



Methods Handbook for Social Studies Junior Tutorials

Committee on Degrees in Social Studies
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HARVARD
COLLEGE

Methods Handbook for Social Studies Junior Tutorials

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Junior Tutorials in Social Studies—An Overview

Junior tutorials (Social Studies 98s) are intensive semester-length seminars which are limited to no more than ten students. Thus they are distinctive from other seminars because of the special role that they play within the Social Studies curriculum. Junior tutorials form an important bridge for juniors, who are in the process of defining a “focus field” and plan of study to which their theses will be tied. In making the intellectual move from studying social theory as sophomores (in Social Studies 10) to focusing on a general area of academic interest and planning a thesis project that they will complete as seniors (Social Studies 99), juniors are in the process of learning about interdisciplinary work and experimenting with research methodologies that they may want to use in their theses.

The purpose of junior tutorials in Social Studies is to immerse students in a detailed and focused study of an empirical, theoretical, or historical topic in the social sciences. In addition, we aim to provide our juniors with research skills and with experiences that will prepare them to write senior theses. Many of our students develop their thesis ideas while they are taking junior tutorials. But even for those who do not, junior tutorials provide students with practical examples of the kind of interdisciplinary work that is encouraged in Social Studies. Junior tutorials also allow students to practice finding a research topic, conducting research using primary sources, analyzing data, and developing an argument.

Students in all junior tutorials are required to write a substantial (20–25 page) research paper employing primary sources. These papers are not assignments to be completed at the end of the semester but rather should be part of a semester-long process aimed at teaching students how to plan and complete a substantial research paper in ways that mimic and support the thesis writing process they will undertake during their senior year. This process of teaching students how to plan, conduct, and analyze research presentable to a wider audience requires a significant time investment not only from the students who will do this work but also on the part of the tutors who seek to impart these skills. Tutors are thus required to meet with students outside of class on a regular basis throughout the semester, as they coach students through the different stages of their paper research and writing processes.

In the following sections of this handbook, we provide general information about planning your junior tutorial in Social Studies, general guidelines for teaching social science research methodologies in Social Studies junior tutorials, and specific guidelines for teaching the five most common research methodologies used by students in Social Studies in writing their senior theses: historical methods, interview-based methods, participant observation, survey research, and theoretical writing.

Section One

Planning Your Junior Tutorial

Junior tutorials, like most other courses, require a period of advance preparation in order to make sure that the course runs smoothly. However, because of the particular goals of the junior tutorial that focus on teaching research and writing about research as processes that take place over time, tutors need to take special care to plan how to integrate lessons about accomplishing these goals into the overall structure of the course. Beginning a few months before the teaching term begins, tutors should be planning how the course syllabus will balance teaching both tutorial content and research skills. Before the semester begins, tutors should also 1) schedule a library visit with one of Harvard's research librarians; and 2) apply for blanket IRB approval for any human subjects-related research that students will conduct over the course of the semester.

General Syllabus Design

I often think of junior tutorials as two “classes” running side-by-side. First, the junior tutorial is a thematic course that examines an issue or question in social science, historical, or philosophical research. Second, the course also focuses on teaching how to write a research paper, a process which also lasts the entire semester and is linked, directly or indirectly, with the themes of the course. Your challenge before the semester begins is to plan a syllabus that allows you to balance these two elements of the tutorial.

In most junior tutorials, the typical reading load is 150–200 pages of reading each week—enough to introduce students to a topic in-depth, but not so much as to prevent them from having time to work on the research skills-related parts of the course. In planning the reading assignments, you will want to keep in mind that most students will also need to do significant amounts of reading outside of the assigned course readings in order to complete their research papers. Balancing these two kinds of course readings is an important part of your syllabus planning process.

You may want to think about including some assignments that reinforce assigned thematic course readings and allow students to practice making arguments, using evidence to support arguments, and preparing for class discussion. To this end, many tutors require their students to submit short response papers before class and include students' response papers as part of their participation grade in class. While some tutors require papers every week, others allow students to hand in a set number of papers (such as 5 or 6) over the course of the semester. Many tutors provide detailed guidelines to students on the syllabus or in class about what kinds of information to include in response papers, what length papers should be, and how papers will be graded. (Faculty at Harvard often have diverse expectations about what a ‘response paper’ should be, so you should not assume that your students have a clear sense of how they should approach such papers.) Some tutors also help students prepare for response papers and class discussion by sending out a list of “reading questions” each week. These questions allow students to focus on the particular aspects of reading that you want to emphasize in discussion. I have also found that these questions allow me to encourage students to begin making links

between our weekly topic of discussion and research processes even before they enter the classroom, and that students often explore these links in their response papers. More detailed guidelines about response papers, reading questions, and planning for class discussion are available on the Bok Center website. Here's the link: <http://bokcenter.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do?keyword=k1985&tabgroupid=icb.tabgroup9201>.

Other syllabus mainstays include: information about books/readings that are on reserve, posted on the course website, or on order at the COOP; information about assignment requirements and due dates; information about how to contact you outside of class; and information about how you will evaluate students and how their class participation and completion of assignments will contribute to their final grade in the course. It is important to be as clear as possible on the syllabus about both due dates and grading, so that students understand up front your expectations and requirements for their participation in the course. By making these aspects known at the outset, you will save yourself time and energy later in the semester.

Staged Assignments for Teaching the Research Process

In planning your syllabus, in addition to focusing on your thematic area of discussion, you will also need to think in more detail about how you will teach students about the research process. For teaching research skills, you need to 1) integrate methods teaching together with your course content throughout the semester; and 2) design assignments that build on each other to help students complete the steps necessary to write a successful final paper. This 20–25 page paper is not just an assignment completed at the end of the tutorial; rather, the research and writing processes related to preparing this paper should have a semester-long focus, mimicking the same sequence of steps necessary for completing a thesis. Because of this focus, most tutors count the paper, together with the written assignments that lead to its completion, as the most significant part of the junior tutorial final grade.

Tutors employ a number of different kinds of staged assignments in teaching students how to plan and complete their final paper. Not all tutors assign the same sequence of assignments, which will of course differ whether students are being taught to complete a paper based on empirical research or a theoretical paper. Nevertheless, the basic steps involved with writing both kinds of papers are similar, and include 1) defining the topic and question that the paper will address; 2) identifying a methodology or interpretive approach that will allow the student to answer her research question; 3) finding and gaining access to secondary sources that will allow students to come up with a theoretical framework for their papers as well as sources that will contribute to the analysis or discussion of primary sources in the body of the paper; 4) completing primary source research; 5) analyzing data; 6) writing a well-organized paper with a strong and well-substantiated argument. (For a more complete list of the elements tutors should expect in final papers, see the heading Research Paper Guidelines at the end of Section 3 of this Handbook.)

Some assignments that tutors have used to help students work through this process are listed below:

- **Mandatory meeting** with instructor outside of class during the first few weeks of the semester to discuss student interests and possible paper topics.
- **Topic essay**, in which students provide a brief overview of their interests and possible topics that

they might want to investigate in their papers.

- **Prospectus**, either as a draft or as a finished product, which mimics the prospectus that students will have to write for their thesis and which should include the following kinds of information: research question, significance, methodology (or interpretive approach, if writing a theory-based paper), and what students expect to argue. The prospectus can be assigned as a single assignment, but many tutors have students write at least two drafts of the prospectus, to help students refine their research question and the methodology that they plan to use to investigate that question.
- **Annotated bibliography**, in which students have to demonstrate that they have identified bodies of literature relevant to their project; that they have begun to locate and read works within those bodies of literature; and that they can make links between these secondary sources and the primary sources they will use to answer their question.
- **Short paper** that situates the student's research question and significance within the secondary source literature.
- **Research exercise** in which students have to "practice" different methodologies, such as interviewing, participant observation, or content analysis; this assignment would be most useful in classes where students are working primarily on papers that are focused on developing in-depth literature reviews.
- **Student Presentations**, where students have to present their question, findings, and argument to the class.
- **Peer review of rough drafts.**

Of course, no one includes all of these assignments on the syllabus, so you'll need to consider which of these assignments you want to have students complete. In my tutorial, for example, I require that students do the following assignments: mandatory meeting, a prospectus (2 drafts), an annotated bibliography, and a class presentation.

In deciding which of these assignments you choose to include on your syllabus, you may want to think both about how the staged assignments you choose to use will complement the course material under discussion as well as how assignments should allow students to work in a progressive fashion towards completing the different stages that make up the research and writing processes.

In some cases, it may be appropriate for you to have students write a thorough literature review paper in lieu of a research paper. These cases should be determined in consultation with students and require that you ensure that students would not be better served by writing an empirically- or theoretically-based research paper instead.

Scheduling a Fall Library Visit

As part of learning research skills, you will need to make sure that your students know how to find both primary and secondary sources related to their research paper topic. Most resources that they need will be available through the Harvard Library System, but many students may not actually know how to access those sources or how to search well for sources they can use. To help teach students these and other library-related skills, all junior tutorials taught during the fall semester are required to have a library visit.

The reference librarian assigned to work with Social Studies tutors is Susan Gilroy

at Lamont Library. Her e-mail address is sgilroy@fas.harvard.edu. She has many years of experience helping Social Studies students and faculty with their research needs, and in addition to covering general topics related to finding research resources, she can also tailor her presentation to the individual research topics on which your students are working if you provide her with that information at least one week before your scheduled visit with her. Because Susan Gilroy is responsible for helping many other faculty and students at the College outside of Social Studies, you will need to contact her at the time that you are first planning your syllabus to make sure that she will be available to meet with your class on a date that works within your trajectory for teaching research skills. I recommend that you schedule a library visit early in the semester, so that students can learn how to locate sources early on in the course. I usually prefer to schedule the library visit for the third, fourth, or fifth week of class, when students have already begun to identify the particular topics on which they may want to write. That way, they are able to focus the session on searching for actual sources that they can use in their research project, and they can ask questions tailored to their individual needs and interests.

The library visit usually takes about one hour of class time. During the session, information covered for students will include: 1) general information about locating sources at Harvard, through different kinds of searching mechanisms, including Hollis and the E-resource link on the Harvard Library website; 2) more specific information about what kinds of sources (journals, databases, books, other libraries at Harvard, etc.) might be particularly helpful for different kinds of research projects or disciplinary focuses; 3) information about locating sources not available through the Harvard library system and how students can request and gain access to any such materials; 4) information about saving citations and downloading them to EndNote, RefWorks, or another database that will allow students to keep track of their sources and references throughout the research and writing processes. Most importantly, the library visit allows students to meet and work with a librarian for—often—the very first time. Harvard has an incredible richness of library-related resources, and students are more likely to be able to make good use of these resources with the help of an experienced librarian.

Because some students will have been abroad during their first semester junior year, not all students in spring tutorials will have already had a library visit. In these cases, you may want to introduce some of these research skills to a student yourself while also requiring all students to check in with you on their process in locating sources. You may also want to consider whether there is another specialized library at Harvard with a collection more relevant to your junior tutorial theme than Lamont and Widener's general collection. (For example, the Harvard-Yenching Library if you are teaching on East Asia; or Schlesinger if you are teaching about gender.) If so, you may want to approach the reference librarians associated with those collections to ask whether they might be willing to do a specialized visit with your tutorial that will cover additional/specialized resources available on that topic.

Applying for Blanket Human Subjects Approval

Most tutors will require that students conduct primary source research for their tutorial paper. In many tutorials, students may want to conduct primary research by getting information from people. If you think that there is any possibility that students in your tutorial may want to conduct research in the form of surveys, interviews, participant

observation, or some other form of gathering information from people, you will need to apply for blanket approval for your course from the Committee on the Use of Human Subjects in Research before your course begins.

Keep in mind that even students enrolled in theory-based tutorials may sometimes be interested in doing interview-based research, and tutors should remain open to students' desires to write on subjects that may not at first seem directly relevant to the tutorial. This flexibility on the part of tutors is important for two reasons. First, not all students' interests are covered by available tutorials, and you may have students who have requested your tutorial even though they plan that their thesis research will focus on a very different topic than the one covered in your tutorial; in other cases, students may not have gained entrance to their first-choice tutorial that might have been a better match for their particular research interests. Second, many students in Social Studies (approximately 80%) write theses that are based on empirical research or on some combination of theoretical and empirical work, and it is important for students in junior tutorials to be able to "practice" the methodology they plan to use for their thesis research. For these reasons, tutors should be prepared to apply for blanket approval from human subjects even if the focus of their tutorial does not necessarily seem to indicate this need.

The application process for blanket approval can be done on-line. The form that is filled out is the same as with any human subjects related research project and can be found at this link: http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~research/hum_sub/index.html. Filling out the form requires providing background information about the tutorial, the types of projects that students might be likely to undertake, and how you as the tutor will teach students about relevant ethical issues related to human subjects' research, particularly as pertains to subject confidentiality and minimizing possible harm. Once you have completed this application, if you are not a voting member of the FAS faculty, then you will need to e-mail it to the Director of Studies, who will submit it to the Committee on the Use of Human Subjects in Research once she has approved it. If you are a voting member of FAS, then you can e-mail it directly to the Committee (cuhs@fas.harvard.edu) for approval. It may take up to two to three weeks to receive approval from the Committee once you have submitted this form, and students cannot begin their research until your application has been approved. You will also have to complete the on-line HETHR training, which will take approximately 1 to 2 hours of your time. The training is available on the Committee website.

The Role of Junior Tutors

In reading through the guidelines about planning your junior tutorial, as outlined in this section, it should be clear that junior tutors play a special role for students in their classes. In addition to being teachers who work to impart particular kinds of knowledge to their students, tutors also coach students—advising them on an individual basis through each stage of their research process. It is hard for students to learn how to choose a topic and find a research question, understand how to find and evaluate sources of information, and evaluate the relative value and drawbacks of different methodological approaches. Through tutors' intensive support of students in the setting of the junior tutorial, it is our hope that students will be substantially better equipped to employ the skills they have learned in planning and completing other research projects as well, including the senior thesis.

Teaching General Research Skills

One of the most difficult tasks for those of us who have been researching for years is thinking about how best to break down the research process into basic tasks that can be taught to students just learning the process. By breaking down the process into discrete tasks that students can perform progressively throughout the semester, you can teach your students a set of steps that they will be able to employ in completing other research projects, including their senior thesis. In this section, I offer some suggestions for introducing students to the steps associated with the process of research design and execution, along with some ideas for working supportively with your students while introducing them to this process over the course of the semester-long junior tutorial. This section ends with a list of guidelines about what you should expect from students' research papers. These guidelines are for your benefit but should also be shared with students so that they understand your expectations about their research papers.

Identifying a Research Topic

For many people, choosing a topic is the most difficult part of writing a research paper, because there are so many possible topics and approaches. In helping students focus on a topic on which they would be willing to write, you should discuss strategies that students can use in identifying a topic and provide examples of kinds of topics that might make sense within the tutorial framework. Most tutors require that students meet with them during the first few weeks of class to talk about their research interests and to discuss possible topics that students may be considering. Some tutors may follow up these meetings with requests that students submit a one-page "topic essay" that requires students to articulate their interests and possible approaches to their research paper topic.

You can also identify some questions for students to consider in thinking about their choice of topics. Sample questions might include:

- Why were you interested in this course?
- What themes/authors/approaches in the course have most interested you so far? What themes look interesting in the upcoming weeks?
- What is something that you would like to understand or understand better?
- Is there a particular question that keeps nagging at you?
- What sort of topic might work well in terms of preparation for possible thesis topics/summer research?
- Are there particular methodologies that you want to learn more about?
- What can you realistically complete in the time remaining this semester?

Section three

Other points that you should consider in helping students to focus on their topics include the following.

- 1) *Encourage students to choose a topic that is related either theoretically or methodologically (or both) to ideas that students are considering pursuing in their theses.* For example, a student planning to write a thesis on sports and nationalism in South Korea using media as the primary basis for empirical research could write a junior tutorial paper interpreting the level of nationalist rhetoric in Korean media sources for one particular sporting event. A student planning to write an interview-based thesis on family planning in China could do interviews on family relationships with Chinese immigrants in Cambridge or Boston. A student planning on writing a thesis about the challenges to developing international human rights directives to aid climate refugees could write a paper that focuses on how climate refugees are currently defined within existing human rights frameworks. In these ways, students can become familiar with theoretical positions related to their thesis topic, develop detailed bibliographies of sources that they will need for their theses, or experience first-hand the benefits and limitations of particular methodological approaches to investigating their interests. Students may also learn from this work what particular aspects of a larger topic they want to pursue in a more focused way for their thesis, or they may find out that the topic or methodology they were considering is not suitable or interesting for them and that they need to look to other topics or materials when they write their theses.
- 2) *Keep an open mind about allowing students to pursue research paper topics that may not be directly related to the tutorial content, particularly if such a topic would enable a student to focus on a topic or methodology that she plans to explore in her thesis.*
- 3) *Stress the importance of choosing a topic that can be reasonably addressed in a semester-length paper.* As this will likely be the first time that students complete a research project of this length, they will have no frame of reference for choosing a topic that is narrow enough to be dealt with well but still wide enough to write 20-25 pages on. Part of your job is to work individually with students to help them understand the possibilities and limitations of this page-limit, as well as the limitations of doing a paper based on primary source research during one semester.

Defining a Research Question and Choosing a Methodology and/or Research Plan

Disciplinary standards for developing research questions and investigating them differ widely across the social sciences. Students, however, may have little understanding about the different kinds of methodological approaches used by the various social science disciplines, nor will they necessarily understand that different kinds of research processes may lead to different research results and outcomes.

To help think through these differences, let's use the broad topic of "migration," which is studied in all the social sciences; yet, the ways this topic is studied varies substantially by discipline. An economic approach to understanding a migration-related question, for example, might entail examining a particular data set to try to prove a hypothesis about whether migrant remittances have increased or decreased in a particular time or geographic or labor context. A sociological approach might involve comparing the relative rates of assimilation for two different ethnic groups, or members of the same ethnic group who have settled in urban versus suburban locations of the

same geographic area. An anthropological approach might ask a broad question about how migrants make sense of their experiences within a particular cultural, social, or economic context. All of these kinds of questions have their bases within the secondary source literature within each discipline, but these questions—and the modes of investigating them—are framed in significantly different ways and will generate different kinds of data, arguments, and outcomes. Your job is to teach students methodological skills within the framework of the social science discipline within which you have been trained; however, you should be aware that students may or may not have prior background or knowledge of the methodology with which you are most familiar. In some cases, students may want to approach their papers from a disciplinary methodology that is different from your own, and, to the extent possible, you should try to be open to this possibility.

One way to help students gain a better understanding of these methodological divergences is to assign readings from different methodological perspectives that investigate the same (or a similar) social phenomenon. For example, I like to assign readings that investigate Chinese family life from both anthropological and sociological perspectives. By reading different scholars' findings in conjunction with each other, students can flesh out the ways in which these scholars' arguments, despite being seemingly opposed, are in fact mutually compatible. I emphasize that their seeming opposition stems from the different research methodologies employed by the two scholars. When viewing participant observation and survey research side by side in this way, students can develop a better understanding of the strengths and limitations of the two different approaches and think about what kind of methodological approaches make the most sense for investigating their individual research question.

Once students have identified a broad topic for their paper, you need to help them gain access to secondary source literature that will allow them to define a particular question that they will investigate in their research paper. Many students have considerable difficulty moving from a broad topic to an answerable question and may not realize that they have more work to do after identifying their topic. The library visit (if you are teaching in the fall) should be scheduled for this point in the semester, so that students can begin focused searches on secondary source literature related to their topic of interest.

When you are confident that students have located the sources that they need, you will want to work closely with individual students to help them define their research question and how they plan to investigate their question. You should encourage them to read in as much detail as possible the secondary source literature on their topic. However, you also need to make sure that students do not get so bogged down in their reading that they do not progress beyond reading secondary sources to the other stages of their research project. One of the most common problems that undergraduates encounter in the research process is thinking that they have to read every source available on a particular topic before they can write something meaningful related to that topic. Instead, you need to help students: 1) identify which sources are most appropriate for them to use; 2) understand when they have enough sources to situate their framework and analysis; and 3) think about how they can make a novel argument or contribution to the existing literature by addressing one aspect of a larger problem or framing an existing problem in a new way.

To help students move from a broad topic to a research question or problem of appropriate scope and complexity, you can ask students to think about the following kinds of questions as they complete their readings of secondary source materials:

- Is there a contradiction or paradox in the existing literature on which your project could focus?
- Can you contribute a new case study to engage with a particular debate within the literature on your topic?
- Can you offer a new interpretation of a theoretical idea, topic, or debate?
- If considering an ethnographic topic, is there some experiential aspect of daily life that you would like to use to compare with published accounts?

Ultimately, your goal is to help students use their understanding of the secondary source literature on their topic to identify the research question or problem on which they plan to focus their investigation. They also need to be able to explain what the main approaches to their question/ problem are in the literature they are using, and why these approaches may not be sufficient to answer their question or resolve the problem that concerns them. Students' engagement with the secondary source literature should also enable them to explain the significance of the question they are asking (or the problem they want to solve), the approach that they plan to use to answer their question (or solve their problem), and what they anticipate they may be able to argue once they have collected and analyzed their data.

Once students have identified a question, focus their attention on: 1) articulating what kinds of research methods have been used in the past to investigate the problem that interests them; and 2) choosing an appropriate methodology/research plan/interpretive approach that they can use to investigate their question. In these discussions, depending on your disciplinary background, your role involves helping students with issues such as: identifying a particular quantitative data set that they could analyze; identifying which publications to use for a media content analysis; locating archival sources for students to access; helping students weigh the pros and cons of using surveys, interviews, or participant observation as their primary means of collecting data and teaching them lessons about how to contact potential informants and conduct these forms of research. In some cases, you may need to provide examples to students of the kinds of information that their research processes are likely to generate. In all cases, your goal is for your student to consider whether the methodological choices they have made are appropriate to their project and to justify the choices they have made to a wider audience. (For detailed suggestions about teaching individual disciplinary methodologies, see Sections 5-9 of this Handbook.)

Throughout this process, keep in mind that students will often be doing their own data collection for the first time. As a result, the goals of this research process and the resulting paper should be focused on encouraging students to do a limited amount of primary research that will allow them to practice the methodology they are using but not overwhelm them. For example, if conducting interviews, you might suggest that students do between five and eight interviews; if doing surveys, you might have students collect between 15 and 20. The data that results from these processes should still be sufficient to allow students to make an argument in answer to their question, but of course it would not be sufficient for a thesis-type project, and you should make that distinction clear to students. In my own tutorial, I encourage students to embrace the

analytical possibilities of these time and methodological limitations and to incorporate a solid discussion about these limitations of their research methods into their final papers, which is excellent practice for similar kinds of methodological discussions they will need to include in their theses during their senior year.

When all these issues have been worked through—individual students have each identified a research topic, defined a research question, and chosen a methodology and research plan—you may want to have students write a prospectus in which they outline this information for you over 3–4 pages. By putting their project plans in writing at this point of their project’s development, students will gain valuable practice articulating 1) what their question is; 2) why it is significant; 3) how the methodology/research plan they have selected will allow them to answer the question(s) they are asking; and 4) what they expect to argue (at this time). You can use the prospectuses to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of students’ proposed plans and provide students feedback about these issues.

Evaluating Sources and Analyzing Data

As students work through finding and reading the primary and secondary sources that they will need to complete their research papers, you may want to think about having students complete assignments that will help them keep track of the information they are gathering, organize their analyses of this information, and aid students’ attempts to integrate their analyses of primary and secondary source data and materials. One assignment that can aid this process is an annotated bibliography. Annotated bibliographies are useful teaching tools, not only because they provide evidence that students have become familiar enough with the library resources to locate appropriate sources for their paper, but also because they require students to begin asking and answering questions about the relative value of the different sources that they plan to use in writing a research paper. By asking students explicitly to explain how a particular source is related to the topic/question they are researching, how it engages with other works in the body of literature under investigation, and why they have chosen a particular source over other potentially similar sources, you can introduce the important concepts that 1) sources are not all are equally valuable for particular projects; 2) scholars engage in dialogues through written works, and students are engaging with these dialogues as part of their research paper writing process; and 3) contextualizing when a work was written, by whom, and for what purpose is a necessary part of the process of analysis and critique that students must perform as part of the research and writing process.

Detailed bibliographies may also allow students to keep track of important references they have found, and students who adopt this approach to collecting and organizing information may be able to incorporate notes about their argument or about how secondary sources relate to the primary data they are collecting.

No matter what written assignments you select, you will still need to engage students in an active discussion during tutorial and also outside the classroom in individual meetings about how to select the sources they use, how to determine the relative value of sources they may consider using, and how to integrate their secondary source materials into the analysis of their primary source materials. In almost all cases, students will need substantial practice integrating their analysis of secondary and primary source materials into an argument that they can support with the evidence that they have collected.

Developing an Argument

Putting together an argument can be daunting for less experienced researchers, but they can get a good head start if you help to diffuse tension early in the research process. You can discuss argument formulation with your students from the very beginning, as they move from choosing a topic, to asking a research question, to their first steps at argumentation. Teach them how to make early tentative arguments by running their theories through their sources early-on, keeping note of ideas as they develop and creating a dialogue between the information they are collecting and what they hope to say in their paper. Most importantly, have them talk to each other about what they plan to argue. As students delve deeper into their research, their work inevitably tends to overlap, and they are often each other's best critics and mentors.¹

In addition to facilitating an on-going discussion about research problems and questions as part of tutorial discussion, you may also want to set aside time during tutorial meetings (or, alternatively, schedule an evening or weekend meeting over pizza or snacks) for students to present their research projects to the class. Presentations allow students to gain valuable practice articulating their projects in a clear and concise way in front of others. They also allow students to “test out” their argument and ideas on a wider audience, and I have found that students who have engaged in intense discussion with each other over the course of the semester enjoy hearing about the research projects that their peers have been working on and discussing how these projects (in many cases) build on their own interests or topics that have been discussed throughout the semester in tutorial. Finally, these presentations introduce students to the productive goals of “workshopping,” where students learn to engage critically with others' work and provide constructive criticism to peers on their academic projects. You might also consider offering your own feedback on student presentations in class, since the advice you offer to one student will likely be relevant to other students as well.

These discussions can be enhanced by having students e-mail their presentation texts to other members of the tutorial before class, so that students come to tutorial prepared to give constructive feedback to their peers. Some tutors also extend these practices into the writing stage of student projects by having students review and workshop each others' rough drafts of their final papers. In these cases, you might want to consider counting students' feedback to their peers as part of their participation grade for the junior tutorial. You may also need to provide some examples of constructive feedback on which students can model their own responses.

Research Paper Guidelines

Below are general guidelines about the expectations that you should have for your students' junior tutorial research papers. By becoming familiar with these guidelines, you can orient your teaching of research skills to emphasize the elements that will support strong scholarly achievements from your students. By making these (or similar) guidelines known to students, you can also provide a clear record of the expectations that will factor into the final grades that you assign to students' research papers.

¹ This paragraph is adapted from *A Handbook for Research Seminar Tutors 2007-2008*, Harvard University Department of History, 2007, p. 21.

Paper Guidelines: Overview

Junior Tutorial Papers should be works of independent scholarly achievement, displaying not only that students have done substantive research but also that they have accomplished that research through appropriate methodological practices and substantially grounded their research framework and analysis within appropriate secondary source literatures. Papers should demonstrate that students have worked on the project's research and writing process over a full semester, resulting in demonstrated knowledge about 1) the significance of their project within the established literature on their topic, and 2) the strengths and limitations of their particular study.

Paper Guidelines: Content

Papers should include the following components:

- **Introduction and central question or problem to be investigated**, as well as how that question or problem fits within the existing literature.
- **Substantive discussion of the literature surrounding the topic**, demonstrating in particular the significance of the student's question and approach within this literature.
- **Thesis statement**, which demonstrates the position taken to answer the question/problem under discussion; the solution to the "puzzle" that the student works to solve in this paper.
- **Methodology or interpretive approach**, meaning the concrete steps taken to investigate the central question/problem; this section should include a clear discussion about how data/evidence was collected and analyzed, along with discussion about the strengths and limitations of the approach used (in other words, what biases may exist through the research design and data collection processes and how these biases may affect a student's analysis of her data).
- **Findings and Discussion**, in which students explain their research findings and discuss them, providing significant analysis that allows students to demonstrate that they can substantiate their thesis statement and answer the question they aimed to explore; in some disciplines, the convention is for these to be separate sections, in others, the convention is for them to be integrated into one coherent narrative whole.
- **Conclusion**, that wraps everything up for the reader.

Papers should also be well-organized and well-written, with a progression of ideas that flow approximately in the order of content points listed above.

Paper Guidelines: Format and Citations

- Papers should be 20-25 pages in length
- Papers should be double-spaced with reasonable print and margins
- Pages should be numbered
- Citation format should be consistent with the discipline in which the paper is written
- Either endnotes or footnotes can be used, but that use should be standardized throughout the paper

- Papers need to include citations and a full bibliography, with references cited in the text or as footnotes
- Papers also need to have a separate end section called “references,” “works cited,” or “bibliography”
- If internet sources have been used, an internet sources annotated bibliography should be attached separately at the end of the paper, explaining for each website referenced information about the website’s production and perspective

Common Issues in Teaching Research Methods

In this section, I focus attention on three common issues that you will have to address in teaching students how to write research papers no matter what disciplinary background you have. These issues are: 1) choosing primary sources; 2) sample limitations and bias among sources; and 3) power and positionality. Below, I provide some information on each of these potential problems and point out particular issues on which to focus in class. Following this section, the next five sections provide more detailed information for incorporating teaching about particular research methodologies into your junior tutorial or for coaching students working on papers using those approaches to research and writing.

Choosing Primary Sources

The focus on junior tutorial papers as research papers presents a problem that students may be facing for the first time in their college paper-writing experience: choosing primary sources. What sources are available? Which are appropriate? How can students gain access to them? These are questions that you will have to help students answer as they work to plan their research project. In most cases students will already have at least some understanding of what constitutes a primary source; however, you may also want to discuss with them what kinds of primary sources are generally acceptable in terms of the discipline from which you are teaching along with the range of sources students may want to consider using for their papers.

If students are working on a theory-based paper, the question of choosing primary sources may revolve around identifying particular texts that students will interpret and analyze. These sources, as well as a number of other kinds of sources that students writing empirically-based papers may want to use, including census information, government documents, surveys, newspapers, diaries, photographs, interviews, or other archival sources, may all be available through Harvard's library system. In these cases, the scheduled library visit can help students to turn up sources that they did not previously know about or locate sources that they thought might be available. This visit can also provide information about how students can use the on-line library resource system to locate sources outside of the Harvard, and Sue Gilroy can always advise students about whether it is possible to get access to these sources through inter-library loan.

For some students, particularly those students who may be struggling to narrow down a broad research topic into a research question, information about the numerous primary sources available may be overwhelming. In these cases, you will need to work with students to help them make decisions about how to choose which of these many sources they should focus on for their research. In other cases, a student with a very particular research interest may be disheartened to learn that there are few sources

available on her topic. If this happens, you can work with the student to think about related topics or questions on which she could focus, comparative approaches that might generate more material to analyze, or alternative strategies to pursue, such as employing multiple methodologies or turning an empirical research paper into a theoretical paper. In all cases, you will need to teach students to think critically about evaluating the sources that they choose and how those choices will affect the argument and analysis in their research papers. A common misconception that students have is that they need to read every source on a topic before they can write about that topic or do original work. Again, your discussions with students about selecting appropriate sources for their papers can address this concern and teach students otherwise.

For students who plan to do interview or participant observation-based research, the choice of primary sources focuses around similar problems of suitability and access, with the added complication that students both have to locate and contact those people they wish to interview or observe. For these kinds of research projects, you will first have to work with students to help them identify a sample for the project they wish to conduct and then help students think about the best ways to contact and gain information from that desired sample. In some cases, students may have a good understanding of whom they should interview, but they might not know how to contact those people or whether it makes sense for them to use a survey instrument, interview instrument, or some other form of collecting data. In helping students solve these issues, it is also important to encourage students to think about how the ways in which they gain access to interview subjects may affect the outcome of their interviews with those subjects.

Sample Limitations and Bias Among Sources

A common problem that all students will face in writing the tutorial paper is the limitation of time and access to sources. Because the paper is a semester-length project, you will need to prepare students to be realistic about these limitations in their paper-planning process and explain to students that the practice of doing primary research and writing those results into a final paper is a more important outcome than having irrefutable evidence to support the argument that they plan to make. At the same time, it is also important to distinguish between reasonable expectations for the junior tutorial paper versus reasonable expectations for the senior thesis. I do this by making clear the fact that I am more flexible with students' execution of research plans for their tutorial papers than I am (or other social scientists will be) with their execution of research plans in their senior theses.

In helping students to plan realistic projects that they can complete during the semester, you may consider using the following guides as benchmarks for empirically-based research papers:

- Interviews: 6-8 for the tutorial paper, versus at least 25 for the senior thesis
- Surveys: students can use already existing surveys; if they create their own survey instrument, you should expect them to do around 20 surveys, versus at least 100 for the senior thesis
- Participant Observation: one observation per week of several hours each visit, versus 6-8 weeks of observation for the senior thesis

For students writing historical or theoretical papers, the concern about limitations of time and access is more likely to revolve around defining a narrow-enough topic or

interpretive framework, so that students can complete the research over one semester.

A related concern that affects students writing research papers with these limitations of time and access to sources is that of bias among sources. It is not reasonable to expect that undergraduate students writing a semester-length (or even a thesis-length) paper will have unbiased samples. This problem matters more for some disciplinary methodologies than others. With surveys, for example, where the goal is to achieve as random a sample as possible, the problem of bias can be problematic. With participant observation, on the other hand, bias is not usually considered to be a problem and may even be seen as a boon to the researcher who has developed strong ties of trust with his or her subjects of observation. In all cases, however, tutorial leaders should teach students to pay attention to this problem of how the particular qualities of the group of people selected to interview, observe, or survey will influence the data collected and the analysis of that data. Students should also include a discussion of this bias in their final papers, where they can explain both the limitations that they faced in conducting their research as well as how these limitations have affected their argument and analysis. Through these discussions, you can emphasize with students the importance of developing an insightful argument over one that will necessarily be generalizable.

Power and Positionality

Another problem central to all empirical research is the issue of how one's status as a researcher both enables and creates challenges to data collection. For students doing interviews, surveys, and observation for their research papers, you will need to make sure that they are aware how their race, gender, class, age, education background, Harvard affiliation, etc., may affect the interactions that they have with their research subjects, the relationships that they form with interviewees, and the kinds of information that survey respondents may be likely to give them.

For example, some research subjects might see female students as too young or inexperienced to be credible researchers to whom they can entrust their views. Others might perceive Harvard students as privileged and part of an influential institution about which the interviewee has negative feelings. In some cases, research subjects may identify more readily with a student from a similar geographic or racial background and thus be willing to trust that student more than one with a background different from their own. Power and positionality affect all aspects of data collection when working with human subjects, and so it is important for you to encourage students to think about how these issues affect both the planning of their research project and the analysis of their research data and include this information in their final paper product.

The issues of power and positionality are also a primary topic of discussion that you should introduce to the class when you discuss applying for consent to conduct research with human subjects. In this case, ethical issues involved in conducting research with human subjects take primary consideration. The most obvious points of concern are focused around the idea of "harm," that is, making sure that informants do not feel pressured into responding to questions or participating in research situations which might make them uncomfortable or entail risk (whether it be personal, social, or political). Yet another point of entry to these issues is through a discussion about subjects' consent to being involved in a research project. Should consent be oral or written? What are the advantages and disadvantages of oral versus written consent? What are the implications for research findings and relationships with informants? Harvard's IRB committee is

comfortable approving applications with either kind of consent, thus providing a valuable opportunity to use decisions about which kind of consent students should use as a way to encourage students to relate abstract concerns about power and positionality to the concrete situation of their own research plans and projects.

Teaching Historical Methods

by K. Healan Gaston

On the face of things, the writing of history appears deceptively simple. Indeed, historical research is more often described as a craft than as a method. It seems a matter of mere common sense: Historians use the method of description to tell stories about the past. But historical research and writing can prove surprisingly difficult to master. What follows is a series of exercises to stimulate your thinking about how to fruitfully and creatively incorporate historical methodology into your tutorial. You may also want to consult a few of the many good books on historical methods. I have found Jim Cullen’s *Essaying the Past: How to Read, Write, and Think about History* particularly helpful for students and Martha Howell and Walter Prevenier’s *From Reliable Sources: An Introduction to Historical Methods* valuable for my own use. The latter is especially relevant to Social Studies, as it traces how classical sociological theories, along with the practices of the social sciences more broadly, have influenced the study of history.

Identifying a Viable Historical Research Topic

It’s never too early to have students begin thinking about their research papers. Historical research tends to progress in fits and starts, especially during the earliest stages, when the student inevitably encounters many dead ends. Here are some exercises designed to help students begin thinking about their projects during the first few weeks of the semester:

Original Historical Research—Primary and Secondary Sources

This exercise is simple but revealing: Just ask your students what the phrase “original research” means. You’ll find that many students will take “original” to mean simply that the paper revolves around their ideas instead of someone else’s—that it is an analytical exercise rather than a merely descriptive recounting of what others have said. But analysis isn’t the only thing, or even the primary thing, that makes an original research paper original; it’s the use of sources in an original manner and the subsequent construction of an original argument. Some researchers will work with newly discovered sources that have literally never been touched by another interpreter. Others will ask new questions of sources that have already been much studied, or will combine and juxtapose bodies of sources in new ways. Continue the discussion by asking your students to clarify the difference between primary and secondary sources. They cannot understand what is meant by original research unless they really grasp the difference between primary and secondary sources. So it’s well worth your time to clarify these concepts in tandem and at the outset. Make sure that your students come away from class with a working knowledge of these critical concepts, rather than just a vague sense of what they mean.

Section five

Beyond Topic and Question—Identifying a Primary Source Base

Building on the previous exercise, suggest to students that they cannot actually claim to have viable paper topics or research questions until each of them has identified one or more primary source bases. Ultimately, it is locating at least one reliable source base that makes a topic viable, since both the topic and the research question tend to be implicit in the identification of a source base. You might suggest that the class adopt a mantra: “I do not have a topic until I have a primary source base.” Then ask your students to enumerate the different kinds of primary sources available to historians and where they are most likely to be found. Use their input to establish that primary sources are most often housed in libraries, museums, and archives, but that they are also found in less formal settings, such as private collections, antique barns, and people’s homes. By placing so much emphasis on finding a primary source base, you run the risk of downplaying the importance of engaging with the existing literature and finding a question that hasn’t yet been asked. So make sure your students understand that, no matter what kind of primary source base they will end up using, they should start with the printed primary and secondary sources, in order to hone the topic and to become familiar with the basic contours of the existing scholarship.

Framing a Topic—The Choices Historians Make

During the first few weeks of the semester, assign a number of articles or chapters that not only introduce students to the major themes of the course, but also get them thinking about the full range of methodological considerations they will encounter in developing research projects. Juxtapose articles that employ different units of historical analysis, such as a person, a movement, a concept, or a decade. Using these examples, discuss various ways of bounding a historical research project and the specific challenges and opportunities associated with each approach. Ask them to think through, with the week’s readings in mind, how the initial choices that historians make shape their experiences of research and writing. The goal is to encourage each student to think like a historian, by engaging the question of what might be gained or lost by a particular choice of how to structure the inquiry. At the end, hand out a list of databases of particular value to historians, along with a list of the major periodicals used by historians in subfields related to the major themes of the course.

Conducting Historical Research

As your students begin their research in earnest, these exercises will help to demystify and humanize the research process. Be sure to emphasize the collective nature of historical research, pointing out the pivotal roles played by teachers, reference librarians and archivists, scholarly conversation partners, historical actors, classmates, friends, and family members in the process. It really does take a village to write a research paper or a thesis! Here are some exercises that dramatize the rewards and challenges associated with intensive historical research:

Cultivating Your Inner Sleuth

Use the well-worn analogy of the historian as a detective who searches for clues that will lead to the pieces of conclusive evidence needed to build a strong case. This image will help your students enter imaginatively into the research process. It will also make

that process seem more romantic than it actually turns out to be—at least most of the time! So make it concrete: Give each student a large index card, to be used like the little notebooks that detectives and journalists carry. Explain that, especially in our computer age, a crucial dimension of any research effort is a comprehensive list of database search terms. Tell them to jot down a list of search terms for their project on their card, and to keep it (or an analogous computer file) with them when they conduct research, so that they can make additions and amendments to the list. You might also ask students to share with the group a few details of their own research process to date, with an eye to the dead ends, pivotal clues, and unanticipated findings that make historical research so engaging and at times frustrating. Try to elicit self-conscious reflection in the rewards and tribulations of historical research, which will encourage everyone in the class to think in new ways about their own processes.

Interrogating A Primary Source

Point out that the historian, like the detective, must know not only where to find the clues that will lead to the evidence, but also how to interrogate that evidence. How reliable is a given source likely to be? What is the range of possible implications that one can draw from it? Like the detective, the historian must be skeptical, creative, and flexible, in order to redirect her search in light of the evidence she finds. After discussing these and other attributes shared in common by historians and detectives, distribute copies of a one-page primary source and ask your students to spend a few minutes analyzing it on their own, then come back to the group to discuss what the source does and doesn't tell us, and how we know.

Research Workshop and Topic Declarations

Near the midpoint of the semester, consider assigning half the normal reading load and conducting a research workshop during the second hour of class. Ask each student to bring in 1) the most useful secondary source they have found to date, 2) an updated paragraph-length description of their project, and 3) a current list of the search terms they've been using. In the first half of the research workshop, use the students' own sources to discuss how to mine a secondary source; the importance of signposting (pointing toward the themes and arguments that follow) in titles, subtitles, and topic sentences; and the pivotal role of footnotes and bibliographies in historical research. In the second half of the workshop, ask your students to share their topics with the group, and have the group brainstorm possible additions to each list of search terms. Ask those who have already met with the library liaison to briefly recount their experiences, in order to encourage others to follow suit.

Spinning Sources into Historical Arguments

As the students begin writing their papers, teach them how to build original historical arguments from the primary and secondary sources they have gathered. Encourage them to continually ask themselves, "What do my readers need to know, and when do they need to know it?" Attempting to think like their readers will help students unfold their arguments and evidence in a more logical and compelling manner. In addition to the exercises below, I give students two writing assignments: a secondary source draft (5-7 pages) due at the end of week eight, and a primary source draft (10-12 pages) due

at the end of week eleven. Splitting the writing process in this manner helps me address the specific challenges associated with each category of sources—and prevents students from simply recycling the same material from one draft to the next. It leaves them with the challenge of merging their drafts in the final paper.

Identifying Scholarly Conversation Partners

Ask your students to define the terms “historiography” and “revision.” After you reach an understanding of these basic concepts, have them jot down answers to a series of questions: Which secondary sources have been the most instrumental in helping you delineate your topic? What does each of these sources do for your argument? How could you place each of them in dialogue with other secondary sources you will use in the paper? How are they similar to, and different from, one another? Then ask your students to reflect again on the role of footnotes in research and writing. Suggest to them that, although footnotes seem complicated and time-consuming, they actually give the reader a detailed sense of a scholar’s main conversation partners and the points of agreement and disagreement between them. Conclude the exercise by reviewing the mechanics of citation and answering student questions about footnotes.

Dissecting Historical Writing—The Importance of Structure

Choose a highly structured and well-crafted scholarly article from among the course readings and take students through a step-by-step tour of the piece. Ask them to describe what the author is doing in specific paragraphs and sentences, and how the piece unfolds logically. The goal is to help your students appreciate the many choices that historians must make in the writing process, and to think more self-consciously about the choices they themselves face.

Categorizing Primary Sources

Ask your students to think of principles of categorization they might use to sort their primary sources into groups. Liken this process of classification to setting up a filing system: both require choices about how information will be organized, and in both cases the choices directly reflect the interpreter’s overall purpose. After giving students time to reflect on their own projects, conduct a group discussion about the many different categories that historians can use to group primary sources. Encourage students to use examples from their own projects.

The Craft of Historical Writing

In the final weeks of the semester, as students enter the final throes of the writing process, I stop assigning reading so that my students can devote themselves solely to their papers. And I require each student to give a twenty-minute in-class presentation in which they describe their findings and field questions from the group. I also conduct exercises, such as the following, that explore the ins and outs of sound historical writing.

Exercising Conceptual Control over the Sources

Begin by asking your students what it means to say that historical writing is largely a descriptive enterprise. For instance, in what sense can it be said that this mode of writing is more about showing than telling? This question should lead you into a detailed discussion of how the historian goes about marshaling evidence. The sheer volume of sources can overwhelm students, leaving their writing fatally underanalyzed. Students often group pieces of evidence together according to a specific logic, but then fail to make that logic explicit, leaving the reader adrift. Encourage your students to assert conceptual control over their unruly sources. This means writing strong topic sentences and offering analysis at the end of each paragraph. You can explain the process this way: In each paragraph, tell me what you're going to show me, then show me with evidence, and then tell me what you showed me.

Consider conducting a writing workshop during your final class meeting. Pair your students in advance of the deadline for their secondary source drafts and have them read and put comments on one another's papers to be exchanged during the final class meeting. During that meeting, review the attributes of strong historical writing, especially the use of active verbs and constructions, rather than passive ones. Reading the work of peers will incline students to put more time into their own drafts and will help them learn from one another.

Teaching Interview-based Research

by Nicole Newendorp

Over the past years, more students in Social Studies have used interviews as their primary means of collecting primary research data for their senior theses than any other single form of data collection. Of the (about) 80% of theses that have an empirical focus, more than half incorporate some form of interview-based research. For this reason, I encourage all students who are thinking about conducting interviews for their theses to practice conducting interviews during their junior tutorials.

The previous sections in this handbook have outlined ways to teach the first stage of this interview-based research process, that of defining a research topic and a question to be investigated. Here, I focus on what to include in teaching the three other phases of conducting interview-based research: planning the interviews, including identifying and contacting a group of interview subjects; carrying out the interviews; and analyzing and writing up the data collected through the interview process.

If you have students who will do interviews for their papers, then you need to get them started on the first phases of this process early on in the semester, as it will take them time to work through each phase of research that I outline below. It is always important to remind busy students that the quality of interview material that they get, along with the quality of their subsequent data analysis, will be stronger if they plan out and conduct their research throughout the course of the semester rather than waiting until just before the paper is due!

Planning the Interviews:

Laying the Groundwork and Human Subjects-related Issues

Some students may have previous experience actually doing the work of conducting interviews, because they are staff writers for the *Crimson*, for example, or have had to complete interview assignments for other classes. Even so, students may not have had to think through the planning issues involved with setting up an interview-based research project that builds on and contributes to academic knowledge in methodologically acceptable ways. For this reason, they may not be aware of the full range of issues involved in setting up a semester-long interview project. You will need to teach students about the groundwork that needs to take place before any interviews can take place. I encourage students to think about:

Who to interview to answer the research question. This first step in planning their projects is to identify a group of interview subjects and also involves thinking about sampling: What kinds of sampling should students know about, and what kind of sample is appropriate for a semester-length research project? As I discussed in Section 4 of this Handbook, this first step also involves practicality, as students need to consider who they can access within the time and geographic

constraints that they face. If they determine that the constraints are too great, then they should consider whether they should re-frame their question or project in order to get data that will allow them to answer the question they are asking given these constraints.

Who will be present at the interview and where interviews will take place. These two questions go hand-in-hand. As students work out who they will interview, they also need to work through related issues such as: Do they need an interpreter to be present? Are they interviewing workers in the presence of their bosses, or clients in the presence of their social workers? Can they do the interviews at people's houses? If not, where can they talk that will be suitably private but safe? In all these cases, the primary lesson that I aim to have students think about is that their interviews may have substantially different outcomes on the basis of who is present at the interview and where the interview takes place. If some students have previously conducted interviews, they may easily understand these points. Ultimately, these questions are both practical but also substantive, focusing on issues of power and positionality among interviewer and interviewee, as I discussed in Section 4.

What questions to ask: writing an interview guide. Once students have a research question and a potential group of interview subjects, they need to begin planning what questions they will ask in the interview. At a minimum, students need to know that there are different ways to structure their interview questions (structured, semi-structured, and non-structured) and that these different interview formats will lead to different kinds of data and possibilities for analysis. In making these points, I often provide students with a sample interview guide for a semi-structured interview, in which students can see more clearly 1) how to strike a balance between questions meant to elicit general responses and questions meant to elicit detailed and specific information; 2) how to probe for answers to questions that interviewees may respond to in a general way or find difficult to answer; and 3) how to word questions in ways that interviewees can understand and that are not biased in favor of particular kinds of answers. For other concrete suggestions about how to word questions, see Section 8 (Teaching Survey Research) of this Handbook.

In addition to these aspects of the necessary groundwork involved in planning for interviews, students also need to learn about applying for approval for conducting research with human subjects. Although students will not have to apply for approval for their individual junior tutorial research projects if you have already applied for blanket approval from the Committee on the Use of Human Subjects in Research, they will still need to be aware of the ethical issues involved in interview-based research, including how to protect interviewee confidentiality, how to minimize any personal, social, political, or other risks associated with interviewing individuals, and how to obtain consent for interview-based research. One way that I help students learn about the ethical issues involved in these research processes is to show students my blanket human subjects application for the course and talk in detail with them about how I answered the questions associated with these issues.

Carrying Out the Interviews

Conducting the interviews is work that students have to carry out on their own, outside of the classroom context. In some cases, interviews will be going well, and students may not have much to talk about other than what data they have collected. In other cases, students will be struggling with contacting interview subjects, getting subjects to

answer their questions, or interpreting the data they have collected and find it beneficial to have the chance to talk about their progress (or lack of it!) with an experienced researcher.

There are several points that I make sure to reinforce with students while discussing how their interviews are going. These points include:

Practicing in advance. Remind students to practice using their recording device before they conduct their first interview, so that they don't begin the interview only to find they have to stop it because they are having difficulty recording. Likewise, remind them to practice asking their questions in advance, particularly if they are in another language, so that they can see if the questions are understandable and seem to elicit clear responses from interviewees.

Showing respect for interview subjects. Students are often dismayed at how difficult it can be to get people to commit to interviews. Make sure to remind students that their interviewees are busy individuals who have lives of their own, and that they are doing students a favor in helping them with their research project. In all cases, students need to be aware of how to show proper respect to their interview subjects when contacting potential interviewees, while doing the interview, and in thanking subjects afterwards.

Probing for detailed responses to questions. Be sure to check in with students about the quality of the responses that they are getting through their interview guide. If they are getting only general answers to questions that are not substantive enough to be helpful, then work with students to see if they are asking follow up questions that allow them to probe for more detailed responses from subjects. Remind students that it is alright to ask subjects for clarifications of points that they have made, and to ask them for examples of broad claims or statements that they make. Help students to work through when it makes sense to stay strong in terms of pressing for more information, or when they may need to back off so that they do not risk alienating or upsetting their interview subjects.

Staying flexible throughout the research process. Remind students that whenever doing research with individuals, things do not always go according to plan. Being flexible is an important part of conducting successful interview-based research. Furthermore, when things do not go according to plan, it is a good idea to take stock of the research process in place to determine what is not working and what improvements can be made. Problems can result from miscommunication between interviewer and interviewee, poor planning on the part of the interviewer, unclear or insufficient questions in an interview guide, or any of a number of other factors. While sometimes problems such as these may mean that students are not able to collect the information that they expect, thinking about these problems and how they have affected the data collected are also important analytical exercises from which students can benefit and which should be addressed in the methodology section of students' tutorial papers.

After the Interviews: Analysis and Writing Up

In making the transition from collecting data material to developing a written product, the most important problem that students face is taking their interview data and organizing their findings into something out of which they can make a coherent argument with relevant links to the secondary source literature that frames their project. As students doing interview-based research work through this process, you can teach students about coding—that is, the process that allows a researcher to perform a content analysis on interview data, tracing and linking particular themes and trends in responses across multiple interviewees. To aid students in understanding how to code, you may want to provide examples of types of information that you have coded for in your own work or have students read a methodological text that gives specific examples of coding. You may also want to work with students individually to discuss what themes have resulted from their interview data and how they might focus on these themes to develop a suitable argument from their data and organize the discussion of their findings in support of that argument.

Teaching Participant Observation

by Nicole Newendorp

The Problem of Time in Participant Observation Research

Participant observation is a methodology that requires in-depth involvement with a particular group of people over an extended period of time. As part of the process of teaching how to conduct participant observation, it is important to make clear to students the depth of involvement of this type of research and the significant time commitment that it entails. It also means that you may need to help students scale back expectations for the research project they are envisioning—away from a comparative project to one through which they can answer an interesting question through in-depth examination of one group.

Although a handful of students do use participant observation as the primary form of data collection for their senior theses, very few actually rely on this form of data collection for semester-length papers—opting instead to do media content analysis, interviews, or surveys. To help students think about how to do participant observation within restricted timeframes, you can help students to strategize how they might draw on volunteer work or other activities in which they are already involved to build on the rapport they have developed with people through those experiences to develop the relationships of trust that ethnographers depend on for their data collection.

You should also emphasize how shorter periods of participant observation can be used to supplement other forms of data collection—such as interviews or surveys—or how other forms of data collection might supplement the data that students collect through short periods of participant observation. Even a short stint of participant observation can help students to better understand a social dynamic that they have been learning about primarily by interviews by providing a site and context through which to observe—for example—the interactions that take place among colleagues, the rhythm of a daily work schedule, or how decisions are made in a group setting.

What is Ethnography?

At the most basic level, students need to know that ethnography is the specific form of writing produced by anthropologists, or ethnographers, who have employed participant observation as their primary form of data collection. Of course, ethnography can also be used as a short-hand terminology to refer to the process of doing participant observation—what we call “ethnographic” fieldwork. A common misconception that students (and scholars in other disciplines) have is that any time a researcher includes primary data collected from people as part of a research methodology, their project is “ethnographic.” Instead, it is important to point out that ethnographic fieldwork has its basis in rigorous participant observation methodology.

I find that because many students will not have had much (if any) prior exposure to ethnographic readings, they are often skeptical of ethnographic findings and question the validity of ethnographers' interpretation and analysis of events as detailed in the works we read. By talking through these concerns in conjunction with reading assigned ethnographies, through which students have a chance to learn about the time and effort that go into participant observation, students gain a better understanding of that ethnography is. Moreover, they can also have more informed discussions about the strengths and weaknesses of participant observation as a research methodology. In other words, reading ethnographies and talking about participant observation go hand-in-hand, as you help students identify within the context of the ethnographies they have read: 1) what kinds of data participant observation allows one to collect; 2) what kinds of interactions ethnographers have with their research subjects; and 3) what particular challenges face ethnographers/others conducting participant observation research.

The “Nuts and Bolts” of Participant Observation-based Research— Developing and Implementing a Research Plan and Finding and Setting up a Fieldsite

The practical information that I introduce about how to conduct participant observation to students includes: 1) how to develop and implement a research plan; and 2) how to find and set up a research site. The main resources that I use to fuel student discussion on these topics are targeted methodological readings, class content-related assigned ethnographies, and also a presentation on my own research. Questions that I aim to have students think about are:

- Who (what population of people) will students need to access to be able to answer their research question?
- Can students realistically gain access to this population over the course of the semester (or, if they are planning for their thesis, over the summer)? How and where?
- How might students use their networks (both personal and academic) to gain permission to be a participant observer at a particular location?
- Can students gain access to a location from multiple entry points (that is, contacts) so as to be able to supplement the information they get from one group with that of another as well?
- What advantages or disadvantages might students encounter through gaining access to informants through multiple entry points?
- What kinds of “work” does doing participant observation entail?
- What (materials, daily events, people’s actions, etc.) might students want to pay attention to? What kinds of questions might they want to ask and to whom?
- How might people (research subjects) react to participant observation? In what ways might they be helpful or not helpful?
- How do you keep track of/record your ethnographic data?
- What are the biases that will be inherent in focusing on one particular location/group of people to answer your question?

- What are the benefits of the group/location students have chosen (or might choose)?
- What kinds of problems might an ethnographer encounter while doing research?

By presenting concrete examples of how ethnographers have worked out these issues (either through readings, through a presentation of your own research, or both) and linking the discussion of these examples to specific goals for students' projects, students should be able to adapt these questions to their own research projects.

Along with these practical considerations about conducting participant observation, students will begin asking questions about how the presence of the ethnographer affects the data collection process. Additional questions about personal relationships also come up in thinking about the kinds of problems that ethnographers encounter in conducting participant observation research—in which the primary outcome depends on having established strong bonds of trust with the subjects of her research. As a result, discussions about these “nuts and bolts” and planning issues usually segway quite naturally into the topic of power and positionality in participant observation research. See Section 4 of this Handbook for more information about power and positionality in social science research.

Working Towards an Analysis of Participant Observation Data

You will also want to talk with students doing participant observation about how to use fieldnotes to keep track of their research findings and develop a data set that students will use to write their research paper. Emphasize that by writing down their observations and interactions with their informants in an organized way, they will be better able to analyze their notes for important themes that have come up in their research to generate an interesting argument for their paper. You can also encourage students to keep a separate set of notes in which they document and explore the connections between their research findings and the secondary source literature that frames their project as another means of helping them work towards developing their data into a more polished written product.

Teaching Survey Research

by Anya Bernstein

Note: This section is drawn in great part from notes and handouts developed by Dan Hopkins in his workshop “Using Quantitative Data and Surveys in Your Senior Thesis” conducted for Social Studies students in April of 2009.

Students who wish to gather data from a large number of people may be willing to sacrifice depth for breadth; in this case, they may use a survey. Some students use survey data collected by other scholars; other students create their own surveys. Some examples of topics that might lend themselves to survey research are:

- A study of opinions about religion in EU countries
- A study of political trust in Africa
- A study of student perceptions of the teaching profession at Harvard
- A study of parental opinions about school choice in Cambridge

If a student in your junior tutorial is interested in doing a survey, you may want to start out by explaining that in a junior tutorial, when time is very limited, it is easier to use surveys created by other social scientists than to create one’s own. Encourage your student to get familiar with social science surveys that have already been done, and to find out whether the data he is interested in is already available. If the data is not available, you and your student may consider going through the process of creating a survey and administering it to a small number of people for the purposes of the junior tutorial paper. While a survey of a very small number of people will necessarily be suggestive rather than conclusive, it may be worth it for your student to learn how to create a survey and to go through the process of administering it as he prepares for his senior thesis research. However, a student who wants to create his own survey will need to start very early, especially if you have not obtained blanket human subjects approval for course projects in your tutorial. In addition to obtaining the necessary approvals (both from the Committee on Human Subjects, if needed, and from the necessary organizations or individuals), developing a survey takes a great deal of time.

Below I’ve listed a number of surveys and data that students can use.

Some Common Social Science Surveys (collected by Dan Hopkins)

Institute for Quantitative Social Science Dataverse (repository of data sets)
<http://dvn.iq.harvard.edu/dvn/>

Polling the Nations (database of polling questions worldwide)
<http://poll.orspub.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/>

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General Social Survey (US survey by sociologists)

<http://www.norc.org/GSS+Website/>

American National Election Study

www.electionstudies.org

European Social Survey (social and political survey of European countries)

<http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/>

World Values Survey

<http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/>

Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey (data on social capital in US communities)

<http://www.cfsv.org/communitysurvey/>

Afrobarometer

<http://www.afrobarometer.org/>

Students who want to use this data will need to learn how to download and manipulate the data, and will need to choose a statistical program with which to analyze the data. The most common programs are SPSS and Stata, both of which are available for downloading from Harvard.

The Student-Created Survey

If you and your student decide that the best course of action is to design and administer a survey, the first step is to define the population of interest and determine how you will sample it. Ideally, your student would obtain a list of the population (e.g., a roster of students, voters in a precinct, workers in a firm), randomly select a sample, and make every effort to survey those sampled. This is not always possible, however, as some people will not be reachable and others will refuse to be sampled. Students are sometimes surprised to discover this; they expect that everyone will be as enthusiastic about their research as they are! You can gently remind them that study participants rarely benefit from the study as much as the student will and that it costs them time and energy. This lesson is worth reminding students who are doing all kinds of empirical research, not only those doing surveys.

If it is not possible to get a random sample, students should construct a sample that is as unbiased as possible. In particular, students should ensure that everyone in the population has an equal chance to be part of the sample. For example, a student may try to recruit welfare recipients from a center in Somerville for his survey by posting signs around that center (with permission, of course). He may not be able to get equal access to every recipient: some may not go to the center during the month he is doing his research and others may read the sign and not want to participate. But the student should at least ensure that he has put up his recruitment posters in an easily accessible area and that he responds to each phone call promptly and makes an equal effort to interview each person who responds to his recruitment poster.

Students who are relying on biased samples (and most undergraduate-collected sam-

ples will be biased) should spend some time thinking (and should describe in the paper) about this bias and how it could affect results. For example, if a student studying work-family expectations among Harvard students sends a survey to all members of one of the Harvard houses (some 400 students) but only receives 50 responses back, she should consider what she knows about the students who filled out the survey and incorporate this information into her analysis of her data results. Are they disproportionately men or women? Are they disproportionately from one class year (seniors, for example)? Are they from any particular regions or social classes? If the responses are unrelated to the argument the student wants to make, then bias is less of a problem than it is if they are related.

Students creating surveys for Social Studies thesis projects typically survey about 100 people, again for reasons of time and resources. This means that any statistical tests they perform on the results are less likely to be significant, and students should address this issue as they present their results.

The All-Important Question Wording

This is the big Kahuna of survey (as well as interview) design. Some good sources are Floyd Fowler's *Improving Survey Questions* and Stanley Payne's *The Art of Asking Questions*. However, here are some general rules of thumb (developed by Dan Hopkins, with some additions from Anya Bernstein).

- **Keep the questions as simple as possible.** Avoid "double-barreled" questions that tap multiple dimensions. One example of what to avoid: "Would you say President Obama is handling foreign affairs well, or that he is handling the economy well?" Obviously, these are two questions, not one.
- **Pay attention to question wording.** Use clear, broadly understood phrases, and where possible, use survey questions that have been previously validated or pre-tested.
- **Try to describe response scales in meaningful terms to anchor them.** You may want to anchor "10" with "strongly agree" and "1" with "strongly disagree." Using an odd-number of response categories (1-5 rather than 1-10) may encourage center-seeking behavior (your respondent may answer: "3" to everything).
- **Keep in mind that survey respondents will look for clues as to what the survey researcher might want to hear.** Be very attentive to questions that could elicit concerns about social desirability—e.g. it is notoriously hard to assess racial attitudes accurately. Also, try not to cue the respondents in particular directions. "This is a survey about levels of racism in the U.S." would not be an effective way to start most surveys.
- **One way to make a question neutral is to offer two diverging perspectives, and ask the respondent to compare herself to those two.** "Some people think that the United States should be more involved in the Middle East conflict. Some people think that it should be less involved. How about you, what do you think?" This is a better question than, "Do you think the United States should be more involved in the Middle East?"
- **Survey respondents infer the meaning of a given question based on previous questions in the survey.** Pay close attention to question order, and ask broad or open-ended questions early

on, before you have primed the respondent with your specific topic.

- **Order your questions such that sensitive questions come later in the interview, when the respondent has developed some level of trust.** Income is almost always one of the last questions asked in surveys.
- **Avoid hypothetical questions where possible;** instead, ask about concrete behaviors.

Presenting Survey Data

As your student starts to analyze his data, encourage him to make graphs of the responses, to see what kind of variation there is. It may also be helpful for him to create cross-tabs, showing, say, the distribution of men as compared to women who voted for Obama. Encourage your student to compare the data from the survey to the secondary literature and to the hypotheses he developed at the beginning of the project. A major goal of the paper will be to explain why the findings do or do not fit with the original hypothesis. Finally, encourage your student to step back from the findings of this survey and consider what he would do if he had more time and was able to redesign the survey or survey more or different people. This may lead not only to a better argument in the paper but also to a more clearly defined thesis project, if the paper leads in that direction.

Junior Tutorials and Junior Tutorial Research Papers in Theory

by Verity Smith

The main purpose of this section is to provide suggestions for tutors teaching junior tutorials in “theory”—that is, tutorials that primarily engage conceptual, interpretive, philosophical, or normative questions and debates, and rely primarily upon social theoretic, political theoretic, or philosophical texts. It is also intended, however, to provide suggestions for aiding students interested in writing conceptually-oriented research papers in tutorials that include a mix of theoretical and empirical materials and focus on a combination of theoretical and empirical questions, as many junior tutorials do.

As with other junior tutorials, junior tutorials in theory are organized primarily around a theme, though they may also be historically delimited (that is, focus on a particular period or periods). The primary discipline(s) on which a junior tutorial in theory may draw may be Philosophy, Political Science, Anthropology, Intellectual History, Gender Studies, Art and Aesthetics, Culture Studies, African-American Studies, Sociology, Law & Society, or other related fields. But whatever the primary disciplinary focus of the tutorial, the aim of a theory tutorial is two-fold, just as it is in other junior tutorials: to both further students’ thinking about a particular theme, and to familiarize them with approaches to research that they may employ in their research paper (and, ultimately in their thesis project).

Junior tutors focusing on theoretical questions and/or texts face some unique challenges in this regard. As is the case in any junior tutorial, some students will be drawn to the course primarily for the “content” or theme, whereas others are attracted to the methodology or approach. This duality of purpose is even more pronounced in theory tutorials. Tutors are likely to discover that some students are not inclined towards theory (having taken the course because the theme appeals to them), whereas others have little interest in the theme itself, having simply wanted to take “a theory seminar.” Helping each of these constituencies find a suitable research subject means being flexible as to whether a given student’s research paper focuses on a particular thinker or concept, or whether, contrariwise, the student wants to connect an aspect of the theoretical literature to an empirical problem, or a concrete cultural artifact (using, for example, a philosophical debate to illuminate a historical or legal case, an event, a trend in law-making, an art object, a set of policy debates, or so on).

Another issue faced by junior tutors teaching theory tutorials is that of how to introduce students to a range of styles of interpretation. While some tutorials draw on an array of interpretive approaches, others may draw primarily from work in a particular interpretive tradition (e.g. historically contextualist, analytic, continental, Marxist, feminist, or so on). In the former instance, it is important that these approaches be flagged in the course of class discussion, so that students begin to see various ways in

which one might construct a theoretical argument. In the latter case, it is helpful if the approach used is made explicit, and alternative approaches to the topic are at least mentioned (ideally with references provided), so that students begin to understand that there are competing modes of interpretation, and can determine which to employ in their own work.

Common Confusions Regarding Theory Research Papers

Additionally, there are several common confusions regarding the research process for a theory paper which are useful to dispel as early in the semester as is possible. The first, and perhaps most prevalent one, is that the research paper is just a longer version of a ss10 paper. Because most of the students enrolled in junior tutorials have already completed ss10, they do have significant experience reading and writing about social theoretic texts, which is a major advantage in teaching a junior tutorial in theory. However, students often thus assume that the research paper should engage a ss10 thinker or thinkers (this is also a common myth in the thesis-writing process, and so it is helpful to clear this up sooner than later). Thinking back to classic social theory may indeed be useful in engaging the students in class discussion, and/or in helping them brainstorm regarding potential research questions and themes. But it is not only unnecessary, but sometimes problematic for the research paper to focus on these texts, as it encourages students to think of the research paper as an interpretive exercise more akin to a short ss10 paper than to a substantial piece of research. The key here is to stress the importance of framing an argument in terms of a lacuna it fills in interpretive debates, and/or in terms of the contribution it makes to the secondary literature, which is something students need not consider when writing for ss10.

The second common confusion students have is related to the one above. Because they may think of theoretical texts as “standing alone” in some sense (indeed, they are usually encouraged not to draw on secondary sources in ss10), they may assume that the library visit (discussed in Section 2 of this Handbook, above) and the cultivation of general research skills does not apply to them if they wish to write a theory research paper. Besides stressing, again, the role of the secondary literature in interpreting theoretical texts, tutors might also suggest that students consider archival sources and/or sources not available in English-language versions (depending, of course, on a given student’s language skills), and each of these dimensions to research in theory require library skills. Susan Gilroy, the reference librarian at Lamont Library who will run the library visits, is excellent at helping students interested in theoretic questions and texts, just as she is in working with the more empirically-minded amongst our students. Thus, it may be useful to set up an additional visit for tutorials running in the Spring term at which your students can discuss available research strategies if they attended a library visit in a non-theory tutorial in the Fall, but later wish to do work in theory.

Finally, students are often confused as to what constitutes a “methodology” in a theory-based research paper. This is, indeed, often a source of great anxiety for students during the thesis-writing process, and so, again, it is helpful to clarify this issue in the junior tutorial. Generally speaking, it tends to be more helpful to stress differences in *interpretive approaches* (as discussed above) rather than *methodologies* in theory-based tutorials. A given student may thus take a historically contextualist approach (Skinnerian or otherwise), a deconstructive approach, a Marxist approach, a feminist theoretic approach, a Weberian approach, or so on. While some scholars working in theory con-

sider a given approach to entail something akin to a social scientific method, many do not do so. Thus, this language may be misleading when aiding students in executing their research papers.

Suggestions for Syllabus Design, Staged Research Assignments, and Teaching Strategies

Most of the suggestions raised in Section 2 of this handbook apply to theory-based tutorials as well as non-theory based ones. In particular, asking students to submit a topic (with perhaps a short commentary appended) early in the term is very useful, as is requiring them to submit a prospectus with a preliminary bibliography appended, and/or an annotated bibliography in which they demonstrate their familiarity with relevant secondary literature.

Additionally, many tutors have found it particularly useful to have students in theory-based tutorials sign up for short “response papers” (perhaps two per term), in which they make an argument that may or may not be absorbed into their larger project. This helps them identify debates of particular interest to them early in the term, and/or, just as usefully, to rule out those they will not want to engage in their own research. These papers might then be circulated to all class members by the student (say, by 8:00 p.m. the night before tutorial), presented briefly in tutorial, and thus not only help frame the discussion in a given session, but aid students in thinking through their ideas (and getting peer feedback regarding the same) in a nascent form, as they begin to formulate a larger research question for the tutorial paper.

And, too, junior tutors teaching theory-based tutorials may want to consider assigning presentations of key pieces of secondary literature (literature identified by the tutor) so that students have some sense of how scholars doing interpretive work engage theoretic texts and questions. This is a particularly useful assignment if a given tutorial focuses a great deal on classic texts, in that students can get a sense of the range of things scholars might focus on in interpreting the work of canonical thinkers.

Relatedly, tutors will greatly aid their students first forays into research on a theory-related topic or thinker if they distribute bibliographies in each session (or each unit of the course) listing additional literature on a given subject or thinker. This can serve as a starting point so that students do not remain wedded to the reading done in tutorial itself in constructing their research topic.

Additional strategies that tutors teaching theory-based tutorials may find particularly useful are the staging of class debates and/or the distribution of weekly reading and discussion questions. While these strategies tend to be helpful in any seminar, it is particularly important that students in theory-based tutorials have a model for the type of questions one might ask of theoretical texts and concepts, as they are often less accustomed to thinking in that manner than in asking empirical questions, in spite of the fact that they have (usually) already taken ss10.

Finally, it may be helpful for tutors teaching theory-based tutorials to set out some key philosophical terminology for students early in the term – explaining, for example, the differences between *epistemological* questions, *ontological* questions, *normative* questions, and *phenomenological* questions, or between *genealogical* and *non-genealogical* views of history. These and other philosophical distinctions are not only useful tools in students’ critical engagement with theory-based material, but will often appear in the secondary

literature, the reading of which can be quite daunting for students not familiar with this terminology.

What Constitutes a Contribution to Research in Theory?

While students in all junior tutorials need help establishing what might constitute an original contribution to research, students taking theory-based tutorials tend to be even more perplexed and/or anxious in this regard. They may worry that they must “solve” or fully “answer” long-running, fundamental philosophical questions and quandries. Or they may feel they must read or address *all* of the relevant secondary literature in order to come up with a fully “new” interpretation.

Thus, it is helpful to provide students with several models of what a theory-paper could look like, whether via the secondary literature assigned and/or listed for students bibliographically, or through brainstorming with students as to research topics. A student with foreign language skills may, for example, contribute to the English-language literature on a given topic by translating and commenting on a key text not yet available to readers. Or he or she might do archival work, historical, or otherwise. S/he might use theoretic debates and texts to shed light on an empirical problem or to make sense of a cultural artifact (such as, say, the design of a particular war-time memorial). Or s/he may attempt to parse the various senses of a key theoretical concept which have been glossed over and/or run together. Whatever the interpretive approach and the contribution intended, however, students should always aim to make the *stakes* of interpretive debates evident in their research papers. Helping students draw these out is a key part – perhaps *the* key part – of advising student research in theory-based tutorials.

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