



**COMM 305: Understanding Social Science  
Research  
4 Units**

**Spring 2021 – Tuesday, Thursday – 11:00 AM-  
12:20 PM**

**Section:** 20477

**Location:** Zoom Meetings found at [blackboard.usc.edu](https://blackboard.usc.edu)

**Instructor: Dr. Marlon Twyman**

**Office:** Zoom Office Hours Link in Blackboard

**Office Hours:** 3:30-4:30 PM PST on Tuesday, or by  
appointment

**Contact Info:** [marlontw@usc.edu](mailto:marlontw@usc.edu)

**Teaching Assistant: Ignacio Cruz**

**Office Hours:** 10:00-11:00 AM PST on Thursday, or by  
appointment

**Contact Info:** [ignacioc@usc.edu](mailto:ignacioc@usc.edu)

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

**Teaching Assistant: Yuanfeixue (Feixue) Nan**

**Office Hours:** 12:30-1:30 PM PST on Tuesday, or by  
appointment

**Contact Info:** [ynan@usc.edu](mailto:ynan@usc.edu)

**TA Assignment:** (Alphabetical) Last name starting with  
Magee-Zhang

## **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.

## II. Student Learning Outcomes

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

1. Explain basic social science research concepts, theories, and methods
2. Discuss how social science research can be used to address social problems and issues.
3. Identify how politics, ethics, and researcher biases affect the methods and findings of social science research.
4. Interpret basic qualitative and quantitative data analyses
5. Evaluate the strengths, limitations and general quality of research studies.
6. Collaborate to create research projects on a diverse range of topics.

## 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.

### **Software**

Given that instruction will be virtual, please plan to use the following software technologies **freely** available through USC

- Blackboard: [blackboard.usc.edu](https://blackboard.usc.edu)
  - Links to Zoom Meetings and Recordings for class instruction
  - Homework and Final Paper Submissions
  - Email Announcements
- Google Drive OR Microsoft Office 365: <https://software.usc.edu/free-to-campus/>
  - For preparation of homework assignments and final
- Adobe Creative Cloud: <http://www.annenbergdl.org/adobe/>
  - For PDF reading and editing
  - Other media editing software that may be of interest
- Citation Manager: RefWorks, Zotero, or Mendeley. EndNote available through USC
  - To cite any references used in writing assignments

#### 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. Description and Assessment of Assignments & Assignment Submission Policy**

The course requires completion of the following assignments:

### **Weekly**

- **Responses to Class Content:** After attending/watching lectures, reading materials, and performing required activities, students will be expected to answer questions and provide opinions related to class content.

### **Individual Assignments**

- **Semester Work Schedule for Typical Week:** At the start of the semester, students will provide their anticipated time commitment towards the course.
  - Indicate if you will be watching lectures synchronously or asynchronously
  - Please provide the time zone in which you will be located for the semester
  - For all seven days of the week, indicate how much time is expected to be spent attending lecture, watching recorded lectures, and doing homework
  - Include specific time windows for the activities
  - The work schedule will be essential when collaborating in groups and will help coordination to accomplish the shared goal of creating the deliverables
  - Given that the course is 4 Units, plan to spend 8 hours on the course outside of lecture time
- **Two Research Article Assessments:** On two different occasions, the instructor will provide a research article for students to critique and analyze. Students will need to answer a series of questions about the article as well as write a 1-to-2-page analysis of the article. One article will employ a quantitative research method while the other article will utilize a qualitative research method.

### **Group Collaboration**

- **Three Team Projects:** Working in groups is a standard part of social science research. It will better help you understand the role of communication in the process. The course requires that students work together on three separate research projects to create deliverables related to required topics that will be provided in an assignment description during the semester.
  - **Report:** The group will write a 2-to-3-page, double-spaced (500-750 word) report. The assignment description posted during the semester will detail the requirements beyond the length.

- **Presentation:** The group will record a presentation sharing their findings, approach, lessons learned, and limitations of their project using Zoom
  - Between 10 and 15 minutes long
  - Voice narration by at least 2 team members is required
  - Share a link for instructors and peer review
- **Project Management Summary:** The group will write a 1-to-2-page, double-spaced (250-500 word) description of collaboration.
  - The names and contributions of each member
  - Include the number of meetings
  - The technologies used to coordinate and communicate
  - Describe if the collaboration was synchronous, asynchronous, or a mixture of both (include an estimated percentage)
  - Positive experiences
  - Areas for improvement

### **Final Assignment**

- **Peer Review of Team Projects:** During Finals Week, you will submit a series of reviews (exact number to be announced in assignment description during semester) for other teams' submissions to the last team project. The assignment description will have explicit instructions to follow for each review. The details below are to provide guidelines to set expectations.
  - The reviews will need to include the following: description of the team's research approach and method, summary of results, production quality, and opportunities for improvement
    - **Description of Team's Research Approach and Method:** An explanation of how a team conducted their research project.  
Example questions to answer in this section: What type of research was conducted? What kind of data was collected and analyzed?
    - **Summary of Results:** Summarize your takeaways from their project. Example questions to answer in this section: What did the team project tell you about the topic? What did you learn?

- **Production Quality:** An assessment of how the research was presented. Critique design choices. Ratings and comments will need to be provided.
- **Opportunities for Improvement:** Briefly, give feedback on aspects of the research and presentation that would have improved your opinion regarding the work. Be critical, but also fair and respectful.

## VI. Grading

### a. Breakdown of Grade

Assignment	Points	% of Grade
Class Participation and Attendance	50	5
Semester Work Schedule for Typical Week	100	10
Weekly Responses to Class Content	200	20
Quantitative Research Article Assessment	50	5
Qualitative Research Article Assessment	50	5
Team Project #1	150	15
Team Project #2	150	15
Team Project #3	150	15
Peer Review of Team Projects	100	10
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,000</b>	<b>100%</b>

### b. 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

### c. Grading Standards

Letter Grade	Description
A	Excellent; comprehensive knowledge and understanding of subject matter; all expectations met and exceeded.
B	Good; explicitly or implicitly demonstrates good, if not thorough understanding; only minor substantive shortcomings.
C	Satisfactory/Fair; reasonable knowledge and understanding of subject matter; despite any shortcomings, demonstrates basic level of understanding.
D	Marginal; minimal knowledge and understanding of subject matter; more than one significant shortcoming.
F	Failing; unacceptably low level of knowledge and understanding of subject matter.

### d. Grading Timeline

#### Grading Timeframe and Missing or Inaccurate Score Inquiries/Disputes

For effective learning, students should receive timely feedback on assignments. Therefore, every attempt will be made to grade assignments and post grades within two weeks. Scores for all assignments are regularly updated on Blackboard. A Blackboard Announcement will notify the students when grades are posted. You are responsible for notifying your assigned TA **within one (1) week** of a score posting if you think a score is missing or inaccurate. If you fail to inquire/notify the professor of any discrepancy, missing score, or contest a score within one week of the date the score is posted, no further changes will be made.

### VII. Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

**Important note to students:** Be advised that this syllabus is subject to change - and probably will change - based on the progress of the class, events, and/or guest speaker availability, where relevant. Students should consult the Registration Calendar for dates regarding add/drop deadlines, fees, grading options, etc.

Readings, videos, and learning materials will be provided in Blackboard throughout the semester. The weekly topics and assignment due dates are in the schedule below.

## ***Course Overview***

**Week 1: Jan. 19 & Jan. 21**

**Topics: Syllabus Explanation & Introduction to Social Science Research**

Assignments Due:

1. Saturday (1/23): “**Semester Work Schedule for Typical Week**” Assignment

## ***Section 1: The Social Science Research Enterprise***

**Week 2: Jan. 26 & Jan. 28**

**Topics: Universities, Research Institutes, and Funding Sources**

Assignments Due:

2. Saturday (1/30): Responses to Class Content Deadline

**Week 3: Feb. 2 & Feb. 4**

**Topics: Ethics and Biases in Designing and Conducting Research**

Assignments Due:

1. Saturday (2/6): Responses to Class Content Deadline

## ***Section 2: Social Science Research Fundamentals***

**Week 4: Feb. 9 & Feb. 11**

**Topic: Reading Research Articles and Understanding Research Questions**

Assignments Due:

1. Saturday (9/13): Responses to Class Content Deadline

**Week 5: Feb. 16 & Feb. 18**

**Topic: The Scientific Method and Hypothesis Development**

Assignments Due:

1. Saturday (2/20): Responses to Class Content Deadline

**Week 6: Feb. 23 & Feb. 25**

**Topic: Quantitative Research Approach**

Assignments Due:

1. Saturday (2/27): Responses to Class Content Deadline



**Week 7: Mar. 2 & Mar. 4**

**Topic: Qualitative Research Approach**

Assignments Due:

1. Thursday (3/4): Submit first “**Research Article Assessment**” Assignment
2. Saturday (3/6): Responses to Class Content Deadline

**Week 8: Mar. 9 & Mar. 11**

**Topic: The Research Loop: How Quantitative and Qualitative Research Mix**

Assignments Due:

1. Thursday (3/11): Submit second “**Research Article Assessment**” Assignment
2. Saturday (3/13): Responses to Class Content Deadline

### ***Section 3: Social Science Research Tools and Concepts***

**Week 9: Mar. 16 & Mar. 18**

**Topics: Audience Analysis**

Assignments Due:

1. Saturday (3/20): Responses to Class Content Deadline

**Week 10: Mar. 23 (NO CLASS-WELLNESS DAY) & Mar. 25**

**Topic: Polling Public Opinion**

Assignments Due:

1. Saturday (3/27): Responses to Class Content Deadline

**Week 11: Mar. 30 & Apr. 1**

**Topic: Experimental Design and Laboratory Experiments**

Assignments Due:

1. Thursday (4/1): “**Team Project #1**” is Due
2. Saturday (4/3): Responses to Class Content Deadline

**Week 12: Apr. 6 & Apr. 8**

**Topic: Natural Experiments and Online Experiments**

Assignments Due:

1. Saturday (4/10): Responses to Class Content Deadline

<b>Week 13: Apr. 13 &amp; Apr. 15</b> <b>Topic: Computational Research Approaches</b>
<u>Assignments Due:</u> 1. Thursday (4/15): <b>“Team Project #2”</b> is Due 2. Saturday (4/17): Responses to Class Content Deadline
<b>Week 14: Apr. 20 &amp; Apr. 22 (NO CLASS-WELLNESS DAY)</b> <b>Topic: Notes about Statistics</b>
<u>Assignments Due:</u> 1. Saturday (4/24): Responses to Class Content Deadline
<b>Week 15: Apr. 27 &amp; Apr. 29</b> <b>Topic: Social Network Analysis</b> <b>COURSE EVALUATIONS</b>
<u>Assignments Due:</u> 1. Thursday (4/29): <b>“Team Project #3”</b> is Due 2. Saturday (5/1): Responses to Class Content Deadline
<b>Finals Week: May 5-May 12</b>
<u>Assignments Due:</u> 1. Tuesday (5/11): <b>“Peer Review of Team Projects”</b> Assignment Deadline

#### VIII. Policies and Procedures

##### Attendance policy

Students are strongly encouraged to attend live sessions via Zoom. This is the best way to engage with the course and keep up to date with class activities and assignments. Students who miss live sessions will be able to keep up with the class by reviewing class recordings and completing asynchronous class activities and assignments by the published deadlines. Note that university guidelines dictate that faculty should only maintain normal attendance, participation, and assessment expectations for students when the class time falls within reasonable learning hours in the student’s time zone, defined as 7:00am to 10:00pm in the student’s time zone.

##### Late Assignment Policy

To accommodate unexpected interruptions and time zone differences for students in the course, the standard late policy is a three-day, penalty-free extension **as long as students notify Dr. Twyman AND their assigned TA via email request for extension before the deadline.** The email subject

should read “COMM 305 [STUDENT’S FULL NAME] requests extension for [INSERT ASSIGNMENT NAME]”

**Assignments that are submitted late without permission will be marked as 0%.**

#### **Synchronous session recording notice**

Live class sessions will be recorded and made available to students through Blackboard (including transcriptions). 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 the appropriate disciplinary sanction.

#### **Going back to Campus**

Although we are starting the semester with online instruction only, conditions may improve. In such case, courses listed as hybrid will give opportunity to students to attend class in person. This will happen only by following the strictest health guidelines and safety protocols. These are listed in the Trojans Return page. Please take the time to read this ahead so that you are prepared in case it is possible to return to in-person instruction.

#### **Participation**

Participation is part of your grade. The current modality of teaching includes synchronous and asynchronous lessons, assignments, exercises, and evaluation processes, and each affords different types of participation. In a synchronous zoom environment, when proper, participation is synchronous. This may include talking during a zoom meeting or using the chat function to participate in discussions.

The distant nature of these learning environments may prompt us to forget that we are a community and that each of us and our ideas deserve respect. For this reason, it is imperative that you remember to **respect the opinion of others**, regardless of how much you disagree.

#### **Zoom Etiquette and Online Interaction:**

- Although you are not obligated to turn your camera on, you are strongly encouraged to have your camera on. Please wear **appropriate clothing**. Please keep your **microphone off** during zoom class, except when you’re asked to unmute for discussion or questions. Please use **appropriate backgrounds**.
- Students are expected to treat one another professionally and with respect.
- To foster an inclusive environment during collaboration, please expect other students to put forth their best efforts and be understanding of other students’ priorities, obligations, and responsibilities. Please give each other time to reply to messages and email.

## **Additional Policies**

### **Communication**

#### **Email:**

- Please consult the syllabus and Blackboard before emailing with questions, in case the answer to your question is readily available.
- For extensions, accommodations, and emergencies, please email Dr. Twyman and your assigned TA. Expect responses **within** two business days, if not sooner. Emails sent on the weekend will be replied to no later than Tuesday of the following week.
- The TAs are course managers and will handle questions regarding assignments, group projects, grades, due dates, exams, etc.
- For non-urgent questions, topics, etc., we strongly encourage attendance during office hours instead of emailing.

#### **Zoom Office Hours:**

- Dr. Twyman and the TAs will hold Zoom Office Hours using the link provided on Blackboard. Please remain in the waiting room if there is another student in the office hours. Office Hours will also be held by appointment scheduled via email correspondence.

## **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. 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](https://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](https://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct).

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.

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.

### **b. Support Systems**

*Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call*  
[studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling](https://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](https://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 “o” 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. 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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://dps.usc.edu), [emergency.usc.edu](http://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](http://dps.usc.edu)

Non-emergency assistance or information.

*Annenberg Student Success Fund*

<https://annenberg.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.