

SOCSC-UH 1210Q-001

Logic of Social Inquiry

(4 credits)

Fall 2017

Syllabus

Professor: Malte Reichelt

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Location: East Admin (A4-001)

Lecture days and times: MoWe 9:00AM - 10:15AM

Recitation days and times: Su 9:00AM - 10:15AM; Tu 9:00AM - 10:15AM

Course Prerequisites: None

1. Course Overview and Goals

We are routinely exposed to politicians, journalists, civil society leaders, social media voices, and our friends and colleagues offering answers to social questions and explanations for social problems. How are we to assess and adjudicate these answers and explanations, especially when they contradict one another? One way to do so is to examine the empirical foundations of the claims being made. For example, upon what data do the claims rest? How were the data collected? What assumptions and methods drove the analyses of these data? Are the inferences drawn from the data and analyses valid?

To help you develop such a critical approach to questions and answers about the social world, this course explores the relationship between social questions and the methods employed to investigate these questions. It does so by examining the major approaches to empirical studies in the social sciences. It offers skills in developing research designs for explorative, descriptive, explanatory, and evaluation research.

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

- Use a critical perspective to engage research designed to make claims about the social world;
- Specify a social question and develop a research design to explore this question;
- Conduct a small survey-based research project to answer your social questions; and
- Understand the logic at the foundation of subsequent methodological courses in the social sciences.

2. Research project

As part of the course, you will participate in a group research project, called “The social life of NYUAD”, designed to give you actual experience on how social scientists conduct their research. The project will exemplify how to design research projects, beginning with the development of theories about the social world, then planning ways to test these theories, and finally gathering and analyzing the necessary data. We will form groups of 3-4 students at the beginning of the semester who will conduct the research project together. Together with your group, you will gain hands-on experience using social research methods. You are expected to write two short papers on both of these methods: One research proposal and one final research paper. You will be responsible for completing the research assignments by the deadlines indicated. Detailed information will be provided at every stage of the process.

3. Meetings, assignments, and grading

a. Lectures

We will have two lectures per week. Students are expected to attend all lectures and recitations, prepared to discuss the readings and participate actively. During each meeting, two selected student will lead the class in an activity that engages the readings along two dimensions: (1) an overview of the main questions, arguments, and claims, and (2) a critical response to the reading, including questions posed to the class.

b. Recitations

There are two recitations offered for this course. Students are expected to attend one of the recitations. The recitations will entail small exercises to deepen the understanding on concepts presented in the lectures and will offer time to work on your group research projects and receive feedback. The aim is to apply the theoretical concepts, we discussed in class, develop a theoretically sound social research question, design a survey, collect and analyze data, and arrive at conclusions that will help answer your questions.

c. First writing assignment

Your first writing assignment will be a **research proposal**. With this paper, you will (1) specify a research question of interest and (2) find and evaluate scholarly evidence that is used to answer this question.

The research question should be answerable using a simple survey that can be conducted on campus. Students should thus focus on past behavior, attitudes, perceptions or preferences of students. It is a good idea to focus on factors that vary among students, such as race and ethnicity, gender, social background, countries of origin, preferences, etc. and pose questions either about influencing variables or outcomes of these factors.

This assignment includes the following tasks:

- Select a topic of interest. Please discuss your topic with the instructor before finalizing your choice;
- Develop a topic of interest into an answerable question;
- Find scholarly literature on the topic and question (three to four peer-reviewed articles), primarily by using key concepts as search terms in a library search;

Discuss the following in the paper:

1. Introduction to and motivation for your topic
2. Literature overview
 - a. How existing scholarly work has asked this question, including explicit and implicit assumptions.
 - b. How existing scholarly work has justified interest in this question.
 - c. How and why existing scholarly work has empirically investigated this question.
 - d. Successes in how existing scholarly work has empirically investigated this question. In discussing the successes, aim to synthesize your assessment of the successes into categories that cut across the specific research papers, instead only using the papers as specific examples. The aim is to comment on the body of literature as a whole.
 - e. Obstacles, pitfalls, issues, and problems related to the methodological approaches used by scholarly work to empirically investigate your research question. In discussing the pitfalls, aim to synthesize your assessment of the obstacles into categories that cut across the specific research papers, instead of only using the papers as specific examples. The aim is to comment on the body of literature as a whole.
3. Your research question, including
 - a. Theoretical background (to help understand the link between theory and research design, refer to the readings by Weber, Gould, and Hedström)
 - b. Definition of terms, concepts, and assumptions that fit together into the guiding argument of your project
4. Potential ways to measure your concepts

Some of the scholarly literature may employ research methods that are unfamiliar to you. Your textbook can be helpful in evaluating such methods. For example, if you encounter a report from a clinical trial, you should read the chapter on experiments. If you come across things you do not understand, ask about them in class. Nevertheless, you may have remaining questions or feel you do not understand the methodology fully. This is not a problem. Simply ask the question in your paper. Smart questions count just as much as smart answers.

The paper should be written in collaboration with other students. Collaborative work is often more rewarding than individual research. Working with others will also reduce the subjectivity of your observations. However, it is often more time-consuming because you need to come to an agreement about what should be done by whom. Note that there will be one grade for all group members regardless of the division of labor in the group. If you would like to divide up the group and answer more detailed or slightly different questions, you can talk to the instructor about the possibility to divide up the group and write separate papers.

The paper should be six to 10 pages in length, single spaced, not including the bibliography. It is due **October 16**; you can submit it earlier. Submit your paper as a Word document to the NYU Classes site. Late papers will be accepted only under exceptional circumstances. You will also present your paper in class and you may use the feedback in class to improve your paper.

d. Second writing assignment

Your second writing assignment will build on the research proposal to develop a survey based research paper. With this paper, you will directly draw on your insights in the research proposal and (1) specify a research question of interest, (2) use existing scholarly literature to identify relevant theory and prior research, (3) describe the study design, the data you collected and your analytical strategy, and (4) describe your findings and implications.

The typical components of a research paper are:

1. Introduction: research question (“the puzzle”) and relevance (“why should we care”)
2. Literature review
3. Theory (to help understand the link between theory and research design, refer to the readings by Weber, Gould, and Hedström)
 - a. Definition of terms, concepts, and assumptions that fit together into the guiding argument of your project
 - b. Research question and specific hypotheses derived from the theory and to be addressed by the design
4. Research design
 - a. Units of observation and case selection
 - b. Specific method of data collection
 - c. Data description
5. Analytical methodology, with justification
6. Results
7. Conclusion
 - a. Discussion of insights and implications
 - b. Discussion of problems and limitations
 - i. Reliability, validity, and generalizability
 - ii. Possible weaknesses in the design
8. References
9. Appendices (if applicable):
 - a. For example: questionnaire or interview guide or informed consent forms

The paper should be written in collaboration with other students. This will most likely depend on how you approached your research proposal. The paper should be seven to 12 pages in length, with single spacing, not including the bibliography. It is due **December 13**; upload your paper to the NYU Classes site. Late papers will be accepted only under exceptional circumstances. You will also present your paper in class and you may use the feedback in class to improve your paper.

e. Grading

- Participation 30%
 - Reading activities; graded on a scale of 0 to 3 (“unsatisfactory” to “excellent”)
 - Paper presentations; graded on a scale of 0 to 3 (“unsatisfactory” to “excellent”)
 - General in-class participation; graded on a scale of 0 to 3 (“unsatisfactory” to “excellent”)
- Research proposal 35%
 - Marked with letter grades; “Excellent”, “very good”, “sufficient”, or “not sufficient”
- Research paper 35%
 - Marked with letter grades; “Excellent”, “very good”, “sufficient”, or “not sufficient”

4. Academic Integrity

Integrity is critical to the learning process and to all that we do here at NYU. As members of our community, all students agree to abide by the NYU Student Code of Conduct, which includes a commitment to:

- Exercise integrity in all aspects of one's academic work including, but not limited to, the preparation and completion of exams, papers and all other course requirements by not engaging in any method or means that provides an unfair advantage.
- Clearly acknowledge the work and efforts of others when submitting written work as one's own. Ideas, data, direct quotations (which should be designated with quotation marks), paraphrasing, creative expression, or any other incorporation of the work of others should be fully referenced.
- Refrain from behaving in ways that knowingly support, assist, or in any way attempt to enable another person to engage in any violation of this Code of Conduct. Our support also includes reporting any observed violations of this Code of Conduct or other School and University policies that are deemed to adversely affect the NYU community.

5. General Conduct & Behavior

Students are also expected to maintain and abide by the highest standards of professional conduct and behavior. Please familiarize yourself with NYU's policy in regard to in-class behavior & expectations and the NYU Disruptive Behavior Policy at the following site:

<http://www.nyu.edu/about/policies-guidelines-compliance/policies-and-guidelines/bullying--threatening--and-other-disruptive-behavior-guidelines.html>).

6. Reading materials

1. Singleton, Royce and Bruce Straits (2017): Approaches to Social Research
2. Various articles and excerpts, found on the NYU Classes site

7. Reading schedule

Part I: Approaches to social science

Week 1. September 4 & 6: Course overview and introduction to social research

*** No mandatory readings due this week

*** No recitations this week

Week 2. September 11 & 13: Theory, inference, and causality

*** Recitations begin this week

- Monday
 - Excerpt from "Objectivity' in Social Science" by Max Weber ([1904] 2007)
 - Excerpt from Collision of Wills by Roger Gould (2003)
 - Abend, Gabriel. 2008. "The Meaning of Theory", *Sociological Theory*, 26(2): 173-199
- Wednesday
 - "Causal Mechanisms in the Social Sciences," by Peter Hedström and Petri Ylikoski (2010)
 - Excerpt from *The Oxford Handbook of Analytical Sociology*, "What is Analytical Sociology All About?", by Peter Hedström and Peter Bearman (2011)

Week 3. September 18 & 20: Social science approaches

- Monday
 - Excerpt from "Suicide" by Emile Durkheim ([1897] 1951)
 - "The Social Structure of Suicide" by Peter Bearman (1991)
- Wednesday
 - "Suicide Determination and Professional Authority of Medical Examiners," by Stefan Timmermans (2005)
 - "Knocking on Heaven's Door? Protestantism and Suicide" by Sascha Becker and Ludger Woessmann (2011)

Week 4. September 25 & 27: The science in social science and ethics

- Monday
 - Chapter 1 in *Approaches to Social Research*
 - Chapter 2 in *Approaches to Social Research*
- Wednesday
 - "Behavioral Study of Obedience" by Stanley Milgram
 - "Gender, Science, and Culture in Reproductive Health Research" by Ruth Macklin (1999)

Week 5. October 2 & 4: Elements in research design and measurement

- Monday
 - “The Four Questions” by Maurice Zeitlin
 - Chapter 4 in *Approaches to Social Research*
- Wednesday
 - Chapter 5 in *Approaches to Social Research*

Week 6. October 9 & 11: The logic of sampling & presentations

- Monday
 - Chapter 6 in *Approaches to Social Research*
 - Lepore, Jill. 2015. “Politics and the New Machine: What the turn from polls to data science means for democracy.” *The New Yorker*. Nov. 16, 2015
- Wednesday
 - *In-class presentation of research proposals*

Week 7. October 16 & 18: In-class presentations of research proposals & surveys

- Monday
 - *In-class presentation of research proposals*
- Wednesday
 - *No readings*

Week 8. October 23 & 25: Fall break

***** No class | Fall break**

Part II: Modes of social research

Week 9. October 30 & November 1: The logic of survey-based research

- Monday
 - Chapter 9 in *Approaches to Social Research*
- Wednesday
 - Excerpt from *The Oxford Handbook of Analytical Sociology*, “Surveys” by Hannah Brückner (2011)
 - Excerpt from “Improving survey questions”, “Some general rules for designing good survey instruments”, by Floyd Fowler Jr. (1995)

Week 10. November 6 & 8: Finding and using available data

- Monday
 - Chapter 12 in *Approaches to Social Research*
- Wednesday
 - “Graphing the Grammar of Motives in National Security Strategies: Cultural Interpretation, Automated Text Analysis and the Drama of Global Politics” by John Mohr, Robin Wagner-Pacici, Ronald Breiger, and Petko Bogdanov (2013)

Week 11. November 13 & 15: The logic of experimental research

- Monday
 - Chapter 7 in *Approaches to Social Research*
 - Zimbardo, Philip G. et al. 1973. “The Mind is a Formidable Jailer: A Pirandellian Prison.”, *New York Times Magazine*, April 8, pp. 38-60.
- Wednesday
 - Chapter 8 in *Approaches to Social Research*
 - Pager, Devah. 2003. “The Mark of a Criminal Record.”, *American Journal of Sociology*, 108(5): 937-75

Week 12. November 20 & 22: Analyzing quantitative data

- Monday
 - Chapter 15 in *Approaches to Social Research*
- Wednesday
 - Chapter 16 in *Approaches to Social Research*

Week 13. November 27 & 29: Analyzing quantitative data & the logic of network research

- Monday
 - “Empathic concern and prosocial behaviors” by Christopher J. Einolf (2008)
 - t.b.a.
- Wednesday
 - “The Strength of Weak Ties” by Mark Granovetter (1973)
 - “Chains of Affection: The Structure of Adolescent Romantic and Sexual Networks” by Peter Bearman, James Moody, and Katherine Stovel (2004)

Week 14. December 4 & 6: The logic of field and ethnographic research

- Monday
 - Chapter 11 in *Approaches to Social Research*
- Wednesday
 - “Muslim American Youth and Secular Hip Hop: Manifesting ‘Cool Piety’ Through Musical Practices” by John O’Brien (2013)

Week 15. December 11 & 13: **In-class presentations of research papers**

- Monday
 - *In-class presentation of research papers*
- Wednesday
 - *In-class presentation of research papers*

Week 16. December 18 & 20: **Final exams**

*** No class | Final exams