



## **COMM 305: Understanding Social Science Research (4 Units)**

**Fall 2020 – T, Th 2:00-3:20pm PST**

**Section:** 20477R

**Location:** ONLINE, Enter ZOOM via Blackboard

**Professor: Andrea Hollingshead**

**Office Hours:** After class and by appointment

**Contact Info:** aholling@usc.edu

**Teaching Assistant: Devyn Harrod**

**Office Hours:** Mon 11:00a-12:00pm PST

**Contact Info:** dharrod@usc.edu

**TA Assignment:** (Alphabetical) Last name starting with A-Hernandez

**Teaching Assistant: Hoan Nguyen**

**Office Hours:** Th 1:00-2:00pm PST

**Contact Info:** hoannguy@usc.edu

**TA Assignment:** (Alphabetical) Last Name starting with Heuel-Pearl

**Teaching Assistant: Sabrina Reich**

**Office Hours:** T 1:00-2:00pm PST

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**TA Assignment:** (Alphabetical) Last name starting with Polk-Z

### **I. Course Description**

Social science is the scientific study of human social behavior. Much of what we know about human communication is based on social science research. Most careers in communication rely on social science research and data to some extent, so understanding social science research gives students a professional as well as academic advantage. The focus in this course is on understanding, evaluating and communicating research rather than on actually conducting research. Topics include source credibility, research ethics, researcher objectivity and biases, research questions, theory and hypotheses, qualitative research (e.g. interviews, participant observations), quantitative research (e.g. experiments, surveys and polls), basics of data analysis, interpretation of findings, study limitations, and the importance of replication. We will also discuss how to synthesize, evaluate and integrate research studies on a topic and how to present research so it is understandable, interesting and compelling to different audiences. At the end of this course, students should be better and more informed consumers of research.

This is a “flipped course” and is divided into weekly modules. In a flipped course, most content delivery is moved to the pre-class work done by students. In each module, you’ll read articles, watch videos, and engage in short assignments to assess your knowledge before we discuss the topic in class. Thus, most class time will be spent on group discussions, demonstrations, team project meetings, interviews with guest speakers and other active-learning exercises, which is much more enjoyable than long lectures for everyone including the professor.

## II. Student Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Explain basic social science research concepts, theories and methods
- Discuss how social science research can be used to address social problems and issues.
- Identify how politics, ethics and researcher biases affect the methods and findings of social science research.
- Interpret basic qualitative and quantitative data analyses
- Evaluate the strengths, limitations and general quality of research studies.
- Produce a team video that reviews, critiques and summarizes research studies on a social science topic for a general audience.

## III. Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

All course materials, which include readings, videos and supplementary learning materials will be available through course blackboard. There is no required textbook.

Live class sessions will be recorded and made available to students through Blackboard. Please remember that USC policy prohibits sharing of any synchronous and asynchronous course content outside of the learning environment. As a student, you are responsible for the appropriate use and handling of these recordings under existing SCampus policies regarding class notes (<https://policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-c/>). These rules will be strictly enforced, and violations will be met with appropriate disciplinary action.

## IV. Zoom Class Live Sessions

**We expect everyone to attend the Zoom class sessions** unless you are in a time zone that makes attending class difficult (outside of 7:00am-10:00pm PST.) Attending the live session is the best way to learn course material, meet your fellow students, and keep up with class activities and assignments. However, students who miss live sessions can review class recordings and receive class participation credit by completing an alternative class assignment within 24 hours of class (by 2:00pm PST Wednesday/Friday.) International students for whom attending class is difficult should contact their TA about accommodations.

**We also expect you to have your video on during class and especially during breakout rooms.** Being able to see one another creates accountability and a sense of community. If you

have a personal circumstance that makes having your video on difficult, such as a poor home internet connection or a busy home environment, just let your TA know.

Course content is considered to be intellectual property and our class meetings are confidential. USC policy prohibits sharing of any synchronous and asynchronous course content outside of the learning environment. As a student, you are responsible for the appropriate use and handling of these recordings under existing SCampus policies regarding class notes (<https://policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-c/>). These rules will be strictly enforced, and violations will be met with disciplinary sanction.

**Important:** All students must enter our Zoom classroom through Blackboard. Students will not be admitted through the waiting room. If you find yourself in the waiting room for class, you did not enter class correctly, and need to sign off and try again. See link: <https://keepteaching.usc.edu/students/student-toolkit/classroom/zoom/> for more detailed instructions.

## **V. Assignments**

### **Exam**

There will be one open-book take-home exam. There will be two parts: 1) multiple choice and T/F 2) essay. It will be available at 2:00pm PST on Oct 27 and is due by Wed, Oct 28 at 11:59pm PST. It is worth 10% of your grade. Details will be provided later in the semester.

### **Team Project**

The Comm 305 Team Project is a capstone experience that requires your team to review, summarize, critique and integrate research studies on a social science topic for a general audience. The main deliverables are a 20-min team research video, and a professionally-presented scripted video with a reference list. In the second week of the semester, you will be randomly assigned into a 5-person team. Over the semester, your team will engage in each of these step: select a topic; develop a research question; locate and read relevant peer-reviewed articles; find a set of articles to include in your project; critique, synthesize and integrate the articles; answer your research question; and ultimately produce a team research video for a general audience. Each step will involve a small graded assignment to receive feedback and keep your team on track. Some class time will be devoted to team work and feedback, but most of your work on the team project will be done outside of class. The team that produces the best video will receive special recognition. All team members must have a speaking role. Specific guidelines will be given later in the semester.

The maximum length for the team video is 25 min; the minimum is 15 min. This assignment is worth 30% of your final grade, and is due by Fri, Nov 13 at 11:59pm PST.

## **Individual Research and Critique**

Each team member will write a comprehensive review and critique of one peer-reviewed journal article that will appear in your team video. This assignment will be very useful for your team projects. It is due on Blackboard along with a pdf of the reviewed article on Fri, Oct 9 at 11:59pm PST. Specific guidelines will be given later. It is worth 10% of your grade.

## **Take-home Final Assignment**

Instead of a final exam, you will serve as a judge to select the finalists for the “Best Team Research Project Video: Comm 305 Fall 2020” competition. As a judge, you will watch three team videos, write a review of each video, and select the best of the three with a rationale for your choice. I will choose the winner from the finalists.

The specific assignment guidelines and links to the semifinalist videos will be available on Blackboard at the scheduled final exam time: Tues, Nov 17 at 2:00pm. The assignment is due by Wed, Nov 18 at 11:59 PST. It is worth 10% of your final grade.

## **Weekly Module Completion**

As mentioned earlier, this course is structured as a flipped classroom so it is essential that all students are well-prepared to fully participate and benefit from classroom activities.

The class is divided into weekly modules that will appear on Blackboard the week before they are covered in class. Each module contains learning materials and a short assignment or quiz to complete before the class sessions on that module. Each module should take 3 hours on average per week to complete.

We will track your review of weekly materials and will grade the short assignments/quizzes. This component is worth 20% of your grade: 10% for course material review; 10% for assignments and/or quizzes. The weekly module should be completed before Tuesday’s class for full credit. Partial credit (50%) will be given up to 48 hours late; 0% credit after 48 hours.

We will drop your lowest weekly module completion score. Students who earn a perfect score on every weekly module throughout the semester will earn 3 extra credit points (not % pts) to apply to another grade component at the end of the semester.

## **Class Participation, In-Class Work Products, and Professionalism**

We want to encourage students to actively participate in class activities. There will be many opportunities to contribute to class discussions through making comments verbally, chat, or in break out rooms. The TAs will keep track of student comments in the large class, which will contribute toward your class participation grade.

In addition, we require the completion of small work products to receive class participation credit for the Zoom class session. Although we will keep track of attendance, being “present” in the Zoom session is not enough to earn class participation credit for that session, you must **also** complete the in-class work products. These will vary depending on the class. Some will be done individually; some as a group. These work products may require participation in polls, surveys, chats, quizzes, breakout rooms and/or in-class short assignments. In-class work may be assigned at any point during the class.

An alternative assignment based on the Zoom session recordings to earn class participation credit will be available for international students and others who miss class. Each alternative assignment is due by 11:59pm PST the day following the missed live session to receive full class participation credit. Late assignments up to 48 hours after this deadline will receive 50% partial credit. No credit will be given for alternative assignments submitted after 48 hours. We will give two free class passes for the semester in case you miss class and are unable to make-up the work on time.

You don’t need to contact the Comm 305 instructor team about missing class to complete the alternative assignment and earn class participation credit.

In addition, this grade includes a professionalism component. Professionalism relates to your personal conduct and communications in and outside of Zoom sessions with other students and the Comm 305 Instructor Team. I expect everyone in the Comm 305 learning community to treat one another with respect and kindness, and to do their part in creating a safe, positive and comfortable space for sharing knowledge and ideas. In Zoom sessions, you should conduct yourself in a respectful manner and consider how your actions might come across on video. We will deduct points from the class participation grade for unprofessional or disrespectful behavior. The Class Participation and Professionalism component together are worth 20% of your grade.

## **VI. 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. You should receive a confirmation from Blackboard if the assignment was successfully submitted. Do not email your assignments to your TA or to the professor.

Late assignments will receive 50% penalty, and will not be accepted more than 48 hours after the deadline. (Emailed assignments to the professor or TAs will not receive any credit.)

## **VII. Grading**

### **1) Breakdown of Grade**

<b>Assignment</b>	<b>% of Grade</b>
Team Project	30

Exam	10
Individual Research Critique 1	10
Take-home Final Assignment	10
Weekly Module Completion	20
Class Participation & Professionalism	20
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100%</b>

## 2) Grading Scale

93% to 100%: A	80% to 82%: B-	67% to 69%: D+
90% to 92%: A-	77% to 79%: C+	63% to 66%: D
87% to 89%: B+	73% to 76%: C	60% to 62%: D-
83% to 86%: B	70% to 72%: C-	0% to 59%: F

## 3) Grading Standards

<b>Letter Grade</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>A</b>	Excellent; demonstrates extraordinarily high achievement; comprehensive knowledge and understanding of subject matter; all requirements met and/or exceeded; high attention to detail such as spelling and grammar
<b>B</b>	Good; moderately broad knowledge and good understanding of subject matter; most requirements met, moderate attention to detail
<b>C</b>	Satisfactory/Fair; reasonable knowledge and understanding of subject matter; at least one major requirement not met, little attention to detail
<b>D</b>	Marginal; minimal knowledge and understanding of subject matter; most major requirements not met, lack of attention to detail
<b>F</b>	Failing; unacceptably low level of knowledge and understanding of subject matter

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

## VIII. Grading Time Frame and Grade Inquiries

We will do our best to post exam and paper grades within two weeks from the due date. Scores for all assignments and exams are regularly updated on Blackboard. Any inquiries 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 the grade is posted, Your written inquiry must include a justification for any requested change.

## IX. Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

**Important note to students:** Be advised that the topics/daily activities may change based on the progress of the class, guest speaker availability, and unforeseen consequences. Exam and team project due dates will not change.

All Course Materials are available via Blackboard. Each weekly module should be completed before Tuesday's class to receive full Module Completion credit.

	Topics/Daily Activities	Readings and Homework	Deliverable/Due Dates
Week 1 Dates: 8/18, 8/20	Introduction to Social Science Research	Module 1: Introduction to Social Science Research	<b>Module 1 due: 8/20 by 2:00pm PST</b>
Week 2 Dates: 8/25, 8/27	The Research Enterprise in the Social Sciences	Module 2: How to Read and Evaluate Research Studies	<b>Module 2 due: 8/25 by 2:00pm PST</b>
Week 3 Dates: 9/1, 9/3	Ethics, Politics & Bias in Research	Module 3: Research, Politics and Bias in Research	<b>Module 3 due: 9/1 by 2:00pm PST</b>
Week 4 Dates: 9/8, 9/10	Team Assignments & Research Questions	Module 4: Research Questions and Modes of Inquiry	<b>Module 4 due: 9/8 by 2:00pm PST</b>
Week 5 Dates: 9/15, 9/17	Qualitative vs. Quantitative Data and Approaches	Module 5: Theory and Hypotheses	<b>Module 5 due: 9/15 by 2:00pm PST</b>  <b>Team Milestone 1 due: 9/18 by 11:59pm</b>
Week 6 Dates: 9/22, 9/24	Qualitative Data Analysis	Module 6: Qualitative Data Analysis	<b>Module 6 due: 9/22 by 2:00pm PST</b>

			<b>Team Milestone 2 due: 9/25 by 11:59pm PST</b>
Week 7 Dates: 9/29, 10/1	Polling and Public Opinion	Module 7: Descriptive Quantitative Research	<b>Module 7 due: 9/29 by 2:00pm PST</b>
Week 8 Dates: 10/6, 10/8	Lab Experiments	Module 8: Experiments I	<b>Module 8 due: 10/6 by 2:00pm PST</b>  <b>Individual Research Critique 1 due: Fri, Oct 9 at 11:59pm PST</b>
Week 9 Dates: 10/13, 10/15	Natural and Online Experiments	Module 9: Experiments II	<b>Module 9 due: 10/13 by 2:00 pm PST</b>  <b>Team Milestone 3 due: 10/16 by 11:59pm PST</b>
Week 10 Dates: 10/20, 10/22	Quantitative Data Analysis	Module 10: The Basics of Quantitative Data Analysis	<b>Module 10 due: 10/20 by 2:00pm PST</b>  <b>Team Milestone 4 due: 10/23 by 11:59pm PST</b>
Week 11 Dates: 10/27, 10/29	<b>Take-Home Exam</b>  Research for Social Change	No Module	<b>Exam distributed on 10/27 at 2:00pm PST: Due on 10/28 at 11:59pm PST</b>
Week 12 Dates: 11/3, 11/5	The Future of Social Science Research	Module 11: Data Science and Visualization	<b>Module 11 due: 11/3 by 2:00pm PST</b>  <b>Team Milestone 5 Due: 11/4 by 11:59pm PST</b>
Week 13 Dates: 11/10, 11/12	Course Recap & Last Day Celebration	No Module	<b>Team Project Videos Due: 11/13 by 11:59pm PST</b>
STUDY DAYS Dates: 11/14-11/16			

FINAL EXAM PERIOD Dates: 11/17-11/24	<b>Take-home Final Assignment</b> will be available on 11/17 at 2pm PST		<b>Take-home Final Assignment is due: 11/18 by 11:59pm PST</b>
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## **XII. Policies and Procedures**

### **Blackboard**

I use Blackboard extensively in class and expect students to check at least once per day for updates and announcements.

### **Communication**

Use USC email for contacting the Comm 305 Instructor team, and check your USC email for time-sensitive information every day.

The TAs are the course managers and handle student-related communications. They are your main resource for questions about assignments, group projects, grades, due dates, exams etc. Consult the course syllabus or Blackboard first before contacting your TA – the answer may already be there. TAs will respond within 24 hours on weekdays. It may take a little longer on weekends.

I handle questions about course content. I enjoy meeting and getting to know students, so please come to my office hours to discuss class topics in more detail, tell me about a research study, or just to say hello.

### **Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems**

#### **Academic Integrity Policy:**

The School of Communication maintains a commitment to the highest standards of ethical conduct and academic excellence. Any student found responsible for plagiarism, fabrication, cheating on examinations, or purchasing papers or other assignments will be reported to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards and may be dismissed from the School of Communication. There are no exceptions to the school’s policy.

#### **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 Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” [policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b](http://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](http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct).

In addition, it is assumed that the work you submit for this course is work you have produced entirely by yourself, and has not been previously produced by you for submission in another course, without approval of the instructor. It is a serious offense to participate on behalf of or produce work for other students and to communicate in any way during exams.

### **Accommodations:**

Students requesting academic accommodations based on a disability are required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP when adequate documentation is filed. Please be sure this letter is delivered to the professor as early in the semester as possible. DSP is open Monday-Friday, 8:30 am -5:00 pm. The office is in the Student Union 301 and their phone number is (213) 740-0776."

### Emergency Preparedness/Course Continuity in a Crisis

In case of a declared emergency if travel to campus is not feasible, USC executive leadership will announce an electronic way for instructors to teach students in their residence halls or homes using a combination of Blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technologies. See the university's site on **Campus Safety and Emergency Preparedness**.

### **Support Systems:**

*Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call*  
[studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling](http://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](http://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 Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL), press "0" after hours – 24/7 on call* [studenthealth.usc.edu/sexual-assault](http://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](http://equity.usc.edu), [titleix.usc.edu](http://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.

*Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298*

[usc-advocate.symplicity.com/care\\_report](https://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](https://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 Campus Support and Intervention - (213) 821-4710*

[campussupport.usc.edu](https://campussupport.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](https://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](https://dps.usc.edu), [emergency.usc.edu](https://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](https://dps.usc.edu)

Non-emergency assistance or information.

*Annenberg Student Scholarships and Awards*

<https://annenbergscholarships.usc.edu/current-students/resources/annenbergscholarships-and-awards>

The Annenberg Student Emergency Fund is distributed to students experiencing unforeseen circumstances and emergencies impacting their ability to pay tuition or cover everyday living expenses.

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.