THE GRADUATE INSTITUTE GENEVA

INSTITUT DE HAUTES ÉTUDES INTERNATIONALES ET DU DÉVELOPPEMENT
GRADUATE INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AND DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

Department of Anthropology and Sociology (ANSO)

Academic year 2019-2020

Research Design and Prospoal Writing in Social Sciences

ANSO037- Spring- 6 ECTS
Schedule & Room

Course Description

This course (strongly recommended for 2nd year ANSO Master students) is a class on research design in the social sciences. Students will learn how to relate their cases and observations drawn from fieldwork (observation, interview, or archives) with theory and conceptual debates. 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.

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Syllabus

Performance Assessment

The assessment of students' performance will be broken down into three criteria: participation in class (15% of the grade), engagement as a commentator (25%), writing of the weekly assignments (30%) and the final research proposal (30%).

Students are required to read about 3-4 book chapters and articles every other week, but the key elements of this class are writing and commenting.

Every other week, students will write one part of their research proposal, so that they gradually make progress**. Each writing exercise is due by Wednesday 2pm 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, students will be asked to focus on ONE particular piece of writing (by one of their colleagues), and write a short comment to be presented in the 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).

Depending on class size, during the presentations we will split the class into 2 groups (max. 8 students per group). In that case, each week, the discussions will be chaired alternatively by the professor and the TA (each one changing group each week). Overall, students will receive feedback on their theory review, case selection, data-collection methods once by the TA and once by the Professor.

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1. **Tuesday, 17 September 2019:**
   ➢ 10:15 to 12:00pm (S6) ANSO037 |

   Course Introduction and Overview

2. **Tuesday, 24 September 2019:**
   ➢ 10:15 to 12:00pm (S6) ANSO037 |

   Research Design and Evaluation

   In this session, we will consider the different criteria used to evaluate research, in grant committees but also in blind review for publication and broader academic debates. Please come to class thinking about examples of what you think is "good" and "bad" research.

   References

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

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

   Guetzkow, Joshua, Michèle Lamont, and Grégoire Mallard. "What is Originality in the Humanities and the Social Sciences?." American Sociological Review 69.2 (2004): 190-212.

3. **Tuesday, 01 October 2019:**
   ➢ 10:15 to 12:00pm (S6) ANSO037 |

   From Research Idea to Research Object

   Guidelines for the writer:

   After you decide your topic of research, 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 one 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.

4. **Tuesday, 08 October 2019:**
   ➢ 10:15 to 12:00pm (S6) ANSO037 |

   What is a Literature Review and What Purpose does it Serve?

   In this session, we will consider different types of literature reviews, how these might relate to your research proposal, and their distinct purposes. We will also consider how to best go about doing a literature review, including reviewing a range of possible sources and strategies.

   References

   Booth, Andrew, Diana Papaioannou, and Anthea Sutton, (2012), *Systematic Approaches to a Successful Literature Review*, London: Sage, Chapters 1, 2 & 4, pp. 1-35 & 53-69.

5. **Tuesday, 15 October 2019:**
   ➢ 10:15 to 12:00pm (S6) ANSO037 |

   What is Theory?

   In this session, we will discuss what we mean by theory in social sciences and how we relate to it. Come to class open to debate different perspectives and argue for your own.

   References

Alexander, Jeffrey. Chapter 1 of Theoretical logic in sociology, Vol. I: Positivism, presuppositions, and current controversies.

Abend, G. (2008). The meaning of 'theory'. Sociological Theory, 26(2), 173-199.

Besbris, M., & Khan, S. (2017). Less Theory. More Description. Sociological Theory, 35(2), 147-153.

Camic, Charles, and Neil Gross. "Contemporary developments in sociological theory: current projects and conditions of possibility." Annual Review of Sociology 24.1 (1998): 453-476.

Charmaz, Kathy and Belgrave, Linda Liska. Grounded theory. The Blackwell encyclopedia of sociology, 2007.

6. **Tuesday, 22 October 2019:**
   ➢ 10:15 to 12:00pm (S6) ANSO037 |

Theory and Literature Review

Guidelines for the writer:

You need to write 2 pages, starting with your research question (2 lines). Then, you announce which subfields of anthropology/sociology your question belongs to (legal anthropology, 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. 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 (a methodological limit? 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).

Tip: Annual Reviews of Sociology, Anthropology, etc, usually have good examples on how to write a literature review.

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 in maximum 3 lines of thought: 3 problems you may identify (and that can be improved). 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 proposal? (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.

7. **Tuesday, 29 October 2019:**
   ➢ 10:15 to 12:00pm (S6) ANSO037 |

   Choosing a Case

   In this session we will discuss how to justify your case of analysis. What is your case a case of? Why study your case? Is it representative or unique? Are the results from it generalizable? This is probably one of the most key questions one has to deal with in qualitative research, so please take your time to read the following pieces:

   References

   Burawoy, Michael. 2009. *The Extended Case Methods: Four Countries, Four Decades, Four Great Transformations, and One Theoretical Tradition*. Pp. 143-192. Introduction and Chapter 1.

   Skocpol, Theda and Margaret Somers. 1980. "The Uses of Comparative History in Macrosocial Inquiry." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* Vol. 22, No. 2, pp. 174-197.

   Lund, Christian. "Of what is this a case?: analytical movements in qualitative social science research." *Human organization* 73.3 (2014): 224-234.

   Small, Mario Luis. "How many cases do I need?' On science and the logic of case selection in field-based research." *Ethnography* 10.1 (2009): 5-38

8. **Tuesday, 05 November 2019:**
   ➢ 10:15 to 12:00pm (S6) ANSO037 |

   Cases Selection

   Guidelines for the writer:

   Start by re-stating 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.

   Step 1: 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 may want to look for articles which deal with the specifics of your case(s) but which do not have a good literature review (some more historically/empirically-based articles). Or articles that deal with your case but that do not ask the same question about it. Yet they may allow you to learn something about your case, which will allow you to formulate hypotheses about how your case dialogues with your conceptual questions. You need to pay close attention to the conceptual questions that have been asked about this case before, and what 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 2-3 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.

Step 2: In order to develop the ideas above, 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). Try to find some criteria which make these cases and your case(s) comparable and not comparable at the same time.

Then, write down 1-2 pages: describe your case(s) and explain why choosing these other case(s) might help you verify or disconfirm your hypotheses.

Guidelines for the commentator:

About the case(s): 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. 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).

About the non case: 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.

9. **Tuesday, 12 November 2019:**
   ➢ 10:15 to 12:00pm (S6) ANSO037 |

Interviews and other Data Collection Methods

This week we will discuss two important controversies one around urban ethnographies of the "poor" and the other on the pros and cons of observation and in-depth interviews. These two controversies raise important questions on research methods, their underlying research assumptions and the ethics of research with human subjects. Read with an open mind – the goal is not to take sides, but to understand the tensions and choices made by researchers.

References

Urban Ethnographies in the 1990s

Wacquant, L. (2002). Scrutinizing the street: Poverty, morality, and the pitfalls of urban ethnography. *American journal of sociology*, *107*(6), 1468-1532.

Anderson, E. (2002) 'The Ideologically Driven Critique', American Journal of Sociology 107(6): 1533-50

Duneier, M. (2002) 'What Kind of Combat Sport is Sociology?', American Journal of Sociology 107(6): 1551-76.

Newman, K.S. (2002) 'No Shame: The View from the Left Bank', American Journal of Sociology 107(6): 1577-9

Wilson, W. J., & Chaddha, A. (2009). The role of theory in ethnographic research. *Ethnography*, *10*(4), 549-564.

Talk is cheap controversy :

Jerolmack, C., & Khan, S. (2014). Talk is cheap: Ethnography and the attitudinal fallacy. *Sociological Methods & Research*, *43*(2), 178-209.

Cerulo, K. A. (2014). Reassessing the problem: Response to Jerolmack and Khan. *Sociological Methods & Research*, *43*(2), 219-226.Vaisey, S. (2014). The "attitudinal fallacy" is a fallacy: Why we need many methods to study culture. *Sociological Methods & Research*, *43*(2), 227-231.

DiMaggio, P. (2014). Comment on Jerolmack and Khan,"Talk Is Cheap" Ethnography and the Attitudinal Fallacy. *Sociological Methods & Research*, *43*(2), 232-235.

Jerolmack, C., & Khan, S. (2014). Toward an understanding of the relationship between accounts and action. *Sociological Methods & Research*, *43*(2), 236-247.

Lamont, M., & Swidler, A. (2014). Methodological pluralism and the possibilities and limits of interviewing. *Qualitative Sociology* 37(2), 153-171.

10. Tuesday, 19 November 2019:

➢ 10:15 to 12:00pm (S6) ANSO037 |

Data Collection Methods

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.

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? (Criteria of originality)

11. Wednesday, 26 November and 3 December 2019:

➢ 10:15 to 12:00pm (S6) ANSO037 |

Revisiting Literature Review

Guidelines for the writer:

As your research proposal has been involving, so might be your ideas. Rewrite your literature review in the light of the changes that have been made (perhaps eventually you need to engage with different bodies of literature!).

Guidelines for the commentator:

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)?

12. Monday, 10 and 17 December 2019:

➢ 10:15 to 12:00pm (S6) ANSO037 |

Discussion of Final Proposals

Guidelines for the writer:

The total proposal should be 30.000 characters maximum (without bibliography) – about 8 pages, the size of a FNS Doctoral research application.

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 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?