**Data Description (abstract)**

The datasets are part of a longitudinal mixed-methods project evaluating the comparative quality of teaching and learning in sociology related social science degrees in four UK university departments. The concern was with whether students were being justly served by the universities regardless of their social background or the status of the university. The four universities were given the pseudonyms Community, Diversity, Prestige and Selective to reflect their character and position in the league tables. Over the period of the study, Community and Diversity were regularly in the bottom quartile and Prestige and Selective regularly in the top quartile. The research investigated and evaluated the relationship between relative wealth, cultural background, gender, age or disability and the knowledge, pedagogy, curricula they accessed. The questions were investigated by way of interviews exploring first year students’ biographies and university experience, case-studies of students, a survey of students, video-tapes of teaching followed by interviews with the lecturers, interviews with key informants (lecturers who helped us gain access), evaluation of students work, analyses of policy documents, institutional documents and statistics. The research captured the relationship and interactions between students' lives and backgrounds; the degrees that they study; and the conditions in their universities. It helped to gain a better understanding of what should count as a good and just university education in different institutional settings. The data sets available here are curtailed by preserving institutional and individual anonymity.

**The data collection methods used, final sample size and composition as well as sampling method.**

The data partially constituted case-studies investigating the quality of university education in four UK departments that taught sociology related social sciences. The departments were given pseudonyms to reflect their character and were invited to participate on the basis of their position in the UK league tables. The sociology departments at Community (C) and Diversity (D) were in the bottom quartile of the four major UK league tables throughout the period of study (2008-2012) and Prestige (P) and Selective (S) were in the top quartile. We aimed to collect comparable data sets in each institution but they vary according to the composition of the student body and the slight variance in the number of students we managed to gain access to in each institution. The data stored includes: a) life-grids and transcripts from two hour semi-structured interviews pertaining to 98 students about their lives prior to university and their experience of university education and life in their first year (27=C, 23=D, 23=P, 25=S); b) transcripts relating to 31 of these students who became case study students and who were also interviewed about their second and third year education and experiences (6=C, 9=D, 9=P, 7=S); c) a survey of students from all three years of the degree with 769 returns from across the four institutions (210=C, 158=D, 163=P, 238=S) (48.5% 1st Year, 28.9% 2nd Year, 21.7% 3rd Year, .9% 4th Year); d) interviews with 12 seminar tutors who were interviewed about their teaching which was videoed (3=C, 3=D, 3=P, 3=S). The students were all volunteers who responded to requests for participants. The samples matched the distribution of students in each institution by gender, age, ethnicity, disability and social class reasonably well but mature, male and students with declared disabilities were slightly over-represented. Teachers were also volunteers teaching the modules selected for study.