

SC781: DISSERTATION SEMINAR

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Office hours: by appointment
Class time: Mondays 4-6:30 PM
Class location: McGuinn 340

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This seminar is designed for Sociology graduate students working on their dissertation proposals or dissertations. Typically, this means that students should have completed their MA papers and comprehensive examinations before they enroll in this seminar. All students who are writing dissertations are strongly recommended to enroll in this seminar, at least for one semester. Others can be allowed to attend on a case-by-case basis.

The seminar is a continuing research workshop which covers all stages of the research process, from conceptualization and theory development, to preparation and defense of the dissertation proposal, to data collection, analysis, and writing, and finally to the preparation and defense of the dissertation. The main goals of the seminar are to help you keep your dissertation research on track, ensure focus and consistency, and maintain quality of research and writing. The seminar also aims to create a supportive environment and provide you with feedback on your work in progress.

COURSE POLICIES

The seminar meets biweekly and attendance is mandatory. Typically, for each participant, we schedule two class meetings when their work is discussed: a major presentation and a mini-presentation. The schedule will be determined during the first meeting of the seminar. We will try to accommodate everyone's preferences as much as possible. At this point, we also decide whether we would like to schedule any special sessions, e.g., invite a guest presenter to discuss some aspect of research or writing, or hold a brainstorming session on grants, fellowships, and awards.

Dissertation seminar presentations are designed to elicit encouragement, feedback, and constructive criticism by a broader group throughout the research and writing process. For a major presentation, the person scheduled to present circulates a major piece of work for everyone to read and discuss. This major piece of work can be a draft of your literature review, proposal, or a chapter; it can also be a set of memos, an interview transcript, or anything else that is most helpful for you given your stage in the dissertation process. For a mini-update, the presenter circulates a shorter piece of work, typically two-three pages long, containing some ideas, questions, etc.

For both types of presentation, this piece of work, accompanied by an explanatory note, should be emailed to me (natasha@sarkisian.net) no later than three days before the corresponding meeting. In the explanatory note, you may wish to stress any points or questions that you would especially like to be addressed. I will place your materials on the course website and notify everyone of their availability.

At this point, it is important that all other participants carefully read the materials and think about both the positive aspects and the potential critical comments and suggestions. All participants are expected to come to the seminar prepared to fully engage the presenters' work. And the two presenters are encouraged to bring some snacks for the group to enjoy. If a participant cannot attend the seminar on a given week, this participant should send comments and suggestions to the presenting individuals by email as soon as possible, and copy the instructor on these messages.

A typical seminar meeting will start with all participants giving updates on their progress since the last meeting. After that, we will spend much of the class time discussing the work of the major presenter. The last half an hour will be spent on the mini-presentation. We will start the discussion of each student's work by pointing out the positive aspects of that work. Then we will move on to suggestions, comments, and constructive criticisms. At the end of each meeting, all participants will fill out a form specifying what they are planning to accomplish in the next two weeks, four weeks, and six weeks. This form is then used when the participants give their updates in the beginning of the next seminar meeting. Since most of the seminar discussions center on work in progress, grading is on a pass/fail basis.

The course website contains some resources that you should explore. If you are in early stages of the process, check out the examples of completed dissertation proposals posted. To see some examples of completed dissertations, you can use the Dissertations and Theses - Full Text (ProQuest) database available through the library. The course website also provides links to pages that list funding opportunities for graduate students. It is a good idea to start thinking about applying for funding early in the process. Also note that many deadlines are in October-November, so please plan accordingly.

I also would like to stress that you are always welcome to come and see me with for any additional feedback and help. If I am not in my office, email is the best way to get in touch with me – I check my email very often. You are also welcome to call me either in my office or at home (any time between 9 AM and 10 PM). And make sure to check your email, too – from time to time I may send some announcements.

Finally, keep in mind that these course policies are tentative. My goal as an instructor is to create the most helpful and supportive environment for all participants. Therefore, as a group, you have the full control over the way this seminar is organized. If you have any ideas or suggestions, feel free to discuss them in class or meet with me in person.