your book and browse through the books located in the surrounding stacks. When you have found your richest stack of relevant literature, email me a selfie to document your library discovery!

Week 5: September 23

Individual meetings

Assignments:

- 1) Assignment #2: Annotated Bibliography (6-10 sources). Upload to bCourses by noon on 9/23.

Week 6: September 30

Individual meetings

PART III: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Week 7: October 7 (Joint Session: Meet in 420 Social Sciences Building)

Discussion of ethical issues and practices in research; CPHS protocol

Assignments:

- 1) Complete CITI training and email me your certificate of completion

Register for eProtocol at the Committee for Human Subjects (CPHS) website:
(<http://cphs.berkeley.edu/>)

Follow the instructions for the “Student Investigators Guide” and complete the CITI preliminary training requirement. It takes between 2 – 4 hours to complete this training course (it gives you an overview of how to protect human subjects in research). All students must complete the CITI course and submit their certification of completion.

Week 8: October 14

Introduction to Research Methods

Assignments:

- 1) Submit Annotated Bibliography entries for 4 sources (upload to bCourses)
- 2) Kristin Luker, “Field (and other) Methods” (Ch.8) in *Salsa Dancing Into the Social Sciences*

Week 9: October 21 (Joint Session: Meet in 420 Social Sciences Building)

Interview Methods with Professor Edwin Lin

Assignments:

- 1) Assignment #3: Preliminary Literature Review (5-8 pages). Submit hard copy in class and upload to bCourses.

Week 10: October 28

Individual meetings

Week 11: November 4

Individual meetings

Assignment:

- 1) Submit Annotated Bibliography entries for 2-4 sources (upload to bCourses)

Week 12: November 11 - NO CLASS MEETING

Assignments:

- 1) Assignment #4: Preliminary Methodology (2-3 pages). Upload to bCourses by Friday 11/12.

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| PART IV: THESIS PROSPECTUS |
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Week 13: November 18

Workshopping Prospectus

Assignment:

- 1) Prepare 5-minute presentation of your project that addresses:
 - Research Question
 - Framing Literature
 - Proposed Methodology
 - Biggest Challenge/Obstacle

*Also bring in a *visualization* of your project to share during your presentation.

Week 14: November 25 - NO CLASS MEETING

Week 15: December 2

Workshopping Prospectus Continued

Assignment:

- 1) Submit Annotated Bibliography entries for 3-5 sources (upload to bCourses)

****December 16 - FINAL PROSPECTUS DUE (15-20 pages)****

Upload an electronic copy to bCourses by Thursday 12/16

Annotated Bibliography Entries

An annotated bibliography serves as a tool for researchers to document and organize the relevant scholarship they read. One of the primary tasks of a researcher is to extensively read scholarship that is relevant to their project, giving them the necessary expertise and knowledge to design and implement an original research project. You should be reading at least 1-2 sources relevant to your project every week, and writing up annotated bibliography entries for them, which should include the following:

- 1) Full Citation (decide on a citation format and stick to it)
 - 2) Summary of authors' main arguments
 - 3) Comments on relevance for your project
 - 4) List of keywords (which will help you search and organize your annotated bibliography)
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Assignment #1: PRELIMINARY PROPOSAL (3-4 pages)

Due Thursday, September 9

The goal of this assignment is to help you clarify your ideas and to provide you with an opportunity to confront the decisions you will need to make in your research. If you are torn between various paths, just describe the pros and cons of each direction. For example, perhaps your research interest generates two different questions, and you have not yet decided which to pursue. Discuss both. The process of writing this proposal should move you forward toward making your decisions. Feel free to discuss your research interests not only with your senior thesis advisor, but also with other professors and/or graduate students who share your area of interest.

Your proposal should include all of the following:

Statement of your research question

Phrase your question in 25 words or less. The important thing is to make an attempt at moving from an “area of research” or a “topic” to a research question, a statement of a specific question to be answered by your research.

Why is it worth knowing? (“so what?”)

Explain why your research question is important and the implications it might have.

Literature

What different sociological literatures might be relevant to your project? What have you read thus far that you think is useful and what are some of the things you think you should read? Why? How do these readings relate to your project?

Proposed Methodology

What kind of data are you going to try to gather? Try and be specific here, even if your ideas are very vague 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 whom you might interview, as well as the types of questions you might ask. If you are going to do text-based research, say something about where you think you can find relevant source material.

Include a **bibliography** for any sources you refer to.

Assignment #2: ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY (6-10 sources)

Due Thursday, September 23

An annotated bibliography includes: a full citation of the source; a brief summary of the authors’ main arguments; comments on the relevance for your project; and keywords. Submit a complete annotated bibliography that includes all of the relevant sources you’ve read thus far (for a total of 6-10).

Utilize subheadings in your annotated bibliography – this organizes the entries by grouping them under particular sub-topics or different approaches. Do what makes most sense right now for your project – and think of your annotated bibliography as a living document that will be expanded and reorganized as your project develops.

While internet posts or news items may be relevant to your research (and you should document those elsewhere), your annotated bibliography should exclusively include scholarly articles and books.

Also include your current research question at the top of your annotated bibliography.

Assignment #3: PRELIMINARY LITERATURE REVIEW (5-8 pages)

Due Thursday, October 21

A literature review includes an overview of key arguments and sources that pertain to your topic, serving to frame your research and its contribution to existing scholarship. Focus primarily on scholarly work that relates to the empirical core of your topic. Some students may also include consideration of studies that shed light on the sociological implications of the proposed study. For example, if you are interested in why the anti-abortion movement has been more successful in some states than in others, your literature review might include both general works on social movements and more specific works on anti-abortion groups.

To write a literature review, it is absolutely essential to know the key books and articles that have been written on your subject. A literature review summarizes key works, often clustering them in some way around common arguments or themes.

This is a time when you should be using library and internet databases. Be sure to explore different sources. Draw on books and articles you read in classes that most inspired or interested you. Follow their citations and bibliographies. Take a look at any relevant dissertations, as dissertations include an overview of the relevant literature (usually the first chapter). Your literature review should include around 8-12 sources.

Be sure to include your current research question.

Assignment #4: PRELIMINARY METHODOLOGY (2-3 pages)

Due Friday, November 12

A methodology is a strategy for gathering data (observations) that will help you answer your research question. Describe the methodological approach(es) you will use to carry out the research for your thesis. How will you gather data for your project? What kind of data will help you answer your research question? Try to be as specific as possible when outlining your research plan. For example, if you are doing interviews, whom are you going to interview? You should explain how you intend to locate people to interview, how and where you will conduct the interviews, and how many interviews you plan to undertake. Attach (separately) a list of questions you intend to ask. If you are doing ethnographic fieldwork, you should identify your field site and the specific issues that you want to explore there. If you plan to use archival or database sources, identify and examine them to make sure they hold material to address your research question. If your project has a comparative dimension, what will you compare and what do you hope to gain from this comparison?

Be sure to include your current research question.

Assignment #5: FINAL PROSPECTUS (15-20 pages)

Due Thursday, December 16

The final prospectus presents your research project and thoroughly lays out your plans for implementing it. The prospectus has 4 main sections. The introduction introduces your research question and makes a case for its importance. The literature review summarizes the existing scholarship on your topic in a manner that highlights the contribution of your research. The methodology section explains the research methods you will use to gather your data as well as your plan to gain access to the relevant sources, sites and/or people needed to gather this information. Your conclusion might include a working hypothesis (if you have one), some indication of what you have found so far, or why your results might be significant. The final prospectus should be about 15-20 pages in length (typed, double-spaced). It should be thoroughly cited and include a full bibliography (consult the ASA style guide).