**SOCIOLGY 203: SYLLABUS AND TENTATIVE SCHEDULE**

This course pursues two perhaps contradictory goals. The *intellectual* goal is to understand the epistemological foundations of the major research traditions in the social sciences. The *practical* goal is to help students develop rigorous and workable research designs for their theses and dissertations. This is not a methods course as such, but rather an exploration of the embattled terrain that lies between method and theory. Students are not expected to be quantitatively inclined or statistically competent, but they will be required to think in formal logical terms.

We begin with an overview that emphasizes both the conflicts and the complementarities among different methodological traditions. We will then look more closely at three very general styles of explanation: the standard social-science model of quasi-experimental research, historicist methods using ideal types, and single-case analysis in ethnographic and other interpretive research. If we haven’t had as much fun as we can handle by this time, we will also explore relational analysis as it has been developed in sequence and network models.

**Course Requirements:** Students are expected to show up each week prepared to discuss the assigned readings, ask fearless questions about things you don’t understand (remember: there are *no* stupid questions), and argue about things you understand but don’t agree with. Beginning in the second week, two or three students will be responsible for making a presentation to get the discussion rolling at each meeting. There are two kinds of writing assignments:

1. Three short critical papers (2-3 pages) on journal articles representing the three styles of explanation discussed in the seminar. See below for guidelines.
2. A research proposal (minimum 15 pages), on a topic of your choice, due at the end of the seminar. See below for guidelines.

The following books are required:


The following book is recommended reading:


Other required readings are available through E-reserves.
Guidelines for Short Critical Essays

We will be reading three articles that offer empirical examples of the quasi-experimental, historicist, and single-case styles of explanation. These are examples, not exemplars; that is, following Abbott’s emphasis on methodological pluralism, I have tried to choose articles that fit each tradition in some ways and defy it in others. In response to each article, you are asked to write a short (2-3 page) essay that addresses the following questions:

1. What is the research question?
2. What theory or theories are brought to bear on the question?
3. Is there a dependent variable? If so, what is it?
4. Where would you place the analysis in terms of Abbott’s typology (Tables 2.1 and 2.2 in *Methods of Discovery*)?
5. Are the question, theory, data, methods, and analysis related to each other in a convincing way?

You are welcome to add other critical observations you may have, but try to keep in mind that, for this course, we are interested mainly in the logic and adequacy of the analysis, given what the authors set out to do. It might help to imagine that you are reviewing each of these articles for a sociology journal: What would the editor need to know in order to make an informed decision about whether to accept them for publication? What kinds of revisions would you like the authors to make?

Guidelines for Proposals

We will spend time in class discussing how to construct a proposal, and you will build your proposals in steps. The following assignments are due over the course of the quarter:

April 14: 1-2 sentence statement of your research question or problem

April 21: 1 paragraph containing

- a statement of your research question or problem
- a hypothetical (falsifiable) explanation

May 5: 1 page containing

- a statement of your research question or problem
- a hypothetical (falsifiable) explanation
- a description of your research method

Completed proposals are due at the end of the quarter. You might find the following websites useful in this regard:

http://isber.ucsb.edu/gh  (links)

http://www2.smumn.edu/deptpages/~tcwritingcenter/Forms_of_Writing/ResearchProposal.htm  (more links)

http://www.research.umich.edu/proposals/pwg/pwgcontents.html  (guide)
Course Schedule and Readings

Week 1, March 31  Introduction

Week 2, April 7  Overview: Types of methods and types of theories

Stinchcombe, *Constructing Social Theories*, ch. 3

PART I.  THE QUASI-EXPERIMENTAL RESEARCH MODEL

Week 3, April 14  Theory, conceptualization, and hypotheses

Stinchcombe, *Constructing Social Theories*, ch. 1 & 2.
*Recommended:*


Week 4, April 21  Causal imagery and inference: How to prove things

PART II. MODELS OF HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

Week 5, April 28  Foundations: Weberian ideal-type analysis


Recommended:
Ragin, Constructing Social Research, ch. 5.


Week 6, May 5  Other approaches to historical analysis


Recommended:
Stinchcombe, Constructing Social Theories, pp. 101-128, “Historicist Causal Imagery.”

PART III. QUALITATIVE ANALYSES OF SINGLE CASES

Week 7, May 12  The epistemological limits of cases


Recommended:
Ragin, Constructing Social Research, ch. 4.


Week 8, May 19  Pushing the limits of cases


Recommended:

Week 9, May 26  ** No class—Memorial Day holiday **

PART IV. BEYOND CASES AND VARIABLES: RELATIONAL MODELS

Week 10, June 2  Sequence and narrative analysis


Recommended: