

COMM 305: Understanding Social Science Research (4 Units) (8/21/21)

Fall 2021 – 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: Katrin Fischer

Office Hours: 1:00-1:50 pm on Thursday (Zoom)

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

Teaching Assistant: Donggyu Kim

Office Hours: 12:30 – 1:30 pm (Zoom)

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TA Assignment: (Alphabetical) Last Name starting
with R-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 the media and communication industries 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), data analysis basics, 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 communicate research findings to a non-academic audience. At the end of this course, students will become informed consumers of social science research.

This is a “flipped course” and is divided into modules. In a flipped course, most content delivery is in pre-class work done by students and class time is devoted to applications of that content. In each module, students read articles, watch videos, and engage in short assignments to assess their knowledge before we discuss the topic in class. Thus, most class time is spent on group discussions, demonstrations, team project meetings, interviews with guest speakers and other active-learning exercises. This innovative format is 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 is used to address social problems and issues.
- Identify how politics, ethics and researcher biases affect the methods and findings of social science research.
- Conduct and 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 supplemental materials will be available through Blackboard. There is no required textbook.

IV. Zoom Class Live Sessions

We expect all students to attend Zoom live class sessions. Attending the live class 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 the missed class (by 2:00pm PST Wednesday/Friday.)

We also expect all students to have their video on during Zoom live class sessions. 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 internet connection or a busy home environment, just let your TA know.

All Zoom live class sessions will be recorded and made available to students through Blackboard.

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.

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

Team Project

The Comm 305 Team Project is a capstone experience that requires student project teams to review, summarize, critique, and integrate research studies on a social science topic for a general audience. The main deliverables are a 20-min professionally presented scripted video with a reference list. All team members must have a speaking role.

In the third week of the semester, students will be randomly assigned into a 4-6 person research project team. Most work on the team project will be done outside of class. Over the rest of the semester, your team will engage in each of these steps: 1) selecting a research topic; 2) developing a research question; 3) locating relevant peer-reviewed articles; 4) critiquing, synthesizing and integrating the articles; 5) answering your research question; and 7) ultimately producing a team research video for a general audience. Some of these steps will involve a small graded assignment to receive feedback. The team that produces the best video will receive special recognition. Specific guidelines will be given later in the semester.

The maximum length for the team video is 20 min; the minimum is 15 min. This assignment is worth 25% of your final grade, and is due by Fri, Dec 3 at 11:59pm PST (last day of classes).

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 participate and benefit from classroom activities. It is also important to keep up with coursework as each topic builds on the previous one.

There are 10 weekly modules. Each module contains learning materials and short assignments to complete before the Zoom class sessions on that topic. Each module will appear on Blackboard on Thursdays after class and will be due the following Tuesday at 12- noon. Each module should take 3-4 hours on average to complete. (See Course Schedule and Weekly Breakdown for due dates.)

Each module is weighed equally in the module completion grade. Module grades are based on whether students carefully review the materials (Blackboard indicates whether students actually reviewed them.) and the quality of short assignments in the module. This component is worth 25% of your grade. A late penalty will be assessed on all late modules. Modules submitted more than 48 hours late will not receive credit.

Exams

There are two open-book exams. The exams will be given on Tue, Oct 12 and Tues, Nov 23. Each exam is worth 10%, for a total of 20% of the course grade. Exam details will be provided later in the semester.

Individual Research and Critique

Each team member will prepare a comprehensive review and critique of one peer-reviewed journal article. This assignment will be useful for your team projects. It is due on Blackboard along with a pdf of the reviewed article on Fri, Nov 5 at 11:59pm PST. I will give specific guidelines later in the semester. 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 2021” 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 our scheduled final exam time: Thurs, Dec 9 at 2:00pm. The assignment is due by Sat, Dec 11 at 11:59 PST. It is worth 10% of your final grade.

Class Participation and Professionalism

We expect all students to participate actively during class discussions and activities.

To receive class participation credit for the Zoom class session, in addition to being present, you must **also** complete all in-class work products. These will vary depending on the class. Some will be done individually; some as a group. These work products include participation in polls, surveys, chats, quizzes, breakout rooms and/or in-class short assignments. If you do not complete the work products even if you are “present” in the Zoom session, you will receive a “0” for that day, which is equivalent to being absent. Students can earn partial credit for completing some but not all in-class work products.

An alternative assignment based on the Zoom recording to earn class participation credit will be available for students 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.

You do not need to contact the Comm 305 instructor team about missing class to complete the alternative assignment and earn class participation credit. See the “Assignments” tab on Blackboard for more information.

Late assignments up to 48 hours after this deadline will receive 50% partial credit. Alternative assignments submitted after 48 hours late will not receive credit.

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. Professionalism relates to your personal communications in and outside of Zoom sessions with other students and with the Comm 305 Instructor Team. It is also important to consider how your actions might come across on video. Everyone notices when students are

engaged in “extracurricular” activities during class, which has a negative impact on the class energy level and is disrespectful.

We will deduct points from the class participation grade for unprofessional or disrespectful behavior. The Class Participation and Professionalism component together are worth 10% of the course 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 a late penalty, and will not be accepted more than 48 hours after the deadline without prior approval from the Comm 305 Instructor team.

VII. Grading

1) Grade Components and Weighting

Assignment	% of Grade
Team Project	25
Weekly Modules	25
Exams	20
Individual Research Critique	10
Take-Home Final Assignment	10
Class Participation	10
TOTAL	100%

2) Grading Scale

Below are the grade thresholds for assignments, exams, and final course grades. Your final course % must be in the range to receive that grade, there is no “rounding up.”

93% to 100%: A	80% to 82.99%: B-	67% to 69.99%: D+
90% to 92.99%: A-	77% to 79.99%: C+	63% to 66.99%: D
87% to 89.99%: B+	73% to 76.99%: C	60% to 62.99%: D-
83% to 86.99%: B	70% to 72.99%: C-	0% to 59.99%: F

3) Grading Standards

Letter Grade	Description
A	Excellent; demonstrates very 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	Good; moderately broad knowledge and good understanding of subject matter; most requirements met, moderate attention to detail
C	Satisfactory/Fair; reasonable knowledge and understanding of subject matter; at least one major requirement not met, little attention to detail
D	Marginal; minimal knowledge and understanding of subject matter; most major requirements not met, lack of attention to detail
F	Failing; unacceptably low level of knowledge and understanding of subject matter

All assignments will be graded on content, organization, format and attention to detail. Details such as correct spelling, grammar and following assignment instructions are required for an “A”. Assignment rubrics will be available on Blackboard under “Syllabus and Rubrics.”

VIII. Grading Time Frame and Grade Inquiries

We will do our best to post grades on Blackboard within two weeks from the due date. There is a 24-hour waiting period on all questions about grades. Any grade-related questions 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. Your TA will discuss the inquiry with me, and we will provide our decision within a week. Grade questions more than one week after grades are posted will not be considered.

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. Assignment and exam due dates will not change.

	Topics/Daily Activities	Readings and Homework	Deliverable/Due Dates
Week 1 Dates: 8/24, 8/26	Introduction to Social Science Research		

Week 2 Dates: 8/31, 9/2	Data and the Research Process	Module 1: Reading and Evaluating Social Science Research	Module 1 due: 8/31 by 12:00pm-noon PST
Week 3 Dates: 9/7, 9/9	Ethics, Politics & Bias in Research	Module 2: Research Ethics, Politics and Bias	Module 2 due: 9/7 by 12:00pm-noon PST
Week 4 Dates: 9/14, 9/16	Team Assignments & Research Questions	Module 3: Research Questions and Modes of Inquiry	Module 3 due: 9/14 by 12:00pm-noon PST
Week 5 Dates: 9/21, 9/23	Qualitative vs. Quantitative Research Approaches	Module 4: Qualitative Research I	Module 4 due: 9/21 by 12:00pm-noon PST Team Milestone 1 due: 9/24 by 11:59pm
Week 6 Dates: 9/28, 9/30	Qualitative Research	Module 5: Qualitative Research II	Module 5 due: 9/28 by 12:00pm-noon PST
Week 7 Dates: 10/5, 10/7	Descriptive Quantitative Research	Module 6: Public Opinion and Survey Research	Module 6 due: 10/5 by 12:00pm-noon PST Team Milestone 2 due: 10/8 by 11:59 pm
Week 8 Dates: 10/12 (10/14: NO CLASS - FALL BREAK)	Exam 1		Exam 1 on 10/12
Week 9 Dates: 10/19, 10/21	Inferential Quantitative Research	Module 7: Theory and Hypotheses	Module 7 due: 10/19 by 12:00-noon pm PST Team Milestone 3 due: 10/23 by 11:59pm PST
Week 10 Dates: 10/26, 10/28	Experiments	Module 8: Sampling and Experiments	Module 8 due: 10/26 by 12:00pm-noon PST
Week 11 Dates: 11/2, 11/4	Experiments	No Module	Individual Journal Article Critique Assignment Due on 11/5 by 12-noon
Week 12 Dates: 11/9, 11/11	Data Analysis and Statistics Basics	Module 9: The Basics of Statistics	Module 9 due: 11/9 by 12:00pm-noon PST

Week 13 Dates: 11/16, 11/18	Data Science and the Future of Social Science Research	Module 10: Creating and Delivering Team Research Presentations	Module 10 due: 11/16 by 12:00pm-noon PST
Week 14 Dates: 11/23 (11/25: NO CLASS THANKSGIVING)	Exam 2	No Module	Exam 2 on 11/23
Week 15 Dates: 11/30, 12/2	Dress Rehearsal, Course Recap, & Last Day Celebration	No Module	Team Milestone 4 due: Nov 29 by 11:59 PST Team Project Videos Due: 12/3 by 11:59pm PST
STUDY DAYS Dates: 12/4-12/7			
FINAL EXAM PERIOD Dates: 12/8-12/15	Take-Home Final Assignment will be available on 12/9 @ 2pm PST		Take-home Final Assignment is due: by 12/11 11:59pm PST

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.

If you have a special circumstance that we should know about, please set up a time to discuss it with us. The sooner we know about a situation, the more we can do to help.

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

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.

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.