This course introduces the family of methods called "Historical and Comparative Sociology." Over the last generation, HCS has become one of the most vibrant and intellectually fecund regions of scholarship not only in sociology, but also in allied disciplines such as history, political science, economics, and anthropology. Our aim will thus be to understand what makes the field so interesting, both in its substance and how it produces scientific knowledge.

The course has two parts. First, we survey the wide variety of methods used in HCS—from Millian comparisons among cases to the analysis of "eventful" historical transformations deeply embedded in time and causal contexts.

Second, we apply this toolkit to classic works in the field of HCS as well as key recent interventions. Using the origins and variations of modern states as our substantive terrain, we will evaluate works along four dimensions:

- the work's motivation, or the significance of its research question;
- its argument, or the causal links advanced and how they address the work's motivating question;
- the logic of inquiry used to test, support, or demonstrate the work's argument;
- and the evidence underlying the work's claims.

Along the way, we will seek to (1) understand the different configurations of these four dimensions in each of the works we examine, and (2) evaluate their adequacy as social-scientific enterprises.

**REQUIREMENTS**

The course is a seminar, and thus depends on active, prepared participation. Seminar participants will help guide the discussion once during the semester. Additionally, participants will produce two pieces of writing in the course: first, they will develop a research project proposal containing preliminary statements regarding each of the four dimensions of CHS work (12-15 pages); this will be accomplished by revising a draft begun in sections over the course of the semester.
CONTACT AND OFFICE HOURS

My office hours are by appointment. I will try to answer all emails within 24 hours, but will sometimes be slower.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Reading materials will be made available on Blackboard at least a week prior to their assignment.

READINGS AND SCHEDULE

Week 1 (Aug 29th): Introduction

Week of Sept 5th: Labor Day: No Class

Week 2 (Sept 12): Auto-Narratives

Required. HCS's history within American sociology is usually interpreted as one where HCS was co-opted into the disciplinary mainstream, neutering its radical potential. However, the field is still characterized by a “right” and a “left”—distinguished, in part, by their relative emphasis on some flavor of positivism and on how radical HCS's challenge to orthodox sociological categories ought to be.


Recommended. Beyond such a simple dichotomy, the field has also seen many “turns,” including cultural, structuralist, imperial, and beyond. Moreover, historical sociologists have also reflected on their own careers and those of their colleagues to situate themselves within the fields' transformation.

Week 3 (Sept 19th): Onto-epistemology: Is there anything out there? How do we know?

[ONE PAGE STATEMENT OF MOTIVATION DUE.]

Required. The foundations of HCS rest on three philosophical resolutions to two basic problems: first, how people can know about the external world at all; and, second, how their observations can be collected and built into stable, perhaps even cumulative, bodies of knowledge.

Inductive Empiricism

- Hume, David. *An Equiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Sections III to V.

Falsificationism


Realism


Recommended. Of course, these three perspectives have been subject to enormous criticism, especially after the "Kuhnian" revolution in the philosophy of science. In particular, they have been criticized for stereotyping the process of how knowledge accumulates, for neglecting how knowledge is gathered, deployed, and processes by people actively engaged with the world, as well as for other dubious technical assumptions about the nature of social reality.

- Kuhn, Thomas. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.

Week 4 (Sept 26): Explanation I: Induction, Deduction, and Pragmatism

The central concern of HCS is deceptively simple: how do we explain historical events and processes? The field draws upon three basic perspectives (which are paired with representative contemporary methodological statements).

Deduction

- Hempel, Carl G. "The Function of General Laws in History."

Induction

- Mill, "On the Four Methods of Experimental Inquiry."
- Ragin, Chs. 6-8, *The Comparative Method*.

Pragmatism

- Peirce, Charles S. "Induction, Deduction, and Hypothesis."
Week 5 (Oct 3rd): Explanation II: Beyond Induction, Deduction, and Pragmatism

[ONE PAGE STATEMENT OF EVIDENCE]

Required. While deduction, inducting, and pragmatism remain the staples of contemporary HCS, each have been subjected to searching, sustained criticism and extension, which has yielded four more widely employed contemporary methods. (Those wishing for a characteristic illustration may optionally read the work paired with each example.)

Eventful Temporality


Critical Realism

- (Steinmetz, George. 2008. "The Colonial State as a Social Field: Ethnographic Capital and Native Policy in the German Overseas Empire before 1914." ASR.)

Negative Case and Counterfactual Analysis


Path Dependence


Recommended. In HCS today, there are more fascinating methodological experiments taking place. These generally revolve around a more radical critique of the assumptions inherent in orthodox induction and deduction when applied to historical analysis, and center on a sustained engagement with the structure and function of narratives in historical explanation.


**Week 6 (Oct 10th):** Barrington Moore and Theda Skocpol

- TBD

**Week 7 (Oct 17th):** Immanuel Wallerstein and Giovani Arrighi

[ONE PAGE STATEMENT OF LOGIC OF INQUIRY DUE]

- TBD

**Week 8 (Oct 24th):** Charles Tilly and Miguel Centeno

- TBD

**Week 9 (Oct 31st):** Norbert Elias and Eiko Ikegami

[ONE PAGE STATEMENT OF PROSPECTIVE ARGUMENT DUE]

- TBD

**Week 10 (Nov 7th):** Karl Polanyi and Greta Krippner

- TBD

**Week 11 (Nov 14th):** Isaac Martin and Monica Prasad

- TBD

(Week of Nov 21st): No Class for Thanksgiving

**Week 12 (Nov 28th):** Phil Gorski and Damon Mayrl

- TBD

**Week 13 (Dec 5th):** Pierre Bourdieu and George Steinmetz

- TBD
  - Final Project Proposals are due by Midnight, Friday, December 15th