



COMM 305: Understanding Social Science Research

ASC 204

Fall, 2015

Professor: [Carlos Godoy, PhD, Esq.](#)

Office Hours: ANN 306 12:30-1:50; 5:00-7:00 pm Tues/Thurs or by Appt.

E-mail: cgodoy@usc.edu

Course Description

Website:

There is a course website at blackboard.usc.edu. All students enrolled in this course have access to the website through their USC username and password. This website is an official place for posting information relevant to the class, such as announcements, assignments, grades, lecture materials, and so forth.

Course Materials (All Readings will be posted on Blackboard)

You are welcome to purchase a copy of Earl Babbie's *The Basics of Social Research* (5th Edition) ISBN: 0495812242 either in print or as an e-book, if that is easier for you.

Course Overview

Scientific discovery is one of the most exciting experiences anyone can enjoy. This is especially true in the social sciences, because such important and useful lessons can be learned. To understand how and why people think and act as they do is to create powerful handles for improving the quality of life for all of us, now and for future generations to follow.

How can practices be designed to improve players' performances? What can children be taught in school that will prevent them from becoming addicted to cigarettes? What can a political candidate say and do during a campaign in order to win a presidential election? How should cell phones be designed to most effectively prevent them from causing automobile accidents? How can racism in America be eliminated? Social science can provide answers to all these questions and many more, enabling society to maximize individual happiness and collective life satisfaction.

Speculations abound about the nature and causes of human cognition and behavior, but many of those suspicions turn out to be wrong. Only when our assumptions are subjected to objective evaluation using the scientific method can we distinguish illusion from reality.

The purpose of this course is to introduce you to the tools for doing such work. If you are interested in considering a career that entails conducting social science research, these are tools you will

find valuable in doing your work. But almost any career involves and benefits from using social science evidence to inform decision-making. This course will teach you how to interpret this evidence and how to differentiate reliable studies from studies you should view skeptically.

To conduct social research investigating any phenomenon of interest to you, you will need to know:

- (1) What findings exist in the published literature on your phenomenon,
- (2) How to collect objective and accurate data that permit strong scientific inferences,
- (3) How to analyze the data you collect to reach appropriate conclusions,
- (4) How to interpret your findings and identify their implications,
- (5) How to plan your next study of the phenomenon, to build on your last and move your understanding forward even more.

This course will teach you to read research reports to identify the fundamentals of the findings and their meaning. It will expose you to the fundamentals of the primary social science research designs in use these days: laboratory experiments, field experiments, surveys, and unobtrusive methods. It will expose you to the fundamentals of data analysis from a layperson's perspective. And it will expose you to techniques for report writing.

Course Requirements

The fundamental requirements of the course will involve the following:

- 1) Attend all lecture/class sessions and participate actively in class discussions, answering questions and making comments frequently.
- 2) Read all assigned readings.
- 3) Check in with your assigned TA at least once per week and let them know everything is 'ok' so far or if there are any issues or questions that need to be answered.
- 4) Complete the mid-term exam (to be given on October 22nd). The midterm will be composed of multiple-choice, true/false, fill-in and short answer essay questions.
- 5) One 20 minute in-class research study presentation outlining your research proposal to the class and to your 'clients'. These oral presentations will summarize and critique a research article (to be selected by you) and present a better way to research the issue. The purpose of these summaries is to (1) refine skills in discerning the fundamental claims made by a report about causal influence, mediation, and moderation, and (2) refine skills at describing research findings, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of the study design. (Note: These are team projects—groups of 5 per team)
- 6) Write a final team report proposing and justifying the design of a research study that could be conducted (due Wed. May 14th. You may choose any hypothesis of interest for you to investigate. The criteria to be used in grading will be: (1) originality, (2) scientific rigor and convincingness, (3) ability to test for causal influence, mediation,

and moderation, (4) likely social importance of the likely findings. This paper may be no less than 8 pages and more than 10 pages long, double-spaced with one-inch margins, formatting according to the publication manual of the American Psychological Association (5th Edition: <http://www.apastyle.org>) and should propose to use at least 2 complementary methodologies.

7) Be excited about the value and promise of social science research!

Grading

Research participation experience/attendance/quizzes	10%
20-minute research summary	15%
Midterm exam	30%
Final Research Proposal	45%
TOTAL	100%

Class Schedule

Week 1:

Aug 25- Aug 27

Introduction: Readings: Babbie Chapters 1, 2 & 4

The Purposes of Social Research
The magic of scientific inquiry
Theory Construction
Deduction
Induction

Week 2:

Sept 1 – Sept 3

Readings: Babbie Chapter 4 continued
Three Purposes of Research
The Logic of Nomothetic Explanation
Necessary and Sufficient Causes
Units of Analysis
The Time Dimension
How to Design a Research Project
The Research Proposal

Week 3

Sept 8- Sept 10

Chapter 4 & Chapter 5 continued.....

Theory Construction
Deduction
Induction

Hypotheses
Path models
Causality

- Independent vs. dependent variables
- Direct effects
- Mediation
- Moderation

Empirical evaluation

- Description
- Explanation

The logic of hypothesis testing
Steps in designing a research program

Week 4

Sept 15 – Sept 17

Measurement

Constructs
Operationalization
Reliability
Validity
Questionnaire Design

Sampling

Probability sampling

- Simple random sampling
- Systematic sampling
- Stratified sampling
- Multi-stage cluster sampling

Sampling error
Coverage error
Non-probability sampling
Calculating response rates

Week 5

Sept 22 – Sept 24

Field Experiments Readings: Babbie Chapter 12

Purposes of field experiments
Purposes of evaluation research
Experiments vs. quasi-experiments
Non-equivalent control groups
Interrupted time series analysis
Practical challenges of implementing field experiments
Strengths and weaknesses of field experiments

Week 6

Sept 29th –Oct 1st

Surveys Readings: Babbie Chapter 9

Holbrook, A. L., Krosnick, J. A., Visser, P. S., Gardner, W. L., & Cacioppo, J. T. (2001). Attitudes toward presidential candidates and political parties: Initial optimism, inertial first impressions, and a focus on flaws. American Journal of Political Science, *45*, 930-950.

Krosnick, J. A., Holbrook, A. L., & Visser, P. S. (2000). The impact of the Fall 1997 debate about global warming on American public opinion. Public Understanding of Science, *9*, 239-260.

Survey accuracy
Cross-sectional surveys
Repeated cross-sectional surveys
Panel surveys
Focus groups
Modes
Interviewer training
Interviewing
Response rate maximization and impact
Pretesting
Coding
Strengths and weaknesses of surveys

Week 7

Oct 6th –Oct 8th

Unobtrusive Research

Readings: Babbie Chapter 11, Godoy Dissertation Excerpt

Iyengar, S., & Behr, R. (1985). "Television news, real-world cues, and changes in the public agenda", Public Opinion Quarterly, *49*, 38-57.

Tetlock, P. E. (1979). Identifying victims of groupthink from public statements of decision makers. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, *37*, 1314-1324.

Time series analysis
Observational research
Content analysis
Archival analysis
Historical/comparative analysis

Weeks 8

Oct 13th – Oct 15th 5th

Biases in and Ethics of Social Science Research Readings: Babbie Chapter 3

- Experimenter bias
- Demand characteristics
- Placebo effects
- The Hawthorne effect
- Deception
- Debriefing
- Perseverance
- Effects of social research
 - Public policy making
 - Changing the phenomenon being studied
- Effects of surveys
 - Bandwagon effects
 - Topic interest
 - Voter mobilization
- Testimony in court

Week 9

Oct 20th – Oct 22nd

Midterm Exam Review

*****Midterm October 22nd*****

Week 10

October 27th

Report Writing and Reading Readings: Babbie Chapter 17

“Writing” from *The Compleat Academic*, edited by Darley, Zanna, Roediger, Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

- The structure of a good research report
- The structure of a good paragraph
- Creating tension and drama
- What to reveal, how not to distract
- Different styles for different disciplines
- How to read a research report
- How to critique a research report

October 29th Assemble into groups and brainstorm ideas together (group cohesion exercises)

Week 11

Nov 3rd – Nov 5th Group meetings –Individual Team Appointments

Week 12

Nov 10th Presentations Begin

Nov 19th Presentations continued....

Week 13

Nov 25th –Nov 27th No class –Thanksgiving Break

Week 14

Dec 2nd

Presentations continued....

Dec. 4th Presentations continued..... Top Team Awards –
Last day of class
Research Plan Briefs due on Dec 18th

Academic Conduct

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Section 11, *Behavior Violating University Standards* <https://scampus.usc.edu/1100-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions/>. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct/>.

Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university. You are encouraged to report any incidents to the *Office of Equity and Diversity* <http://equity.usc.edu/> or to the *Department of Public Safety* <http://capsnet.usc.edu/department/department-public-safety/online-forms/contact-us>. This is important for the safety whole USC community. Another member of the university community – such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member – can help initiate the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person. *The Center for Women and Men* <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/cwm/> provides 24/7 confidential support, and the sexual assault resource center webpage sarc@usc.edu describes reporting options and other resources.

Support Systems

A number of USC's schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing. Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more. Students whose primary language is not English should check with the *American Language Institute* <http://dornsife.usc.edu/ali>, which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students. *The Office of Disability Services and Programs* http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations. If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, *USC Emergency Information* <http://emergency.usc.edu/> will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.

I will not give you grey hair.

****Welcome to the Class!****