

SOSC 13300: Social Science Inquiry III

DETAILS

Building/room: Classics Building 405

Time: 3-4:20 M/W

Course website: Canvas

Instructor email: cooley@uchicago.edu

INSTRUCTOR

Scott Cooley

Office hours: 2-3:30 on Tuesdays, Pick 506

One-on-one Zoom meetings by appointment. My schedule is typically flexible on Fridays.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The Social Science Inquiry sequence explores classic and contemporary points of view about ways of gathering, analyzing, and interpreting information about public policy issues. The course aims to provide students with an introduction to the philosophy of social science inquiry, a sense of how that inquiry is conducted, and an understanding of how policy implications can be drawn responsibly from empirical evidence. The sequence's objective is to convey the promise and the pitfalls of social science, as well as a sense of its uses and abuses.

At this point in the sequence, students should be familiar with the basics of social science research design (particularly for causal inference), and familiar with how to produce empirical evidence through statistical testing. This final quarter will focus on helping students apply what they've learned in previous quarters to research questions of their own choosing. Each class session highlights a skill that students will need to practice, or decisions students will need to make when developing their own projects. Typically, class sessions touch on a variety of social science fields, often drawing on the substantive expertise of the course's instructor.

COURSE MATERIALS

Readings for this course will be available through Canvas, the University Library, or links in the syllabus. There are no books required for purchase.

RESEARCH PROJECTS

The primary purpose of this quarter is to help students develop their own social science research projects. Every class session will contribute towards some aspect of that project. Students can work on the research projects alone or in teams of two. Given that we have 19 students in the class, one three-person team is also acceptable. A team's research project must use a statistical analysis (e.g.: those covered in the Winter Quarter) to test a theory about a social phenomenon.

Each team must complete several assignments over the course of the quarter. These are:

- Third week: Propose a research topic (in-class presentation)
- Fifth week: Propose a research design (paper and in-class presentation)

- Ninth week: Perform the proposed analysis and summarize results (paper and in-class presentation)

Specific due dates are in the schedule below.

OUTLINE OF ASSIGNMENTS

Students' overall grades for this class will be out of 100 points, earned as listed below. Due dates are listed in the Course Schedule. More detailed guidelines are available on Canvas.

Participation and attendance (10 points, 10%)

- In-class participation
- Attendance

In-class presentations

- Research Topic (5 points, 5%)
- Research Design (10 points, 10%)
- Final Presentation (10 points 10%)

Papers

- Research Design Proposal (15 points, 15%)
- Descriptive Statistics Report (10 points, 10%)
- Final Paper (30 points, 30%)

Coding and data management exercises R / Stata (10 points, 10%)

Schedule

(Class 1, Monday March 28) Introduction

Read for today:

- Bellemare (2022). *Doing Economics: What You Should Have Learned in Grad School—But Didn't*. Chapter 2: How to Write Applied Papers in Economics. Available free on [his website](#).

(Class 2, Wednesday March 30) Motivating studies with reverse causal questions

Read for today:

- Gelman and Imbens (2013). Why ask why? Forward Causal Inference and Reverse Causal Questions. *NBER Working Paper*.
- Rosenfeld et al. (2014). New York's Crime Drop Puzzle: Introduction to the Special Issue. *Justice Quarterly*.
- Rosenfeld and Fornango (2014). The Impact of Police Stops on Precinct Robbery and Burglary Rates in New York City, 2003-2010. *Justice Quarterly*

(Class 3, Monday April 4) The merits of puzzlement as a motivating device

Read for today:

- Tom Pepinsky (2019). On Puzzles and Political Science. Blog post [available here](#).

- [Skim] Gustafsson and Hagström (2018). What is the point? teaching graduate students how to construct political science research puzzles. *European Political Science*.
 - More context on puzzlement to fill in the gaps in Pepinsky's blog post
- Glass (2010). A critique of the hypothesis, and a defense of the question, as a framework for experimentation. *Clinical Chemistry*.

(Class 4, Wednesday April 6) Developing useful social theories

Read for today:

- Elster (1989). Social Norms and Economic Theory. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*.
- Healy (2017). Fuck Nuance. *Sociological Theory*.

(Class 5, Monday April 11) Research topic presentations

(Class 6, Wednesday April 13) Imagining an ideal experiment

Read for today:

- Green and Spry (2014). Hate Crime Research: Design and Measurement Strategies for Improving Causal Inference. *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice*. Pages: 228-234; 236-238.
- Keizer et al. (2008). The Spreading of Disorder. *Science*.

(Class 7, Monday April 18) Approximating an ideal experiment with observational data; developing and using social measures defensibly

Read for today:

- Andersen et al. (2011). A Step-by-Step Guide to Using Secondary Data for Psychological Research. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*.
- Jacob and Rothstein (2016). The Measurement of Student Ability in Modern Assessment Systems. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*.

(Class 8, Wednesday April 20) Research design presentations, 1

Read for today:

(Class 9, Monday April 25) Research design presentations, 2

(What should be Class 10, Wednesday April 27) No class due to instructor conflict

Sunday May 1 11:59PM, Research Design Proposal due

(Class 11, Monday May 2) The benefits of thinking graphically

Read for today:

- Huntington-Klein (2021). Chapters 6-8. In *The Effect*. [Available free online](#).

(Class 12, Thursday May 4) Providing evidence on the causal mechanisms

Read for today:

- Bueno de Mesquita, E., & Fowler, A. (2021). *Thinking clearly with data: A guide to quantitative reasoning and analysis*. Princeton University Press. Chapter 14: Assessing Mechanisms.

(Class 13, Monday May 9) Evidence of absence, or absence of evidence? Interpreting insignificance.

Read for today:

- Bernardi et al. (2017). 'Sing Me a Song with Social Significance': The (Mis)Use of Statistical Significance Testing in European Sociological Research. *European Sociological Review*.
- Rainey (2014). Arguing for a negligible effect. *American Journal of Political Science*.

(Class 14, Wednesday May 11) Presenting empirical evidence

Read for today:

- Healy (2019). *Data Visualization: A Practical Introduction*. Chapter 1: Look at Data.

Sunday May 15th 11:59PM, Descriptive Statistics Report due

(Class 15, Monday May 16) Going from evidence to conclusions

Read for today:

- Burgess and Briggs. (2010). School assignment, school choice and social mobility. *Economics of Education Review*.
- Cullen et al. (2006). The effect of school choice on participants: Evidence from randomized lotteries. *Econometrica*.

(Class 16, Wednesday May 18) Wrapping up the sequence and in-class troubleshooting

No readings

(Class 17, Monday May 23) Final presentations, 1

(Class 18, Wednesday May 25) Final presentations, 2

Tuesday May 31st 11:59PM, Final Paper due