Sociology 326

Historical Sociology

Colby College, Fall 2022

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Overview:
Historical methods are foundational to analyses of social change. This course provides an in-depth survey of contemporary social-scientific methods for exploring processes of social transformation. We will examine how to formulate historical research questions; how to identify, collect, and interpret historical evidence; how to navigate digital and physical archives; and techniques for inferring causality using historical materials.

Key Learning Outcomes:
1) Learn the strengths and weaknesses of different kinds of historical evidence, how to identify and collect them, and how to mobilize them in a sociological argument
2) Improve ability to understand, recognize, and deploy major techniques of causal inference using historical methods
3) Improve skills in evaluating methodological choices in works of historical sociology
4) Gain practice designing a small-scale sociological project using historical methods

Course Requirements:
This class is designed to familiarize you with historical methods in sociological research. This entails both understanding the theoretical and philosophical apparatus that underlies historical inquiry, and learning the art and craft of dealing with historical evidence. Because an original historical research project is not generally feasible within the span of a single semester, our primary goal instead will be to develop a solid proposal for such a project. There are, accordingly, two primary kinds of assignments for this class: (1) Doing the readings and actively engaging with them, to be evaluated through class participation, discussion leadership, and reading reflections; and (2) a proposal for a project using historical sociological methods, to be developed in stages over the course of the semester through a series of scaffolded assignments and in-class workshops.
The composition of your final grade will be as follows:

1. **Preparation, attendance, and active participation (15%).** This course will be run as a discussion seminar, with limited lecturing. Its success depends upon the active engagement and participation of all members of the class. Accordingly, both attendance and active participation are mandatory. Active participation means doing the readings, thinking about them, and putting your thoughts, questions, and opinions on the table during class. You will be penalized for inadequate attendance, preparation, or participation.

   You should come to each class armed with at least one question that the readings raised for you, and at least one passage you found confusing, inspiring, problematic, or insightful that you would like to discuss. These questions and passages will provide a good starting point for our conversation. As you read, therefore, ask yourself: what kinds of questions do these readings raise for me? Do they seem to complement or contradict one another in interesting ways? What might the author be missing, or not paying enough attention to? Does the argument ring true in light of my own experience?

2. **Discussion leader (5% each, 10% total).** Each student will be responsible for serving as discussion leader (or co-discussion leader, depending on enrollment) twice over the course of the semester. As discussion leader, you will be responsible for preparing a short (5-minute) presentation laying out the main themes of the readings and some of the questions they raised for you. You will also be responsible for moderating the conversation.

3. **Reading reflections (1% each, 15% total).** For all classes where you are not serving as discussion leader, you will submit a short (no more than one paragraph) reading reflection before each class. These reflections could discuss something you found particularly interesting or insightful in the readings, something you did not understand and would like to discuss further, a passage that you would like to unpack in greater detail (please indicate page numbers), or a reflection on how you might apply the principles in the readings to your own project. You may skip one reflection at any point in the semester. Daily reflections must be posted to Moodle by 9:00AM on the day of each class.

4. **Research proposal (60% total).** The final project for this course will be a 10-page research proposal that lays out a research question, situates it in existing sociological scholarship, and explains how you propose to investigate it both empirically and methodologically. You will develop this proposal in stages over the course of the semester, each of which will constitute an intermediate assignment in its own right:
   a. A preliminary statement of interest (5%) (due in class on **Thursday, September 22**) that lays out the topic you wish to investigate and the reason you are interested in studying it, a preliminary research question, and a discussion of the potential case(s) you propose to use to study it.
b. **A statement of motivation (5%)** (due in class on **Thursday, October 6**) that presents an initial review of the relevant historical and theoretical literatures relevant to your case, and explains how your research question complements or builds on those literatures. **We will workshop this statement in class.**

c. **A statement of evidence (5%)** (due in class on **Thursday, October 20**) that presents an initial review of the sources of data you might be able to examine as part of your project.

d. **An initial proposal (5%)** (due via Moodle on **Sunday, November 6**) that revises and combines the above sections. **We will workshop this initial proposal in class on Tuesday, November 8.**

e. **A statement of logic of inquiry (5%)** (due via Moodle on **Thursday, November 17**) that discusses the specific historical methods you plan to use to investigate your question, and why they are appropriate for your research question.

f. **A revised proposal (5%)** (due on **Sunday, December 4**) that includes revised versions of all above sections as well as preliminary hypotheses and an abstract. **We will workshop this revised proposal in class on Thursday, December 8.**

g. **A final proposal (25%)** (due on **Monday, December 19 at 4PM**) that incorporates the feedback you have received.

h. **An auto-critique of your proposal (5%)** (due on **Monday, December 19 at 4PM**) in which you critique your own proposal, highlighting its weaknesses and ways you might address them.

**Essential Classroom Policies:**

1) **Classroom etiquette:** Be respectful of each other and of each other’s opinions.

2) **Electronic devices:** During class time, you are expected to pay attention, take notes, ask questions, and engage with the ideas under discussion. Mobile phones and computers can make it more difficult for you and those around you to achieve these goals. For this reason, mobile phones must be turned off (or put on silent mode) and put away for the duration of the class. Computers must only be used for course-related purposes (notetaking, reading, in-class research, etc.). Students who disregard this policy may lose their laptop privileges and/or be asked to leave the class.

For further policies, see the fine print (p. 10).
COURSE OUTLINE AND READINGS

Required Texts:
The following books are required for this course. They are available in the bookstore or through course reserve, or online from your favorite bookseller:


Additional Readings:
A few additional required readings will be available as PDF files on the course website in Moodle. These are marked below with the ® symbol.

Weekly Plan:
This syllabus is a provisional document, and is subject to change. Any changes will be announced in class and through Moodle.

PART I: PRELIMINARIES

Class 1 (September 8)  
History as Sociology  

Class 2 (September 13)  
Historical Sociological Research  
ANDREW ABBOTT, *Digital Paper*, Preface and chapters 1-2 (pp. ix-35)

Class 3 (September 15)  
Getting Started: Questions and Cases  
ANDREW ABBOTT, *Digital Paper*, chapter 4 (pp. 64-90)  
PART II: HISTORICAL EVIDENCE

Class 4 (September 20)  Finding Sources
ANDREW ABBOTT, *Digital Paper*, chapters 3, 5, and 6 (pp. 36-63, 91-128)

Class 5 (September 22)  Primary Sources I: Power and Preservation

**Assignment 1 (Statement of Interest) due**

Class 6 (September 27)  Primary Sources II: Provenance and Interpretation

**Bring an item from your own personal archive to class today.**

Class 7 (September 29)  Primary Sources III: Archives

**Visit to Colby Special Collections – Meet at Miller Library**
Class 8 (October 4)  
**Secondary Sources**


Class 9 (October 6)  
**Proposal Workshop 1**

**NO READINGS**

**Assignment 2 (Statement of Motivation) due. Bring 4 copies to class.**

NO CLASS OCTOBER 11 – FALL BREAK

**PART III: CAUSAL INference (AND ITS DISCONTENTS)**

Class 10 (October 13)  
**Causality and Explanation**


Recommended: ® DAVID HUME, A Treatise on Human Nature (Clarendon, 1960 [1740]). Book I, §2-6 (pp. 73-94).
Class 11 (October 18)  
**Processes and Mechanisms**


Class 12 (October 20)  
**Temporality**


**Assignment 3 (Statement of Evidence) due**

Class 13 (October 25)  
**Comparison**


**Recommended:** ® JOHN STUART MILL, “Of the Four Methods of Experimental Inquiry.” Book III, Chapter VIII (pp. 278-91) in *A System of Logic, Ratiocinative and Inductive* (Harper & Brothers, 1890 [1843]).
Class 14 (October 27)  
**Counterfactuals**  

PART IV: SOME EXAMPLES

Class 15 (November 1)  
**Public Health**  

Class 16 (November 3)  
**The Politics of Knowledge**  

**Initial Proposal due Sunday, November 6**

Class 17 (November 8)  
**Proposal Workshop 2**  
NO READINGS

**Bring 4 copies of your proposal to class**

NO CLASS NOVEMBER 10 (SSSR MEETINGS) – WORK ON YOUR PROPOSAL

Class 19 (November 15)  
**Secularization**  

NO CLASS NOVEMBER 17 (SSHA MEETINGS) – WORK ON YOUR PROPOSAL

**Assignment 5 (Statement of Logic of Inquiry) due**
NO CLASS NOVEMBER 20 (THANKSGIVING) – WORK ON YOUR PROPOSAL

NO CLASS NOVEMBER 22 (THANKSGIVING) – EAT YOUR TURKEY

Class 22 (November 29) Racial Categories

Class 23 (December 1) Economic Policy

**Revised Proposal due Sunday, December 4.

Class 24 (December 6) Policing

Class 25 (December 8) Proposal Workshop 3
NO READINGS

**Final Proposal and Self-Critique due December 19, 4PM.
THE FINE PRINT (FURTHER POLICIES)

Course Communication:
Moodle (http://moodle.colby.edu) will be our primary means of communication during this class. All students should be sure that they can access the readings and other features of the course.

Email is the best way to reach me. I will try to reply to you as quickly as possible, but I cannot always reply immediately. I will reply within 24 hours during the week, and by Monday morning for emails sent over the weekend.

Attendance Policy:
Students are expected to arrive on time and not to leave early unless arranged in advance with the instructor. You may miss up to three classes with no penalty, but excessive (four or more) absences will negatively affect your grade. You are responsible for all course announcements, assignments, and material covered on the days that you are absent.

If a serious family, health, or other problem arises during the course of the semester that will compromise your ability to attend class, please get in touch with me as soon as possible.

Colby is supportive of the religious practices of its students, faculty, and staff, and we are committed to ensuring that all students may observe their religious beliefs without academic penalty. If you observe a religious holiday that will impact your work in this course, please see me at the beginning of the term to discuss a reasonable accommodation.

While Colby College is supportive of athletic participation by its students, academics take priority over athletics. Both NCAA and Colby rules prohibit missing classes for practices. In the case of overlapping commitments between class and athletic competitions, you should meet with me as soon as possible to discuss those overlaps.

Grievances:
Although I try hard to grade fairly and consistently, grading is nevertheless an inexact science. If you are unhappy with your grade on an assignment, you can come to my office hours with a one-page written explanation of why you feel your grade should be different, as well as the original assignment. Based on this petition, I will decide whether to re-grade your exam or presentation. Be advised that your grade may move upwards or downwards should I decide to re-grade it!

Academic Honesty:
Honesty, integrity, and personal responsibility are cornerstones of a Colby education and provide the foundation for scholarly inquiry, intellectual discourse, and an open and welcoming campus community. These values are articulated in the Colby Affirmation and are central to this course. You must in no way misrepresent your work or be party to another student’s failure to maintain academic integrity. Any violations of academic honesty will be referred to the Coordinator of Academic Integrity; sanctions may include suspension or expulsion.

Sexual Misconduct/Title IX Statement:
Colby College prohibits, and will not tolerate, sexual misconduct or gender-based discrimination of any kind. Colby is legally obligated to investigate sexual misconduct (including, but not limited to, sexual assault and sexual harassment).

Students should be aware that faculty members are considered responsible employees; as such, if you disclose an incident of sexual misconduct to me or any other faculty member, we have an obligation to report it to Colby’s Title IX Coordinator. “Disclosure” may include communication in person, via email/phone/text, or through class assignments.

If you wish to speak confidentially about an incident of sexual misconduct, please contact Colby Counseling Services (207-859-4490); the Director of the Gender and Sexual Diversity Program, Emily Schusterbauer (207-859-4093); or the Office of Religious and Spiritual Life (207-859-4272).