

**Sociology Department
University of California San Diego**

**SOCI 106
Comparative and Historical Methods
Spring 2026**

When: Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays 11:00am - 11:50am

Where: Coalition Building Room 122

Instructor: Dr. Maud Arnal, PhD, CPM, LM (she/her)
Lecturer, Sociology Department
University California San Diego
Email: mmarnal@ucsd.edu

Office Hours: Mondays 02:00pm - 4:00pm on Zoom, and by appointment
Zoom link: <https://ucsd.zoom.us/j/99149801337>

Course Credits: 4

Prerequisites: This is an upper-division elective course for undergraduate students in the Sociology department. Others require permission of the instructor to enroll.

Format: Lectures, discussion, and case study. Each class will provide an opportunity to discuss the key issue identified for that day through a combination of presentations and discussions.

Course Description¹:

Comparative-historical methods in sociology includes a diverse set of inquiries and approaches. Despite this diversity, there are some general theoretical issues, methodological frameworks, and substantive topics, which have dominated the field, including studies of multiple case analyses, large-scale social change, and regional and/or historical variation. This course examines the methods and reasoning commonly employed by comparative and historical sociologists with a focus on maternal and child health. In addition to exploring comparative and historical sociology's logic of inquiry – considering key problems, debates, and approaches within the methodological tradition – it will sensitize students to comparative and historical sociology as a genre of sociological writing and orient them to the practicalities of conducting this type of research. The course operates at both a macroscopic level and a microscopic level in which students will be encouraged to cultivate what C. Wright Mills calls “the sociological imagination”². The objective

¹ *Acknowledgement:* This course is modeled and further informed by reflection on courses taught by Heather Harper, Robert Jansen, Catherine Lee, Christine Payne, Efe Pecker.

² Mills, C. W. 1959. *The sociological imagination*. Oxford University Press.

is both to provide a foundation for further sociological study of comparative-historical methods, and to acquire a way of thinking which can offer a point of departure for one's own research. A single quarter can provide only a sampling of the current range of theory and empirical work on the comparative and historical methods in sociology. The course offers a series of lectures, readings, and exercises to inform students' critical comparative exploration of various historical moments of significant social change. The purpose of this course is to develop student's critical thinking through their engagement with the comparative-historical sociology literature to identify, understand, and hone the use of comparative historical methods to enlighten past, present, and future processes of social change.

According to Joanne G. Kurfiss³, critical thinking is "a rational response to questions that cannot be answered definitively and for which all the relevant information may not be available. It is defined here as an investigation whose purpose is to explore a situation, phenomenon, question, or problem to arrive at a hypothesis or conclusion about it that integrates all available information and that therefore can be convincingly justified. In critical thinking, all assumptions are open to question, divergent views are aggressively sought, and the inquiry is not biased in favor of a particular outcome." By adopting a critical social science approach to exploring processes of social change in sociology students will gain a comprehensive initiation to the comparative-historical methods, while taking a critical look at their own representations of selected topics.

Course Objectives: Having successfully completed this course, the students will be able to:

1. Embed comparative and historical methods in their sociological research;
2. Demonstrate an understanding of how adopting a comparative-historical sociological perspective help to develop critical thinking in their sociological research;
3. Distinguish between various methods of sociohistorical comparison;
4. Critically analyze and synthesize theoretical arguments, current research and scholarly work on comparative-historical sociological methods;
5. Engage in scholarly discussion about topics covered in class;
6. Imagine, develop, and write a research proposal on a selected topic and demonstrate skills to engage with the methods used in a comparative-historical sociological perspective;
7. Demonstrate awareness of ways in which the critical comparative exploration of various historical moments of significant social change used in the assigned readings is developed to enlighten the complexity of their chosen topic.

³ Kurfiss, J.G. 1988. *Critical thinking: Theory, research, practice, and possibilities*. Washington, DC: Association for the Study of Higher Education.

Course Requirements and Assessment:

There will be a variety of assignments and graded projects for this course. The diversity in assignments is meant to ensure success for different kinds of learners and to offer many opportunities for accumulating points. The course requirements, on which student evaluation is based, are as follows:

1. Class Attendance and Participation	20%
2. Reflective discussion posts (n=7)	21%
3. Midterm Research Proposal	28%
4. Final Research Proposal	28%
5. Midterm Evaluation Survey	3%
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Total	100%

Course Requirements:

General requirement: Teaching and learning are interrelated. Instructors and students are expected to be active participants in this course and other student-led activities. The instructor's responsibility has been to develop a core Comparative and Historical Methods class that addresses significant topics and concepts in the field and to prepare individual sessions, exercises and assignments that will facilitate students' learning. Please realize that not all significant topics and concepts can be addressed by a one quarter core course. Topics have been chosen thoughtfully in order to give initial exposure to foundational inquiries and approaches. The student's responsibility as a learner is to engage with the course ideas, to come to class prepared to participate in class discussions, exercises, and to learn to think critically as she/he/they listen/s, write/s and discuss/es.

Attendance: Attendance is required for both in-person and remote sessions. Your attendance and active participation in every class session is central to your ability to succeed in this course. Active participation in workshops and discussions is essential. Student can earn up to 2 points per class for attendance and participation. The Sociology Department in the School of Social Sciences at the University of California San Diego expects students to attend class on time and to stay until the end. University of California believes that significant student learning occurs in the classrooms and recognizes the importance of in-class experiences, and if missed by a student even for legitimate reasons, cannot be fully recovered. Students are responsible for any missed content, announcements, due dates, homework assignments, date changes, etc. when they miss a class. To the extent possible, please inform the instructor if you know ahead of time that you will be absent or late for a class. In case of extraordinary circumstances (e.g. serious illness, death in the family, etc.), considerations will be made regarding any assignments that occur in the timeframe of the emergency. Please note that the extensions are not guaranteed and will be granted solely at the discretion of the instructor. Missing more than two sessions will negatively impact your grade.

Class participation: Students are expected to participate in workshops, discussions, exercises, and group work to the best of their abilities. They are expected to read the articles and listen to the videos or audio files listed as “required” in advance of the session, so that they can use the information in class and actively participate.

Required readings: Weekly readings will be made available through Canvas every Monday for the following week. Complementary readings will be suggested from time to time for students who wish to pursue selected topics in depth. Students are encouraged to share other helpful resources with the class. Please come to class prepared to critically and actively engage with the assigned texts listed for that day.

Reflective discussion post: The reflective discussion post represents a summary of critical thoughts in response to the required readings. The purpose of this exercise is to allow students a chance to process weekly class material and to help students to develop questions, comments, or critiques to interact with the material presented during the lectures. It will also help the instructor assess students’ understanding of materials and readings. Students are invited to write one paragraph (150-200 words) that should include 1) a summary of the main argument and 2) students' opinion of each assigned reading. These do not need to be perfectly written; the substance of ideas is more important than the presentation. Students will post a total of 7 times throughout the semester. Please post the reflexive discussion post on Canvas **by 11:59pm every Sunday**.

Research Proposal:

Students will imagine a research proposal providing an opportunity to study a topic of their choice by integrating lectures and readings on the comparative and historical methods. This proposal should identify a researchable problem, situate it theoretically, and elaborate a suitable research design. These projects are designed to give students agency and control over their learning process, while also allowing them to explore sociology in creative and personal ways. The assignment should demonstrate comprehension and utilization of theories, methodologies, and approaches developed in comparative-historical sociology.

The midterm and final research proposal are assigned to help students improve their sociological imagination, analytical skills, critical thinking, and to become familiar with how they can develop a critical comparative exploration of various historical moments of significant social change. Students are expected to clearly present their comparative and historical sociology’s logic of inquiry about the topic of their choice, and the methods they intend to develop to explore this topic (drawing on their own research, class readings and discussions).

The final research proposal must be organized as follows: 1) present the topic chosen, 2) justify its importance in regard to the comparative-historical sociological perspective, 3) identify and summarize existing scientific literature, 4) develop your research questions, 5) elaborate a proposed methodology.

Midterm Research Proposal:

Students will submit one midterm writing presenting the topic they have selected and how they intend to study and develop it to develop their final research proposal. The midterm assignment is designed to help students to imagine and conceptualize their final project and to receive feedback.

- Considering the comparative and historical methods in sociology, students will define a specific topic to develop their own research proposal, identify a researchable problem, and situate it theoretically.
- The midterm research proposal writing must be organized as follows: 1) present the topic chosen, 2) justify its importance in regard to the comparative-historical sociological perspective, 3) identify and summarize existing scientific literature.
- Paper length is **minimum 500 words, maximum 700 words** (word count includes footnote/ endnotes, but excludes bibliography), single-spaced, fully justified, and with 1" margins on all four sides. The font must be Times Roman, double-spaced, and the font size must be 12.
- Please utilize the **APA Style** when formatting references. Exact formats and citation styles for written assignments are based on the American Psychological Association see: <https://apastyle.apa.org/> I strongly encourage the adoption of an electronic citation system such as Zotero, Mendeley, EndNote or others.
- **A minimum of 5 references is required for the bibliography of your midterm paper.** The reference for this assignment consists of peer-reviewed articles (see guidelines and list on Canvas), official reports by governmental agencies such as the United States Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Maternal and Child Health Bureau (MCHB), etc., and official reports by international organizations such as the WHO and the UNICEF.
- Midterm assignment is due by **11:59 pm on May 3rd**. Assignment must be submitted on Canvas. Research proposals turned in late will be assessed a penalty: a half-letter grade if it is one day late, or a full-letter grade for 2-4 days late. Research proposals will not be accepted if late by more than three days.

Final Research Proposal:

Based on their midterm assignment and the feedback they have received; students will continue to develop and finalize their final research proposal. In the final research proposal students will elaborate on their research puzzle by analyzing and evaluating the scientific literature, developing adequate research questions in the comparative-historical sociological perspective, and elaborate a proposed methodology. Further guidelines will be provided in class.

- The final research proposal must be organized as follows: 1) present the topic chosen, 2) justify its importance in regard to the comparative-historical sociological perspective, 3) identify and summarize existing scientific literature, 4) develop your research questions, 5) elaborate a proposed methodology.
- Paper length is **minimum 1000 words, maximum 1400 words** (word count includes footnote/ endnotes, but excludes bibliography), single-spaced, fully justified, and with 1” margins on all four sides. The font must be Times Roman, double-spaced, and the font size must be 12.
- Please utilize the **APA Style** when formatting references. Exact formats and citation styles for written assignments are based on the American Psychological Association see: <https://apastyle.apa.org/> I strongly encourage the adoption of an electronic citation system such as Zotero, Mendeley, EndNote or others.
- The analysis of a **minimum of 8 peer-reviewed references** that are required for the bibliography of your final research paper to help you to develop and to support your proposed methodology. The bibliography can include references covered and discussed in class, readings assigned, and peer-reviewed already identified for the midterm paper. The evidence base for this assignment consists of peer-reviewed articles, official reports by governmental agencies such as the United States Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and official reports by international organizations such as the WHO and the UNICEF. Statistics and facts that appear in lay publications, even respected ones such as the New York Times, Wall Street Journal, or their international equivalents, should be traced to their original sources and cited accordingly.
- Final research proposal is by **11:59 pm on June 7th**. Assignment must be submitted on Canvas. Final research proposals submitted after this deadline will not be accepted.

Students are invited to make an office hours appointment any time to discuss their midterm and/or final research proposal before the due date.

Individual Midterm Session Evaluation Survey: Your feedback helps to assess the effectiveness of individual sessions, provide requested feedback to guest speakers, and most importantly to keep improving this course in real time and for future quarters. Therefore, you are asked to complete a midterm evaluation survey to receive full credit for this portion of your grade. The evaluation is very brief and will be made available through Canvas on Week 5 **from April 27th to May 4th**. **Your submissions will be anonymous** – I will be able to see that you completed the evaluation, but the survey results will not be attached to your name. The evaluation will be open for completion for a week, after which point the evaluation will be closed. These evaluations are also an opportunity for you to provide general feedback to the instructor about how the class is going, not specific to a session. There will also be an opportunity to provide anonymous feedback through the Department (which will also be shared with the instructor) at the end of the quarter: <https://set.ucsd.edu/>.

Course Assessment:

Grading: Grades are assigned based on the following letter grade and marks criteria (see below).

Letter Grade and Marks:

A+	96.50 – 100	B+	86.50 – 89.49	C+	76.50 – 79.49	D+	66.50 – 69.49
A	92.50 – 96.49	B	82.50 – 86.49	C	72.50 – 76.49	D	60.00 – 66.49
A-	89.50 – 92.49	B-	79.50 – 82.49	C-	69.50 – 72.49	F	59.00 and below

Key Dates:

ASSIGNMENT	DEADLINE	SUBMISSION TYPE
Reflective Discussion Posts	Every Sunday By 11:59pm	On Canvas
Midterm Evaluation Survey	From April 27th to May 4th By 11:59pm	On Canvas

Midterm Paper	May 3rd By 11:59pm	On Canvas
Final Paper	June 7th By 11:59pm	On Canvas

Course policy:

Late Work Policy: Assignments turned in late will be assessed a penalty: a half-letter grade (0.5 point) if it is one day late, or a full-letter grade (1 point) per day late for 2-4 days late. Assignments will not be accepted if late by more than four days other than under exceptional circumstances. Assignments submitted after June 7th will not be graded. Final research proposals submitted after June 7th will not be accepted.

Grades of "Incomplete": The current university policy concerning incomplete grades will be followed in this course. Incomplete grades are given only in situations where unexpected emergencies prevent a student from completing the course and the remaining work can be completed the next quarter. Your instructor is the final authority on whether you qualify for an incomplete. Incomplete work must be finished by the end of the subsequent quarter or the "I" will automatically be recorded as an "F" on your transcript.

Writing Policy: Commentary on written work will be delivered in written format, at the end of the assignment. However, upon request, an alternate delivery method can be used. If desired, instructor comments can be made verbally and delivered to the student as an mp4. This approach yields far fewer written comments, but much more commentary in general is delivered, due to the speed and specificity of speech. Those requesting mp4 feedback must state so when the essay is turned in. All papers should demonstrate mastery of grammar, punctuation, spelling, and syntax expected of college level students. If you need writing assistance, please seek help from the Student Support Services Program in the Office of Academic Support and Instructional Services (OASIS). You can also contact the UCSD Writing Hub (writinghub@ucsd.edu). All papers are to be word-processed, proofread, and solely the work of the author.

Student Expectations:

Statement of University of California’s Policy on Integrity of Scholarship: The UCSD Policy on Integrity of Scholarship provides in-depth information about the policies and procedures relating to student integrity of scholarship.

According to the policy, “Integrity of scholarship is essential for an academic community. The university expects that both faculty and students will honor this principle and in so doing protect the validity of university intellectual work. For students, this means that all

academic work will be done by the individual to whom it is assigned, without unauthorized aid of any kind. Instructors, for their part, will exercise care in planning and supervising academic work, so that honest effort will be upheld.”

More information can be found on the Academic Senate Office website: <https://senate.ucsd.edu/operating-procedures/senate-manual/>.

Statement Related to Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: If you require classroom accommodation because of a disability, you must first contact the Office for Students with Disabilities (<https://osd.ucsd.edu/>) to determine eligibility for modifications, and other adjustments and accommodations due to a disability. You should inform the course instructor as soon as possible regarding eligibility determinations. The university is committed to providing reasonable accommodations to assist students in their coursework.

Counseling and Student Health: Students may occasionally have personal issues that arise in the course of pursuing higher education or that may interfere with their academic performance. If you find yourself facing problems affecting your coursework, you are encouraged to talk with an instructor or to seek confidential assistance at Student Health Services, 858-534-3300 or Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS), 858-534-3755. Visit their website for more information: <https://wellness.ucsd.edu/Pages/default.aspx>.

Crisis intervention is always available 24/7 from: CAPS, 858-534-3755. **BUT** – Do not wait until you reach a crisis to come in and talk with us. We have helped many students through stressful situations impacting their academic performance. You are not alone so do not be afraid to ask for assistance.

Title IX Statement: The Office for the Prevention of Harassment and Discrimination (OPHD) is the Title IX Office for UC San Diego and investigates reports of sexual harassment, sexual violence, dating and domestic violence and stalking. You may file a report online with the UC San Diego Office for the Prevention of Harassment and Discrimination (OPHD) at <https://ophd.ucsd.edu/> or you may call OPHD at 858-534-8298.

Please note that University employees (including faculty and teaching assistants), who are not confidential resources, are designated Responsible Employees. Responsible Employees are required to report any incidents of sexual violence or sexual harassment to Michael Diaz OPHD Director / Title IX Officer.

If you are not ready to file a report, but wish to receive confidential support and advocacy, please contact CARE at the Sexual Assault Resource Center (CARE at SARC). CARE at SARC provides violence prevention education for the entire UCSD campus and offers free and confidential services for students, staff and faculty impacted by sexual assault, relationship violence and stalking. Accessing resources at CARE at SARC will not constitute a report to the University.

Academic Conduct Policy: The success of the Honor Code is made possible only with the acceptance and cooperation of every student. Each student is expected to maintain the principles of the Code. Example of Honor Code violations include:

- Giving or receiving information from another student during an examination;
- Using unauthorized sources for answers during an examination;
- Illegally obtained test questions before the test;
- Any and all forms of plagiarism – submit all or part of someone else’s work or ideas as your own;
- The destruction and/or confiscation of school and/or personal property.

Violations of the Honor Code are serious. They harm other students, your professor, and the integrity of the University. Alleged violations will be referred to the Office of Judicial Affairs. If found guilty of plagiarism, a student might receive a range of penalties, including failure of an assignment, failure of an assignment, and withholding of the final course grade until a paper is turned in on the topic of plagiarism, failure of the course, or suspension from the University.

Violations of Academic Integrity: Violations of the principle include, but are not limited to:

- Cheating: Intentionally using or attempting to use unauthorized materials, information, notes, study aids, or other devices in any academic exercise.
- Fabrication and Falsification: Intentional and unauthorized alteration or invention of any information or citation in an academic exercise. Falsification is a matter of inventing or counterfeiting information for use in any academic exercise.
- Multiple Submissions: The submission of substantial portions of the same academic work for credit (including oral reports) more than once without authorization.
- Plagiarism: Intentionally or knowingly presenting the work of another as one’s own (i.e., without proper acknowledgment of the source).
- Abuse of Academic Materials: Intentionally or knowingly destroying, stealing, or making inaccessible library or other academic resource materials.
- Complicity in Academic Dishonesty: Intentionally or knowingly helping or attempting to help another to commit an act of academic dishonesty.

Plagiarism and cheating include, but is not limited to:

- Copying liberally from someone else’s work without his/her/their knowledge or permission; or with his/her/their knowledge or permission and turning it in as your own work.
- Summarizing/paraphrasing in your own words ideas you got from a book, article, or the web without providing the reference for the source.

- Copying anything from a book, article or website and adding or pasting it into your paper without using quotation marks and/or without providing the full reference for the quotation, including page number.
- Copying of someone else's exam or paper.
- Allowing someone to turn in your work as his or her own.
- Not providing adequate references for cited work.
- Copying and pasting large quotes or passages without properly citing them.
- Recycling a paper you wrote for another class.
- Turn in the same (or a very similar paper) for two classes.
- Purchasing or otherwise obtain a paper and turn it in as your own work.

Use of AI and Academic Integrity

In this course, the use of AI tools (such as ChatGPT or similar systems) is not permitted for any assignments. All submitted work must reflect your own thinking, writing, and analysis, in line with UC San Diego's Academic Integrity Policy and the Sociology department's standards (see resources below). Using AI to generate, rewrite, paraphrase, or structure any part of your assignments counts as unauthorized assistance and may be treated as academic misconduct. That said, learning about AI and how to use it responsibly as a learning tool will be covered in class in person. Separately, please note that the instructor may use AI-assisted tools to support fair, consistent, and equitable grading practices (for example, to help check clarity, consistency, or bias in evaluation), but final grading decisions always remain the instructor's responsibility. If you are ever unsure about what is allowed, please ask before submitting your work.

UCSD Academic Integrity & AI Resources

- Academic Integrity Policy: <https://academicintegrity.ucsd.edu/process/policy.html>
- Academic Integrity Office (general): <https://academicintegrity.ucsd.edu/>
- AI & Academic Integrity Guidance: <https://academicintegrity.ucsd.edu/choose-integrity/gen-ai/index.html>
- Academic Integrity in UCSD Catalog: <https://catalog.ucsd.edu/academic-integrity.html>

Instructor Goals:

At a minimum, I hope to pursue the following goals and solicit your open and timely feedback on how well we are meeting these goals:

- Communicate effectively and frequently;
- Be an enthusiastic, active and involved;
- Demonstrate a mastery of the discipline;
- Relate material to current practices;
- Clearly explain complex concepts and ideas;
- Provide a framework for lifelong learning;

- Strive to involve participant in class activities;
- Be available to assist participants in or out of class; and
- Have respect and concern for all participants.

Class Schedule:

Tentative schedule available at the time of syllabus publication, course content might need to be modified. The instructor will inform the students of any changes to topic and readings.

See schedule below and on Canvas for the most up to date schedule!

Module 1 – Introduction to Comparative and Historical Methods

What are Comparative and Historical Methods?

Week 1

Welcome, Class Overview and Expectations – Defining Comparative and Historical Methods

Week 2

What makes historical comparative analysis different? – Designing a project

Required reading: Blee, K. M. (1991). Women in the 1920s' Ku Klux Klan Movement. *Feminist Studies*, 17(1), 57-77.

Module 2 – Types of Historical Arguments and Historical Sources

Cause, Time, and Events

Week 3

The “Discovery” of Child Abuse — Understanding Historical Arguments and Sources

Required reading: Pfohl, S. J. (1977). The “discovery” of child abuse. *Social problems*, 24(3), 310-323.

Week 4

Developing a Comparative Research Proposal

No required reading - Midterm Workshop

Module 3 – Comparative Analysis

Making Comparison

Week 5

“Pricing the Priceless Child” — Understanding Comparison

Required reading: Zelizer, V. A. (1981). The price and value of children: The case of children's insurance. *American Journal of Sociology*, 86(5), 1036-1056.

Week 6

Questioning “Metrics” — Developing Critical Analysis Beyond Data

Required reading: Loudon, I. (1988). Maternal mortality: 1880–1950. Some regional and international comparisons. *Social history of medicine*, 1(2), 183-228.

Module 4 – Making a Comparative-Historical Argument

Case Selection

Week 7 & Week 8

The case of “Hysteria” — How to Develop a Comparative-Historical Argument?

Required readings (both readings are required):

- 1) Mason, K. A. (2022). Blenders, hammers, and knives: postpartum intrusive thoughts and unthinkable motherhood. *Anthropology and humanism*, 47(1), 117-132.
- 2) Adeponle, A., Groleau, D., Kola, L., Kirmayer, L. J., & Gureje, O. (2017). Perinatal depression in Nigeria: perspectives of women, family caregivers and health care providers. *International journal of mental health systems*, 11, 1-13.

Module 5 – Conclusion & Wrap-up

Putting It All Together

Week 9

The “Obstetric Racism” Dilemma — Refining Your Comparative Research Proposal

Required readings (both readings are required):

- 1) Taylor, J. K. (2020). Structural racism and maternal health among Black women. *The Journal of Law, Medicine & Ethics*, 48(3), 506-517.
- 2) Saluja, B., & Bryant, Z. (2021). How implicit bias contributes to racial disparities in maternal morbidity and mortality in the United States. *Journal of women's health*, 30(2), 270-273.

Week 10

“Playing the Numbers Game” — Final Reflections and Course Synthesis

Required reading (both readings are required):

- 1) Shiffman, J., & Shawar, Y. R. (2020). Strengthening accountability of the global health metrics enterprise. *The Lancet*, 395(10234), 1452-1456.
- 2) Storeng, K. T., & Béhague, D. P. (2014). “Playing the numbers game”: evidence-based advocacy and the technocratic narrowing of the safe motherhood initiative. *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, 28(2), 260-279.