

**SC 710 – Logics of Sociological Inquiry  
Spring 2012**

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Office Hours: T 3:30 – 5:30  
or by appointment

Classroom and Time: McGuinn Hall 415, Th 4:30 – 7:00

*Sociology is the answer. But what was the question?* – Ulrich Beck

*Whatever sociology may be, it is the result of constantly asking the question: “What is the meaning of this?”* – C. Wright Mills

*The dilemma...is that a knowledge claim that meets the criteria of adequacy for one group, and thus is judged to be an acceptable knowledge claim, may not be translatable into the terms of a different group.* – Patricia Hill Collins

*The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house.* – Audre Lorde

I’ll be honest. I did not like my graduate research methods course. I found it both incredibly boring and largely inconsequential since most of the methods surveyed were given cursory attention at best. I certainly did not learn how to *do* research. To be fair, I think it is nearly impossible to adequately teach a full range of methods in a single semester. From my experience the best way to learn how to do methods is *outside* the classroom with the help of an established and patient mentor. As such, after you have chosen a specific research strategy I advise you to start looking for a mentor as soon as possible so that you can learn the nuts-and-bolts of particular methods. When I was tapped to teach this course, then, I wanted to change the expectations and to design it in a way that could meet the needs of a diverse group of students who would be embarking on independent research. This syllabus is the product of that pedagogical endeavor.

The goal of this course is to examine the epistemological and conceptual issues embedded in the logics of sociological inquiry and to design research projects that release, rather than constrain, the sociological imagination. Although we will be surveying various research methods, this course is more focused on how to think about your research before – and while – you are doing it. We will consider how sociologists define and/or redefine our discipline, how we use and/or misuse theory, and how we design research using both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Central to these concerns are the ethical and political problems and possibilities inherent in research. This course will center on the following guiding questions: **What is the aim of sociology? How do we go about making sense of the social world? How do ethics, politics and a researcher’s social location shape research practices? How does graduate school “discipline” its students, and what are the cost and benefits of these disciplinary practices? How do the concepts and methods discussed in this course relate to your research agenda?**

We will explore these fundamental research issues and guiding questions through two parallel processes: 1) examining the connections between theory and methods and 2) designing individual research projects. This requires that you have individual, empirical projects in mind. At this stage I suspect some of you already have a specific research idea, while others have more general “areas of interest.” Although there will be adequate time for refinement, you will need to come to this course with a set of questions and ideas that you are interested in engaging with for

the entire term. These ideas and questions will eventually evolve into a research proposal. The first half of each class period will focus on the assigned readings, and the second half will be concerned with the development of student projects through peer review and discussion. This course has been specifically designed to feed into the Second-Year Graduate Writing Seminar in order to help facilitate a productive and timely route to graduation. Thus, I suggest that the topic you pick be geared towards conducting research that will lead to a M.A. thesis, comprehensive exam, and/or a dissertation project.

As the opening quotes suggest, this course prepares graduate students to: 1) ask and answer sociological questions; 2) interpret and “read” meanings in both your own and others’ research; 3) identify, understand and critique various research paradigms and practices; and 4) make the academic switch from purely being a consumer of knowledge to being a producer of knowledge.

After completing this course you should be able to:

- ⇒ Read, identify underlying assumptions and critique social research
- ⇒ Understand and use strategies of deductive and inductive theorizing
- ⇒ Identify how to choose the method that can best answer a particular research question
- ⇒ Design and write research proposals

**Course Expectations and Evaluation:**

1) This is a *reading* and *participation* intensive course. Readings are due *on the date they are listed*. Come to class ready to discuss them.

2) If you miss class, you are responsible for getting notes from a classmate. Missing three classes will constitute failing the course. A doctor, school administrator, or other certified official must verify an absence in order for it to be excused. Notes from parents or legal guardians will not be accepted.

3) You will be evaluated in the following four areas:

***a. Class Participation (15%):*** This includes contributing to class discussions, actively engaging in peer review processes, and respecting the views of others. Students are also encouraged to critique all the assigned readings and to dissect the debates within them.

***b. Class Presentation (25%):*** You will also lead a class presentation based on a particular day’s assigned readings. You are encouraged to include outside material, but this is not required. Class presentations can take a variety of forms and can incorporate a range of presentation aids (e.g., film, interpretive dance, lecture, poetry, posters, etc.) Leave approximately 20 minutes at the end of class to allow the professor to highlight key points. Your presentation will be carefully evaluated based on the following rubric:

## Class Presentation Rubric

### Is the class session well organized?

Relates material to previous readings	1	2	3	4	5
Provides internal summaries and transitions	1	2	3	4	5
Maintains continuity in the discussion/presentation	1	2	3	4	5
Summarizes main points at end of presentation	1	2	3	4	5
Paces class session appropriately	1	2	3	4	5

### How is the content presented?

Presentation aids are useful	1	2	3	4	5
Presents background information for ideas	1	2	3	4	5
Explains difficult terms and concepts	1	2	3	4	5
Integrates readings and discussion/presentation	1	2	3	4	5
Helps clarify material	1	2	3	4	5

### Is the presenter credible?

Appears well-prepared	1	2	3	4	5
Understands the material	1	2	3	4	5
Is able to admit insufficient knowledge	1	2	3	4	5
Speaks audibly and clearly	1	2	3	4	5
Communicates enthusiasm	1	2	3	4	5

### How is the presenter's rapport with the other class members?

Encourages participation	1	2	3	4	5
Responds constructively to class members	1	2	3	4	5
Treats members equitably	1	2	3	4	5
Recognizes when others are confused	1	2	3	4	5
Shows respect for other's view points	1	2	3	4	5

NOTE: I recognize that some class sessions require a heavier reading load and/or involve more complex ideas and concepts. I will take this into consideration when evaluating class presentations.

**c. Weekly Statements (25%):** A weekly statement will be due every Wednesday by 11:59 p.m. via Blackboard. The topic of your weekly statement is highlighted after the assigned readings in the reading schedule. Although it is not imperative to directly mention each reading, statements should at least tackle the ideas presented in all of them. Although I have chosen readings that I think are substantively interesting, be sure to focus your statements on the connections between theory and method.

Statements will be evaluated based on the following criteria: (a) an introduction that distinctly states your topic and why it is important; (b) responses should have a logical flow with supporting evidence from the readings and lecture; (c) a succinct critique of the pertinent issues; (d) and all papers should be typed, double spaced, and NO MORE than two pages. Your final evaluation of your weekly statements will come at the end of the semester and will be based on improvement over time. At the end of the semester you will neatly organize and hand-in a portfolio including each of your statements and a research proposal (which will be discussed more below) in a portfolio.

**d. Research Proposal (35%):** The last fraction of your final grade will consist of a 12-15 page research proposal (12 point font, double spaced, one-inch margins). The page limits **do not** include footnotes, appendixes, and/or references. For more details on the research proposal see the “Literature and Proposal Guidelines” section at the end of this document.

**Major Assignment Dates:**

- ⇒ **February 16<sup>th</sup>:** Research topic, a rough outline, and a tentative reading list must be posted to Blackboard.
- ⇒ **March 15<sup>th</sup>:** A draft of the literature review for the final proposal is due and must also be posted to Blackboard.
- ⇒ **April 12<sup>th</sup>:** A draft of the proposal’s methods section must be posted to Blackboard.
- ⇒ **April 19<sup>th</sup>:** If you are using human subjects complete both a version of the BC IRB’s human subject protocol for your research project **AND** either CITI Training Certificate or NIH Training Module. The BC IRB human subject protocol should be posted on the class Blackboard site. CITI and NIH training modules can be time consuming, so plan your time wisely. I have assigned the CITI or NIH certification later in the semester assuming that some of you may not know if you will be using human subjects. However, if you are sure you will be *I highly recommend* that you complete the certification earlier. Certification can be frustrating, so get a head start if you are sure human subjects will be a part of your research agenda.
- ⇒ **May 3<sup>rd</sup>:** All of your written work should be included in your final portfolio – including weekly writing assignments and all rough drafts. Late proposals **will not** be accepted.

**Grading Scale:**

94-100= A	70-73= C
90-93= A-	66-69= C-
86-89= B+	62-65= D+
82-85= B	58-61= D
78-81= B-	54-57= D-
74-77= C+	53-00= F

**Academic Integrity**

Academic integrity is a standard of utmost importance in this course. Guidelines for academic integrity in written work are posted on the Boston College website at:

[www.bc.edu/integrity](http://www.bc.edu/integrity)

If you have any questions pertaining to the academic integrity guidelines, please come and talk with me for more clarification. If you are caught violating Boston College’s policies on academic integrity, you will receive a failing grade for the assignment and the appropriate Dean will be notified in accordance to the rules set forth by Boston College.

## **Books**

### Required:

Kristen Luker. 2008. *Salsa Dancing into the Social Sciences*. Cambridge: Harvard.

### Recommended:

Howard Becker. 1998. *Tricks of the Trade*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

*The professor reserves the right to incorporate additional readings throughout the course.*

## **Reading Schedule:**

### **Part I: Disciplining Knowledge**

#### Graduate School

**Jan 19:** First Day of Class – No Assigned Readings. *Be prepared to talk about ideas for your research proposal!*

**Jan 26:** Dowd, James. 1991. “Revising the Canon: Graduate Training in the Two Sociologies.” *Teaching Sociology* 19: 308-321.

Austin, Ann E. 2002. “Preparing the Next Generation of Faculty: Graduate School as Socialization to the Academic Career.” *The Journal of Higher Education* 54: 723-740.

Gardner, Susan K. 2008. “Fitting the Mold of Graduate School: A Qualitative Study of Socialization in Doctoral Education.” *Innovation in Higher Education* 33: 125-138.

DeFour, Darlene and Barton Hirsch. 1990. “The Adaptation of Black Graduate Students: A Social Network Approach.” *American Journal of Community Psychology* 18(3): 487-503.

Gasman, Marybeth, Aviva Hirschfeld and Julie Vultaggio. 2008. “ ‘Difficult Yet Rewarding’ : The Experience of African American Graduate Students in Education at an Ivy League Institution.” *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education* 1(2): 126-138.

Lovitts, Barbara. 2008. “The Transition to Independent Research: Who Makes It, Who Doesn’t, and Why.” *The Journal of Higher Education* 79(3): 296-325.

*Weekly Statement Assignment:* Answer one (or two) of the course guiding questions from the first page of the syllabus.

*Weekly Workshop Task:* Discuss how you think graduate school has, can or will shape the way you conduct research. Thus far, have you found graduate school liberating or limiting your research options?

## **Constructing the Classics & the Canon**

**Feb 2:** Luker, Kristen. *SDSS*. Chapter 1 – Salsa Dancing? In the Social Sciences?; Chapter 2 – What’s It All About?; and Chapter 3 – An Ode to Canonical Social Science

Connell, R.W. 1997. “Why is Classical Theory Classical?” *American Journal of Sociology* 102(6): 1511-1557.

Steinmetz, George. 2005. “The Genealogy of a Positivist Haunting: Comparing Prewar and Postwar U.S. Sociology.” *Boundary* 2(32): 109-135.

Sarkisian, Natalia and Naomi Gerstel. 2004. “Kin Support among Blacks and Whites: Race and Family Organization.” *American Sociological Review* 69: 812-837.

*Weekly Statement Assignment:* Answer one (or two) of the course guiding questions. In your response be sure to discuss if you think Sarkisian and Gerstel’s article does or does not fit within the classical tradition. Be sure to defend your claim.

*Weekly Workshop Task:* Discuss how the classical tradition does or does not impact your evolving research. Do you think you will be working in this tradition? Why or why not?

## **Part II: Epistemologies and “Other” Ways of Knowing**

### **Feminists & Critical Race Perspectives**

**Feb. 9:** Collins, Patricia Hill. 1989. “The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought.” *Signs* 14(4): 745-773.

DeVault, Marjorie. 1996. “Talking Back to Sociology: Distinctive Contributions of Feminist Methodology.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 22: 29-50

Scheurich, James Joseph and Michelle Young. 1997. “Coloring Epistemologies: Are Our Research Epistemologies Racially Biased?” *Educational Researcher* 26(4): 4-16.

Tyson, Cynthia A. 1998. “A Response to ‘Coloring Epistemologies: Are Our Qualitative Research Epistemologies Racially Biased?’” *Educational Researcher* 27(9): 21-22.

Solorzano, Daniel and Tara Yosso. 2002. “Critical Race Methodology: Counter-Storytelling as an Analytical Framework for Education Research.” *Qualitative Inquiry* 8(1): 23-44.

Wilkins, Amy. 2004. “Puerto Rican Wannabes: Sexual Spectacle and the Marking of Race, Class and Gender Boundaries.” *Gender & Society* 18(1): 103-121.

*Weekly Statement Assignment:* Answer one (or two) of the course guiding questions. In your response be sure to discuss if you think Wilkins’ article does or does not fit within any or all of the feminists and critical race perspectives discussed. Be sure to defend your claim.

*Weekly Workshop Task:* Discuss how feminists and/or critical race approaches do or do not impact your evolving research. Do you think you will be working in any or all of these perspectives? Why or why not?

### **Indigenous Perspectives**

**Feb. 16: DUE – Research topic, a rough outline, and a tentative reading list posted to Blackboard.**

Porsanger, Jelena. 2004. "An Essay About Indigenous Methodology." *Nordlit* 15: 105-120.

Louis, Renee Pualani. 2007. "Can You Hear Us Now? Voices from the Margin: Using Indigenous Methodologies in Geographic Research." *Geographical Research* 45(2): 130-139.

Street, Jackie, Fran Baum and Ian PS Anderson. 2009. "Is Peer Review Useful in Assessing Research Proposals in Indigenous Health? A Case Study" *Health Research Policy and Systems* 7:2

Schulz, Amy J. 1998. "Navajo Women and the Politics of Identity." *Social Problems* 45(3): 336-355.

*Weekly Statement Assignment:* Compare and contrasts indigenous perspectives to a classical/canonical approach to research, and with feminists/critical race perspectives. In your response be sure to discuss if you think Schulz's article does or does not fit within indigenous perspectives. Be sure to defend your claim.

*Weekly Workshop Task:* First, discuss how indigenous approaches do or do not impact your evolving research. Do you think you will be working in this tradition? Why or why not? Second, discuss the assignment that you turned in to class today. What are your aspirations and your anxieties? What are your next steps?

## **Part III: Crafting Research**

### **Framing: Literature and Theory**

**Feb. 23:** Luker, Kristen. *SDSS*. Chapter 4 – What Is This a Case of, Anyway?; Chapter 5 – Reviewing the Literature; Chapter 10 – Data Reduction and Analysis.

Becker, Howard. 1998. Chapter 4 – Concepts from *Tricks of the Trade*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

LaRossa, Ralph. 2005. "Grounded Theory Methods and Qualitative Family Research." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 67(4): 837-857.

Logan, Trevon. 2010. "Personal Characteristics, Sexual Behavior, and Male Sex Work: A Quantitative Approach." *American Sociological Review* 75(5): 679-704.

*Weekly Statement Assignment:* Answer one (or two) of the course guiding questions. In your response be sure to discuss how Logan uses literature and theory to frame his argument. Do his claims support his argument?

*Weekly Workshop Task:* What literature and theories are you planning to use to frame your research? Why? What alternative literatures and theories could you possibly use?

### **Design: Sampling and Measurement**

**March 1:** Luker, Kristen. *SDSS*. Chapter 6 – On Sampling, Operationalization, and Generalization; and Chapter 7 – Getting Down to the Nitty-Gritty.

Becker, Howard. 1998. Chapter 3 – Sampling from *Tricks of the Trade*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Crouch, Mira and Heather McKenzie. 2006. “The Logic of Small Samples in Interview-Based Qualitative Research.” *Social Science Information* 45: 483-499.

Chen, Anthony. 1999. “Lives at the Center of the Periphery, Lives at the Periphery of the Center: Chinese American Masculinities and Bargaining with Hegemony.” *Gender & Society* 13(5): 584-607.

*Weekly Statement Assignment:* Answer one (or two) of the course guiding questions. In your response be sure to discuss how Chen uses sampling and measurement to substantiate his argument. Does his data support his argument?

*Weekly Workshop Task:* How and why are you choosing your sample? How does your theoretical framing impact your sample choice? What alternative samples could you possibly use?

**March 8: NO CLASS! Enjoy Your Break!!!**

## **Part IV: Field & Other Methods**

### **Interviews, Ethnography and Content Analysis**

**March 15: DUE – Literature Review posted to Blackboard.**

Luker, Kristen. *SDSS*. Chapter 8 – Field (and Other) Methods

Burawoy, Michael. 1998. “The Extended Case Method.” *Sociological Theory* 16(1): 4-33.

McGuffey, C. Shawn. 2008. “Saving Masculinity: Gender Reaffirmation, Sexuality, Race, and Parental Responses to Male Child Sexual Abuse.” *Social Problems* 55(2): 216-237.

Hoang, Kimberly Kay. 2011. “ ‘She’s Not a Low-Class Dirty Girl!: Sex Work in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.” *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 40(4): 367-396.

Del Rosso, Jared. 2011. “The Textual Mediation of Denial: Congress, Abu Ghraib, and the Construction of an Isolated Incident.” *Social Problems* 58(2): 165-188.

*Weekly Statement Assignment:* Discuss how McGuffey, Hoang, and Del Rosso use their respective methods to make sense of the social world. How do they use their method of choice to defend their theoretical arguments?

*Weekly Workshop Task:* How and why are you leaning towards a particular research method? How does your theoretical framing impact your methodological choice? What alternative methods could you possibly use?

### **Historical-Comparative & Mixed Methods**

**March 22:** Luker, Kristen. *SDSS*. Chapter 9 – Historical – Comparative Methods

Fourcade-Gourinchas, Marion and Sarah Babb. 2002. “The Rebirth of the Liberal Creed: Paths to Neoliberalism in Four Countries.” *American Journal of Sociology* 108(3): 533-579.

Small, Mario Luis. 2011. “How to Conduct a Mixed Methods Study: Recent Trends in a Rapidly Growing Literature.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 37: 57-86.

Ivankova, Nataliya, John Creswell and Sheldon Stick. 2006. “Using Mixed-Methods Sequential Explanatory Design: From Theory to Practice.” *Field Methods* 18:3-20.

Moore, Mignon R. 2008. “Gendered Power Relations among Women: A Study of Household Decision Making in Black, Lesbian Stepfamilies.” *American Sociological Review* 73: 335-356.

Jeness, Valerie. 2010. “From Policy to Prisoners to People: A ‘Soft Mixed Methods’ Approach to Studying Transgender Prisoners.” *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 39(5): 517-553.

*Weekly Statement Assignment:* Discuss how Fourcade-Gourinchas and Babb, Moore, and Jenness use their respective methods to make sense of the social world. How do they use their method(s) of choice to defend their theoretical arguments?

*Weekly Workshop Task:* Read and provide in-class feedback on each other’s literature reviews.

### **Participatory Action Research & Public Sociology**

**March 29:** Genat, Bill. 2009. “Building Emergent Situated Knowledges in Participatory Action Research.” *Action Research* 7: 101-115.

Dodson, Lisa and Leah Schmalzbauer. 2005. “Poor Mothers and Habits of Hiding: Participatory Methods in Poverty Research.” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 67(4): 949-959.

Burawoy, Michael. 2005. "For Public Sociology." *American Sociological Review* 70(1): 4-28.

Burawoy, Michael, William Gamson, Charlotte Ryan, Stephen Pfohl, Diane Vaughan, Charles Derber, and Juliet Schor. 2004. "Public Sociologies: A Symposium from Boston College." *Social Problems* 51(1): 103-130.

Noy, Darren. 2009. "The Contradictions of Public Sociology: A View from a Graduate Student at Berkeley." *American Sociologist* 40: 235-258.

Cable, Sherry, Donald Hastings and Tamara Mix. 2002. "Different Voices, Different Venues: Environmental Racism Claims by Activists, Researchers and Lawyers." *Human Ecology Review* 9(1): 26-42.

*Weekly Statement Assignment:* Discuss how Dodson and Schmalzbauer & Cable et al use their respective approaches to make sense of the social world. How do they use their method of choice to defend their theoretical arguments?

*Weekly Workshop Task:* Read and provide in-class feedback on each other's literature reviews.

**April 5: NO CLASS! Enjoy your break!!!**

## **Part V: Ethics & Emotions**

**April 12: DUE – Methods section posted to Blackboard.**

Guillemin, Marilys and Lynn Gillam. 2004. "Ethics, Reflexivity, and 'Ethically Important Moments' in Research." *Qualitative Inquiry* 10(2): 261-280.

Gonzalez-Lopez, Gloria. 2011. "Mindful Ethics: Comments on Informant-Centered Practices in Sociological Research." *Qualitative Sociology* 34: 447-461.

Goode, Erich. 1999. "Sex with Informants as Deviant Behavior: An Account and Commentary." *Deviant Behavior* 20: 301-324.

Hubbard, Gill, Kathryn Backett-Milburn and Debbie Kemmer. 2001. "Working with Emotion: Issues for the Researcher in Fieldwork and Teamwork." *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 4(2): 119-137.

Rager, Kathleen. 2005. "Self-Care and the Qualitative Researcher: When Collecting Data Can Break Your Heart." *Educational Researcher* 34: 23-27.

*Weekly Statement Assignment:* Answer one (or two) of the course guiding questions.

*Weekly Workshop Task:* Depending on student need, provide in-class feedback on literature review and/or methods section.

## Part VI: Pulling it All Together – IRBs & Salsa Dancing

**April 19: DUE – Complete BC IRB human subject protocol and post it to Blackboard. Also, complete CITI training certification or NIH training module. Print out your certification and bring it to class.**

*The Belmont Report*, The National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, US Department for Health, Education and Welfare. 1979 (<http://ohsr.od.nih.gov/guidelines/belmont.html>).

*Research on Human Subjects: Academic Freedom and the Institutional Review Board*, American Association of University Professors. 2006 (<http://www.aaup.org/AAUP/comm/rep/A/humansubs.htm>).

Lincoln, Yvonna S. 2008. “Institutional Review Boards and Methodological Conservatism: The Challenge to and From Phenomenological Paradigms,” pp. 221-244 In *The Landscape of Qualitative Research (3rd Edition)* by Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Luker, Kristen. *SDSS*. Chapter 11 – Living Your Life as a Salsa-Dancing Social Scientist

*Weekly Statement Assignment:* Complete a version of the BC IRB protocol for your research project. Post it on the class Blackboard site as usual.

*Weekly Workshop Task:* Depending on student need, provide in-class feedback on literature review, methods section, and/or IRB protocol.

**April 26:** No Assigned Readings. Continue work shopping individual projects.

**May 3: DUE – Final Portfolio, which includes the research proposal.**

No Assigned Readings. Discussion: Next Steps? Now that you have written the proposal, what are you going to do with it?

## Literature Review and Proposal Guidelines

In this course you will write a literature review and a full research proposal, which should convince both you and me that you understand how to design sociological research. The literature review is often the first part of a proposal, while a research proposal is the first part of a research project. It may be useful for you to find an example or two of sociological research proposals online. Most published research projects in sociology are organized in this way: Introduction; Literature Review; Methods; Findings; and Conclusion, though it depends somewhat on your method and your publishing venue. The research proposal for this course you will focus on the first three parts of the process. A good research proposal does three things:

- ⇒ Introduces your topic and convinces the reader that doing research on this topic is important.
- ⇒ Presents a review of the relevant literature that provides a foundation for your project.
- ⇒ Presents a description of the way you will design your study (in terms of methods you will use) and the way you will go about collecting data.

### What should the introduction look like?

The introduction sets up the rest of the paper. It should include:

- ⇒ A clear statement of the issue you wish to address. You should describe the issue clearly and coherently so that anyone, sociologist or not, would understand what you are researching. This is especially important because there is a good chance that a sociologist will **not** be on an internal review board (IRB) or, depending on the venue, proposal selection committee.
- ⇒ An explanation of why it is of general interest. The introduction must frame the case in a way that is appealing to your readers. Use Luker's tips around framing.
- ⇒ An explanation of the practical implications of your research, regarding larger publics. Rather than simply noting how your contribution may add to sociological research, try to show how it may have relevance to the wider world and other disciplines.

Many researchers write their introductions after writing the other portions of their proposal or paper. I, for example, write the introduction last. As you review the literature you may come up with different issues you would like to address or different ways you would like to frame your research. As you decide upon the methods you will use, you may also change your orientation to the topic. However, whether you write your introduction first, last, or somewhere in between, write clearly and directly address the issue you want to study.

### What should the review of the literature look like?

The literature review sets up the context for your study. A properly executed review of the literature in an area lays the foundation for a successful piece of research. A literature review can be one of the most time-consuming parts of your paper, especially when you are entering a new area of study. The longer you study a given topic, the easier the literature review will be to write. The two major parts of this process include:

- ⇒ Identifying the **most** relevant and significant research in the area. Explore library databases of

articles and books to help determine what research you should discuss in your proposal. You should also ask faculty and other graduate students who work in this area to identify pieces that might be helpful. When you find an article or book centrally related to your topic, read its reference section to find other pieces that might be useful. As you continue doing this you will begin to notice that almost everyone references certain works, which indicates that they are particularly crucial. You can find out the same information on Google Scholar, which often includes how many times a piece of scholarship has been cited. This, however, should not dissuade you from using lesser-known works, which can also provide valuable insights. This is especially true of scholarship that falls outside of mainstream conventions.

- ⇒ Providing a careful, well-written summary of the overall literature, rather than specific pieces. A good literature review systematically covers the research and logically follows the development of an idea. Rather than summarizing every argument each book or article makes, you want to focus on the issues that are most relevant for the study that *you* are proposing. Don't try to write about every study ever done with any possible connection to your research and all the details of each study. Instead, think about *framing* your topic, and report the relevant and most significant issues that emerge. Your literature review should provide you with the theoretical and methodological rationale for the study you are proposing.

The literature review is sometimes called the “theory” section, because many researchers describe their theoretical framework in this section. If you are designing a study meant to test hypotheses using quantitative or qualitative data, you may include a statement of your hypotheses. You must be careful to construct convincing theories that can be proven right or wrong. As Stinchcombe stated: “Social theorists should prefer to be wrong rather than misunderstood.” If you take a more grounded theoretical approach, it is still useful to place your research in its appropriate theoretical context; that is how your expectations or questions are related to the larger literature. Once you have settled on a research topic I suggest that you find a published research article that you highly respect in your field of study and use its literature review and/or theory section as a guide.

### **What should the methods section look like?**

In this section you need to state clearly how you will research your question. There are a variety of methods that you can use to answer your question. In some cases, you can use different methods to approach the same research question; in other cases, your question will dictate the method you need to use. It is likely that in choosing the problem or doing the review of the literature you will be guided toward one method or another. What is the best way to tackle your issue? How do you think you might answer this question? Once you have determined the best method, you will need to address the key design issues for that method. You must specify:

- ⇒ The population you want to observe
- ⇒ Your justification of sample/sampling procedure, and the representativeness of the data
- ⇒ How you will gain access to and collect the data, and any ethical issues you need to address
- ⇒ How you will try to measure your “elements” and how you will attempt to ensure reliable/valid data
- ⇒ The method's strengths and weaknesses for this particular project (you must discuss both)

### **What should my writing style be like?**

Writing style is very important. You should (and will!) make several revisions before turning in your research proposal. The main qualities you need to satisfy in terms of writing style include:

- ⇒ Readable but precise language. Your writing should be professional, but not filled with jargon. The proposal should be readable to an interested, college-educated reader with no knowledge of the topic area. If possible, you should have someone outside of your discipline read the proposal and provide feedback on its clarity.
  
- ⇒ Organization. Write an outline of your proposal to see if the ideas flow in a sensible manner. Provide “road signs” at the beginning of the proposal and the beginning of each section to let the reader know what you will be talking about and what will come next. Summarize the arguments that you have presented at the end of each section. Include transitions from section to section so that the reader can easily follow your logic, rather than being thrown from topic to topic. Read (and reread) the text carefully, and eliminate any irrelevant information (or footnote information that is less important to your argument).