

Masterclass in Social Research

Week 1: Welcome and Introduction



Plan for today

- ▶ **About the Masterclass**
 - History and learning objectives
 - Weekly syllabus
 - Assessment and requirements
 - Module contact
- ▶ **Introduction:** Tell us about yourself
- ▶ **Exercise:** Find your research buddies



History and objectives

- ▶ The **Masterclass in Social Research** is the final 30-credit compulsory module for **MSc Social Research** students
 - The Masterclass was created at the beginning of the Postgraduate Social Research Programmes to provide students at Birkbeck with a variety of methods training
 - While serving as a compulsory module for MSc students, the Masterclass is also open to research postgraduate students
 - The topics covered by the Masterclass may change from year to year based on staff availability and new developments in social research
- ▶ Following recent program restructuring, the Masterclass now serves two main objectives
 - Produce a new group of competent social researchers with different career and academic interests
 - Showcase cutting-edge social research methods while helping students reflect on some of the most common methods



Module organization

- ▶ "Master" lecture series (6-7:30pm)
 - Each week will feature a speaker from an SSHP department who is an expert in the selected issue and method
 - The speakers will decide how they will deliver the lectures, with the use of different pre-sessional and/or in-class activities
 - **The lecture series is open to all taught and research postgraduate students and their participation will not be credited**
- ▶ "Pieces-of-the-craft" workshops (7:40-9pm)
 - Each week will focus on a social research "skill" and the workshop activities will help students complete the required assessment.
 - Between Weeks 8-11, students will participate in the "dissertation fairs" where they share their research ideas and receive feedback.
 - **The workshops are only open to students who are taking the Masterclass for credits.**



Weekly syllabus: Lecture series

- ▶ **Week 1:** Welcome and introduction
- ▶ **Weeks 2-5:** Qualitative Social Research
 - Oral history (Prof Jasmine Gideon)
 - Ethnography (Dr Ben Gidley)
 - Discourse analysis (Dr Margarita Aragon)]
 - Historical research and archives (Dr Brodie Waddell)
- ▶ **Weeks 7-10:** Social Data Science
 - Survey (Dr Barry Maydom)
 - Social network analysis (Dr Chao-Yo Cheng)
 - Geographic data science (Dr Roberto Murcio)
 - Text-as-data (Dr Laszlo Horvath)
- ▶ **Weeks 11:** Quali-quant methods for social media research (Drs Scott Rodgers and Rob Topinka)



Weekly syllabus: Workshops and presentations (tentative)

- ▶ **Week 2:** Academic blogging and podcasting
- ▶ **Week 3:** Transparency and open social science
- ▶ **Week 4:** Using AI for social research
- ▶ **Week 5:** Research talks for work in progress
- ▶ **Week 7-10:** Dissertation fairs (student presentations)
- ▶ **Week 11:** SR happy hours



Assessment (if you are taking MSR for credits)

- ▶ **Two blog posts (40%):** Write a blog post to summarize and reflect on **two of the lectures**; one lecture from Weeks 2-5 with the other one from Weeks 7-11
- ▶ **A critical reflection paper (60%)**
 - Write a critical reflection paper (3,500-4,000 words) to discuss how the Masterclass helps with you research
 - Provide (1) a summary of your research project, (2) a discussion on how the lecture series help with your project and (3) a response to the questions/comments/critiques you receive during the presentation



Role of the moderator

- ▶ The moderator will join the lecture series to
 - Introduce the speaker
 - Moderate the Q&A or discussion, if necessary
- ▶ The moderator will lead the workshops and provide feedback on your assignments
- ▶ The moderator is available to answer your questions
 - Students are encouraged to schedule 1:1 meetings during my office hours (Friday 3-5pm) or by appointment
 - All meetings take place via Teams by default – email if you'd like to meet in person
 - Read the module handbook for details contact policy



Plan for next week

- ▶ Lecture series: Oral history
- ▶ PoC workshops: Academic blogging
 - Before you come: Finish the LSE post and browse one of the examples
 - In class: Use the lecture on surveys as a practice



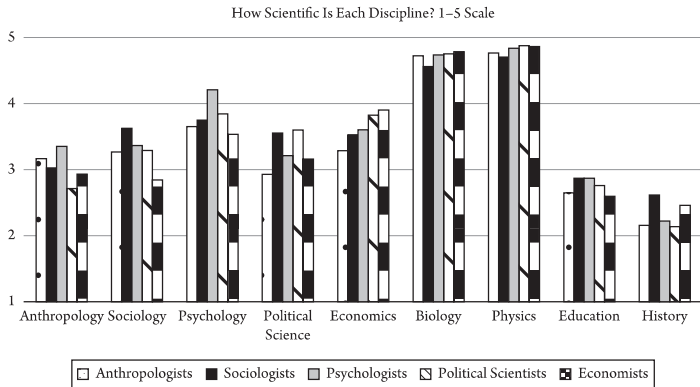


Figure 1.1 Social Scientists' Ratings of Whether Disciplines Are Scientific. Data from the author's 2020 survey of social scientists at major US research universities. $n=1,141$.



Table 1.1 A Catalog of Social Science Biases

		<i>Threat</i>	<i>Strategy to Address</i>	<i>Capacity to Address</i>
Individual Diversity	Demographic Biases	Limited topics and interpretations	Diversification and listening	Strong and increasing
	Geographic Biases	Limited generalization	Globalization, cross-cultural comparison	Increasing; differs by discipline
	Political Biases	Limited goals and interpretations	Empathetic recognition and sensitivity	Decreasing; recognition increasing
Scientific Practice	Methodological Biases	Incorrect findings and interpretations	Reproducibility reforms; empiricism	Strong and increasing
	Disciplinary Biases	Incomplete coverage; non-integration	Interdisciplinary research; team science	Strong and increasing
	Institutional Biases	Limited goals and topics; translation	Reform of evaluation and rewards	Strong
Innate Difficulties	Temporal Biases	Limited generalization	Long time horizons; historical data	Increasing, inherently limited
	Cognitive Biases	Confirmation bias; non-cumulation	Reproducibility reforms; meta-science studies	Increasing, inherently limited
	Application Biases	Limited goals and topics; translation	Learning from history; tracking basic science	Inherently limited



Knowing each other

- ▶ Please share your name, course, and subject area (e.g., political science) with us
- ▶ What are the methods you have learned or used previously?
- ▶ What project are you working on at this moment?



Exercise: Find your research buddies

- ▶ Share your subject area with each other
- ▶ Is your subject area a social "science?"
- ▶ Is your subject area "suffering" from any "bias" named by Grossmann?
 - Individual diversity: Demographic, geographical, and political
 - Scientific practice: Methodological, disciplinary, and institutional
 - Innate difficulties: Temporal, cognitive, and application
- ▶ If there is more than one subject area being named in your group, is any subject area "more scientific" than others? Why?
- ▶ Can you come up with a collaborative project?



Recap: Investigating the social world as a vocation

- ▶ As a social researcher, we aim to produce "valid" knowledge about the social world
- ▶ The production of valid knowledge involves a series of careful thinking about ontology/epistemology, theory-building, and methodology (or the theory-empirics alignment)
 - **Reveal nuances of the real world:** constructivism and interpretivism ; theory as approach; interpretation; qualitative; inductive/abductive
 - **Search for the "ultimate" truth:** positivism; theory as paradigm; explanation; quantitative; deductive
- ▶ A new definition of "better" social research is emerging as boundaries across subject areas and research methods are constantly being contested and redefined

