

Sociology 490: Senior Seminar in Sociology
Tuesday & Thursday 3:05pm-04:30pm
Fowler 310

Instructor: John T. Lang

Office Hours: Tuesday & Thursday, 10:00am – 11:30am

Office: Swan 220

Phone: (323) 259-1310

E-mail: lang@oxy.edu (best way to reach me)

Course Website: <http://moodle.oxy.edu>

INTRODUCTION

The entire focus of this class is to help you prepare and write your senior thesis. Your final thesis must be properly formatted using American Sociological Association (ASA) style and will be between 36 and 40 pages (9,000 to 10,000 words), not counting references, appendices or tables.

This process is not for the faint of heart, but you will survive! You will work independently but also be an excellent peer for our collective accountability and progress. Your thesis project will be a substantial undertaking, but the course has been designed to break this large project into smaller, more manageable pieces. The course requires that you work with integrity and work consistently.

I will do everything I can to assist you with your work and advise your project and writing throughout the course.

I will expect you to:

1. Fully participate and make meaningful contributions to all in-class, online, and written discussions of the course materials and/or your peer's work;
2. Complete and/or present a series of smaller assignments related to your larger thesis project.
3. Submit a revised, final completed draft of your thesis to be reviewed by the Department.

HELPFUL MATERIALS

Academic Student Projects Grant. The College maintains a fund for support of small academic projects performed by full-time degree-seeking undergraduate students during the academic year. These funds may be used for equipment or consumables for an independent study project, comps research, or travel to field research sites or research subjects. Supplies for art, video and performance projects, oral history, and education outreach in the community may also be funded. Projects must be primarily academic in nature, although not-for-credit activities can receive support. Funds will be awarded to students on a competitive basis. **Grants are limited to the range \$50--\$300 per project. The ASP grant is not intended to be the sole support for any project.** <http://goo.gl/cpXQ7r>

The Human Subjects Research Review Committee reviews all research involving human subjects conducted at Occidental College or by members of the Occidental College community, including faculty, students and staff. It serves as Occidental's Institutional Review Board for purposes of compliance with the Code of Federal Regulations: Title 45, Part 46 - Protection of Human Subjects and the Occidental College Policy on

Research involving Human Subjects. *Research may not begin until you have been formally notified that your proposal has been approved by the committee.* For more information about the committee, about the regulation and ethics of research involving human subjects, or about submitting a proposal for the committee to review, please review the information at <http://goo.gl/kzrpYh>.

Attendance/Participation

Your participation and attendance (or lack thereof) will significantly impact your ability to contribute to course discussions, complete required assignments, and successfully complete your thesis. Please note that your mere physical presence in class does not count toward your participation and/or attendance. I make no distinction between excused and unexcused absences for the courses each absence affects your course grade as follows:

- 1 absence: no effect
- 2 absences: grade lowered one full letter, at the discretion of the professor
- 3 absences: grade lowered two full letters, at the discretion of the professor
- 4 absences: grade lowered three full letters, at the discretion of the professor
- 5 absences: automatic failure, at the discretion of the professor

Please let me know immediately if you have considerations that present a challenge to your meeting the attendance expectations. Plan in advance—and communicate before you find yourself in a jam.

GRADES

There will NOT be a curve. Letter grades in this class have the following meaning:

- A *Outstanding performance.* You have demonstrated very thorough knowledge and understanding of all the material, truly superior critical thinking, and expressed insightful and original thoughts clearly.
- B *Good performance.* You have demonstrated solid knowledge and understanding of the material and good critical thinking. You have also shown the ability to express your ideas clearly. You have completed all required assignments and they have been of good quality.
- C *Satisfactory performance.* You have demonstrated adequate knowledge and understanding of the major concepts and some critical thinking. Your work is free of significant problems.
- D *Deficient performance.* You have only demonstrated a limited understanding of the material, have failed to complete all the required work, and/or have routinely had serious problems.
- F *Failure.* You have failed to learn a sufficient proportion of the basic concepts and ideas. You have failed to complete all the required work, and/or have routinely had serious problems.

Participation

You are expected to contribute in a meaningful and consistent way to both in-class and online discussions and assignments with their peers. Your participation is evaluated from the following:

1. Status Updates – Weekly updates you will provide to ensure that you are on track with your work, have collective accountability, and can receive advising on any questions you have.
2. In-class work – Activities announced and completed in class to reward students who are engaged in the lecture/reading material.

3. Discussions – Formal and informal discussions of materials in-class and online – you must discuss, comment and be an active participant in our classroom sessions.
4. Peer Editing and Constructive Feedback – Evaluations of your peers' contributions to the course assignments (e.g., peer editing of drafts, etc.)

Missing any of these components will impact your ability to fully participate in the course, and thus, your participation grade for the course. Your participation is worth 15 points (or, 1 point each week).

Status Updates

Each week, you will provide a written Status Update. These updates you will provide to ensure that you are on track with your work. It will also provide the opportunity for collective accountability and advising. The goal is for you to enact the scholarly role by working and writing regularly. By 10:00am each Monday morning, you should send an email attachment with your to the status update prompt answers to lang@oxy.edu

Model Article and Outline

You will find a "model article" related to your topic within sociology that uses the same exact methodological approach as your study. Ideally, this article will come from a top sociology journal – *American Sociological Review*, *American Journal of Sociology*, *Social Forces*, *Social Problems*, *Gender & Society*, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, etc. – so that you can examine the structure of their argument and the anatomy of their article so that you have a clear understanding of how you will develop your argument and understand the key components of your thesis. You should outline the article to understand how specifically you will organize and model your argument in your thesis.

Proposal & Presentation

You will write and submit a five-page research project proposal to outline the components of your project. This will serve as the outline for your project and will serve as the contract for what you will accomplish this semester when it is approved.

25 Sources and Annotated Bibliography

As part of your collection of sociological sources for your literature review, you will submit a document with 25 academic/scholarly sources as part of an annotated bibliography. You will organize these sources by the topics/theoretical constructs you are studying, list the source, and then include a brief description of how that source will help you specifically for your project. The goal is to know each of your sources, how they speak to each other, and how they help you demonstrate why your study is needed and the gaps/puzzles you are addressing with your study.

Also, important - you MUST have access to each of these 25 sources - you may NOT just cite the abstract or use something you do not have access to. You may wish to start a folder called Articles to organize these sources.

Literature Review

You will write a first draft of the front end of your paper including the introduction, theoretical background, and the literature review of the theoretical constructs under study. Your first draft will have at least 25 scholarly citations, based upon your annotated bibliography and notes. Your introduction should be 2-4 paragraphs and your theoretical background and literature review should be roughly 5-6 double-spaced pages. You will first submit this draft to your peer for editing. You will then make the necessary revisions and submit your draft to the advisor.

You will prepare a brief presentation of your literature to your peers, summarizing the state of the scholarly knowledge on your topic and the theoretical constructs under study. Please bring your drafts to class for peer editing.

Section Drafts

We will talk about how to write each section of an article. You will submit a draft to your peer for editing. You will then make the necessary revisions to continue writing the rest of your article as part of the first draft of your thesis you will submit. Please bring copies of your drafts to class for editing.

Draft Paper

By compiling and refining the parts of your first draft of your thesis, you will submit a completed draft of your thesis to the advisor. You will then make the necessary revisions to continue editing your thesis so that you can submit your final and revised thesis to the professor.

Final Paper

You will submit your final and revised thesis to the professor. You will receive comments that you will use to continue to revise and prepare your thesis to be submitted to the Sociology Department in January.

Final, Final Paper

You will submit two copies of your revised, polished and final, final paper to your advisor to be distributed to two readers in Sociology. Please know that your paper will be evaluated by two professors in Sociology and not by your thesis advisor. Your thesis will be evaluated as not passing, passing, or passing with distinction. Individuals passing with distinction will present their work to the Sociology department at the end of spring.

COURSE GRADES

Do NOT count on a curve. I will assign letter grades for the entire course as follows:

94.0 and higher = A	74.0 to 76.99 = C
90.0 to 93.99 = A-	70.0 to 73.99 = C-
87.0 to 89.99 = B+	67.0 to 69.99 = D+
84.0 to 86.99 = B	64.0 to 66.99 = D
80.0 to 83.99 = B-	63.99 and lower = F.
77.0 to 79.99 = C+	

Assignment

15 points: Participation
5 points: Research Proposal
30 points: Draft Paper

Final Paper

20 points: Lit Review/Theory
25 points: Research
5 points: Paper

COURSE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

I will hold you responsible for the information in this syllabus, so I expect you to read it, understand it, and ask questions about anything you don't understand.

Office Hours: I hold three official office hours each week. I also encourage you to make an appointment outside of office hours or come by my office anytime to see if I'm available. I am happy to discuss class concepts, college more generally, musings about majors, future planning, or graduate school.

Feedback: I love getting feedback on my teaching and how the class is going. I value your input and I am willing to make changes to the class according to your preferences. Please share with me any comments, suggestions, and ideas you may have, and help me make this a great class. If you would like to do so anonymously, you can type and print out a note and drop it in my mailbox in Swan Hall.

Class Demeanor: While we may find ourselves disagreeing, we must do so with respect, a commitment to hearing what others have to say, and a willingness to think and rethink our own positions. Personal insults have no place in the college classroom.

Technology in Class: Please turn off your cell phones when you come to class. Similarly, text messaging will not be tolerated in class. You are welcome to bring your laptop to class and use it to take notes, access readings we're discussing, and the like. You are not welcome to surf the web, check email, or otherwise perform non-class-related activities during class. Here's my best advice: If you aren't using it to perform a task specifically related to what we are doing in class at that very moment, put it away.

Special Accommodations/Learning Differences: Students with documented disabilities who are registered with Disability Services are required to present their accommodation letter to the instructor at the beginning of each semester or as soon as possible thereafter. Any student who experiences significant physical or mental impairments may contact Disability Services at (323) 259-2969 to learn about available services and support. More information is available at <http://www.oxy.edu/disability-services>.

Assignments: Assignments must be emailed to me before the start of class on the scheduled due date. Late assignments are docked 1 grade per day. Computer problems are not a good excuse for missing a deadline. Make sure to keep an electronic copy of everything you hand in until you receive your course grade.

Academic Integrity: As is always the case, you are responsible for your own work. If you find yourself questioning whether you have documented or cited your sources properly, it is your responsibility to come see me about these issues prior to submitting an assignment. If you are thinking about submitting work that is not your own due to pressure, frustration, perfectionism, or any other reason, please talk to me. I am here to help you resolve these issues before they become a problem for your academic career. Academic integrity violations, including plagiarism, will be taken very seriously. A description of Occidental's academic ethics policies is available in the Student Handbook and on the following webpage:
<http://www.oxy.edu/student-handbook/academic-ethics/academic-ethics>

IMPORTANT DATES

Fall 2014 IRB meeting schedule:

Tuesday, September 9
Tuesday, October 7
Tuesday, November 11
Tuesday, December 9

Fall 2014 ASP grant deadlines:

Friday, September 12, 2014
Thursday, October 9, 2014

CLASS SCHEDULE

Although I will do my best to keep us on schedule, it is possible that we will make some adjustments during the semester. I will give as much notice - both in class and on the course website - when changes are necessary.

AUGUST

Week 1: Welcome to the class
28 Getting ready for work.

SEPTEMBER

Week 2: Status Update due to lang@oxy.edu by 10:00am Monday morning.
2 Write: 25 potential research questions (bring them to class)
30 Tips for Successful Academic Research and Writing (<http://goo.gl/gqrlMh>)
Harvard: A Guide to Writing a Senior Thesis in Sociology

- 4 Write: 3 specific research questions
Booth et al., Asking Questions, Finding Answers
Davis, "That's Interesting"

Week 3: Status Update due to lang@oxy.edu by 10:00am Monday morning.

- 9 Oxy's IRB FAQ (<http://goo.gl/dCgCll>)
Oxy's IRB Approval Request Form (<http://goo.gl/23QNux>)
11 How to write a literature review (<http://goo.gl/TzzYBv>)
7-minute presentation: What do you want to know? Why is it interesting?

Friday, September 12 – 5-page Proposal Due (email to lang@oxy.edu by 4:30pm)

Week 4: Status Update due to lang@oxy.edu by 10:00am Monday morning.

- 16 15-minute individual appointments
18 15-minute individual appointments

Week 5: Status Update due to lang@oxy.edu by 10:00am Monday morning.

- 23 Bring your first draft of your data collection instruments—detailed questionnaires, interview schedules, observational techniques, etc.
25 Read at least 5 sources that use your same methodology. Find a model article and outline it. What can you learn from this work? Bring your article/outline to class.

Week 6: Status Update due to lang@oxy.edu by 10:00am Monday morning.

- 30 6 steps to writing a literature review (<http://goo.gl/4jD4Sz>)
Distinguishing between a theoretical and a contextual literature review
(<http://goo.gl/ReJiJc>)

OCTOBER

- 2 Becker, "One Right Way"
Becker, "Terrorized by the Literature"

Friday, October 3: 25 references/brief annotated bibliography due (email to lang@oxy.edu by 4:30pm)

Week 7: Status Update due to lang@oxy.edu by 10:00am Monday morning.

- 7 15-minute individual appointments
9 15-minute individual appointments

Week 8: Status Update due to lang@oxy.edu by 10:00am Monday morning.

- 14 No class. Fall break.
16 7-minute presentation of your literature review. (email your draft to your partner)

Week 9: Status Update due to lang@oxy.edu by 10:00am Monday morning.

- 21 Writing the Methods Section and Sample Analysis (bring your draft)
23 Writing the Findings Section (bring your draft)

Week 10: Status Update due to lang@oxy.edu by 10:00am Monday morning.

- 28 Writing the Discussion and Conclusions section (bring your draft)
30 Putting it all together. (bring your draft)

NOVEMBER

Week 11: Status Update due to lang@oxy.edu by 10:00am Monday morning.

- 4 Bring first draft of your full paper to class for peer editing.
- 6 Bring second draft of your full paper to class for peer editing.

Week 12: Status Update due to lang@oxy.edu by 10:00am Monday morning.

- 11 **First Draft Due to Prof. Lang (via email)**
- 13 Help a friend. Where are you stuck? Where do you need help? What have you learned? What do you still need to do?

Week 13: Status Update due to lang@oxy.edu by 10:00am Monday morning.

- 18 15-minute individual appointments
- 20 15-minute individual appointments

Week 14: Status Update due to lang@oxy.edu by 10:00am Monday morning.

- 25 Peer editing. Bring your latest draft to class.
- 27 No class. Thanksgiving break.

DECEMBER

Week 15: Status Update due to lang@oxy.edu by 10:00am Monday morning.

- 2 Prof. Lang returns first drafts with comments.

Revising your thesis: You must send me an email (lang@oxy.edu) with your final course paper attached in Word (.doc/.docx format) by 12:00 noon by Friday, December 12, 2014 for a class grade. I will email you comments in the first week of January 2015 so that you can work on your Comps for other members of the department.

Finally, **by 12:00 noon on Tuesday, January 27, 2015, you must submit two physical copies** of your polished thesis for consideration by the Sociology Department. Please put both copies in Professor Lang's mailbox in the main secretary's office. This version of your comps thesis will be categorized by the department as not passing, passing, or passing with distinction.

I'm looking forward to a great semester!