

SOC 6130
Logics and Methods of Sociological Research
FALL 2026

Instructor: Dan Hirschman

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Time and Location: 2:00pm-4:30pm Thursdays, Uris 320

Office Hours: Thursdays, 10:00am-11:30am by appointment only. Meetings will be in Uris 328 or (by request) on Zoom. Sign-up for 1-2 slots using [this calendar](#).

Overview & Objectives¹

This course introduces new (first- and second-year) doctoral students in sociology to the logics and methods of research in our field. Goals for the course include: (1) helping students to move from theory or ideas in prior literature to the development of a clear research question; 2) familiarizing students with a wide range of sociological research methods, including qualitative and quantitative approaches; and 3) training students to evaluate research designs, methods, findings, and interpretations in the contemporary sociological literature. We will begin to answer the following core questions: What are the strengths and weaknesses of different methods? How can different methods be combined so that their strengths and weaknesses balance one another? What assumptions are built into the research design process? How do different approaches to research reflect different positions on the fundamental nature of sociology and its place within science and society?

Learning Goals

By the end of the class, you will be better able to:

- Articulate and evaluate the core meta-theoretical and meta-methodological debates that differentiate competing paradigms in contemporary sociology.
- Position yourself and your research within this multi-paradigmatic matrix and begin to identify your scholarly community.
- Begin to know the work of Cornell sociology faculty, and more broadly, the literature in which you might want to situate your own research.
- Understand what makes a good “sociological puzzle” and how to connect that puzzle to the existing conversations and literatures of the field.

¹This syllabus was adapted from Jamie Budnick’s (2025) Sociology 6130 syllabus and draws on syllabi from Rachel Best, Sarah Burgard, Erin Cech, Scott Frickel, Susan Short, and Mark Suchman.

- Become familiar with a range of empirical methods commonly used in sociological research.
- Navigate a range of issues common in the life of a working sociologist, including writing, editing, reviewing, and evaluating research as well as ethical issues relevant to our field.
- Critically evaluate research designs, methods, findings, and interpretations in the contemporary sociological literature.
- Convey research material clearly and concisely to an audience of peers, both in writing and in public presentations.
- Pose a sociologically interesting question on a topic of your choosing, identify compelling puzzles or hypotheses bearing on your question, and construct a research design to explore your speculations.

Requirements

Attendance and Participation: You are required to attend and participate in class. If you are unable to attend class (for health, family obligations, religious obligations, etc.), please let me know in advance.

Readings: This course is a doctoral seminar. As such, it carries a substantial reading load. You are expected to read all assigned material before coming to class. We will devote most of our class time to exploring the readings.

Presentations: In some weeks, one or two students will begin class by making a 15-20 minute presentation on that week's readings. Each student will present once during the term. We will discuss expectations for presentations in the first week. The goal of the presentation is to set up the week's conversation, make connections across readings and weeks, and (optionally) bring in an outside example or extra context. These presentations may include slides and/or a handout with a summary of key terms and claims made in the readings, and may also include short activities, videos, etc.

Response Memos: Each week (except for the first), you are expected to write a structured response memo approximately 500 words long. This memo should do two things. First, it should attempt to summarize the major argument (as you see it) of one or more of the week's main readings. Second, it should identify a particular passage or topic that you would like to discuss further and offer a question or commentary about that passage or topic. Each memo is due at midnight on the day before the associated class meeting.

Very Short Assignments: In addition to the response memos, the class has two short assignments: Familiarizing yourself with the American Sociological Association and its sections, and ranking a collection of award-winning articles. We will discuss expectations for both assignments in class.

Final Project: The final project for the class is a research proposal. Along the way, you will submit an initial idea for the proposal, followed by an exercise where you explore your topic through alternative methodologies, then a draft, and then a revised final proposal. You

will also provide peer review comments on another student's draft proposal. We will discuss expectations for each of these steps in class.

Respect: There are many ways to interpret the course readings and many competing views on the topics we will discuss, and I hope we will debate many contrasting viewpoints during the course of the semester. To facilitate good discussion, please keep in mind that we are debating ideas, not each other as individuals. This type of debate might take the form of "I disagree" instead of "you are wrong." Please keep the difference in mind so that we can engage in useful and vigorous discussion!

In the context of a graduate seminar, respect takes on an additional, specific meaning. In graduate seminars, there is a tendency to try to show off by "name dropping" (or, read more sympathetically, to make exciting intellectual connections to material outside of the immediate scope of the class). This tendency can lead to stifled discussions and alienation as students who are unfamiliar with a particular thinker or concept are forced out of the conversation. Thus, as a rule, if you want to introduce a term or idea or finding that we have not explicitly discussed in the class, you must briefly explain term, idea, or finding, and then why it is relevant to our discussion. The goal here is not to prevent you from bringing in outside material, but to make sure that we can have a productive conversation by building a shared vocabulary — one of the central purposes of a graduate seminar.

Grading

Participation: 10%

Attending class is a necessary but insufficient condition for full participation. You must also engage with the readings and your colleagues, and do so respectfully. This is not the same as talking a lot — for example, you might make only occasional interventions into the conversation, but ones that show clear engagement with the readings and the flow of discussion. And one of the most important forms of participation is asking basic clarification questions, especially as we begin our discussion. If you have concerns about your participation, please raise them with me in office hours before the end of the term.

Presentation: 10%

Presentations will be graded primarily on clarity and how well they set up our conversation. I do not expect you to be comprehensive (which would not be possible in 15-20 minutes) nor to perfectly understand all of the arguments of the readings.

Response Memos: 20%

Each of the memos will be graded out of 10 points. You will be graded on your best ten memos (which means you can skip up to three weeks as long as you are satisfied with your grade on the ones you turn in).

Very Short Assignments: 5%

The class will have two very short assignments each worth 2.5%: 1. Exploring ASA, 2. Ranking award-winning papers.

Proposal Peer Review: 5%

Each student will be required to write a peer-review of another student's draft proposal. This peer review will include some line-by-line comments as well as a couple of paragraphs summarizing the proposal's strengths and weaknesses and offering suggestions for improvement.

Research Proposal: 50%

Your final project is an original research proposal. We will discuss details of this assignment later in the term. The project is worth 50% of your grade divided across five sub-assignments: 1. Initial idea: 5%, 2. Exploring alternative methodologies 5%, 3. First draft, 5%, 4. In-class presentation: 5%, 5. Final draft: 30%.

Grade Appeals: If you feel that an *error* has been made, you may appeal your grade to me within *one week* of receiving your grade. To appeal your grade, you must provide a written explanation of the error you believe has been made, and I will re-grade the assignment. Please be advised that there is no guarantee that I will raise your grade; in fact, it is possible that I may lower it. For this reason, you should appeal a grade as a last resort when you feel *certain* that you have been graded unfairly.

Administrative Issues

Academic Integrity: Students in the course are encouraged to discuss course material and assignments with each other. However, anything you submit for credit should represent your own work. Plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct are unacceptable. Information on the University's academic code is available [here](#). Any student who plagiarizes will fail the course and may face other sanctions imposed by the University. Students agree that by taking this course, all required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to Turnitin.com for the detection of plagiarism. All submitted papers will be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of such papers. Use of the Turnitin.com service is subject to the Usage Policy posted on the Turnitin.com site.²

To ensure development and mastery of the foundational concepts and skills, the use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools such as ChatGPT is generally prohibited in this course. If you are unsure of any policy or any assignment-specific directions — including whether or not a particular tool is considered generative AI — please consult with me prior to using the technology or completing your assignment.³ If you are interested in proposing research *on* generative AI or research that uses LLMs or similar tools for analysis, please send me an email and we will discuss how to proceed.

Accommodations for Learning: Cornell University is committed to full inclusion of all students. Please inform me early in the term if you have a disability or other condition that

²This paragraph adopts language from Erin York Cornwell's 5010 syllabus, as well as language provided by Cornell for discussing Turnitin.

³This paragraph adopts language from Cornell's [guidance](#) on the use of Generative AI in courses.

might require accommodations or modification of any of these course procedures. You may speak with me after class, by email, or during office hours. For more information, please contact [Student Disability Services](#) (phone: 607-254-4545, email: sds.cu@cornell.edu).

Cell Phones and Laptops: We will discuss our policy on the use of these tools during the first class.

General Advice

PhD programs can be overwhelming. For two very useful perspectives, I recommend Fabio Rojas' [Grad Skool Rulz](#) (an ebook based on blog posts) and Jessica Calarco's [A Field Guide to Grad School: Uncovering the Hidden Curriculum](#) (a traditionally-published book).

Required Texts

We will read substantial portions of Kristin Luker's (2008) *Salsa Dancing into the Social Sciences: Research in an Age of Info-Glut* and you might want to own a copy.

All of the readings will be available on the course Canvas site as pdfs and/or as links. The readings for each week are listed in the order you might want to read them.

Course Outline

Class 1: What is sociology? (8/27)

- Wallerstein, Immanuel. 1996. "Open the Social Sciences." *Items* 50(1): 1-7.
- Ragin, Charles. 1994. "What Is Social Research" (chapter 1, pp. 5–30) and "The Goals of Social Research" (chapter 2, pp. 31–53) in *Constructing Social Research: The Unity and Diversity of Method*.
- Luker, Kristin. 2008. "What's It All About?" (chapter 2, pp. 22–39) and "An Ode to Canonical Social Science" (chapter 3, pp. 40–50) in *Salsa Dancing*.
- Burawoy, Michael. 2016. "Sociology as a Vocation." *Contemporary Sociology* 45(4):379–93.

Exploring ASA assignment due 9/3.

Class 2: Epistemology, Objectivity, Facts & Values (9/3)

- Harding, Sandra. 1991. "'Strong Objectivity' and Socially Situated Knowledge" (chapter 6, pp. 138–63) in *Whose Science, Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives*.
- Hacking, Ian. 2001. "Why Ask What?" (chapter 1, pp. 1–35) in *The Social Construction of What?*

- Anderson, Elizabeth. 2004. “Uses of Value Judgments in Science: A General Argument, with Lessons from a Case Study of Feminist Research on Divorce.” *Hypatia* 19(1):1–24.
- Reed, Isaac Ariail. 2010. “Epistemology Contextualized: Social-Scientific Knowledge in a Postpositivist Era.” *Sociological Theory* 28(1):20–39.
- Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. 2021. “Research Through Imperial Eyes” (chapter 2) in *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. 3rd edition.

Class 3: Research Questions and the Literature (9/10)

- Becker, Howard S. 1986. “Terrorized by the Literature” (chapter 8, pp. 135–149) in *Writing for Social Scientists*.
- Luker, Kristin. 2008. “Reviewing the Literature” (chapter 5, pp. 76–98) and “Getting Down to the Nitty-Gritty” (chapter 7, pp. 129–154) in *Salsa Dancing*.
- Firebaugh, Glen. 2008. “There Should Be the Possibility of Surprise in Social Research” (chapter 1, pp. 1–18) in *Seven Rules for Social Research*.
- Davis, Murray S. 1971. “That’s Interesting! Towards a Phenomenology of Sociology and a Sociology of Phenomenology.” *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 1(2):309–44.
- Abbott, Andrew. 2004. “Ideas and Puzzles” (chapter 7) in *Methods of Discovery: Heuristics for the Social Sciences*.
- Mears, Ashley. 2017. “Puzzling in Sociology: On Doing and Undoing Theoretical Puzzles.” *Sociological Theory* 35(2):138–46.

Class 4: Cases (9/17)

- Walton, John. 1992. “Making the Theoretical Case.” Pp. 121–137 in *What is a Case? Exploring the Foundations of Social Inquiry*.
- Luker, Kristin. 2008. “What is this a Case of, Anyway?” (chapter 4, pp. 51–75) in *Salsa Dancing*.
- Small, Mario Luis. 2009. “‘How Many Cases Do I Need?’ On Science and the Logic of Case Selection in Field-Based Research.” *Ethnography* 10(1):5–38.
- Pacewicz, Josh. 2022. “What Can You Do With a Single Case? How to Think About Ethnographic Case Selection Like a Historical Sociologist.” *Sociological Methods & Research* 51(3):931–62.
- Collins, Caitlyn, Megan Tobias Neely, and Shamus Khan. 2024. “‘Which Cases Do I Need?’ Constructing Cases and Observations in Qualitative Research.” *Annual Review of Sociology*. 50:21–40.

Class 5: Sampling, Operationalization, and Comparisons (9/24)

- King, Gary, Robert Keohane, and Sidney Verba, 1994. “Determining What to Observe” (chapter 4, pp. 124–149) in *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*.
- Becker, Howard S. 1998. “Sampling” (chapter 3) in *Tricks of the Trade: How to Think about your Research While You’re Doing It*.
- Luker, Kristin. 2008. “On Sampling, Operationalization, and Generalization” (chapter 6, pp. 99-128) in *Salsa Dancing*.
- Skocpol, Theda, and Margaret Somers. 1980. “The Uses of Comparative History in Macrosocial Inquiry.” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 22(2):174–97.
- Steinmetz, George. 2004. “Odious Comparisons: Incommensurability, the Case Study, and ‘Small N’s’ in Sociology.” *Sociological Theory* 22(3):371–400.
- Vaughan, Diane. 2014. “Analogy, Cases, and Comparative Social Organization” (chapter 3, pp. 61–84) in *Theorizing in Social Science: The Context of Discovery*.

Class 6: Description, Explanation, Causation (10/1)

- Abbott, Andrew. 1988. “Transcending General Linear Reality.” *Sociological Theory* 6(2):169–86.
- Hedström, Peter, and Petri Ylikoski. 2010. “Causal Mechanisms in the Social Sciences.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 36:49–67.
- Holland, Paul W. 1986. “Statistics and Causal Inference.” *Journal of the American Statistical Association* 81(396):945–60.
- Sen, Maya, and Omar Wasow. 2016. “Race as a Bundle of Sticks: Designs That Estimate Effects of Seemingly Immutable Characteristics.” *Annual Review of Political Science* 19:499–522.
- Gerring, John. 2012. “Mere Description.” *British Journal of Political Science* 42(4):721–46.

Ranking award-winning papers assignment due 10/7.

Class 7: Writing & Reviewing (10/8)

- Calarco, Jessica. 2020. “Reading and Writing About Other People’s Research”, “Writing About Your Research”, and “Publishing and Promoting Your Work” (chapters 4,7 and 8) in *A Field Guide to Grad School*.
- OrgTheory. 2011. “The Editors Speak: What Makes a Good Review?” Available [here](#).

Award-winning Articles:

- Frye, Margaret. 2017. “Cultural Meanings and the Aggregation of Actions: The Case of Sex and Schooling in Malawi.” *American Sociological Review* 82(5):945–76.

- Brown, Hana E. 2020. “Who Is an Indian Child? Institutional Context, Tribal Sovereignty, and Race-Making in Fragmented States.” *American Sociological Review* 85(5):776–805.
- Lei, Ya-Wen. 2021. “Delivering Solidarity: Platform Architecture and Collective Contention in China’s Platform Economy.” *American Sociological Review*.
- Monk, Ellis P., Michael H. Esposito, and Hedwig Lee. 2021. “Beholding Inequality: Race, Gender, and Returns to Physical Attractiveness in the United States.” *American Journal of Sociology* 127(1):194–241.
- Mittleman, Joel. 2022. “Intersecting the Academic Gender Gap: The Education of Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual America.” *American Sociological Review* 87(2):303–35.

Note: For this week’s memo, you can either respond to the pieces on writing and reviewing or engage more deeply with one of the award-winning articles if one catches your interest.

Class 8: Critical Methods & Public Sociology (10/15)

- Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo, and Tukufu Zuberi. 2008. “Toward a Definition of White Logic and White Methods.” Pp. 3-30 in *White Logic, White Methods*.
- Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo, and Gianpaolo Baiocchi. 2001. “Anything but Racism: How Sociologists Limit the Significance of Racism.” *Race and Society* 4(2):117–31.
- Schilt, Kristen, Tey Meadow, and D’Lane Compton. 2018. “Introduction: Queer Work in a Straight Discipline.” Pp. 1–34 in *Other, Please Specify*.
- Gates, Gary and Jody Herman. 2018. “Beyond Academia: Strategies for Using LGBT Research to Influence Public Policy” in *Other, Please Specify*.
- Cohen, Philip. 2025. “Introduction” in *Citizen Scholar*.

Initial idea for research proposal due 10/21.

Class 9: Qualitative Interviews and Ethnography(10/22)

- Gerson, Kathleen and Sarah Damaske. 2021. “Depth Interviewing as Science and Art” (chapter 1, pp. 1–29), “Getting Started” (chapter 2, pp. 30–44), and “Interviews with Whom?” (chapter 3, pp. 45–65) in *The Science and Art of Interviewing*.
- Jerolmack, Colin and Shamus Khan. 2014. “Talk Is Cheap: Ethnography and the Attitudinal Fallacy.” *Sociological Methods & Research* 43(2):178–209.
- Lamont, Michèle and Ann Swidler. 2014. “Methodological Pluralism and the Possibilities and Limits of Interviewing.” *Qualitative Sociology* 37(2):153–71.
- Rao, Aliya Hamid. 2026. “The Problem with Rapport in Interview-Based Studies.” *Qualitative Sociology* 49(1):47–70.

- Lindsay, Sadé L. 2022. “Damned If You Do, Damned If You Don’t: How Formerly Incarcerated Men Navigate the Labor Market with Prison Credentials.” *Criminology* 60(3):455-79.

Note: Sadé Lindsay will visit class.

Class 10: Historical Methods (10/29)

- Sewell, William H. 1996. “Three Temporalities: Toward an Eventful Sociology.” Pp. 245-280 in *The Historic Turn in the Human Sciences*.
- Mahoney, James. 2004. “Comparative-Historical Methodology.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 30:81–101.
- Clemens, Elizabeth S. 2007. “Toward a Historicized Sociology: Theorizing Events, Processes, and Emergence.” *Annual Review of Sociology*. 33:527-49.
- Hirschman, Daniel, and Isaac Ariail Reed. 2014. “Formation Stories and Causality in Sociology.” *Sociological Theory* 32(4):259–82.

Class 11: Survey Methods (11/5)

- Converse, Jean M., and Stanley Presser. 1986. “Strategies of Experience and Research” (chapter 1, pp. 9–30) and “The Experimental Evidence” (chapter 2, pp. 31–47) in *Survey Questions: Handcrafting the Standardized Questionnaire*.
- Schuman, Howard and Stanley Presser. 1996. “Scope and Method” (chapter 1, pp. 1–13) in *Questions and Answers in Attitude Surveys: Experiments on Question Form, Wording, and Context*.
- Westbrook, Laurel, Jamie Budnick, and Aliya Saperstein. 2022. “Dangerous Data: Seeing Social Surveys through the Sexuality Prism.” *Sexualities* 25(5–6):717–49.
- (Skim!) Saperstein, Aliya and Andrew M. Penner. 2012. “Racial Fluidity and Inequality in the United States.” *American Journal of Sociology* 118(3):676–727.
- Kramer, Rory, Robert DeFina, and Lance Hannon. 2016. “Racial Rigidity in the United States: Comment on Saperstein and Penner.” *American Journal of Sociology* 122(1):233–46.
- Alba, Richard D., Noura E. Insolera, and Scarlett Lindeman. 2016. “Is Race Really So Fluid? Revisiting Saperstein and Penner’s Empirical Claims.” *American Journal of Sociology* 122(1):247–62.
- Saperstein, Aliya and Andrew M. Penner. 2016. “Still Searching for a True Race? Reply to Kramer et al. and Alba et al.” *American Journal of Sociology* 122(1):263–85.

Exploring alternate methods assignment due 11/11.

Class 12: Open Science, Replication, and Survey Experiments (11/12)

- Cohen, Philip. 2025. “Open Scholarship” (chapter 3) in *Citizen Scholar*.
- Freese, Jeremy, and David Peterson. 2017. “Replication in Social Science.” *Annual Review of Sociology*.
- Jackson, Michelle, and D. R. Cox. 2013. “The Principles of Experimental Design and Their Application in Sociology.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 39:27–49.
- Voelkel, Jan G., Ashwini Ashokkumar, Adina T. Abeles, Jarret T. Crawford, Kylie Fuller, Chrystal Redekopp, Renata Bongiorno, Troy H. Campbell, Ullrich K. H. Ecker, Matthew Feinberg, P. Sol Hart, Matthew J. Hornsey, John T. Jost, Aaron C. Kay, Anthony Leiserowitz, Stephan Lewandowsky, Edward Maibach, Erik C. Nisbet, Nick F. Pidgeon, Alexa Spence, Sander van der Linden, Christopher V. Wolsko, Jane K. Willenbring, Neil Malhotra, and Robb Willer. 2026. “A Registered Report Megastudy on the Persuasiveness of the Most-Cited Climate Messages.” *Nature Climate Change* 16(2):214-25.

Note: Jan Voelkel will visit class.

Class 13: Ethics, IRBs, and Administrative Data (11/19)

- Jerolmack, Colin, and Alexandra K. Murphy. 2019. “The Ethical Dilemmas and Social Scientific Trade-Offs of Masking in Ethnography.” *Sociological Methods & Research* 48(4):801–27.
- Stark, Laura. 2022. “Protections for Human Subjects in Research: Old Models, New Needs?” *MIT Case Studies in Social and Ethical Responsibilities of Computing*.
- Cross, Jennifer E., Kathleen Pickering, and Matthew Hickey. 2015. “Community-Based Participatory Research, Ethics, and Institutional Review Boards: Untying a Gordian Knot.” *Critical Sociology* 41(7–8):1007–26.
- Matias, J. Nathan. 2020. “Why We Need Industry-Independent Research on Tech & Society.” Available [here](#).
- Whittaker, Meredith. 2021. “The Steep Cost of Capture.” *Interactions* 28(6):50–55.
- Daviss, Claire, and Ming D. Leung. 2025. “Reactions, Revisions, and Rehiring: Changes in Employers’ Gendered Preferences in Online Labor Markets.” *Organization Science* 36(6):2087-2107.

Note: Claire Daviss will visit class.

Draft proposals due 11/25.

Note: No class on 11/26!

Peer reviews due 12/2. In-class presentations on 12/3

Class 14: AI, Wrap-Up, and Future Directions (12/3)

- Abramson, Corey M., Tara Prendergast, Zhuofan Li, and Daniel Dohan. 2026. “Qualitative Research in an Era of Artificial Intelligence: A Pragmatic Approach to Data Analysis, Workflow, and Computation.” *Annual Review of Sociology*.
- Engzell, Per, and Nathan Wilmers. 2026. “The Paper Factory.” Available at [SocArXiv](#).
- Nelson, Alondra. 2026. “Field Theory: AI as Social Science Question, Object & Tool.” *Daedalus*.

Final proposals due 12/10.