

Princeton University  
Department of Sociology

Sociology 503

## METHODS OF SOCIAL SCIENCE

Instructor: Alejandro Portes  
Office Hours: Wednesday, 3:00 – 5:00; Thursday, 6:00 – 7:00

### Synopsis:

This course seeks to cover classic and contemporary approaches to social research with an emphasis on the logic of formulating questions to the empirical world and seeking reliable answers to them. Although all such efforts are in a sense comparative, the course will pay special emphasis to comparisons between large social units – such as communities, cities, and nations – and alternative methodologies designed to deal effectively with them.

Students will be asked to formulate, present, and defend a research proposal on a topic of their choice. As a special feature of the course during this semester, lectures will be combined with selected presentations by outside speakers in the cycle of lectures of the Center for Migration and Development. Students will be asked to evaluate these lectures based on knowledge acquired during the course.

### Grading:

One-third mid-term examination  
One-third research proposal and class presentation  
One-third final examination

### Bibliography:

Herbert Asher, *Causal Modeling*, Sage.  
Howard Becker, *Tricks of the Trade*, Chicago.  
Emile Durkheim, *The Rules of the Sociological Method*, Free Press.  
Alejandro Portes, Manuel Castells, and Lauren Benton, *The Informal Economy*, Johns Hopkins University Press.  
Charles Ragin, *The Comparative Method*, University of California Press.  
Julian Simon and Paul Burstein, *Basic Research Methods in Social Science*, Random House.  
Charles Tilly, *Big Structures, Large Processes, Huge Comparisons*, Russell Sage Foundation.  
Max Weber, *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*, Free Press.

### Articles and Books:

Herbert Hyman, “Theoretical Problems in the Descriptive Survey,” Chapter 3 in H. Hyman, *Survey Design and Analysis*, Free Press.  
\_\_\_\_\_, “Problems in Treating Simple Relations between Two Variables,” in H. Hyman, *Survey Design and Analysis*, Free Press.  
Ernest Nagel, “Patterns of Scientific Explanation,” Chapter 2 in E. Nagel, *The Structure of Science*, Harcourt-Brace.  
\_\_\_\_\_, “Methodological Problems of the Social Sciences,” Chapter 13 in E. Nagel, *The Structure of Science*, Harcourt-Brace.  
Portes, Alejandro, “Immigration Theory for a New Century: Some Problems and Opportunities,” *International Migration Review* 31(Winter 1997.)  
\_\_\_\_\_, “Contentious Science: The Forms and Functions of Trespassing,” University of Maryland, Urban Studies Program, 1995.

## Course Outline

<i>Week</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Readings</i>
<b>Module I: The Origins and Logic of Social Research</b>		
1 <sup>st</sup> : September 14 – 20	The Sociological Intuition: Its Classical Origins	Durkheim, Introduction (by S. Lukes,) Chs. 1-3; Weber, “Objectivity in Social Science.”
2 <sup>nd</sup> : September 21 – 27	The Sociological Intuition – II	Durkheim, Chs. 4-6; Weber, “The Meaning of Ethical Neutrality;” Nagel, “Patterns of Scientific Explanation.”
3 <sup>rd</sup> : September 28 – October 4	The Logic of Scientific Explanation	Simon and Burstein, Chs. 2-4; Nagel, “Methodological Problems in the Social Sciences;” Portes, “Immigration Theory for a New Century.”
4 <sup>th</sup> : October 5 – 11	The Language of Science: Theories and Other Symbolic Constructions	Simon and Burstein, Chs. 5-7; Becker, Chs. 1-2; Portes, “Contentious Science.”
<b>Module II: Doing it: The Practice of Social Research</b>		
5 <sup>th</sup> : October 12 – 18	Experimental and Quasi-experimental Designs	Simon and Burstein, Chs. 10-12; Becker, Ch. 4
6 <sup>th</sup> : October 19 – 25	The Logic of Survey Research (Outside Lecture: Douglas Massey)	Simon and Burstein, Chs. 9, 13, 15; Hyman, “Theoretical Problems;” Becker, Ch. 3.
7 <sup>th</sup> : October 26 – November 1	Mid-term Examination	
November 2 – 8	Fall Recess	
8 <sup>th</sup> : November 9 – 15	Qualitative Studies	Shaffir <i>et. al.</i> , Parts I – II; Portes <i>et. al.</i> , Part IV.
9 <sup>th</sup> : November 16 – 22	Assessing Causal Relations (Outside Lecture: Giovanni Arrighi)	Asher, Chs. 1-2; Simon and Burstein, Chs. 22, 24-26; Hyman, “Problems in Treating Simple Relations.”

<i>Week</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Readings</i>
<b>Module III: An Introduction to the Comparative Method</b>		
November 23 – 29	Thanksgiving Recess	
10 <sup>th</sup> : November 30 – December 6	Comparing Large Structures <b>CLASS</b> <b>PRESENTATIONS</b> <b>BEGIN</b>	Tilly, Chs. 1-4; Ragin, Chs. 1-5.
11 <sup>th</sup> : December 7 – 13	Causality in Quantitative and Comparative Research	Asher, Ch. 3; Ragin, Chs. 6-8.
12 <sup>th</sup> : December 14 – 20	An Illustrative Study: The Informal Economy	Tilly, Chs. 5-7; Portes <i>et. al.</i> , Chs. 1-8, Conclusion.
Final Examination: TBA		