

SOC 204B: Capstone Research Seminar

Catalog Description

This course focuses on the sociological research and writing process for Sociology majors. Students will continue to develop their capstone projects and will write substantial, accompanying papers. Capstone projects and papers can be based on research projects developed in 204A or on projects developed during the course. Students in the honors program or coterminial students in the research track may incorporate their papers into their theses. The class is designed to support students as they complete original research projects during the quarter or pieces of a larger honors or master's thesis.

Course Overview

This course advances your capstone research by guiding you through the process of developing and completing an original sociological project. Whether you are building on a previously designed study or beginning a new one, you will formulate and refine a focused research question, engage and evaluate relevant sociological scholarship, and apply appropriate methods to investigate your topic. Throughout the quarter, you will collect, analyze, and interpret evidence, drawing well-supported conclusions that connect your findings to broader theoretical conversations. The course is structured around staged assignments and sustained writing, supporting you as you develop a substantial research paper that clearly and persuasively communicates your original work. You will also strengthen your ability to write within sociology by practicing discipline-specific conventions, including genre, style, and standards of academic discourse. Regular feedback, revision, and peer engagement are central to the course, helping you refine both your research and your writing as you move toward a polished final product.

Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)

1. Formulate and investigate original sociological research questions, including those appropriate for capstone, honors, or thesis-level work
2. Critically evaluate sociological theory and empirical research
3. Collect, analyze, and interpret data using appropriate sociological methods
4. Produce a substantial written research paper that clearly and persuasively communicates original findings
5. Apply discipline-specific writing conventions, including sociological genres, styles, and standards of academic discourse.

Course Material and Technology

- All course reading and other material will be posted on Canvas and can be accessed at no cost.
- You will need to have access to a device that connects to the internet so that you can access email and Canvas. Students can borrow equipment and access other learning technology from the Lathrop Learning Hub.

Online Instruction (If Necessary)

This course can be delivered synchronously online via Zoom, maintaining the same structure of discussions, workshops, and peer review activities through breakout rooms, shared documents, and real-time feedback.

ASSIGNMENT SUMMARY

See Appendix for detailed descriptions of these assignments

Attendance and Participation	20%
Four Milestones	45%
Peer Review	10%
Presentation	5%
Final Paper (with required memo)	20%

CLASS SCHEDULE

Readings are drawn from two core guides and abbreviated as follows; numbers indicate the page where each reading begins. Both texts are posted on Canvas:

- (H) *A Guide to Writing a Senior Thesis in Sociology*, Harvard University (2019).
- (P) *Writing Sociology: A Guide for Junior Papers and Senior Theses*, Princeton University (2012).

Prompts and submission links are available on Canvas. Assignments are due by 11:59pm on the date listed. The schedule is subject to change. You will be given advance notice, and Canvas will be updated accordingly.

Class	Topic	Prep for Class	In Class	Assignments / Notes
Week 1 Tues	Introduction to Research; Project Management	(H) Time Management, Sample Timeline: 1 (H) Drafting the Thesis: Overview: 40 (H) Basic Writing Tips: 52 (H) ASA Style Guide: 59 [for reference]	Course overview and expectations; introduce projects and current progress; outline research process; discuss goals and challenges.	Due *Wednesday* Submit a short memo about your project.
Thurs	From Research Topics to Research Questions	(P) Ch. 1: The Research Question: 5 (H) Turning a Topic into a Research Question: 8 (H) Part One: Before You Begin: 3	Strategies for time management; workshop topics into focused research questions; small-group feedback; begin project timelines.	

Week 2 Tues	Matching Questions to Data and Methods	(P) Ch. 5: Methods: 26 (H) Choosing a Methodology: 13	Review reading; align research questions with methods; examine qualitative and quantitative designs; refine methodological approaches. Discussion of IRB and ethical research practices, including when IRB is required and how to proceed.	
Thurs	Finding Literature	(P) Ch. 2: Defining the Importance of Your Research: 11 (H) Beginning the Literature Review: 18 * Choose an article to bring to class for analysis; read and annotate the article prior to attending class. * IRB: Ensure any required IRB process is in place and moving forward	Present and review selected articles; analyze theory and methods; identify model scholarship; strategies for organizing sources and notes.	Submit a detailed timeline plan for your project.
Week 3 Tues	Collecting Data	(P) Ch. 4: Finding Data: 21 (H) Recruiting Subjects or Gathering Data Sources: 30 (H) Qualitative Data Analysis Basics: 36 (H) Quantitative Data Analysis Basics: 37 (H) Content Analysis Basics: 38 * Choose from additional readings I have curated based on your chosen methods.	Overview of qualitative and quantitative methods; discuss choosing appropriate methods for research questions; review data collection strategies; begin applying methods through coding exercises; troubleshoot plans and assess feasibility.	
Thurs	Developing a Plan for Data Analysis; Guest Lecture: SSDS	(P) Ch. 6: Data Analysis: 35	Guest lecture from Software and Services for Data Science (SSDS); overview of quantitative methods and tools; guidance on selecting appropriate software; introduction to available workshops,	Milestone 1 Due

			consultations, and data resources; Q&A.	
Week 4 Tues	Writing the Literature Review	(P) Ch. 3: The Literature Review: 14 (H) Literature Review: Setting Up Your Thesis: 42	Discuss structure and scope of the literature review; Annotate literature review sections of published articles	
Thurs	Writing the Data/Methods Section	(H) Data and Methods: 43 (P) Ch. 5: Methods: 26 (review)	Apply methods in practice; organize and prepare data; overview of analytic approaches; workshop analysis plans; introduce tools for managing and analyzing data.	Receive Milestone 1 comments from me
Week 5 Tues	Writing the Data/Methods Section	(H) Results: 45 (preview)	Review expectations; analyze sample sections; draft or outline methods; address common challenges.	
Thurs	Presenting Results	(H) Results: 45 (P) Ch. 6: Data Analysis: 35 (review)	How to present findings clearly; review tables and visualizations; analyze results sections; discuss emerging findings.	Milestone 2 Due
Week 6 Tues	Discussion and Conclusion	(P) Ch. 7: Discussing Your Findings and Drawing Conclusions: 43 (H) Discussion and Conclusion: 51	Connect findings to arguments; analyze examples; identify contributions and implications; workshop key claims.	
Thurs	Discussion and Conclusion (continued)	(H) Discussion and Conclusion: 51 (review)	Workshop sections; peer feedback; refine interpretation of findings.	Receive Milestone 2 comments from me
Week 7 Tues	Writing Introductions and Abstracts	(H) Drafting the Thesis: Introduction: 41 (H) Drafting the Thesis: Overview: 40 (review)	Strategies for introductions and abstracts; analyze examples; draft or revise; align with core argument.	
Thurs	Project Updates and Workshop	N/A	Student progress updates; structured peer feedback; troubleshoot research and writing issues.	Milestone 3 Due
Week 8 Tues	Writing bootcamp and one-on-one meetings	N/A	In-class writing time; individual meetings; targeted feedback and support.	

Thurs	Clearly and Effectively Communicating Ideas	(H) Basic Writing Tips: 52 (review) * Additional Reading	Review structure and organization; address clarity and coherence; revise for flow.	Receive Milestone 3 comments from me
Week 9 Tues	Revising and Peer Review	(H) Revision, Revision, Revision: 54	Revision strategies; guided peer review; practice constructive feedback.	
Thurs	Evaluating Theory and Critiquing Research	(P) Introduction: 3 (revisit framing) * Additional Reading	Revise a section of the capstone project paper; Assign peer reviewers.	Milestone 4 Due
Week 10 Tues	Final Paper Presentations	Prepare presentation	Student presentations; peer feedback.	
Thurs	Final Paper Presentations	Prepare presentation	Student presentations; peer feedback; course reflection and closing discussion.	Peer Revisions Due Receive Milestone 4 comments from me & your peer reviewer
Finals Week	No class. No reading. No in-person or virtual meetings. We do not meet during the scheduled final exam period for this course.			Final Paper and Memo Due

COURSE POLICIES AND GRADING

See Canvas for additional information and links

Syllabus

You are required to thoroughly read the syllabus and are responsible for all information in it.

Canvas

You are required to review all policies on Canvas and are responsible for all information posted.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Please see Canvas for answers to frequently asked questions.

Grading

All scores will be entered into Canvas throughout the term as I grade each assignment. You are responsible for monitoring your grades and alerting me in a timely manner if you think I have made an error. Be aware that the final grade shown on Canvas may not match your final grade in the class due to missing or unentered grades, rounding, dropping lowest scores (when applicable) etc. Your final grade will be calculated as a percentage of the points earned out of the total points available, according to the following scale:

A	93% - 100%	A-	90% - 92.99%	B+	87% - 89.99%
B	83% - 86.99%	B-	80% - 82.99%	C+	77% - 79.99%
C	73% - 76.99%	C-	70% - 72.99%	D+	67% - 69.99%
D	63% - 66.99%	D-	60% - 62.99%	F	0-59.99%

Late and Missing Work

All late work will be marked down by 1 full grade (10%) every day that it is late, starting the minute it is late. Work that is more than 10 days late will receive a “0” and be considered “missing.” Exemptions to late and missing work penalties will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Students are expected to contact me in a timely manner and may be required to submit supporting documentation such as a doctor’s note.

Institutional Review Board Approval

Students must follow all applicable university policies governing research with human participants. Students considering collecting data from human participants or using course data beyond the class must consult with the instructor and, when appropriate, the Institutional Review Board before beginning the research or pursuing further dissemination.

ASSIGNMENT SUMMARY

Assignment Notes and Policies

Full instructions, grading rubrics, and submission details are available on Canvas and will be reviewed in class. See the “Grading” section of this syllabus for policies on late and missing work. Canvas also provides definitions of key terms (e.g., *no-questions-asked*, *unforeseen emergency*, *timely manner*) and examples of acceptable documentation.

Writing Guidelines and Advice

Additional details and expectations are available on Canvas and will be reviewed in class.

- Argumentation and Revision - Make specific, direct arguments, avoid vague or overly broad language • Be open to revision and feedback, rewriting improves your work • Be willing to refine or change your research question as your project develops.
- Clarity, Style and Formatting - Write clearly and concisely • Avoid passive voice • Use precise language • Use footnotes sparingly • Follow required formatting and citation guidelines.
- Academic Integrity and Use of Sources - Give credit for all ideas that are not your own • Avoid thin paraphrasing, do not simply reword sources • Avoid over-quoting sources when explaining others’ work, prioritize your own analysis • Cite and explain others’ ideas, using in-text citations and a full reference section.

Attendance and Participation

All students begin with full credit. Students maintain this score by attending regularly and arriving on time, prepared to actively participate in discussion, analysis, and small-group work, and by completing the assigned preparation outlined in the syllabus. Thoughtful contributions, respectful listening, and meaningful engagement with peers are expected. You have *one no-questions-asked* absence for which you will not receive a penalty. Each additional absence will result in a 3-point deduction from your score. If you miss class due to late enrollment, you will not be penalized, but you will forfeit your no-questions-asked absence. Students are responsible for all material covered in any missed class, including completing missed in-class work, in a timely manner. If your attendance and participation become a concern, you will be required to meet with me to create a plan for improvement.

Your participation grade includes a few minor assignments, which are described below. Failure to complete these assignments will result in a 3-point deduction from your score. The introductory memo must be submitted in a timely manner; failure to do so may result in being dropped from the course.

Introduction Memo

Submit a short memo that introduces your research project and your current progress. The goal is to give me a clear sense of what you are working on and where you are in the process. Describe your topic, what draws you to it, and what you are hoping to explore. If you have a research question, include it; if not, describe the direction you are considering. You should also explain what you have done so far and what stage your project is in, as well as any initial ideas about data, sources, or methods. Finally, note any questions,

uncertainties, or challenges you are encountering, along with anything else that would be helpful for me to know as I support your work this quarter.

Timeline Memo

Submit a memo outlining a clear timeline and plan for advancing your research project over the remainder of the quarter. The goal is to demonstrate how you will move from your current stage to a more fully developed draft. Identify key tasks such as data collection, analysis, literature integration, and drafting, and indicate the checkpoints you anticipate reaching. You should also note any anticipated challenges or areas where you may need support as you continue developing your project.

Model Article

Select a model academic article (or book, if appropriate for thesis writers) that uses a similar type of data and analytic approach to your project, and read it by the day indicated on the syllabus. This assignment is intended to help you identify examples of strong research design, methods, and writing that you can draw on in your own work. Expectations and criteria for appropriate selections will be discussed in class in advance, and you will be introduced to library resources that will help you identify and locate a suitable source.

Final Paper Memo

Submit a brief memo reflecting on your final paper, including your rationale for revisions not adopted (if applicable) and your plans for next steps (see “Final Paper” below for more information).

Milestone 1: Research Design Proposal

- Research Topic and Motivation: A clear description of your topic and why it is important
- Research Question: A clearly stated main question, with sub-questions if applicable
- Working Hypotheses: Your preliminary expectations or proposed answers
- Data and Methods Plan: Data - What data you will use, how you will collect it, your timeline, and any progress to date. Methods - How you will analyze the data and why this approach is appropriate for your question
- Justification and Literature Context: Identify the gap your project addresses; Briefly describe the main areas of relevant literature
- Annotated Bibliography: A set of sources with brief summaries and explanations of relevance

Milestone 2: Draft Sections and Analysis Plan

- Revised Research Question: Updated based on feedback
- Draft Data and Methods Section: A written draft describing your data and methodological approach
- Draft Literature Review: A structured draft engaging relevant scholarship
- Data Analysis Plan: A clear and specific plan for how you will analyze your data

Milestone 3: Expanded Draft

- Revisions from Milestone 2: Research question; Data and methods; Literature review
- New Draft Sections: Abstract; Introduction; Analysis; Conclusion

Milestone 4: Full Draft for Peer Review

- Revised Materials from All Previous Milestones: Incorporating feedback

- Full Rough Draft of the Paper: A complete draft ready for peer review (including all major sections)

Peer Review

Review and provide feedback on a complete draft written by a peer. I will also review each paper and provide feedback. Students will use both sets of comments to inform their revisions as they prepare the final draft.

Presentation

Deliver an in-class presentation on your research. Length and content will be determined by course enrollment.

Final Paper

Submit a revised final draft that includes the following sections: Title, Abstract, Introduction, Literature Review, Data and Methods, Analysis, Conclusion, and References. The front half of your paper must clearly state your research question(s). When relevant, it must also clearly state your hypothesis or hypotheses. Include figures, tables, or other visual representations of data when appropriate. Your final draft must consider prior feedback, with particular attention to instructor comments (see required memo below).

Memo (Required)

Submit a brief memo with your paper that includes:

- Rationale for Revisions Not Adopted (if applicable): If you chose not to incorporate specific feedback, explain your reasoning.
- Next Steps: Describe what you plan to do with your paper. Examples include, but are not limited to, the following: continuing development in SOC 204C, using it as a writing sample for graduate school, revising and submitting it for publication, expanding it into a larger project, and completing it solely for this course.