

Social Science Inquiry

SOSC 131 (Autumn 2008)

Office Hours: Tue 1:00-2:30

(Gates Blake, Room 215)

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This course is the first part of the Social Science Inquiry sequence. As it is the case with all good trilogies, the course, as the first act, aims to introduce the key themes of interest, set the proper background for the second and third installments of Social Science Inquiry, and arouse curiosity for the future episodes to come.

The autumn quarter will focus on a central question: What does it mean to study human social life scientifically? This course seeks to answer this question by examining the history and philosophy of the social sciences. Using prominent examples from Anthropology, Economics, Political Science, Psychology, and Sociology, we will explore the major epistemological approaches underlying contemporary social science including: experimental methods, deductive methods (such as rational choice models and game theory), inductive methods (such as survey analysis, epidemiology, and econometrics), and ethnography.

Students will write four short papers (2 pages each) during the quarter and will have a take home final. Class grades will be based on the papers (12.5 percent each) and final exam (30 percent) as well as class participation (20 percent). Our mode of conduct will be “seminar”, not lecture; therefore, all students are expected to arrive in class ready to discuss the readings. In addition, students are expected to contribute to the discussion forum on the Chalk website on a weekly basis. In your forum posting, you can criticize one or more of the readings, pose a clarification question, or address a previous posting; as long as the posting stimulates discussion, format or length is not important.

Texts: The books below are available for purchase in the Seminary Co-Op. Reserved copies can also be found in Regenstein Library.

- A.F. Chalmers, *What is this Thing Called Science?*
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- Mitch Duneier, *Slim's Table*

All the other assigned chapters and articles will be available [electronically] in the University of Chicago e-reserves and from the Chalk website.

Weeks 1-2: Philosophies of Science and Social Science

- September 29** Introduction
- October 1** The Scientific Method
- A.F. Chalmers *What is this Thing Called Science?* Chapters 1-4
- October 6** The Scientific Method Part II
- Chalmers, Chapters 5-8
- October 8** Applying Science to Social Questions
- McIntyre, L. (2006) "A Science of Human Behavior" Chapter 2 from *Dark Ages: The Case for a Science of Human Behavior* MIT Press.
 - Bachrach, P. and Baratz M. (1962) "Two Faces of Power" *American Political Science Review* 56: 947-52.

Weeks 3-4: Deductive Methods

- October 13** Introduction to Deductive Social Science
- Little, D. (1991). *Varieties of Social Explanation*, Chapter 3.
 - Friedman, M. (1954) "The Methodology of Positive Economics" from *Essays in Positive Economics*. University of Chicago Press.
 - Elster, J. (1983) "The Nature and Scope of Rational Choice Explanation" from *Explaining Technical Change*. Cambridge University Press.
- October 15** Applied Deduction
- Downs, A. (1964). *An Economic Theory of Democracy*, Chapters 3,7, and 8.
 - Schelling, T. (1978). *Micromotives and Macrobehavior*, Chapter 3 ("Thermostats, Lemons, and Other Familiar Models").
- October 20** Game Theory
- Schelling, T. (1984) "What is Game Theory?" from *Choice and Consequence*, Harvard University Press.
 - Axelrod, R. and W. Hamilton (1982), "The Evolution of Cooperation" *Science*, Vol. 211, pp. 1390-1396.
 - Axelrod, R. (1984). *The Evolution of Cooperation*, Chapter 4.

October 22 Rationality Assumption Revisited

- Simon, H. (1995) "Rationality in Human Behavior" *Political Psychology* 16:45-61.
- Tversky, A. and Khaneman, D. (1974) "Judgment Under Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases" *Science*.

Weeks 5-6: Experimental Methods

October 27 What Makes A Good Experiment?

- McDermott, R. 2002. "Experimental Methods in Political Science" *Annual Review of Political Science*.
- Sears, D. 1986. College Sophomores in the Laboratory - Influences of a Narrow Database on Social-Psychology View of Human Nature. *Journal of Personality And Social Psychology* 51(3): 515-530.

October 29 Classic Experiments in Social Psychology

- Asch, S. (1955) "Opinions and Social Pressure." *Scientific America* 193: 31-35.
- Darley, J & Latane, B. (1968). "Bystander Intervention in Emergencies: Diffusion of Responsibility." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 8:377-383
- Milgram, S. (1963). "Behavioral Study of Obedience." *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*.

November 3 Experiments in the Lab and the Field

- Rosenthal R and Jacobson (1966) "Teachers Expectancies: Determinates of Pupils' IQ gains." *Psychological Reports*, 19: 115-18.
- Rosenhan, D. (1973) "On Being Sane in Insane Places" *Science*, 179:250-58.
- Pager, D. 2003. "The Mark of a Criminal Record." *American Journal of Sociology* 108: 937-975.

November 5 Natural and Quasi-Natural Experiments

- Doherty, D. et al. (2006) "Personal Income and Attitudes toward Redistribution: A Study of Lottery Winners." *Political Psychology* 27(3): 441-458.
- Bouchard, T. et al. (1990) "Sources of Human Psychological Difference: The Minnesota Study of Twins Reared Apart." *Science*, 250, 223-29.
- Metrick, A. (1995) "A Natural Experiment in Jeopardy" *American Economic Review* Vol. 85, No. 1. pp. 240-253.

Weeks 7-8: Inductive Methods - Quantitative

- November 10** The Pitfalls of Collecting Data
- Asher, H. (1992) *Polling and the Public*, CQ Press, Chapters 2-4.
 - La Piere, R. T. (1934) "Attitudes and Actions." *Social Forces* 12: 230-37.
- November 12** Upending Conventional Wisdom
- Frank, T. (2003) "Lie Down for America" *Harper's*.
 - Bartels, L. (2005) "What's the Matter with *What's the Matter with Kansas*"
- November 17** Correlation versus Causation
- Little, D. (1991). *Varieties of Social Explanation*, Chapter 8.
 - Taubes, G. (2007) "Do We Really Know What Makes Us Healthy?" *New York Times Magazine*.
 - Levitt, S. (2004) "Understanding Why Crime Fell in the 1990s: Four Factors That Explain the Decline and Six That Do Not." *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 2004, 8(1), pp. 163-90.
- November 19** Testing Alternative Hypotheses
- Conley, D. (1999) *Being Black, Living in the Red*. University of California Press, Chapters 1, 3.

Weeks 9-10: Inductive Methods -- Qualitative

- November 24** Ethnographic Methods
- Klinenberg, E. (1999) "Denaturalizing Disaster: A Social Autopsy of the 1985 Chicago Heat Wave." *Theory and Society*
 - Duneiner, M. (2003) "Scrutinizing the Heat: On Ethnic Myths and the Importance of Shoe Leather" *Contemporary Sociology*.
- November 26** Thanksgiving!
- December 1** Local Ethnography
- Duneier, M. 1998. *Slim's Table*.
- December 3** Local Ethnography [continued]
- Duneier, M. 1998. *Slim's Table*.
 - Wrapping Up for the Final
- December 8** FINAL PAPER DUE BY 5PM