

Princeton University
Department of Sociology

Sociology 503

METHODS OF SOCIAL SCIENCE

Instructor: Alejandro Portes

Office Hours: Tuesday, 3:00 – 4:30; Thursday, 5:00 – 6:00

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. These presentations are an integral part of the course. There will be one guest lecture during the semester.

Grading:

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

Bibliography:

Herbert Asher, *Causal Modeling*, Sage.
Emile Durkheim, *The Rules of the Sociological Method*, Free Press.
Alejandro Portes, Carlos Dore, and Patricia Landolt, *The Urban Caribbean*, Johns Hopkins University Press.
Charles Ragin, *The Comparative Method*, University of California Press.
Royce A. Singleton and Bruce C. Straits, *Approaches to Social Research*, Oxford University Press.
Charles Tilly, *Big Structures, Large Processes, Huge Comparisons*, Russell Sage Foundation.
Max Weber, *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*, Free Press.

Articles and Chapters in 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>
Module I: The Origins and Logic of Social Research		
1 st : September 20 – 26	The Sociological Intuition: Its Classical Origins	Durkheim, Introduction (by S. Lukes,) Chs. 1-3; Weber, “Objectivity in Social Science.”
2 nd : September 27 – October 3	The Sociological Intuition – II	Durkheim, Chs. 4-6; Weber, “The Meaning of Ethical Neutrality”; Nagel, “Patterns of Scientific Explanation.”
3 rd : October 4 – 10	The Logic of Scientific Explanation (Guest lecturer: Patricia Fernandez-Kelly)	Singleton and Straits, Chs. 1-3; Nagel, “Methodological Problems in the Social Sciences”; Portes, “Immigration Theory for a New Century.”
4 th : October 11 – 17	The Language of Science: Theories and Other Symbolic Constructions	Singleton and Straits, Ch. 4; Portes, “Contentious Science”; Tilly, Chs. 1-3.
Module II: Doing it: The Practice of Social Research		
5 th : October 18 – 24	Measurement and Sampling	Singleton and Straits, Chs. 5-6.
6 th : October 25 – 31	Mid-term Examination	
November 1 – 7	Fall Recess	
7 th : November 8 – 14	Experimental and Quasi-Experimental Designs	Singleton and Straits, Chs. 7-8; Hyman, “Theoretical Problems.”
8 th : November 15 – 21	The Logic of Survey Research	Singleton and Straits, Chs. 9-10; Hyman, “Problems in Treating Simple Relations.”

<i>Week</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Readings</i>
Module III: Causality and the Comparative Method		
November 22 – 28	Thanksgiving Recess	
9 th : November 29 – December 5	Causality in Quantitative and Comparative Research	Asher, Chs. 1-2; Ragin, Chs. 1-5.
	CLASS PRESENTATIONS BEGIN	
10 th : December 6 – 12	Comparing Large Structures	Tilly, Chs. 1-4; Portes <i>et. al.</i> , Chs. 1, 2, 8.
11 th : December 13 – 19	Boolean Methods and Non-Recursive Causal Models	Ragin, Chs. 6-7; Asher, Ch. 3.
Final Examination: TBA		