COURSE OBJECTIVES

This course examines the methods and reasoning commonly employed by comparative and historical sociologists. In addition to exploring comparative and historical sociology’s logic of inquiry—considering key problems, debates, and approaches within the methodological tradition—it will sensitize students to comparative and historical sociology as a genre of sociological writing and orient them to the practicalities of conducting this type of research.

The reading list is intentionally eclectic. One feature of comparative and historical research is that each project requires the development and justification of a methodological architecture capable of responding adequately to the unique ambitions and considerations of that project. In light of this fact, it is my view that students are better served by broad exposure to a range of tools (and to the assumptions behind them and the critical objections that have been raised) than by doctrinaire socialization into the instructor’s favored approach. But this requires that students engage with the material deeply and critically, take stances on the arguments raised, and generally commit to developing a relationship to the methodological tradition that is genuinely their own.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Active Participation (10%): The quality of our discussions 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. 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?). You should also discuss how the various readings relate to one another, considering them as a set and highlighting points of contrast and complementarity.

Acknowledgement: This course is modeled on a similar offering by Greta Krippner and further informed by reflection on courses taught by Rebecca Emigh, Howard Kimeldorf, James Mahoney, Dan Slater, and Maurice Zeitlin.
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 two 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, December 1; the final draft is due at 5:00pm on Thursday, December 14.

READINGS

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


Skocpol, Theda. 1979. States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Supplemental:
The readings listed in this syllabus only begin to scratch the surface of the many methodological statements and exemplary works in comparative and historical sociology. Accordingly, you will be provided with a list of supplemental readings. (This is a continuously evolving list, so please send me suggestions for additions!) You will also notice that some weeks in this syllabus identify a couple of recommended supplemental readings that relate particularly well to the required texts. It is not an expectation of this class that you read these: they are simply provided for your benefit (now, or in the future).
COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1 (September 7): Introduction


Suggested Supplemental Reading:

Week 2 (September 14): Defining a Research Topic / Discussion of Proposal Assignment


Suggested Supplemental Reading:

Week 3 (September 21): Comparison 1 (The Basics) / Discussion of Research Topics
* Come prepared to discuss potential research topic(s).

Week 4 (September 28): Exemplary Book 1


Week 5 (October 5): 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 6 (October 12): Working with Cases

*For Part I:*


*For Part II:*


*Suggested Supplemental Reading:*


**Week 7 (October 19): Exemplary Book 2**


**Week 8 (October 26): Historical Process, Temporality, and Events**

*For Part I:*


*For Part II:*


*Suggested Supplemental Reading:*


**Week 9 (November 2): *** NO CLASS: SSHA MEETINGS ***
Week 1 (November 9): Theorizing 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 11 (November 16): Working with Historical Sources / Behind the Scenes: Information Management and Analysis


Week 12 (November 23): *** NO CLASS: THANKSGIVING ***
Week 13 (November 30): Exemplary Articles / Behind the Scenes: Article Writing and Revision

*** Draft proposal due (for circulation) Friday, December 1, 5:00pm ***

For Part I:


For Part II:
* Read materials provided by Jansen

Week 14 (December 7): Proposal Draft Workshop
* Read all other student proposals and be prepared with comments on each.

*** Final proposal due Thursday, December 14, 5:00pm ***