

COMM 305: Understanding Social Science Research (4 Units)

Spring 2020 – Mon, Wed 2:00-3:20p

Section: 20477R

Location: ANN L101

Instructor: Andrea Hollingshead

Office: ANN 414L

Office Hours: After class in classroom and by appt

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Teaching Assistant: Steffie Kim

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TA Assignment: Teams 1-8

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Academic Services

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TA Assignment: Teams 9-16

I. Course Description

Social science is the scientific study of societies and social behavior. Much of what we know about human communication is based on social science research. This course offers practical knowledge about social science research methods so students can become better and more informed consumers of research. The focus is on understanding, evaluating and communicating research rather than on actually conducting research. Topics include research ethics, researcher objectivity and biases, research questions, theory and hypotheses, qualitative research methods (e.g. interviews, participant observations), quantitative research methods (e.g. experiments, surveys and polls), basics of data analysis, interpretation of findings, study limitations, and replication. Most professional careers rely on social science research and data to some extent, so understanding social science research can give students a professional as well as academic advantage.

This is an active and experiential class. I enjoy creating and experimenting with different class activities to help students learn the material such as class exercises and demonstrations, small and large group discussions, and guest speakers. We will randomly divide the class into teams during the second week of the semester, and you will collaborate with your team throughout the semester on in-class assignments and a final team project.

II. Student Learning Outcomes

The specific objectives of the course are to provide students with:

- Concepts and a language for understanding social science research
- Exposure to ethical issues and biases inherent in social science research
- Analytical tools to interpret basic quantitative and qualitative data analyses
- Critical thinking skills to evaluate study strengths and limitations
- Exposure to research that explores how to relate to others in a diverse world
- A safe and supportive class environment for learning and experimentation

III. Course Notes

I will post my slides on Blackboard before each class.

IV. Description and Assessment of Assignments

Exams

There will be two in-class exams. They are not cumulative, and will be a combination of multiple choice, T/F, short answer and essay. The first exam will be on Wednesday, March 11 and the second is during finals week on Monday, May 11 from 2-4pm.

If you have an excused absence (e.g., athletic competition, necessary surgery) and know in advance you cannot take the test on the designated day, you must make arrangements to take a make-up exam earlier than the rest of the class. Check with your TA and professor well in advance about whether your planned absence qualifies as excused. If you are seriously ill on exam day, you will need to contact your TA before the exam and provide documentation from a physician or hospital visit to take a make-up exam. [USC Student Health does not provide routine medical excuses for short-term absences from class or missed assignments due to illness or injury. <https://studenthealth.usc.edu/policy-on-medical-excuses-for-class-absence/>]

Team Project

Your team will choose a research topic and create a video (18 min max) for a general audience that brings to life ideas, methods and findings from at least 5 social science research studies on the topic. You will also turn in your video script, a research critique, and a bibliography. A team topic statement is due from your team on Blackboard by March, March 4. The video and script/critique/bibliography are due on Blackboard by Friday, May 1 by 11:59pm. More specific guidelines will be given early in the semester.

In-Class Assignments

There will be a series of short unannounced in-class assignments almost every week. You must be in class to receive credit. Most will be completed in your team – a few will be completed individually. Some are reading checks. Others involve applying class concepts. If you've read for the week, you should do well on the assignment without any additional studying. There are no make-ups for in-class assignments even for excused absences. Instead you can drop your

three lowest scores. Missing class on an in-class assignment day will count toward your drops. A perfect score on every in-class assignment with no drops will result in 3 extra credit points.

Since part of your grade for this class is based on team work and performance, let your TA know as soon as possible if you feel someone on your team is not carrying his/her weight. Do not wait until the end of the semester and expect that we will be able to address team issues on short notice.

Class Participation and Professionalism

This is a fun course, especially for students who attend every session, keep up with assigned readings and actively participate in class discussions. I expect everyone to stay up to date on course readings and come ready for discussion.

Your class participation grade will be based on your attendance, the frequency and quality of your contributions to your team and to class discussions over the semester. If you have excellent attendance (missing three classes or less) and make high quality comments, you will earn a high participation grade. Perfect attendance (no excused or unexcused absences after Jan 22) will result in 3 extra credit points.

High quality comments:

- Offer a unique and relevant perspective
- Are informed by course material
- Move the analysis forward
- Build on the comments of others
- Include logic or evidence

In addition, this grade includes a professionalism component. I hope to cultivate a safe and positive learning community where everyone is treated with respect and kindness, and feels comfortable expressing their opinions. Everyone should come with a positive attitude and be fully present during class.

Being fully present means that laptops should be used only for class purposes. That means no social media, no online shopping, no game playing, no online news reading etc. during class. It is disruptive, and lowers the energy level in the classroom. (Yes, everyone notices even if you are discreet.) The TAs will monitor and record violations to this policy. Every violation after the first warning will lower your grade by one letter. Mobile phones should not be visible or used during class.

Individual Check-ins

Each week you will receive a brief three-question survey asking about your confidence in the material, something you learned that was interesting/important, and an optional comment section for questions, suggestions etc. Completing all weekly check-ins will lead to high check-in score. No late check-ins will be accepted.

Extra Credit

There are three extra credit opportunities over the semester to reward excellence and contributions to the greater good. We will apply extra credit points to your final grade.

1. The first opportunity is on Thurs., Jan 23. Participate with me in the LA Homeless Count. <https://www.theycountwillyou.org/> Sign up on the website and join me (7pm-midnight) at the location closest to campus (South Central - 3787 S. Vermont.) (See Blackboard for details.) Write a 2-page reflection on the homeless count research method (strengths and challenges) and what you learned about the experience. Due Jan 30. (3 points)
2. If you have perfect attendance beginning January 22 (after teams are formed.) (3 points)
3. If you receive a perfect score on every in-class assignment with no drops. (3 points)

If you do all three above, receive an extra point for a total of 10 points.

V. Grading

Breakdown of Grade

Assignment	% of Grade
Exam 1	25
Exam 2	25
Team Project	20
In-class Assignments	15
Participation & Professionalism	10
Weekly Check-ins	5
TOTAL	100%

Grading Scale

94% to 100%: A	80% to 83%: B-	67% to 69%: D+
90% to 93%: A-	77% to 79%: C+	64% to 66%: D
87% to 89%: B+	74% to 76%: C	60% to 63%: D-
84% to 86%: B	70% to 73%: C-	0% to 59%: F

VI. Assignment Rubrics

All assignments are graded on both content and format. They should be written in complete sentences. Details such as correct spelling, grammar and following assignment instructions are required for an “A” grade.

VII. Assignment Submission Policy

All assignments are due on the date and time specified and must be submitted via Blackboard to receive full credit. Allow plenty of time to upload assignments by the deadline, and double-check to make sure the process was successful.

Late assignments will receive a penalty of one letter grade and will not be accepted more than 24 hours after the deadline. (Emailed assignments to the professor or TAs will not receive credit.)

Any queries about your grade on an assignment or exam must be submitted to your **TA in writing, no sooner** than 24 hours after, and **no later** than one week after receiving your grade. It should include a justification.

VIII. Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

The course textbook is available for purchase on Amazon, Cengage Learning website, and the University bookstore.

Babbie, E. (2016). The basics of social science research. Seventh edition. Cengage Learning.

In addition to chapters from the course textbook, there will be an additional 1-2 research articles and a supplemental TED talk or news article assigned per week. These other course materials will be provided on Blackboard at least one week before they are due in class. The articles cover a range of topics and methods. These additional readings are required and may appear on the in-class assignments and exams.

The textbook is very helpful for introducing social science concepts and principles. However, the best way to learn how to evaluate social science is to read actual social science research articles. They are hard to read at first and will require your full attention and brain capacity. However, it will get easier the more you do it. Try to understand what the researchers were investigating, why, what they did, and what they found. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the research? How would you explain the study to a general audience? Don't worry about the statistics – we'll cover the very basics of statistics later in the semester and talk about how to decipher more sophisticated analyses when you are not a statistics expert. If you have questions or concerns about what the researcher did, write them down and bring them up during class, with your team and/or with your TA

IX. Laptop Policy

All undergraduate and graduate Annenberg majors and minors are required to have a PC or Apple laptop that can be used in Annenberg classes. Please refer to the **Annenberg Digital Lounge** for more information. To connect to USC's Secure Wireless network, please visit USC's **Information Technology Services** website.

X. Add/Drop Dates for Session 001 (15 weeks: 1/13/20 – 5/1/20)

Friday, January 31: Last day to register and add classes for Session 001

Friday, January 31: Last day to drop a class without a mark of "W," except for Monday-only classes, and receive a refund for Session 001

Tuesday, February 4: Last day to drop a Monday-only class without a mark of "W" and receive a refund for Session 001

Friday, February 28: Last day to drop a course without a mark of "W" on the transcript for Session 001. [Please drop any course by the end of week three (or the 20 percent mark of the session) to avoid tuition charges.]

Friday, February 28: Last day to change pass/no pass to letter grade for Session 001. [All major and minor courses must be taken for a letter grade.]

Friday, April 3: Last day to drop a class with a mark of "W" for Session 001

XI. Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

Important note to students: Be advised that the topics/daily activities are subject to change - and probably will change - based on the progress of the class and/or guest speaker availability. Exam and team project due dates will not change.

Check Blackboard for the weekly reading list. Readings should be completed by Monday's class on the week they are due unless otherwise specified.

	Topics/Daily Activities	Readings and Homework	Deliverable/Due Dates
Week 1 Dates: 1/13-1/15	Introduction to Research Methods	"Monkeys reject unequal pay." Brosnan & de Waal – <u>Nature</u> . Babbie, Chapters 1, 15	We will discuss Brosnan & de Wall in class on 1/15)
Week 2 Dates: 1/20-1/22	Team Assignments & In-group activity	Finish Week 1 Assigned Reading "How to build a successful team" (Bryant – <u>New York Times</u>)	[NO CLASS MLK Day: Monday, January 20]

Week 3 Dates: 1/27-1/29	Ethics, Politics & Bias in Research	Babbie, Chapter 3 Additional research articles (TBD)	
Week 4 Dates: 2/3-2/5	Research Design I: Questions, Theory and Hypotheses	Babbie, Chapter 2 Additional research articles (TBD)	
Week 5 Dates: 2/10-2/12	Research Design II: Methods	Babbie, Chapter 8 Additional research articles (TBD)	
Week 6 Dates: 2/17-2/19	Research Design II: Quant Methods	Babbie, Chapter 9 Additional research articles (TBD)	[NO CLASS: President's Day: Monday, February 17]
Week 7 Dates: 2/24-2/26	Research Design II: Quant Methods	Research articles (TBD)	
Week 8 Dates: 3/2-3/4	Research Design III: Measurement	Babbie, Chapter 6 Additional research articles (TBD)	Team Final Project topics due by Wed, Mar 4.
Week 9 Dates: 3/9-3/11	Exam 1	NO READING	In-class Exam 1 on Wed, March 11.
Spring Break Dates: 3/16-3/20	NO CLASSES		
Week 10 Dates: 3/23-3/25	Quant Data Analysis	Babbie, Chapter 14 Additional research articles (TBD)	
Week 11 Dates: 3/30-4/1	Social Media Research and Big Data	Research articles (TBD)	
Week 12 Dates: 4/6-4/18	Qualitative Research	Babbie, Chapter 10 Additional research	

		articles (TBD)	
Week 13 Dates: 4/13-4/15	Qualitative Data Analysis	Babbie, Chapter 13 Additional research articles (TBD)	
Week 14 Dates: 4/20-4/22	Content Analysis and Evaluation Research	Babbie, Chapters 11 & 12 (Due 4/20) Additional research articles (TBD)	
Week 15 Dates: 4/27-5/29	Team Projects and Course Wrap-Up	NO READING	Team projects are due on Friday, 5/1 at 11:59pm
STUDY DAYS Dates: 5/2-5/5			
FINAL EXAM PERIOD Dates: 5/6-5/13	Exam 2	Monday, May 11 from 2-4pm	

XII. Policies and Procedures

Additional Policies

I use Blackboard extensively in class and expect students to check at least once per day for updates and announcements. The TAs and I will use email to communicate with students so be sure to check your USC email account at least once per day.

Communication

My job as Course instructor is to design and teach the course. The TAs are my managers. They advise me and handle student communications and grading. If you have any specific questions about the syllabus, readings, grades, policies, absences or assignments, please contact your TA during her office hours or via email before coming to me. They will respond quickly (within 48 hours if not sooner).

However, I am available during my office hours (or by appointment) for general topics, for example, if you want to stop by and introduce yourself, nerd out on human (or animal) research, or ask for an opinion.

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

a. Academic Conduct

Plagiarism

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. It is your responsibility as students to familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct.

b. Support Systems

Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call
studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1 (800) 273-8255 – 24/7 on call
suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention and Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL),
press “0” after hours – 24/7 on call
studenthealth.usc.edu/sexual-assault

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)- (213) 740-5086 | *Title IX* – (213) 821-8298
equity.usc.edu, titleix.usc.edu

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants. The university prohibits discrimination or harassment based on the following *protected characteristics*: race, color, national origin, ancestry, religion, sex, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, age, physical disability, medical condition, mental disability, marital status, pregnancy, veteran status, genetic information, and any other characteristic which may be specified in applicable laws and governmental regulations. The university also prohibits sexual assault, non-consensual sexual contact, sexual misconduct, intimate partner violence, stalking, malicious dissuasion, retaliation, and violation of interim measures.

Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298
usc-advocate.symplicity.com/care_report

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office of Equity and Diversity | Title IX for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

The Office of Disability Services and Programs - (213) 740-0776

dsp.usc.edu

Support and accommodations for students with disabilities. Services include assistance in providing readers/notetakers/interpreters, special accommodations for test taking needs, assistance with architectural barriers, assistive technology, and support for individual needs.

USC Support and Advocacy - (213) 821-4710

uscса.usc.edu

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

Diversity at USC - (213) 740-2101

diversity.usc.edu

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

USC Emergency - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call

dps.usc.edu, emergency.usc.edu

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

USC Department of Public Safety - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-120 – 24/7 on call

dps.usc.edu

Non-emergency assistance or information.

Annenberg Student Success Fund

<https://annenberг.usc.edu/current-students/resources/additional-funding-resources>

The Annenberg Student Success Fund is a donor-funded financial aid account available to USC Annenberg undergraduate and graduate students for non-tuition expenses related to extra- and co-curricular programs and opportunities.

Breaking Bread Program [undergraduate students only]

<https://undergrad.usc.edu/faculty/bread/>

The Breaking Bread Program is designed to provide individual undergraduate students with an opportunity to meet and have scholarly discussions with faculty members outside of the normal classroom setting. Through this program, students and faculty enjoy good company and great conversation by literally “breaking bread” over a meal together and USC will pick up the tab! Your meal event can take place anywhere outside of the normal classroom setting. Your venue can be a restaurant or eatery on or off-campus.