Department of Anthropology and Sociology (ANSO)

Academic year 2021 - 2022

Research Design and Proposal Writing in the Social Sciences (for MA1)

ANSO124 – Spring 2022- 6 ECTS
Schedule & Room

Course Description

This course pursues two inter-related goals: to help students theoretically construct a problem of sociological and/or anthropological importance; to help students develop a coherent research design for their future research. Students are encouraged to come to class with a research idea in mind, or better, a draft of a research proposal. Throughout the class, students will write small assignments that will allow them to produce a research proposal by the end of the class.

> **PROFESSOR**

Grégoire Mallard
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Office hours
Monday 14h-16h

> **ASSISTANT**

Office hours

Syllabus

PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT

Students are required to read about 3-4 book chapters and articles per week. This course requires active participation from all members during class and every week. The assessment of students' performance will be broken down into three criteria: participation in class (20% of the grade), many short memoranda (30% each), and a final research proposal (50%). Many short memoranda are required throughout the semester, and the grade will reflect as much quality as regularity and the ability to respect deadlines. The final research proposal will not be longer than 25 double-spaced pages.

Organization of the Class

Some classes are entirely devoted to the discussion of articles, and other classes are entirely devoted to the discussion of students' writing assignments. When students are asked write a new piece of their research proposal, the assignment is due by **Saturday at noon BEFORE the class**. Students are required to send their writing exercise **to the TA** who will make a compilation that will be shared with all the other students of the class. Therefore, every student can (and must) read her colleagues' writing exercises prior to class. In addition, when a writing assignment is due, students will be asked to focus on ONE particular piece of writing (by one of their colleagues), and discuss it in class. This student will be referred to below as your 'commentator'. Commentators may vary for each week. This exercise is meant to nurture your commenting (e.g. analytical) skills, which means that you should not only do the work of 'commentator' for the one paper you are assigned to comment upon (and for which you need to read a little more), but for ALL the proposals. So in class, we should gather a lot of comments, almost by everybody for each paper. That means that everyone needs to learn to express herself very briefly, and go immediately to the core of the problems you have identified and also propose a solution to solve the problem (all in one minute max).

WEEK 1   Evaluative Cultures of Research Proposals   (February 22)

Lamont, Michèle. 2009. Chapter 3. *How Professors Think: Inside the curious world of academic judgment*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ Press, pp 53-106

Grégoire Mallard, Michèle Lamont and Joshua Guetzkow. 2009. "Fairness as Appropriateness: Managing Epistemological Differences in Peer Review." *Science, Technology and Human Values*. 34(5):573-606.

Abend, Gabriel. 2008. "The Meaning of Theory." *Sociological Theory*. 26(2):173-199.

WEEK 2   Constructing the Object of Research: How Theory Informs Research   (March 1)

Read the doc.ch FNS research proposal by

Nina Khamsy on *Scales of mobility of Afghan migrant youth in the digital era: an ethnography of digital practices on the move*,

Nina Kinderlin, *The making of an armed group, an exploration of illicit, regulatory and judicial space*.

Recommended reading:

And the FNS proposal by Grégoire Mallard on *Bombs, Banks and Sanctions: A Sociology of the Transnational Legal Field of Sanctions.*

Additional readings:

Luker, Kristin. 2008. *Salsa Dancing into the Social Sciences: Research in an Age of Info-Glut*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press Chapter 4: "What is This a Case of, Anyway?" Chapter 5: "Reviewing the Literature".

Becker, Howard S. 1998. *Tricks of the Trade: How to Think About Your Research While Doing It.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Chapter 2: "Imagery." Pp. 10-66.

WEEK 3   From Research Idea to Research Object   **(March 8)**

Guidelines for the writer:
Identify your topic of research, and then find an article in the daily press (NYT, Le Monde, The Guardian, etc.) or magazines (New Yorker, etc.) that deals with some of the issues at stake in your future research. Send the article to your commentator. Then, write what could be an introductory paragraph (half a page) to your future proposal based on that article.

Then, start thinking about the research question that you want to raise about this topic. To help you do so, find two articles: *one* article published in a major generalist journal (e.g. AJS or ASR, a top Anthropology journal, etc.); and choose *one* article from a specialty journal (from recent issues) in which you are likely to publish your paper. Send on of the articles to your commentator.

Then, use both articles to identify: The broad general question the author seeks to answer; and how the author answers her question.

Identify whether the contribution is framed as a contribution to the literature, whether she brings in wealth of new data and disconfirms old theory/frame, whether she challenges existing theory; or adjudicates an ongoing debate in the field; etc.

Then, write one page (or half a page) to formulate your research question, and frame how your future research on the topic can contribute to the field.

Guidelines for the commentator:
You need to comment on the choices made by the writer with respect to the choice of anecdote and research question. Having read one academic and one popular article will help you think of alternative ways that the introduction writer could have used to start his/her proposal. So try to think of alternatives, and the pros and cons of each alternative. If you know the topic, and want to refer to other sources than the academic article that you've been sent, please, do so.

WEEK 4   Types of Reflexivity: What is the Right Distance/Proximity
between Researching and Researched Subjects?   **(March 15)**

Hekman, Susan. 1997. "Truth and Method: Feminist Standpoint Theory Revisited." *Signs.* 22(2): 341-365.

Hill Collins, Patricia. 1989. "The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought." *Signs* 14(4): 745-773.

Khan, S. 2005. Reconfiguring the Native Informant: Positionality in the Global Age. *Signs.* 30(4), New Feminist Approaches to Social Sciences.

Controversy about *On the Run*, by Alice Goffman, University of Chicago Press, 2014.
http://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/O/bo18039324.html
- Dwayne Betts: https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2014/07/alice-goffmans-on-the-run-she-is-wrong-about-black-urban-life.html
- Steven Lubet, http://newramblerreview.com/book-reviews/law/ethics-on-the-run
- Jesse Singal : http://nymag.com/scienceofus/2015/07/heres-whats-in-alice-goffmans-dissertation.html
- Isaac William Martin. 2016. "Academia on the Run?" https://booksandideas.net/Academia-on-the-Run.html

Recommended readings:

Mills, Charles. 1988. "Alternative Epistemologies." *Social Theory and Practice.* 14(3):237-263.

Marjorie L. Devault. 1990. "Talking and Listening from Women's Standpoint: Feminist Strategies for Interviewing and Analysis" *Social Problems*. 37(1): 96-116)

WEEK 5   Understanding the Field to Which You Want to Contribute   (March 22)

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1990. *Homo Academicus*. Translated by P. Collier. Standford, CA: Stanford University Press., pp. xi-xxvi, 6-17, 36-72, 90-107.

How to anticipate on reviewers' responses to article submissions:

Read the reviewers' comments and responses by the authors for Grégoire Mallard, Michèle Lamont and Joshua Guetzkow. 2009. "Fairness as Appropriateness: Managing Epistemological Differences in Peer Review." *Science, Technology and Human Values*. 34(5):573-606.

WEEK 6   Constructing Reflexivity as Part of Constructing Theory   (March 29)

Guidelines for the writer:

You need to choose a topic of interest and start thinking about the field to which you would like to contribute with this choice of topic. To do so, identify one or two key contributors to the academic literature that deals with your topic. In order to find out if his/her contribution is essential, find out which is the most widely cited book or article on your topic of interest. Before you select the one person you would like to focus on, tell us which discipline do these authors come from? What is their gender? Do they problematize gender and race when they construct their object of research? Look for their CV, and find out in which institutions they were trained and in which institution(s) they taught; in which academic journals they have published their work on this topic, and which epistemological style is most common in these journals. On their CV, find out of they produced some report for an international organization(IO)/government/think tank/NGO. If so, find out if the IO/government/NGO has produced other reports on the same topic. At last, independently of whether they have written a report for an IO or not, try to find out if they published an op-ed in a major newspaper (NYT, Le Monde, etc.) on your topic of interest; or if they were interviewed by journalists on the topic. Then, try to find out why the topic made the news. Was there a particular scandal at the time related to that topic? Was there a political controversy?

Then, try to identify if there is one structuring controversy in the field to which you want to contribute. If there is one, who are the other public figures who stand against the authors who inspire you? Are they public intellectuals or academics? If you identify two sides, work backward and ask yourself the same questions as before: re-do the whole assignment with the opposite school, and ask yourself: in which institutions were they trained? Do they problematize gender and race? Etc.

After you have done all this, ask yourself how you will construct the problem that interests you. Will you construct it differently from that of the schools of thought which you have identified on your topic of interest? Try to anticipate which school of thought is more likely find your perspective legitimate. Which kind of institution is more likely to be interested in your perspective? An IO (which one)? An NGO or some social movement groups? A think tank (which one)? How likely are you to build a transversal perspective on this topic, e.g. a position that is not already defended by an IO/think tank/academic school?

Guidelines for the commentator:

The writer of the essay should have sent you her writing assignment as well as 2 op-eds which illustrate the kind of academic positions that one can take on the issue of their choice. You should concentrate on their writing assignment and treat the op-eds as contextual background. In your comments, discuss whether you think the author has responded clearly to the question of finding out whether there is a big difference in the way academics 'problematize' their construction of the object of research and the way politicians/public figures talk about the object of research – of course, you will rely on the writing assignment to know this, and you are not asked to do additional research. From what the writing assignment says, do you get the impression that all the academics share the same definition of the problem? And is that definition different from that found in public debates? Or do some academics borrow their definition of the problem of interest with some politicians/public figures? Please, keep your comments to a maximum of 4 minutes.

WEEK 7:   Theory and Literature Review   (April 12)

Read (again) the literature reviews sections in the proposals that were uploaded in Week 2. Each one has its own style. Some of them try to contextualize debates within the academic field – with some references to institutionalization strategies pursued by academics – while others focus mostly on conceptual divides.

Find an article either from the Annual Review of Sociology, the Annual Review of Anthropology, or another Annual Review journal (in Law and Society for instance), which reviews a field to which you may want to contribute, and analyze it is written. What do you like about it?

For instance:

Gil Eyal, and Larissa Buchholz. "From the Sociology of Intellectuals to the Sociology of Interventions." *Annual Review of Sociology*, 36, 2010, p. 117-137.

Shaila Galvin. 2018. "Interspecies Relations and Agrarian Worlds", *Annual Review of Anthropology*. Vol. 47:233-249.

Please, send all your Annual Review pieces to Dalia by April 8, so that she can upload them on Moodle. Skim those which you may be interested in reading.

Recommended reading:

Machi, Lawrence A. and Brenda T. McEvoy. 2009. *The Literature Review: Six Steps to Success*. Thousand Oaks: Corwin.

WEEK 8   Theory and Literature Review   (April 19)

Guidelines for the writer:

You need to write 2-3 pages, starting with your research question (2 lines). Then, you announce which subfields of anthropology/sociology your question belongs to (legal anthropology, urban sociology, etc.), and which broad set of theories have debated this question for the last 10-20-30 years. This is one paragraph.

Then, draft the literature review of your research proposal. To do so, find 3 articles (send ONE of these to your commentator) on your general topic (but not your case specifically) and list the research questions asked by each author. Identify the research question that is most similar to the one you

want to ask.

Then, list at least 2 (possibly 3) different approaches to answer your research question, which you have identified in the literature. After that, you present the list of concepts/authors/solutions to the puzzle you identified that belong to a first approach (3 paragraphs max). You can tell us what are the limits of their approach (lack of reflexivity? A theoretical one? Etc.). Then, you do the same with the second approach by listing how the concepts/authors/theoretical claims lead to a different answer to your initial research question. You can and present some limits (3 paragraphs max).

Guidelines for the commentator:

You need to pay close attention to the 2 pages of literature review that your fellow student will send you. Your comments should be focused on these 2 pages, and not on the article that your fellow will have sent you, as this other article is just here to allow you to learn a bit more about the kind of literature that will be discussed by your colleague (and that you may not know at all).

Paying close attention to the 2 pages of literature does not necessarily mean that in class, you have to discuss every sentence of the proposal. Please, try to sum up your comments along 3 dimensions, asking: First, do you think the concepts/theories identify will allow your colleague to answer his/her question? Second, can you think of another answer that is not debated in the literature review (and that belongs to another literature)? Third, do you think the debate is well rendered by the draft? (for instance, would you change the order between the first and second set of answers, etc.).
Please, keep your comments to a maximum of 4-5 minutes.

WEEK 9   Choosing a Case: What is it a Case Of?
**   Or How Many Cases do you Need To Prove Your Point?   (April 26)**

Read the research proposal by Eléonore Lépinard, Grégoire Mallard and Nicky Le Feuvre on gendered careers of lawyers after globalization in France, Germany and Switzerland.

Read the research proposal by Graziella Moraes Silva, on "how elites shape unequal democracies and perceptions of redistribution in Brazil and South Africa"

Additional readings:

Boudon, Raymond. 1991. "What Middle Range Theories Are ?" *Contemporary Sociology*. 20(4) :519-522.

Sidney Tarrow. 2010. "The Strategy of Paired Comparison. Toward a Theory of Practice." *Comparative Political Studies*. 43(2): 230-259.

Michael Burawoy. 2009. *The Extended Case Methods: Four Countries, Four Decades, Four Great Transformations, and One Theoretical Tradition*. Pp. 143-192. Chapter 3: "Trotsky vs Skocpol."

Recommended reading:

Charles C. Ragin, 1989. *The Comparative Method: Moving beyond qualitative and quantitative strategies*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, Chapters 3 and 4.)

WEEK 10 Cases Selection **(May 3)**

Guidelines for the writer:

You need to write 2-3 pages, starting with your research question (2 lines), and the one or two literatures that you think you will address (2 lines). This is normally already included in a proposal, but here, please, just write down as your thinking is evolving, and this is just for your readers to know what you will be talking about.

Find 5 articles that deal with the case(s) you want to study. They may overlap with the articles you used for your literature review, but they may not. Indeed, you will look for articles which deal with the specifics of your case(s), and not all of them do have a good literature review (especially among the more historically/empirically-based articles, or among articles that deal with your case but that do not ask the same question about it). These case-specific articles will allow you to learn something about your case, and formulate hypotheses about how your case will fit (confirm or disconfirm) with your theoretical expectations, and what data exist out there. You need to pay close attention to kind of data has been used to answer these questions in your specific case. Send one article in this subset of articles to your commentator.

Based on a subset of these readings, provide an in-depth description of the case(s) you intend to study. Then, write down 3-4 pages: describe your case(s) and explain why choosing your case(s) is the best way to investigate the verifiability of your hypotheses. The point is not to say everything you know about the topic, but to justify why it is a good idea to choose this case 1) to answer your research question; 2) why choosing your case(s) is the best way to investigate the verifiability of your theoretical hypotheses; 3) why choosing this case is a good idea in terms of data available (because you will know what has already been used to investigate that case, and you need to tell us what kind of new data (new interviews, new fieldwork, new surveys, new historical research, etc.) you intend on building upon; 4) why you think that investigating these specific new data with these new theoretical lenses that are yours is better than what has been said about this case before by other authors.

Guidelines for the commentator:

You need to pay close attention to the 2-3 pages of case description that your fellow student will send you. Your comments should be focused on these 2-3 pages, and not on the ONE article that your fellow will have sent you, as this other article is just here to allow you to learn a bit more about the kind of literature that will be discussed by your colleague.

About the case(s), think of the following question: 1) is it a good case to answer the research question (think about micro-macro problems)? 2) If it is a comparison, do you think a comparison is needed? And is it the right comparison to choose? 3) whether the data that will be used is the right one to answer the kind of question raised, and whether you think it will be difficult to get this data (and whether another data may not be better and more readily available).

WEEK 11 Cases Selection **(May 10)**

Guidelines for the writer:

Provide a description of cases that you DO NOT intend to study in depth. Find 5 articles that deal with similar cases, and identify a subset of cases which could be comparable to your case (but which you do not intend to study). Send one article in this subset of articles to your commentator.

Try to find some criteria which make these cases and your case(s) comparable and not comparable at the same time. Then, write down 3-4 pages: describe these case(s) and explain why choosing your case as opposed to these other case(s) is better to verify or disconfirm your hypotheses.

Guidelines for the commentator:

Discuss whether the author convincingly argues that these are 'cases' of the same thing, and if they are not, whether some conceptual clarification is needed from the author about what her/his case is really a case of.

Assess whether the author convincingly argues that the case under study (described in the last assignment) is similar to those other cases (all are the average cases) or whether the inclusion of these other cases shows that in fact, the case under study is chosen because it is an interesting outlier. Then, you should discuss what are the merits of choosing an average vs. an outlier as the main case of your study.

WEEK 12   Data Collection Methods   (May 17)

Guidelines for the writer:

Write 3-4 pages that outline which research methods you intend to use and the problems associated with your methodology. Discuss which methods would be best to use– whether qualitative or quantitative, historical or ethnographic, or a mixture of the two. Note any specific difficulties that you may encounter using such methods – sampling, reliability, numbers of respondents, access to fieldwork or archives, etc. - and explain how they might be resolved. Discuss the ethical issues, if any, associated with the methods used, and how you propose to get round any material or ethical difficulties identified. Pay attention to your positionality when you write about methods: is your gender/race/class/nationality important to co-construct 1) the type of data collected, or 2) your interpretation of your data, or 3) the reception of your interpretation of the data.

Guidelines for the commentator:
Discuss whether you think the data collected (interviews, observation, survey, archives) suffers from a problem of reliability? Or validity? (criteria internal reliability and validity) If there are problems with either the reliability or validity of the data, how can the author come around? Find new data sources? Complement the data collection with another technique? Is the data fit to answer the theoretical question? If there is a problem of validity, should the author change the research question so that we do not run into the same problems? (criteria of theoretical fit) Has the author said something about how the data will be analysed, and how the analysis will allow him/her to produce new knowledge? Is the author reflexive enough about the limits of his or her research?

WEEK 13   Discussion of Final Proposals   (May 24)

Guidelines for the writer:

Write an abstract in which you summarize your proposed research question, methodology, and case selection. Add a detailed timetable outlining the order of steps, and complete the bibliography.
Add all the write-ups and send the first draft of your research proposal to everyone.

Guidelines for the commentator:

In general, do you think the selection of cases and the data-collection methods will allow your colleague to answer his/her research question?