

Application for Editorship of *Sociological Methodology*

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I. Vision for the Journal

1. A Tradition of Rigor and Excellence

Sociological Methodology (*SM*) is the only American Sociological Association periodical publication devoted entirely to social science research methods. It is the premier journal for publishing methods for sociological research, and a preferred methodology outlet for scholars from sociology and related social science disciplines when their methodological research has broader social science implications. It has a long and illustrious tradition kept by a long list of first-rate methodology editors who have brought out the most rigorous and the most innovative methodological treatises, especially those on quantitative research. Indeed, its impact extends beyond sociology. In addition to sociologists, our colleagues in political science, economics, psychology, and other social science disciplines as well as statistics also publish in *SM* and refer to its articles. *SM* is a publication that has elevated the standing of our discipline among the social sciences because of the high quality and the long shelf life of many of the useful papers that are published in it. *SM*'s authorship as well as readership goes far beyond the confines of our national borders even though it is a journal of the ASA. Hence, at the top of my list of goals is to maintain and further the excellent tradition and the high standing of *SM*. I would accomplish this by publishing, upon the completion of our rigorous review process, the highest quality methodological papers that we can find, especially those that will have an impact on the larger social science research community.

Recent *SM* editors have also successfully attempted to deal with issues of broader concern, typically with a thematic treatise followed by discussions and rejoinders: James Heckman's article on causality in *SM* 05 and Stanley Lieberman and Joel Horwich's essay on implication analysis for linking theory and data in *SM* 08 are two good examples. In addition, the current *SM* editor has taken a giant leap forward by initiating online submission, thereby tremendously streamlining the submission and review process.

I would like to maintain this tradition of excellence and rigor in both the quality of the publications in *SM* and in the management of the journal, with an eye to maintaining and furthering its status in sociology and among other social science disciplines.

2. Broadening the Scope of Sociological Methodology and its Readership

Methodology is central to sociological inquiry. Some early masters of sociology were at once theorist and methodologist: In addition to writing on social theory, Durkheim contributed to methodology through his research on suicide and his book *the Rules of Sociological Method*; Weber penned *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*, and through his analysis of the rise of

capitalism, demonstrated a powerful research design that influenced prominent sociologists of the 20th century including James Coleman, who systemized and updated the Weberian design with the specification of macro-micro links, thereby offering a refined design that still inspires today's sociologists in trying to understand and lay bare social mechanisms.

Three components in the research process can be identified as arguably the most important in impacting sociological research—research design, data collection, and data analysis—once the researcher has formulated meaningful questions. The Weberian analysis of the Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism gives rise to a research design that Coleman described in the late 1980s but is yet to be successfully implemented completely by researchers using empirical social science data. In *SM*, we primarily had articles on data analysis, especially of the quantitative type; less often did we read papers on data collection, and even less often still did we encounter essays on research design in the journal. Such outcome is not really any editor's doing, but a historical development and a sociological fact.

I would endeavor to establish *SM* as an outlet for contributions that together address the full range of methodological problems confronted by researchers in the social sciences with a sociological interest, including conceptualization and modeling, measurement, research design, data collection as well as data analysis of both a qualitative and a quantitative nature (though in the qualitative tradition data collection and analysis are more integrated). My previous interaction with a wide range of social science methodologists while editing the encyclopedia on social science methods would help this endeavor. I would also try and provide a natural forum for engaging the philosophical issues that underpin sociological research. My “dream” *SM* would be a journal that publishes innovative and rigorous methodological advances inspired by *and* inspiring further sociological imagination—papers that understand their philosophical and epistemological terrains and limitations, that are not prisoner to a particular rigid paradigm, and that at once are at the cutting edge of social science methodology and possess a simplicity in their styles of exposition that beginning graduate students can follow, with the ultimate goal of furthering knowledge creation in sociological inquiry.

At the same time of maintaining quality and rigor, I would seek innovative research from diverse methodologies. As a journal, we would welcome methodological work on ethnographic methods, feminist methodology, formal modeling and computational strategies, Geographic Information Systems, historical and comparative methods, mathematical modeling and simulation (including agent based modeling, a highly visible method in multiple disciplines in recent years), visual sociological methods and other creative methods to approach the social world. I would strongly encourage contributions that attempt to compare, combine, or integrate different methodologies, in particular those that appear to be rather different, especially the synthesis of quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Although research on improving mixing qualitative and quantitative methodology is still rather rare, I would use my editorship to support such efforts. One idea to accomplish this goal is to have occasional *thematic* methodological reviews in *SM* of path-breaking empirical research that successfully applied mixed methodology as well as important methodological books in this area, with reviewers from different methodological backgrounds to comment on the research methodology. *SM* 87 featured one such example with a review of Lieberson's *Making it*

Count, even though it was not about mixed methodology. Another possibility is to team up with the ASA Methodology Section about having a session directed at such a synthesis. My term as Chair of the Section would facilitate such attempt. Papers presented at the session could be solicited and considered for possible publication in *SM*. Yet another mechanism to encourage such works on not just mixed methodology but also the range of topics listed earlier is through invited papers to *SM* that would be accompanied by comments and discussion, a practice used before by previous editors of *SM*.

Even though I plan to keep open submission as the main source of manuscripts for the journal, another alternative approach that I would use to locate high-quality papers for *SM* is through screening for high-quality work presented at the annual American Sociological Association convention, the ASA Methodology Section winter conference, and other relevant meetings that I (and our board members) attend. National meetings give us the opportunity to become familiar with work that is nearing completion and of potential promise for *SM*. I would encourage authors of the best of these works to submit them to *SM*. It is my sincere hope that all these approaches combined would keep *SM* at the forefront of cutting-edge social science methodology and would broaden the scope of *SM* by especially strengthening its coverage of topics not often featured so far such as research design and data collection as well as of traditions which tended to be left out of the pages of *SM* such as qualitative and less conventional methodologies.

3. Use of Editorial Board Members

Editorial board members are at once promoters, cheerleaders, quality controllers, and representatives of a journal. If chosen as Editor of *SM*, I would select board members that would guarantee rigor and quality on the one hand, and diversity and representativeness of the discipline on the other, with an eye to both continuity and change. The composition of the editorial board membership, through its gradual rotational changes, would ideally reflect the broad range of topics and issues of methodology discussed in the previous section.

As Alan Sica stated in his recent application for editorship of *Contemporary Sociology*, “The ‘ideal’ board member, of course, is one who knows a lot of capable reviewers, is expert in their area, and works hard for the journal.” This is to be balanced by the members’ diverse backgrounds without sacrificing quality, as he further commented. I would like to add that an “ideal” board member would also need to help promote the journal and have the wellbeing of the journal in mind, not just to be a knowledgeable hardworker who only comes into action when there is a review to be done. The editorial board member would also contribute to the identification of potentially strong contributions to methodology and to the suggestion of new directions in the scope and coverage of the journal. Therefore, the goals presented in the previous two subsections would not be reachable without the teamwork of the editorial board, their suggestions and input, and their collaboration both at the annual board meeting and beyond.

II. Background Information

The past two decades have given me many opportunities for gathering experiences in practicing social science methodology. I have the opportunity of working as an author of and a reviewer for *SM* and other methodological journals as well as (inter)disciplinary substantive journals that publish methodological papers. In addition, I have served as a member of the *Sociological Methodology* editorial board and am a member of the *Sociological Methods & Research* editorial board. Within the ASA, I have been particularly active in the Methodology Section, having served as its newsletter editor and on its board, and am currently chair-elect of the section; overseas, I am on the Steering Committee of the ESRC Oxford Spring School in Quantitative Methods for Social Research in the UK.

Perhaps more importantly, and more relevant to the tasks for *SM*'s editor, I have garnered valuable experiences from serving as editor or deputy editor for journals, newsletters, book series, and encyclopedia. From 1992 to 2000, I served two terms as Deputy Editor of *The Sociological Quarterly*. I assisted Editor of the journal in not just the day-to-day business such as finding appropriate reviewers but also keeping track of, and participating in the key decisions about, certain manuscripts that were more related to my specialties. I also edited a special issue of the journal on demographic models and methods that was published in 1996.

As the Newsletter Editor for the Sociological Methodology Section of the ASA, I resurrected the then defunct section newsletter, and the resumed newsletter was continued by subsequent editors, having now become a successful outlet for the section members. The newsletter today still publishes in the same style format and contains the same type of substantive content that I started—including news items of interest to section members and short articles showcasing teaching tips as well as shorter essays on methodological issues.

I was one of the three co-editors of the *Sage Encyclopedia of Social Science Research Methods* (three volumes, 2004) where we covered both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. This experience would benefit me for editing *SM*, should I be selected, not merely because of the process of reading, editing and reviewing manuscripts but also because of my experience in interacting with all kinds of authors including those with expertise on qualitative methods who contributed as authors or reviewers.

Currently, I serve as a book reviewer advisor for the Royal Statistical Society (RSS) and am Editor for the Sage Quantitative Applications in the Social Sciences (QASS) book series (2004-2009). As a book review advisor, I give suggestions to the Book Review Editor about potential reviewers for books on the list to be reviewed and review books of interest myself occasionally. As Editor of QASS, I oversee the entire process of editing—from encouraging and reviewing prospectuses to making editorial decisions and giving suggestions and comments to authors of prospectuses to reviewing complete book manuscripts and making final decisions and commenting on them—altogether 18 books from 2004 to the present.

III. Institutional Support

It is the convention in the Department of Sociology, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign to support the editing of journals by giving editors some release time (typically one course off in an academic year) and the use of an office and a part-time graduate assistant. The decision of support resides in the Head of the Department. Having served as Head of Department, I would be in a position to obtain necessary support for housing a journal. Thus, it would be without financial complications for *SM* to house its editorial office in the Department of Sociology at the University of Illinois, where all submissions would be sent electronically. A senior graduate student with methodological interests would assist the managing editor, and would be funded by the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (LAS) at Illinois. The student-intern would certainly benefit from this valuable training. Both the current editor Yu Xie and the previous editor Rafe Stolzenberg operates or operated the *SM* editorial office in more or less this way.

The Department of Sociology at Illinois would be able to provide the standard office supplies including desks and chairs, file cabinets, and stationeries. Furthermore, the College of LAS at Illinois is interested in furthering the Department of Sociology's presence in the discipline, as conveyed in a conversation between the dean and myself a year or so ago, and would support any reasonable request put forward by the department toward that goal.

Should I be chosen as Editor of *SM*, the timing of the start of the editorship could not be better. I am the current head who has completed four years of service from the summer of 2004 (the term is usually five years). I would be in a position, before stepping down, to work with the incoming head to guarantee support for *SM*. In addition, by mid-2009 I will have completed my term as Editor of the QASS series. Therefore, I would have fresh memories of working as an editor in the methods area, without the complication of having too many commitments.

In addition to the economic and administrative resources at the University of Illinois, the university is rich in colleagues with relevant expertise. Illinois has a tradition as a leader in both qualitative and quantitative methodology in the social and behavioral sciences. For example, the Department of Psychology (and the Department of Educational Psychology) at Illinois constitute one of the largest collections of quantitative social and behavioral scientists in the world. Illinois also boasts some top researchers in quantile regression, spatial analysis, and network analysis as well as some experienced ethnographers. Every May, the International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry convenes in Urbana, Illinois, with close to one thousand attending. These infrastructural features of Illinois would provide supporting resources for identifying potential authors of less-often covered topics and for spreading the goals and plans of *SM*. Such home base for *SM* would give me ready access to expertise in numerous methodological foci and for potential and, most likely, willing reviewers. As Editor of QASS, I have already called upon the expertise in sociology, economics, psychology, educational psychology, statistics, and political science on my campus. It is not difficult to imagine that such intellectual institutional support would continue should I be selected as Editor of *SM*.