SOC 532: PRACTICUM IN COMPARATIVE AND HISTORICAL SOCIOLOGY  
FALL 2019

Time: Th 2:00-5:00pm  
Venue: LSA 3207

Instructor: Professor Xiaohong Xu  
Email: socxu@umich.edu  
Office: LSA 3220  
Office Hours: By appointment.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

This course introduces the family of methods and reasoning called “comparative and historical sociology”. Over the last several decades, comparative and historical sociology has emerged as one of the most imaginative and vibrant intellectual fields in sociology and in the social sciences more broadly. It has created space for sociologists to ask bold questions about social change and engage theoretical issues in sociology, history, political science, economics, and anthropology through rigorous historical research (which, as we will see, does not necessarily concern events in the distant past but primarily involves emphasizing sequence, process and temporality).

One crucial feature of comparative and historical research is that each project requires the development and justification of a logic of inquiry and methodological architecture capable of responding adequately to the unique ambitions and considerations of that project. The course content is constructed based on three considerations. First, to showcase crucial characteristics in the development of comparative and historical sociology (the three “waves”). Second, to give us broad exposure to the variety of tools and traditions in the field (and to the assumptions behind them and the critical objections that have been raised). Third, to incorporate your interests and help advance your intellectual agenda.

Our objectives are to understand the foundational perspectives and key theoretical and methodological debates in comparative and historical sociology; to engage with course material deeply and critically, take stances on the arguments raised, and advance a productive relationship with the methodological tradition that is your own; to develop your own research agenda in light of our reflection on these perspectives and debates.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Active Participation (10%): The quality of our discussion rests on your degree of preparation, active engagement with the material, and willingness to share with others.

2. Presentation/Leading Discussion (20%): Each student will be responsible for presenting on the readings and initiating our discussion once during the semester. You will be assigned during our first class meeting. Your presentation should first and foremost identify the main arguments of each individual reading and attempt to highlight the stakes behind this argument (i.e., to what problem is the argument proposed as a solution?). If the reading is a research
book/paper, you are also expected to highlight its research design, methodological architecture, and the sources, data, and narratives that it uses to construct and substantiate its argument. You should also discuss how the various readings relate to one another, considering them as a set and highlighting points of contrast and complementarity. Finally, you should raise a few issues or questions that you believe will motivate a productive discussion.

3. Response Memos (20%): Six times over the course of the semester, you will prepare a short response memo (approximately 500-600 words) on the week’s material. At least one of these memos must be on one of our three assigned books. When multiple readings are assigned, your memo can address a specific reading, a limited set of them, or all of them. Memos should combine analytical summary with critical engagement. They are due by Wednesdays at midnight and should be posted to the Canvas Discussions forum. (Late memos will not count toward your required six.) Then, in preparation for class on Thursday, you must read (and consider your responses to) the other students’ memos—even on weeks in which you declined to post. (You are not required to reply on the forum to other students’ posts, but I will enable that feature in case you feel so moved.)

4. Research Proposal (50%): The main written assignment for this course is the production of a highly polished research proposal, of approximately ten (double-spaced) pages in length, on a topic of your choosing. This proposal should identify a researchable problem, situate it theoretically, and elaborate a suitable research design. For students early in the program, this will likely be related to the development of your publishable paper project. For students further along, it might be an early statement of your proposed dissertation research. I will provide more detail on this assignment early in the semester and we will tackle it in multiple stages. A preliminary draft (which will be circulated to the other students) is due at 5:00pm on Friday, November 27; the final draft is due at 5:00pm on Thursday, December 12.

READINGS

Required:
Most of the readings for the course are available on the Canvas website. In addition, the following books are recommended for purchase:

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1 (September 5): Introduction


Suggested Supplemental Reading:

Week 2 (September 12): Defining a Research Topic / Discussion of Proposal Assignment


Suggested Supplemental Reading:

Week 3 (September 19): Exemplary Book 1


Week 4 (September 26): Comparison 1 (The Basics) / Discussion of Research Topics
* Come prepared to discuss potential research topic(s).

Week 5 (October 3): Exemplary Book 2.


Week 6 (October 10): Comparison 2 (Criticisms and Extensions) / Discussion of Research Design

* Have selected your research topic and come prepared to discuss dilemmas of research design.


Suggested Supplemental Reading:


Week 7 (October 17): Working with Cases

For Part I:


**For Part II:**


**Suggested Supplemental Reading:**


**Week 8 (October 24): Historical Process, Temporality, and Events**


**Suggested Supplemental Reading:**


**Week 9 (October 31): Theorizing and Engaging History / Student-Selected Readings**

**For Part I:**


For Part II:

* Select one comparative-historical reading (broadly construed) from your own topical area of interest and come prepared to present its logic of analysis to the class.

Suggested Supplemental Reading:


Week 10 (November 7): Exemplary Text 3.


Suggested Supplemental Reading:


Week 11 (November 14): Behind the Scenes: Article Writing and Revision

For Part I:


ASR R&Rs and revision memos provided by Xiaohong Xu.

For Part II:
* Read materials provided by guest speaker Dr. Luciana de Souza Leão.

Week 12 (November 21): *** NO CLASS: SSHA MEETINGS ***

Week 13 (November 28): *** NO CLASS: THANKSGIVING ***
*** Draft proposal due (for circulation) Friday, November 27, 5:00pm ***

Week 14 (December 5): Proposal Draft Workshop
* Read all other student proposals and be prepared with comments on each.

*** Final proposal due Thursday, December 12, 5:00pm ***