



SOCI 313: Sociological Research Methods

Units: 4.0

Fall 2020—Monday and Wednesday 8:00-9:20

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Course Description

This course offers a critical introduction to the scientific methods sociologists use. Sociologists use an extraordinary range of methods for exploring the social world, and therefore, this course will necessarily be selective and exploratory. We will examine just a few essential methods: survey research, ethnography, historical analysis, and digital research, and our exploration will be preliminary. In addition to providing an understanding of foundational methodological principles, a key goal of the course is to get your hands dirty and expose you to the practice of social science research. Therefore, the course requirements seek to expose you to the practical dilemmas and challenges researchers encounter. The ultimate goal of this course is to inspire you to conduct independent research on a topic of your choice; hence the main requirement of this class is to write a research proposal that you can pursue in the following semester.

Learning Objectives

1. Draft your own a research proposal
 - Ask a sociological question
 - Perform an analytical literature review
 - Formulate a testable hypothesis based on literature review
 - Propose methods to answer a research question
 - Develop ethical guidelines for the proposal
2. Perform sociological research on love
 - Develop an online survey, collect data and analyze results
 - Conduct mini-ethnography
 - Design an online experiment
 - Code and analyze research data
3. Assess the strengths and weaknesses of different sociological research methods
4. Critique published sociological research

Prerequisite(s): SOCI 200 Introduction to Sociology

Course Notes

Due to COVID 19 pandemic, the class will be taught online via Zoom. To help you stay focused in Zoom sessions, we will alternate between open discussion, breakout room work, and short recorded lecture segments. Keeping focus in an online environment is challenging so please avoid using other applications or websites while in class. To facilitate interaction, please keep your camera on and your microphone muted during our discussion and turn the microphone on when you speak.

This course follows the “flipped classroom” model. In “traditional” instruction, students attend a lecture and apply the new knowledge alone when they complete homework. In a flipped course, students are introduced to new content in asynchronous activities (reading, for instance) before the class meeting, and apply the new knowledge during the live session. Completing the readings ahead of class is critical and otherwise you will be quite lost during class meetings.

Weekly readings, with the exception of readings in required books, and related mini-assignments are available in the content folder. The main assignments will be placed in the assignment folder. Lecture slides will be posted in the content folder as well. These outlines are not a summary of the lecture! They are designed to help you understand the structure of the class and follow the argument. So please make sure to take notes during lectures and discussions.

This class relies heavily on Blackboard for the administration of various assignments. You may not be familiar with some of these assignments (peer-review modules, for instance). If you experience difficulty posting or reading feedback to an assignment, please contact Dornsife IT Support at 213-740-5555 and choose option 2, [Text chat and Blackboard 9 Support Portal](#), or send an email to blackboard@usc.edu.

Communication and technology policies:

We want you to feel comfortable asking questions and continue and discuss course materials beyond the class. When you write us an email, indicate the course number and your full name in the subject line. Simple questions will be answered by email, but for more complex discussions students may be instructed to visit office hours. Emails regarding attendance should be addressed to your TA. We will respond to emails within 24 hours Monday-Friday, and on the Monday following a weekend or holiday break.

You are required to bring an internet-enabled device with browser capabilities, such as a cell phone or a laptop to class. During class time, you will use this device only to participate in activities guided by the instructor. The use of devices for other purposes is

not permitted during class time unless you have special permission from the instructor. Students who require a laptop to complete in-class work can check one out through the [Laptop Loaner Program](#).

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

Schutt, K. Russell. *Investigating the Social World: The Process and Practice of Research*. Los Angeles: Sage (page numbers below are from the 9th edition but you’ll do just fine with the seventh edition that can be found online)

Salganick, Matthew, 2018. *Bit by Bit: Social Research in the Digital Age*. Princeton University Press: Princeton. (The book is available online in Salganick’s [webpage](#) along with additional datasets and presentations. You do not have to buy it)

In addition, I highly recommend downloading and listening to the podcast “[Give Methods and Chance](#)”. It is a fun and easy way to deepen your exposure to a variety of methods used by contemporary sociologists.

Course Requirements and Grading Breakdown

Your grade for the class will be based on the following factors:

Assessment Tools (assignments)	Learning objectives	% of Grade
Reading and weekly pre-class work	Ask sociological questions; assess research methods; critique published research	15
In class work including quizzes and group work	Ask sociological questions; assess research methods; critique published research	10
Survey design assignment	Develop a survey, collect and analyze data; assess survey methods	15
Mini-Ethnography assignment	Conduct mini-ethnography, assess ethnographic research methods	15
Online experiment assignment	Design an online experiment; assess experimental research methods	15
Draft research proposal	As a sociological question; perform an analytical literature review; formulate a testable hypothesis	10
Research proposal	As a sociological question; perform an analytical literature review; formulate a testable hypothesis; propose a method to answer questions; develop ethical guidelines	20
TOTAL		100

Readings and pre-class work (10%): The readings for each week must be completed prior to the first lecture of the week. On occasion, I will email you short current newspaper articles that pertain to our discussion and you should read those as well. Weekly readings will be accompanied by mini-assignment that must be completed prior to the first lecture of the week. Knowing that you are busy, I allow up to **three** missed or late pre-class work

assignments. If you fail to submit more than three pre-class assignments, your grade will be negatively affected.

In-class work (10%): You are required to come to class regularly, having completed the readings and ready to participate. As a record of participation and attendance, you will be asked to complete some in-class work products individually or in teams. These may include short quizzes, one-minute essays, concept maps, etc. For teamwork, all members will receive the same grade for the grade product. In-class work may be assigned at any point during the class; students who miss the assignment due to arriving late or leaving early will not have an opportunity to make up the work. Knowing that you are busy, I allow up to **five** unexcused absences. If you miss more than five assignments, your grade will be negatively affected.

Three Assignments (3X15%): In order to deepen your understanding of course materials and develop your analytical skills, we will explore and develop ways of studying a sociological topic that will be determined collectively through three assignments. You will be required to complete three assignments: design a short survey; conduct a mini-ethnography; replicate a classic experiment using online research techniques.

Draft Literature Review and Peer Review (10%): Almost every research project begins with a research proposal describing the purpose of the study, the questions that the researcher hopes to answer, and the method of the proposed study. Research proposals help researchers obtain the resources for the study. Perhaps more importantly, the process of writing a research proposal helps research clarify their plan, think through the details of what they are trying to achieve, and create an executable plan. For the purpose of this class, writing a research proposal is a good way to implement what you have learned. If you are happy with the result, you will be able to use the proposal as a basis for a senior thesis or individual research projects.

We will tackle the task of writing a research proposal in two stages. The first part will include an introductory statement of the research problem and a literature review in which you'll explain how your questions build on what has already been reported in the scholarly literature. You will submit the first draft with these components by (10%). You will also review two draft proposals written by your peers and provide constructive suggestions on how to improve them (5%).

Class presentation and research proposal (25%): equipped with constructive suggestions from your peers and the instructors, in the following weeks you will polish and complete

a literature review and develop two methodological plans detailing two ways to empirically answer the research question. During the final weeks of the class, you will prepare a short presentation of the proposal (5%) and use the feedback obtained from your peers to finalize the proposal (20%).

Office hours: The materials and concepts covered in this course are abstract and difficult to grasp. At times, you will probably feel lost. You should also take advantage of our office hours to flesh out matters and make sure that you are on the right track. If you cannot attend the scheduled office hours, please email us and we will find a time that will work for you.

Grading scale:

Course final grades will be determined using the following scale

A	94-100
A-	90-94
B+	87-90
B	84-87
B-	80-84
C+	77-80
C	74-77
C-	70-74
D+	67-70
D	64-67
D-	60-64
F	0-60

Assignment Submission Policy

Coursework should be submitted via blackboard on time but I realize that you are busy and, when possible, I will try to be flexible. Late submission of the three assignments (survey, ethnography, and an online study) and the research proposal will incur a 10% penalty 48 hours after the due date and an additional 5% penalty each day afterward. The one assignment where there is no room for flexibility is the draft of the literature review since failing to submit that assignment on time holds up the entire peer-review process. Late submissions of the literature review draft will incur an immediate 10% penalty and if you fail to submit the draft within 24 hours of the due date you will be excluded from the peer review process and will not earn the points for this assignment.

Grading Timeline

We will make an effort to provide feedback within a week from the due date of assignments.

Course Schedule and Readings: A Weekly Breakdown

Date	Topics and activities	Readings and preparation	Assignment schedule
Week 1: August 17, 19	Who needs methods? How to ask sociological questions? Activity: explore the value of being wrong and how to make it safe to be wrong.	Herek, Gregory. 1995. "Developing a theoretical framework and rationale for a research proposal." Pp. 85-91 in <i>How to Write a Successful Research Grant Application</i> , edited by Willo Pequegnat and Ellen Stover. New York: Plenum Press	Tell us about your sociological interests.
Week 2: September 24, 26	Logics of scientific inquiry Activity: Workshop on asking sociological questions	Schutt, K. Russell. "The process and problems of social research." Pp. 28-66 (Ch. 2)	The two logics of scientific reasoning test
Week 3: August 31, September 2	The nuts and bolts of writing a research proposal Activity: Workshop on searching for literature	Booth, Wayne et. al (2016). <i>The Craft of Research</i> . P. 65-14 (Ch. 5, 6)	Submit a list of six peer-reviewed articles that pertain to your planned research proposal
Week 4: September 9	Sampling strategies Activity: design sampling strategies for various studies	Schutt, K. Russell. "Sampling and generalizability." Pp. 147-186 (Ch. 5)	Design a sampling strategy for studying sexual harassment at USC
Week 5: September 14, 16	Conceptualization and measurement Activity: define, identify dimensions, and operationalize love in small groups	Schutt, K. Russell. "Conceptualization and Measurement." Pp. 102-146 (Ch. 4)	Submit a draft of literature review

Week 6: September 21, 23	Survey research: Questionnaire design Activity: Taking surveys and reading surveys.	Schutt, K. Russell. "Survey research." Pp. 253-310 (Ch. 8), in <i>Investigating the Social World: The Process and Practice of Research</i> . Los Angeles: Sage	Analyze 5 GSS questions of interest. Send a draft of your survey invitation to people in your small group.
Week 7: September 28 (Yom Kippur, no class), 30, October 2	Analyzing quantitative data Activity: Workshop drafts of survey	Best, Joel. 2004. <i>More Damned Lies and Statistics</i> . Berkeley: University of California Press. Ch. 2 "Confusing Numbers" pp. 26-62.	Write an email to an author... Complete peer evaluation of the literature review
Week 8: October 5, 7	Ethnography and fieldwork Activity: Observing love on campus	Charmaz, Kathy. 2006. <i>Constructing Grounded Theory</i> . Sage Publications, Chapter 1, 2. Tavory, Iddo. 2009. "The Structure of Flirtation: On the Construction of Interactional Ambiguity." <i>Studies in Symbolic Interaction</i> , 33: 59-74	Submit an online survey and survey self-assessment
Week 9: October 12, 14	Interviewing Activity: Videotaped workshop on interviewing	Weiss, Robert. 2004. "In their own words: making the most of qualitative interviews." <i>Contexts</i> 3(4) 44-51.	Prepare interview manual for studying love
Week 10: October 19, 21	Historical research Activity: A workshop on casing	Schutt, K. Russell. "Research using historical and comparative data and content analysis." Pp. 552-590 (Ch. 15), in <i>Investigating the Social World: The Process and Practice of Research</i> . Los Angeles: Sage (subject to change with advance notice)	Identify key texts from the assigned period that study love Submit a field study report
Week 11: October 26, 28	Coding data Activity: coding exercise	Charmaz, Kathy. 2006. <i>Constructing Grounded Theory</i> . Sage Publications, Chapter 3, 4.	Evaluate an existing code

Week 12: November 2, 4	Digital methods Activity: TBA	Salganick, Matthew, 2018. "Observing behavior." Pp. 13-84 in <i>Bit by Bit: Social Research in the Digital Age</i> . Princeton University Press: Princeton.	Write an email to an engineer at Google explaining the problem and suggesting an idea of how to fix it.
Week 13: November 9, 11	Online experimentation Activity: Design an online version of Devah Pager's experiment	Salganick, Matthew, 2018. "Running experiments." Pp. 147-230 in <i>Bit by Bit: Social Research in the Digital Age</i> . Princeton University Press: Princeton. Pager, Devah. 2003 "The Mark of a Criminal Record". American Journal of Sociology 108 (5):937-975.	Write an email to an A/B testing researcher.
November 17, midnight			Submit research proposal

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

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. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on scientific misconduct, policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct.

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 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.

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 Campus Support and Intervention - (213) 821-4710

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

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.