

# Proseminar in Sociology

Mills College Spring 2010

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## Required Books

1. The Sociology Writing Group. *A Guide to Writing Sociology Papers*. Worth Publishers. Currently in 6th or 7th edition but 5th, 6th or 7th OK.
2. Zerubavel, Eviatar. *The Clockwork Muse: A Practical Guide to Writing Theses, Dissertations, and Books* Harvard University Press.
3. Karen Elizabeth Gordon. *The New Well-Tempered Sentence: A Punctuation Handbook for the Innocent, the Eager, and the Doomed* Mariner Books.
4. Karen Elizabeth Gordon. *The Deluxe Transitive Vampire: A Handbook of Grammar for the Innocent, the Eager and the Doomed* Pantheon.
5. Luker, Kristin. *Salsa Dancing into the Social Sciences: Research in an Age of Info-glut*. Harvard University Press.
6. ASA Style Guide (Upload new file "asastyleguide-1997.pdf").
7. Additional readings will be available electronically or in the library.
8. Students will need a 3 ring binder for this class.

## Grading Policy

Your grade for this course will be based on

1. the degree to which written assignments demonstrate understanding of ideas in assigned readings
2. your demonstrated ability to distinguish the researchable from the unresearchable and to select research methods appropriate to a selected topic
3. completion of all assignments
  - on time
  - thoughtfully
  - professionally
4. improvement in your skill as a writer
5. preparedness to undertake completion of senior thesis
6. active participation in every meeting of the seminar

All assignments must be completed but no credit will be given for late work. In other words, you cannot pass the course without completing all assignments, but late work will not be graded and may not received feedback.

If there is an extreme situation, an exception to the late policy may be made. In this unusual case, late assignments may be accepted and downgraded 10% per day they are late. Whenever possible, please plan your emergencies in advance and give notice. The scoring system used in the class makes allowance for a normal level of life's topsy-turviness. Please try to confine the amount in your life to this level.

## **Class Attendance and Your Grade**

This is a seminar. That means that you are its content. Your classmates' experiences of the course depend on your contributions and you cannot make a contribution if you are absent, unprepared, fallen behind, or distracted. Participants are permitted one absence from class for a legitimate reason (e.g. illness, travel, etc.). Beyond one, course grade for the course will be reduced by 2/3 of a letter grade per missed meeting (2 missed classes = max grade B+, 3 B-, 4 C Missing more than 4 will likely result in not passing the course and so keep the drop deadline (March 17 last day to drop, March 31 last day to withdraw). Exceptions made for extreme emergencies, but you are advised to avoid extreme emergencies whenever possible. Participants are responsible for signing in each day on the class roster.

## **Pedagogical Notes**

1. Working on a classmate's project. Sometimes you will have an assignment in which you are asked to think through a research issue not for your project but for someone else's. The purpose is two-fold. First, it is often easier to think through another person's project because you are emotionally more removed and not subject to the anxiety of wondering whether it is a good idea, whether it's do-able, etc. The second purpose is that your classmates can often do some outside of the box thinking for you and get you out of a rut.
2. You have to be bad at something for a long time before you can be good at it. — ⇨ [Ira Glass](#)
3. The first draft of anything is shit. — ⇨ [Hemingway](#)

## **1.20 Introduction and Getting Under Way**

We will hit the ground running, working on two fronts simultaneously. First, we will be carrying out a rapid replication of two published research studies. Second, we will begin to brainstorm about possible topics for our own research.

For the replication studies, we'll split the class up into two groups, one for each project. Within the groups, there will be a division of labor: all team members will contribute to some tasks, while other tasks will be assigned to different team members. One team member will be the principal investigator responsible for coordinating the team's work.

The brainstorming will follow a designated program. The point of this is (1) to be systematic, and (2) to be low stress.

Pedagogically, the logic of this approach is that it's best to see how something is done before attempting to do it solo, that we can learn a lot from one another, and that chewing

on big questions like "what's my thesis on?" is best done slowly and perhaps not on center stage.

**READ ([Annotation](#) to be completed prior to seminar meeting)**

Rossi, Alice S. 1965. "Naming Children in Middle-Class Families." ⇨ "[American Sociological Review, Vol. 30, No. 4, pp. 499-513.](#)

Robert M Emerson. 2008. "Responding to Roommate Troubles: Reconsidering Informal Dyadic Control." ⇨ "[Law & Society Review, Vol. 42, Iss. 3; p. 483-512.](#)

**Discussion and Workshop**

What do we know about creating a sociological research question? Creating an online survey?  
Creating an interview guide?

**In Class Work**

Today we will divide up into teams one for the [Roommate Trouble Project](#) and one for the [Baby Naming Project](#) and assign initial tasks and create a project time line. Each student will have specific duties to carry out over the next week. Initial tasks will include drafting interview guides and online surveys, writing up human subjects materials, doing background reading for lit review, and thinking about sampling and recruitment of subjects.

**For Next Week**

Gmail, sign up for wiki, create your own class member page, carry out your first task.

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**1.27 Heading into the Field**

**DUE** Assignments per division of labor for replication projects.

Brainstorm forms filled out or blogged

**READ**

Luker, Chs. 1-4 (about 75 pages)

Luker, Appendix One: "What to Do If You Don't Have a Case"

[PROTIP # 1: How to get the most out of your reading time](#)

[PROTIP # 2: How to summarize and critique a reading](#)

**WORKSHOP**

How to use online databases (Soc Abstracts, Google scholar, and more)

Practice Interviewing. Borrow [digital audio recorder](#) ⇨ [from AV Services](#). Assignment: record, upload, transcribe.

Assignment: 5 minute interview with classmate about work done on project this week and then upload MP3 transcribe and write up the notes.

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## 2.3 The Useful Writing of an Interesting Literature Review

**DUE**

**READ**

[PROTIP # 4: How to write a literature review](#)

Luker, ch. 5 "Reviewing the Literature"

**WORKSHOP**

From annotated bibliographies to literature reviews.

Constructing our calendar/timeline.

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## 2.10

**DUE** Project Bibliography (25 sources)

Final topics (1 page) and Project Timeline

**READ**

(Qualitative Interviews)

Workshop

How to conduct a qualitative interview

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## 2.17 Let Someone Else Collect Your Data

The payoff in social science comes from the analysis and interpretation of data, not its collection. The latter can take up a disproportionate amount of time, especially for beginners. Today we talk about strategies for avoiding the pitfall, most notably, by using data collected by others.

**DUE**

**READ**

(Quantitative Survey Data Analysis): Paper based on GSS

**WORKSHOP**

General Social Survey (GSS) intro in computer lab

**SEMINAR** Student 1 and Student 2

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## 2.24 Field Work and Ethnography

**DUE** Annotated Bibliography (10 sources)

**READ**

(Ethnography)

**WORKSHOP**

How to do ethnographies

**SEMINAR**

Student 3 and Student 4

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### 3.3 Using the Logic We Learned about in Methods Class

**DUE** Revised Timeline

Substantive Background Essay (5 pages)

**READ**

Luker, Ch. 6 "On Sampling, Operationalization, and Generalization"

Zerubavel, E. *The Clockwork Muse*

**WORKSHOP**

Working with U.S. Census data

**Seminar**

Student 5

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### 3.10 Three Flavors of Ethics

The three flavors refer to our three basic responsibilities. Do no harm. Get it right. Know whom you work for.

**DUE**

Essay: Description of the pros and cons of three potential research methods (5-6 pages)

**READ**

(Content Analysis)

Luker Ch. 7 "Getting Down to the Nitty-Gritty" in which the author says it's time to get this show on the road...

**WORKSHOP**

HSRB applications

Social Location and Research Ethics

**SEMINAR**

Student 6

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### 3.17 Try It Out

**DUE** HSRB applications (if applicable)

**READ**

Field Work TBA

Luker, Ch. 8 "Field (and Other) Methods" Participant Observation, Interviews, Focus Groups,  
Content Analysis

**SEMINAR**

Student 7

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**3.31**

**DUE** Complete Preliminary Research (interviews, tables, etc.)

**READ**

(Ethics)

**WORKSHOP**

**SEMINAR**

Student 8

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**4.7**

**DUE** Write-Up of Pilot Study and Preliminary Data Analysis

Workshop

Powerpoint

**SEMINAR** Student 9

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**4.14**

**DUE** Human Subjects Appendix with committee response

**READ**

Luker Ch. 9 "Historical-Comparative Methods"

Luker Ch. 10 "Data Reduction and Analysis"

**SEMINAR**

Student 10

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**4.21 Visualizing Theories and Data**

**DUE** Rough Draft of Zeroth Draft (which is due next week)  
**WORKSHOP**  
Charts and Tables

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## **4.28 Nearly There**

**DUE** [Full Zeroth Draft Due](#)

**READ**

PROTIP # 5: How to present a paper or discussion at a professional meeting

**WORKSHOP**

Presentations

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## **5.5 Wrapping Up and Looking Forward**

**DUE** Presentation in Electronic Form

Project Presentations 1-6

Sign up to bring food

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Project Presentations 7-12 Sign up to bring food