

SYA 5515 Sociology Research Practicum

Professor: Jill Quadagno

Course meeting time: Monday, 9:00-10:00 AM

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Office Hours: Monday, 1:00-3:00, Thursday, 1:30-3:30 and by Appointment

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Summary of Course Objectives: The objectives of this course are to help you design and carry out a research project and to write up the results in a professional style so that you can present your paper at a professional meeting, and submit it to a professional journal for publication.

Course Requirements: To obtain a satisfactory grade in this course, you must attend class on a regular basis, complete all required readings on time, complete all written assignments on time and turn in a first draft of the introduction to your master's paper by December 11.

Required co-requisite: SYA 5971r (2 hrs)

This one-hour practicum is taught in association with two hours of directed research with your major professor. (NOTE: Please see Ms. Jamie Yeargan to sign up for two hours of SYA 5971r with your major professor.)

Course Organization & Format

The objective of this course is to provide you with the skills to develop your Master's paper. You will learn how to formulate a research question, determine what kind of evidence is needed to address that question and make a convincing argument. We will also focus on improving the style and clarity of your writing and preparing your manuscript in a manner that meets professional standards in the discipline.

To make satisfactory progress this semester, you should expect to dedicate six or more hours of out of class time **weekly** to your master's paper project. You should also meet on a regular basis with your major professor. If you invest in this course, you will develop writing skills that will prepare you to write a dissertation proposal as well as serve you well throughout your career. Since skills are cumulative, you cannot progress to stage b until you have passed through stage a. It is thus imperative that you complete your assignments as instructed and on time.

Students will report regularly on their progress and provide both oral and written critiques of their fellow students' papers.

What is the MA Paper?

For a traditional MS degree in sociology, our department requires a Master's Paper (MA paper). The MA paper allows a student to work on a research project that is (ideally) underway and to develop a publishable manuscript. A student learns theory, methods, and substantive content in coursework and then learns about how to communicate the results in a form that is typically used in the discipline.

Choosing a major professor

You will need to select a major professor to supervise your master's paper. Your choice of major professor for the project should be based on practical and substantive considerations. You need someone with whom you can work, and someone who is willing to help you develop a paper with potential for publication. To find out if a faculty member is interested in supervising your project, go to him or her with your ideas and ask. NOTE: If the person with whom you want to work does not really want to work with you, you may need to think again. You need clear evidence of the professor's interest in working with you. Evidence of a strong, explicit commitment is the key to successful collaboration.

Before going very far with the project, the student and major professor must identify two other departmental faculty members to serve as the student's MA paper supervisory committee. While the major professor is in charge of the project, committee members must agree that the manuscript meets disciplinary standards before they sign the final copy.

The MA paper and authorship

The MA paper is a journal-length manuscript that, with additional revisions, may be submitted to a sociology journal for publication. The student and advisor should clarify at the outset, preferably in writing, an agreement on authorship. Who will serve as first author on publications resulting from the collaboration? If the project primarily involves the professor's question and data, the professor will normally be first author. If the student and faculty member fail to negotiate authorship up front, the student should assume that the major professor will be a co-author with order to be negotiated depending on the level of contribution. To avoid misunderstandings and conflict, we urge students and faculty to clarify authorship before the student begins the project.

At the end of this two-semester sequence, you will know how to produce a journal article. This step is valuable for your professional development. Take advantage of it. I am looking forward to working with you.

You need not stay with your professor once the MA project is complete. Indeed, there are good reasons for changing. You have the right to change advisors, as your interests and circumstances change. Your goal: Obtain help while avoiding misunderstanding or hard feelings.

Course Requirements

Required Book:

Booth, Wayne C., Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams. 2003. *The Craft of Research*. University of Chicago Press.

The book is available at Bill's Bookstore.

Assignments:

Aug. 28: Introduction

Sept. 4: No class. Labor day holiday.

Sept. 11: Discussion of master's paper topics

Be prepared to discuss one or more topics you would like to use in your master's paper

Assignment: Booth and Williams, Prologue and Chaps. 1 and 2

Sept. 18: How researchers choose topics

Read the following articles. Be prepared to discuss how each of the authors chose his/her area of research. How did you decide on your own topic? Did you select your topic because of some aspect of your personal history? A theoretical interest? A perceived gap in empirical knowledge? Think - what are the disadvantages and advantages of each starting point?

Assignment:

Joshua Gamson, "Professional Rebellions and Personal Researches or How I Became Bored with Myself." Pp. 245-252 in *Our Studies, Ourselves: Sociologists Lives and Work*. Oxford University Press, 2003.

Kathleen Blee, "On Studying the Enemy." Pp. 13-23 in *Our Studies, Ourselves: Sociologists Lives and Work*. Oxford University Press, 2003.

Sept. 25: Developing a research question

Begin your literature review by reading several articles on your topic. The references should come from professional sociological journals not the popular media as a general rule (although there are exceptions). This will be the beginning of your bibliography for your master's paper. Then prepare a list of several questions you might ask based on the literature review. Where are the gaps in the literature? Can you identify any theoretical debates? Is there a lack of research on a particular subject? See what you can make an original contribution.

Assignment: Chap. 3 and 4

Oct. 2:

Assignment: Read the following articles:

Brooks, Clem and Jeff Manza. 2006. "Social Policy Responsiveness in Developed Democracies." *American Sociological Review* 71 (3): 474-495.

Myles, John. 2006. Comment on Brooks and Manza: Welfare States and Public Opinion." *American Sociological Review* 71 (3): 495-498.

Brooks, Clem and Jeff Manza. 2006. "Reply to Myles: Theory and Methods for Comparative Opinion/ Social Policy Research." *American Sociological Review* 71 (3): 499-501.

After you have read the articles, do the following:

(1) "Pull the outline" of the paper (as published) by listing each section's title and then every subtitle within each section. Make clear which subtitles are subordinate to others (by indenting or numbering or whatever).

(2) As you read each section and subsection: Ask yourself, "what do the authors do here?" What is included in this section? Try to identify the paper's structure.

(3) What is the author's main claim? Find the sentence or sentences that state the paper's main claim. Where is it (in what section)? Quote it exactly and report its page number. Then assess it. Does the evidence support the claim?

(4) What reasons are presented to support the main claim?

(5) Does the evidence presented support the authors' claims?

(6) What arguments are made by Myles in his critique? How do Brooks and Manza respond? Is their response sufficient to convince you that their argument is valid and backed up by evidence? What other evidence might strengthen their case?

Oct. 9: *Your research problem*

Assignment: Chap. 5 and 6

Prepare a one page written statement of your research problem to hand in. This should include a causal model that contains the key concepts in your study. At this point, you should have a minimum of five or six key concepts. Be sure to:

- a) Give each concept a name that communicates to the reader what it is about substantively.
- b) Draw arrows to show which concepts you view as exogenous (not to be explained/predicted by you) and which you view as endogenous (to be explained/predicted by you).
- c) Verbally describe each link (represented by an arrow) in your model and in doing so, clarify

the “form” of the relationship you expect to find.

Bring copies for everyone in the class. What kind of data or evidence will you need to solve your research problem? What do you think your contribution to sociology will be (i.e, add to theory, add to empirical knowledge). Be prepared to discuss your project with the class.

Oct 16: Making arguments

Assignment: Chap. 7 and 8

We will continue with discussion of student ‘s causal models.

Oct. 23: Draft an introduction and give a copy to the student who is assigned to review your project.

Assignment:

Write a draft (‘draft’ means a beginning; a start) of the introduction section and literature review section of your MA paper. Be sure to have your major “claim” in a sentence at the end of the Introduction and be sure to name all your key concepts and your central question.

Your literature review should be organized around your research problem. Do not worry if you have ‘all the literature’ covered. Simply begin. Keep this in mind: You are writing FOR your reader so your reader will be prepared for your results/findings. Your goal in the front end of the paper up to your “findings” is to prepare readers for the results section (or findings) of your study.

Suggestion: Look at how Brooks and Manza begin their paper. What concept do they open the paper with? Do they cite many references in the introduction? How do they organize their literature review. Emulate them if you are unsure of how to proceed.

Reassurance: You will write many versions of your introduction before you finish. All I ask now is that you make a start. In some ways, your introduction is a “story” about your major “claim” (see Booth book again). Your introduction ‘introduces’ your paper. You’ll want to be sure that your readers have a good idea of what the paper is about. You may write three pages or 10 pages, as you see fit; I have no length in mind at this point.

Each student’s paper will be assigned two reviewers.

Oct. 30:

Assignment: Chaps. 9 and 10

Reviewer’s critiques of student paper drafts.

Nov. 6: Drafting a paper

Assignment: Chaps. 11 and 12

Reviewer's critiques of student paper drafts.

Nov. 13: *Revising a paper*

Reviewer's critiques of student paper drafts.

Assignment: Chaps 13 and 14

Nov. 20: To be assigned

Nov. 27: To be assigned

Dec. 4: *Connecting Claims to Evidence*

Final discussion of projects for semester.

Assignment: Chap. 16

Due Date for MA Paper Draft (front portion): Monday December 11, 2005 (firm date)