

**Sociology**  
First Year PhD Course

Zachary Parolin  
zachary.parolin@unibocconi.it

**Course Outline:**

**TUESDAY, OCTOBER 3**

Sessions 1 and 2: Contours of Sociological Research: Concepts, Ideas, Mechanisms, Methods

**TUESDAY, OCTOBER 10**

Session 3: Earnings and Income Inequality

Session 4: Mechanism Thinking in Inequality Research

**TUESDAY, OCTOBER 17**

Session 5: Comparative Labour Market Research

Session 6: Comparative Research Design

**MONDAY, OCTOBER 30**

Session 7: Power & Social Closure

Session 8: Operationalizing Sociological Concepts

**TUESDAY, OCTOBER 31**

Sessions 9 & 10: Project consultations. See page 7 for expectations. Timing to be communicated via email (but will fall within standard class schedule for all).

**TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 7**

Session 11: Culture, Constraints, and Discrimination

Session 12: Measuring Sociological Phenomena

**TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 28**

Session 13: Place, Context, and Opportunity

Session 14: Mediating and Moderating Effects

**TUESDAY, DECEMBER 5**

Session 15: Group Differences in Theory and Practice

Session 16: Decomposition Techniques

**WEEK OF DECEMBER 11, TBA**

Sessions 17 & 18: Presentation of course projects.

**Time and Room:**

The course will meet nine times. Each meeting consists of two sessions (for example, we will cover both Sessions 1 and 2 during our first meeting).

# Bocconi

**Expectations:** The first session of each meeting will be dedicated to discussing the assigned readings for the week. Students should come to each class with three thoughts related to one of the readings, and will be expected to verbally share these thoughts with classmates. The second half of each session will consist of a research challenge dedicated toward improving specific research techniques that are employed within the week's readings.

**Assessment Methods:**

Class Project (Written) – 30% of Grade

Class Project (Presentation) – 20% of Grade

Class Participation – 50% of Grade

**Class Project:** The project will require students to prepare a research question related to one of the topics covered during the course and to outline the structure of a potential journal article that addresses the research question. The written version of the project should provide an extended outline of the Introduction, Background & Theory, Data & Methods, (First) Findings, and (Abridged) Discussion/Conclusion. To be clear, you are not expected to actually write a full academic paper here; this is instead meant to be an extended outline of a potential paper that you could pursue later during your PhD. For the Findings and Discussion/Conclusion sections, you could show and discuss initial analysis linked to your proposed research project and describe extensions that you wish to do; or provide a detailed reflection of the data you need and the data analysis methods you would need to apply (which methods, why, possible problems), including why you cannot do this now (data access, etc.); describe initial analysis you have conducted on a (somewhat) related population / region / variable, etc. You should then contextualize the relevance of your findings, and how such findings would improve our understanding of the given research topic.

The **presentation** component of the project is a 15-minute presentation of your paper outline. You should treat the presentation as you would if you were presenting your work at an academic conference. After each presentation, classmates will have 10 minutes to pose questions related to your proposed paper. More details will be provided in Session 1.

**The written version of the project will be due on December 23.**

## Sessions 1 and 2: Contours of Sociological Research: Concepts, Ideas, Mechanisms, Methods

### Readings:

Small, Mario L., and Devah Pager. 2020. "Sociological Perspectives on Racial Discrimination." *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 34 (2): 49-67.  
<https://www.aeaweb.org/articles?id=10.1257/jep.34.2.49>

Rosenfeld, Jake. (2021). *You're Paid What You're Worth, And Other Myths of the Modern Economy*. **Chapter 1**. (Available on Blackboard).

Irwin, Neil. (2017) "What if Sociologists Had as Much Influence as Economists?" *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/17/upshot/what-if-sociologists-had-as-much-influence-as-economists.html>

### Research Challenge:

Six perspectives on the gender wage gap

**Session 3:** Earnings and Income Inequality

**Session 4:** Mechanism Thinking in Inequality Research

**Readings:**

Wilmers, N., & Zhang, L. (2022). Values and Inequality: Prosocial Jobs and the College Wage Premium. *American Sociological Review*, 87(3), 415–442. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00031224221089335>

Schneider, D., Hastings, O. P., & LaBriola, J. (2018). Income Inequality and Class Divides in Parental Investments. *American Sociological Review*, 83(3), 475–507. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122418772034>.

**Research Challenge:**

Thinking through social mechanisms

**Session 5:** Comparative Labour Market Research

**Session 6:** Comparative Research Design

**Readings:**

Carre, F. and Tilly, C. (2018). *Where Bad Jobs Are Better: Retail Jobs Across Countries and Companies*. Russel Sage Foundation Press. **Read the Introduction and Chapter 7.** (Available on Blackboard).

Storer, A., Schneider, D., & Harknett, K. (2020). What Explains Racial/Ethnic Inequality in Job Quality in the Service Sector? *American Sociological Review*, 85(4), 537–572. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122420930018>

**Research Challenge:**

Layers of comparison: Variation in living and working conditions among platform workers in high-income countries

**Session 7:** Power & Social Closure

**Session 8:** Operationalizing Sociological Concepts

**Readings:**

Western, B. and Rosenfeld, J. (2011). "Unions, Norms, and the Rise in U.S. Wage Inequality." *American Sociological Review*, 76(4) 513–537.

Weeden, Kim. (2002). "Why Do Some Occupations Pay More than Others? Social Closure and Earnings Inequality in the United States." *American Journal of Sociology* 2002 108:1, 55-101

**Research Challenge:**

From idea to input: Operationalizing complex concepts, Pt. 1

## **Sessions 9 & 10: Project consultations.**

This week will be dedicated to one-on-one meetings to discuss your end-of-term project. You should prepare preliminary answers to the following questions (as brief as one or two sentences is fine) to bring to the meeting:

1. What broad topic are you interested in studying?
2. What is an example of a research question you could pursue related to that broad topic?
3. How might answering this research question contribute to the broader literature that it relates to?
4. What data source and methods might you apply to answer your research question?
5. What do you anticipate your key findings would be?

**Session 11:** Culture, Constraints, and Discrimination

**Session 12:** Measuring Sociological Phenomena

**Readings:**

Small, M. L., Harding, D. J., & Lamont, M. (2010). Reconsidering Culture and Poverty. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 629(1), 6–27. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716210362077>

Kleven. H. (2022). “The Geography of Child Penalties and Gender Norms: Evidence from the United States” NBER Working Paper 30176. <https://www.nber.org/papers/w30176>

Pager, D., and Shepherd, H. (2008). “The Sociology of Discrimination: Racial Discrimination in Employment, Housing, Credit, and Consumer Markets.” *Annual Review of Sociology*. <https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/abs/10.1146/annurev.soc.33.040406.131740>

**Research Challenge:**

From idea to input: Operationalizing complex concepts, Pt. 2



**Session 13:** Place, Context, and Opportunity

**Session 14:** Mediating and Moderating Effects

## **Readings**

Hook, J. L., & Paek, E. (2020). National Family Policies and Mothers' Employment: How Earnings Inequality Shapes Policy Effects across and within Countries. *American Sociological Review*, 85(3), 381–416. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122420922505>

Parolin, Z., Matsudaira, J., Waldfogel, J., and Wimer, C. (2022). "Exposure to Childhood Poverty and Racial Differences in Economic Opportunity in Young Adulthood." *Demography*.

## **Research Challenge**

Mediators and Moderators

**Session 15:** Group Differences in Theory and Practice

**Session 16:** Decomposition Techniques

Joanna R. Pepin, Liana C. Sayer, Lynne M. Casper. (2018). Marital Status and Mothers' Time Use: Childcare, Housework, Leisure, and Sleep. *Demography* 1 February 2018; 55 (1): 107–133. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13524-018-0647-x>

Chen, WH., Corak, M. (2008). Child poverty and changes in child poverty. *Demography* 45, 537–553 (2008). <https://doi.org/10.1353/dem.0.0024>

## **Research Challenge**

Our new friends: Kitigawa-Oaxaca-Blinder and DiNardo-Fortin-Lemieux

**Sessions 17 & 18:** Presentation of course projects.

Details will be provided during the first meeting.