

SOCIOLOGY 313
Sociological Research Methods
Spring 2020
TTH 9:30-10:50 THH 214

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Why study research methods?

Research is the core of sociology. Understanding how to conduct research and analyze results are key skills in the twenty-first century—both for the job market and in everyday life. Research allows us to test our assumptions about the world around us and understand the difference between opinion and empirically observed reality, which is central for a thriving democracy. This class will help you become a critical consumer of information and remind you to ask, “How do we know?”

Course Goals (and valuable job-related skills!):

- How to ask sociological research questions and formulate hypotheses;
- How to read a sociological journal article and identify academic sources;
- Understand the purpose of a literature review and how to create one;
- Learn qualitative and quantitative methods that sociologists use when conducting research;
- Interpret qualitative and quantitative data; read tables, graphs, and charts;
- Understand the importance of a research proposal and how to create one in order to conduct your own research.

Student evaluation:

15%	Active classroom participation
10%	Article worksheets/presentations in reading group
10%	Quizzes
1%	Topic statement/research question/proposed bibliography
2%	Peer feedback on literature review
25%	Literature review
2%	Peer feedback on research proposal
35%	Research proposal

Tracking your progress:

You are expected to seek more than a grade from this course. However, I realize that grades are very important to students. You are responsible for keeping a record of your grades and to be aware of your progress as well as areas where improvement is needed, and for seeking help from your peers or professor. Use the breakdown above to calculate your grade.

Participation and Attendance (15%):

This class is based on active student participation in discussions and activities. It is designed to be hands-on and experiential. Therefore, students are expected to attend *every class meeting prepared to discuss the assigned reading and participate in all activities.*

Students are expected to welcome differing viewpoints and to respect the thoughts and ideas of all class participants, listen quietly while others are speaking, and **arrive and leave on time**. Note that a great deal of information covered in class may not be in the readings, and vice versa. **Students are responsible for getting notes or assignments from classmates** should an absence become necessary.

Students often overlook the importance of participation and attendance in their course grade. This grade is based on the percentage of class meetings and discussions you attend (you can't participate if you are not here!), and may increase or decrease based on your participation. Things that will increase it are active participation in activities, comments and questions that reflect knowledge of course material, as well as courteous attention to your professor and peers.

Things that will bring your grade down include disruptive behavior (includes texting and ringing cell phones), disrespect towards your professor or peers, and comments that reveal a lack of preparation and attention. Ideally all class members will attend class regularly, prepared to discuss the reading and be open and respectful of differing viewpoints.

It is your responsibility to sign in every class, as attendance will be taken every day. Signing in for a previous day is not possible, so be sure to sign in. **Signing in for another student is a form of academic dishonesty and will not be tolerated.**

Technology Etiquette:

E-mail is a great resource but never takes the place of a conversation. **Please include "SOCI 313" in the subject line.** Lengthy questions or concerns should be addressed during office hours or a special appointment. Emails are typically answered within one business day. **Absolutely no assignments will be accepted via e-mail.** We will be using Blackboard (<https://blackboard.usc.edu>) to post most handouts and some articles, so check this site periodically.

Cell phones must be put away and turned off during all class meetings, and laptops or electronic devices may only be used by special permission. Multitasking (web surfing, Facebooking, texting, studying for another class) is expressly forbidden and will negatively impact your grade.

Article reports/presentations in reading group (10%):

You will create your own personalized syllabus based on your interests within sociology. *It is a good idea to create your reading list ASAP.* Throughout the semester, on dates noted you will be responsible for finding and reading **two** journal articles from any of the sociology journals listed below (see me for approval for a different journal):

American Journal of Sociology	Journal of Marriage & Family
American Sociological Review	Criminology
Symbolic Interactionism	Deviant Behavior
Ethnography	Social Forces
Gender & Society	Social Problems
Journal of Health & Social Behavior	Sociological Forum
Sociological Perspectives	Socius
Qualitative Sociology	The Sociological Quarterly
Sociology of Education	Sociology of Race & Ethnicity
NGO Majors:	
Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations	
Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly	Nonprofit Quarterly

You will complete a journal article review worksheet (format posted on Blackboard) that includes a summary of what the study was about, its major research question, its method, sampling procedure, and findings for each article you find. You will bring this to class and present this synopsis to a small group in class during the “reading group” portion of the class. This group will be comprised of students with similar research interests.

Each of the 14 worksheets will be graded CR/NC and will be worth .5% of your course grade; the two book synopses will each be worth 2% of your course grade. *You may substitute up to 2 journal articles with book chapters, as long as they are not from the books you will read for the book synopses. Books/chapters must be written by sociologists.* No late worksheets are accepted; the purpose of this assignment is not just to read and summarize, but also to share with classmates in reading group. *You may turn in worksheets early if you know you will be missing a class.*

You may miss 2 journal worksheets without penalty. (Note that you will still need to complete these readings for your literature review.) **If you complete all of the worksheets successfully you may earn up to 1% extra credit.**

These articles should focus on a central topic of interest, which you will study for the semester and will be the focus of your literature review and proposal.

Quizzes (10%):

Each Thursday evening (by 5pm) there will be a 15 point quiz posted on Blackboard, due by 9:15am on the following Tuesday. (No quiz will be posted during spring break.) You may use your readings and notes to respond to this quiz. Quiz questions will come from the previous week’s readings, exercises, and discussion and are meant to provide an opportunity for you to learn and review the material. I encourage you to focus on learning rather than the acquisition of points.

Quizzes **cannot be made up** under any circumstance, but you can miss up to **45** questions without penalty (there will be **210** questions total). You may earn extra credit or make up missed quizzes by answering more than **160** questions correctly (adding up to 3% extra credit to your course grade).

Topic statement/research question/proposed bibliography (1%):

You will complete a draft of the topic statement worksheet (details posted on Blackboard) with your topic, your specific sociological research question, and proposed bibliography by 1/28, refine it during our in-class activities, and turn it in on 2/4. You will receive feedback that will assist you for the literature review assignment. It will be graded CR/NC.

Literature review (25%):

We will learn how to write a literature review during the first part of the course. A literature review is a detailed examination of research related to one’s one topic of inquiry. A major part of this course will involve creating a hypothetical research project—one that you could carry out in the future, perhaps as an honors thesis or during a future class. Instead of a midterm, you will turn in a literature review based on the topic that you have chosen and read about. **Instructions for this assignment are posted on Blackboard. Late papers will be reduced 10% per day; 5% if turned in after the start of class.**

Peer review of literature review (2%)

Peer review is a central part of scholarship—peers often provide feedback before researchers submit their work for publication, and the decision of whether or not to publish is based on peer review.

Before your literature review is graded, you will upload a draft of your literature review on Blackboard using the Peer Assessment tool. A classmate will anonymously read the draft and provide you with detailed feedback and suggestions for improving your work before the due date.

Your classmate **will not** grade your work, but the *peer reviewer* will be evaluated based on the helpfulness of the suggestions or the explanation of what and why the draft fulfilled the requirements of a literature review. The questions for the reviewer are based on the outline for the assignment posted on Blackboard. If you do not turn in a draft, you will not be eligible to complete a peer review and forfeit this portion of the grade.

You will also be evaluated by how well you incorporate any feedback into the literature review you turn in on 3/3.

Research proposal (35%):

The central goal of this class is to write a full research proposal, which enables you to apply what you have learned over the course of the semester.

Instead of a final, you will turn in a document that includes an introduction, your *revised* literature review, your method, rationale for data analysis, your proposed study's limitations, and ethical concerns of your proposed study. You will not be carrying out this study for this course, but are encouraged to do so during a future course (such as SOCI 325) or for your honors thesis (see USC Sociology website for more information). **Instructions for this assignment are posted on Blackboard.**

Peer review of research proposal (2%):

As with the literature review, before you submit the full proposal for evaluation, a classmate will anonymously read a draft of two parts (1% for each section) of your proposal and give you detailed feedback and suggestions for improving your work before the due date.

Your classmate **will not grade** your work; as with the peer review of the literature review, the *reviewer* will be evaluated based on the helpfulness the suggestions or the explanation of what and why the draft fulfilled the requirements of the proposal.

You will also be evaluated by how well you incorporate any useful feedback into the proposal you turn in.

All assignments must reflect original work and must not contain sections cut and pasted from other sources. All take-home assignments must be turned in on Blackboard's turnitin site to generate an originality report in addition to turning in a hard copy (instructions will be provided). Plagiarism will not be tolerated and consequences will be in accordance with university policy. Any papers that are dramatically different in style and content from in-class work will require an oral exam. Failure to appear or to successfully demonstrate that the work is your own *within one week* of notification will result in a failing grade and will be reported to Student Judicial Affairs. **Please see Blackboard for USC Code of Ethics and student resources.**

Finally, grades are earned, they are not given. It is your responsibility to do the best work you are capable of producing. Special individual opportunities for extra credit violate university policy and will not be considered. **Nitpicking over points is discouraged, as it reveals a commitment to a grade rather than to learning.** Continued enrollment in this course indicates acceptance of class policies.

****Any special learning needs should be brought to my attention as soon as possible.****

Required readings: Please print out all readings and bring them to class. Many readings will come from everyday sociology blog.com; all readings will be accessible on Blackboard. Several of the readings for this class will be those that you select based on your interests.

****These dates are estimates and subject to change at my discretion****

	Date	Topic/Assignment	Reading
RESEARCH BASICS			
1	T 1/14	Intro to class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sternheimer, "Getting Excited About Research Methods" • Kaufman, "Doing Sociology"
2	TH 1/16	What is sociological research?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sternheimer, "What is Sociological Research?" • Sternheimer, "What Makes a Research Question Sociological?" • Raskoff, "How We Know: Opinions and Assumptions vs. Empirical Reality" • Sternheimer, "Suicide: Data versus Assumptions"
3	T 1/21	Finding journal articles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sternheimer, "How to Find Reliable Data" • Sternheimer, "Getting Your Sociology Research Project Started"
4	TH 1/23	Reading journal articles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Matthew Desmond, Andrew V. Papachristos, & David S. Kirk, "Police Violence and Citizen Crime Reporting in the Black Community"
READ TWO CORE JOURNAL ARTICLES/COMPLETE WKSHT			
5	T 1/28	Connecting theory with research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sternheimer, "Joining the Conversation: Why Study Theory?" • C.J. Pascoe, "Making Masculinity: Adolescence, Identity, and High School" (pp. 1-15)
DRAFT OF TOPIC STATEMENT AND READING LIST DUE			
6	TH 1/30	Asking sociological research questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kaufman, "Asking Sociological Research Questions" • Sternheimer, "Research Questions: Less is More"
READ TWO CORE JOURNAL ARTICLES/COMPLETE WKSHT			
7	T 2/4	Research rationale and components of a lit review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sternheimer, "How (and Why) to Write a Literature Review" • Sternheimer, "Don't Ask an "Expert:" Read the Research"
TOPIC STATEMENT WKSHT DUE			
8	TH 2/6	Conducting research ethically	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Duneier, <i>Sidewalk</i> appendix • Raskoff, "Mobile Apps and Research Methods" • Sternheimer, "Reality Television and Researching Children: Ethical Issues"
READ TWO JOURNAL ARTICLES/COMPLETE WKSHT			
9	T 2/11	Ethics and institutional review boards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Innis, "Institutional Review Boards: Why Do We Need Them?" • Kaufman, "The Ethics of Ethnography" • Mutchnick & Berg, "Research Ethics"

METHODS

10	TH 2/13	Choosing a method	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Inniss, "Scoop of Ice-cream or Pizza? Choosing the Right Research Method"• Inniss, "Matching Research Methods to Research Questions"
11	T 2/18	Ethnography DRAFT OF LIT REVIEW DUE	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wright, "Where to Sit: Doing Qualitative Research"• C.J. Pascoe, "Making Masculinity: Adolescence, Identity, and High School" (pp. 15-24)
12	TH 2/20	Ethnography READ TWO ETHNOGRAPHY JOURNAL ARTICLES/WKSHT	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pascoe, appendix• Sternheimer, "Researcher Reflexivity: Why who we are Matters"
13	T 2/25	Interviews/Focus groups PEER FEEDBACK OF LIT REVIEW DUE	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Armstrong & Hamilton, <i>Paying for the Party</i> appendix• Sternheimer, "Guys Like Me"
14	TH 2/27	Comparative historical READ TWO INTERVIEW JOURNAL ARTICLES/WKSHT	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sternheimer, <i>Celebrity Culture and the American Dream</i>, introduction• Sternheimer, "What is Comparative Historical Research: The Intersection between Sociology and History"
15	T 3/3	Surveys/questionnaires: Independent and dependent variables LIT REVIEW DUE	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sternheimer, "Are Social Scientists Anti-Social? How to Test Hypotheses"• Kaufman, "Mindfulness and Methodological Confusion"• Mutchnick & Berg, "Technologies of Observation"
16	TH 3/5	Survey sampling and administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mutchnick & Berg, "Sampling and Design"• Inniss, "Does N Equal One? Random and Nonrandom Sampling"• Raskoff, "Sampling Bias and Twitter"
17	T 3/10	Survey question construction	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sternheimer, "The Art and Science of Survey Writing"• Sternheimer, "A Random Invitation: The American Community Survey"
18	TH 3/12	Census 2020 READ TWO SURVEY JOURNAL ARTICLES/WKSHT	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sternheimer, "Sociology and the Census"• King, "The 2020 Census: Help Wanted"
19	T 3/24	Experiments	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pager, "The Mark of a Criminal Record"

20	TH 3/26	Content analysis and evaluation research READ TWO SURVEY JOURNAL ARTICLES/WKSHT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sternheimer, "Doing Research while Watching Sports Center" • Weffer, et al. "Taking a Knee" • Linneman, "Share, Show, and Tell: Group Discussion or Simulations Versus Lecture Teaching Strategies in a Research Methods Course" • Sternheimer, "Applied Sociology: Evaluation Research 101"
DATA ANALYSIS			
21	T 3/31	Analyzing quantitative data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Best, "Confusing Numbers," from <i>More Damned Lies and Statistics: How Numbers Confuse Public Issues</i>
22	TH 4/2	Quantitative data: Tables, graphs, percentages, rates READ ONE BOOK/WKSHT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sternheimer, "Interpreting Numbers in Context" • Sternheimer, "Suicide Rates: Percentages and Rates, Age and Gender" • Mutchnick & Berg, "Table Reading" (pp. 2-5)
23	T 4/7	Quantitative data: When a hypothesis can (and cannot) be confirmed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sternheimer, "Probability vs. Certainty" • Raskoff, "Ecological Fallacies" • Sternheimer, "Crossword Puzzles and the Null Hypothesis" • Sternheimer, "Get to Know MoE: Why the Margin of Error Matters"
24	TH 4/9	Quantitative data: Correlation DRAFT OF METHODS/ETHICS SECTION DUE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wright, "What's a Spurious Correlation?" • Sternheimer, "The "Starbucks Effect": Correlation vs. Causation" • Raskoff, "Correlation vs. Causation: Decoding Autism Research" • Sternheimer, "Research Methods, Statistics, and Video Games"
25	T 4/14	Quantitative data: Causation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wright, "Causation" • Wright, "Types of Causality" • Wright, "Types of Causality II"
26	TH 4/16	Analyzing qualitative data: Coding and finding themes PEER FEEDBACK OF METHODS/ETHICS SECTION DUE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Armstrong & Hamilton, <i>College Pathways and Post-College Prospects</i> • Mutchnick & Berg, "Qualitative Data" (pp. 183-192)
27	T 4/21	Qualitative data: What conclusions can we make? READ ONE BOOK/WKSHT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sternheimer, "Thinking Beyond the Case Study"

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

- 28 TH 4/23 Connecting data with theory
DRAFT OF DATA ANALYSIS/LIMITATIONS SECTION DUE
- [Sternheimer, "Connecting the Dots: Linking Theory with Research"](#)
- 29 T 4/28 Answering a research question
- Raskoff, "[Revisiting Research](#)"
 - Raskoff, "[Interpreting Research Results: Probabilities, Not Certainties](#)"
- 30 TH 4/30 Democracy, data, and the future
PEER FEEDBACK OF DATA ANALYSIS/LIMITATIONS SECTION DUE
- [Kaufman, "Because I'm a Sociologist...."](#)
 - Sternheimer, "[Main Points: What I Want my Students to Learn](#)"
 - Sternheimer, "[Why Social Research Matters](#)"

RESEARCH PROPOSAL DUE TUESDAY 5/12 10 am in HSH 314

Full citations for readings (except Everyday Sociology Blog posts)

Armstrong, Elizabeth A. and Laura T. Hamilton. 2015. *Paying for the Party: How College Maintains Inequality*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Best, Joel. 2004. *More Damned Lies and Statistics: How Numbers Confuse Public Issues*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Desmond, Matthew, Andrew V. Papachristos, & David S. Kirk. 2016. "Police Violence and Citizen Crime Reporting in the Black Community." *American Sociological Review* 81(5): 857-876.

Duneier, Mitchell. 2000. "Appendix." Pp. 333-357 in *Sidewalk*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Linneman, Judith A. 2018. "Share, Show, and Tell: Group Discussion or Simulations Versus Lecture Teaching Strategies in a Research Methods Course." *Teaching Sociology* 47 (1): 22-31.

Mutchnick, Robert J. and Bruce L. Berg. 1996. *Research Methods for the Social Sciences: Practice and Applications*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Pager, Devah. 2003. "The Mark of a Criminal Record." *American Journal of Sociology* 108 (5): 937-975.

Pascoe, C.J. 2007. *Dude, You're a Fag: Masculinity and Sexuality in High School*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Sternheimer, Karen. 2015. *Celebrity Culture and the American Dream: Stardom and Social Mobility*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge.

Weffer, Simón E., Rodrigo Dominguez-Martinez, and Raymond Jenkins. 2018. "Taking a Knee." *Contexts* 17 (3): 66-68.