



USC University of Southern California

SOCIOLOGY 313

Sociological Research Methods

Fall 2021

TTH 9:30-10:50 THH 115

Dr. Karen Sternheimer

sternhei@usc.edu (response time within 24 hrs M-F 9-5)

Office location: HSH 318 (Hazel and Stanley Hall Bldg)

Office hours: TTH 11:15-12:15 *by appointment, other appointment times may be available; email for appt.*

TA: TBA

Office hours: TBA

For additional research assistance, contact Kevin Klipfel, Instructional Design & Assessment Librarian kklipfel@usc.edu

Students are expected to comply with all aspects of USC's COVID-19 policy. Failure to do so may result in removal from the class and referral to SJACS.

Please do not come to class if you have any symptoms. Every effort will be made to record class meetings. To access recordings, go to Blackboard, Zoom, and then Cloud Recordings. USC prohibits sharing of any course content outside of the learning environment.

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;
- Identify academic sources and interpret sociological journal articles, compare and contrast research results from different studies;
- 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 results of research, including tables, graphs, and charts;
- Generate your own research proposal in order to conduct your own future research.

Student evaluation:

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| 10% | Participation |
| 5% | Weekly reflective entries |
| 10% | Scholarly journal article worksheets |
| 10% | Quizzes |
| 1% | Topic statement/research question/proposed bibliography |

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| 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. 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. You can access your grades regularly on Blackboard.

Technology Etiquette:

E-mail is a great resource but never takes the place of a conversation. **Please include “SOI 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>) for all course content. An online “netiquette” guide is posted on the Discussion Board.

Cell phones must be turned off during and put away 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.

Participation (10%):

This class is based on active student participation in discussions and activities and is designed to be hands-on and experiential. Students are expected to attend class meetings prepared to discuss the assigned reading and participate in all activities. **If you are not able to attend class, you are expected to fully participate in the discussion board conversation on Blackboard that week. You are encouraged to participate on the discussion board even if you *are* able to attend. Discussion questions will be posted weekly.**

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 **join and leave meetings 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 Blackboard and other students.**

A full rubric detailing how participation is graded is posted on Blackboard on the “Syllabus and Grading” tab. Active participation in activities, comments and questions that reflect knowledge of course material, as well as courteous attention to your professor and peers are expected.

Weekly Reflective Entries (5%):

Each week, you are asked to reflect on what you have learned during the week and what questions you have about the material and your project using Blackboard’s Journal tool. There will be ten journal entry requirements, each worth .5% of your grade. Only you, your professor and TA can see these entries. They are due each week of the semester by 11:59 pm PST on Fridays. You can miss 5 without penalty.

Scholarly Journal Article Worksheets (10%):

You will create your own personalized syllabus based on your interests within sociology/NGOs. *Work on your reading list ASAP.* Throughout the semester, on dates noted you will be responsible for finding and reading **two** articles from any of the journals listed below (contact me or our TA for approval for a different journal):

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| 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 Credit/Partial Credit/No Credit 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/specialists in NGOs.* 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 by 5pm there will be a 15-point quiz posted on Blackboard, due by 9:15 am on the following Tuesday. You may use 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 **60** questions without penalty (there will be at least **210** questions total). You may earn extra credit or make up missed

quizzes by answering more than **150** 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 **9/14**, refine it during our in-class activities, and turn it in on **9/21**. You will receive feedback that will assist you for the literature review assignment. It will be graded Credit/Partial Credit/No Credit.

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 on the due date.**

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 detailed outline of your literature review on Blackboard using the Peer Assessment tool. A classmate will anonymously read your submission and provide you with detailed feedback based on the assignment checklist and provide 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. **No late drafts or reviews accepted.**

You will also be evaluated by how well you incorporate any feedback into the literature review you turn in on **10/21**.

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.

For your final project, you will turn in a document that includes an introduction, your *revised* literature review, your method, your proposed study's limitations, and ethical concerns of your proposed study. You will not carry 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. **No late drafts or reviews accepted.**

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. 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 previous 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. Once assigned, grades will not be changed unless a mathematical error occurred.*** 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: Many readings will come from everyday sociology blog.com; all readings will be accessible on Blackboard. **Please print them out and be ready to discuss them during class meetings.** 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 |
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| RESEARCH BASICS | | | |
| 1 | T 8/24 | Why research matters | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sternheimer, "Getting Excited About Research Methods"• Kaufman, "Doing Sociology" |
| 2 | TH 8/26 | 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" |
| 3 | T 8/31 | Finding journal articles | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sternheimer, "How to Find Reliable Data"• Sternheimer, "Getting Your Sociology Research Project Started"• Sternheimer, "What is Peer Review?" |
| 4 | TH 9/2 | Reading journal articles READ TWO CORE JOURNAL ARTICLES/COMPLETE WKSHT | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Matthew Desmond, Andrew V. Papachristos, & David S. Kirk, "Police Violence and Citizen Crime Reporting in the Black Community" |

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| 5 | T 9/7 | Interpreting tables and graphs, rates, percentages | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Best, "Confusing Numbers," from <i>More Damned Lies and Statistics: How Numbers Confuse Public Issues</i> |
| 6 | TH 9/9 | Interpreting numbers, continued READ TWO CORE JOURNAL ARTICLES/COMPLETE WKSHT | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sternheimer, "Interpreting Numbers in Context" • Mutchnick & Berg, "Table Reading" (pp. 2-5) |

CONCEPTUALIZING YOUR PROJECT

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| 7 | T 9/14 | Connecting theory with research DRAFT OF TOPIC STATEMENT AND READING LIST DUE | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sternheimer, "Joining the Conversation: Why Study Theory?" • Sternheimer, "Theories and Hypotheses" • C.J. Pascoe, "Making Masculinity: Adolescence, Identity, and High School" (pp. 1-15) |
| 8 | TH 9/16 | Asking sociological research questions READ TWO JOURNAL ARTICLES/COMPLETE WKSHT | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kaufman, "Asking Sociological Research Questions" • Sternheimer, "Research Questions: Less is More" |
| 9 | T 9/21 | Conceptualizing and operationalizing variables TOPIC STATEMENT WKSHT DUE | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sternheimer, "Are Social Scientists Anti-Social? How to Test Hypotheses" • Kaufman, "Mindfulness and Methodological Confusion" |
| 10 | TH 9/23 | Creating and testing hypotheses READ TWO JOURNAL ARTICLES/WKSHT | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sternheimer, "Probability vs. Certainty" • Sternheimer, "Crossword Puzzles and the Null Hypothesis" • Lainer-Vos, "Climate Change and Statistical Inference" |
| 11 | T 9/28 | 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" |
| 12 | TH 9/30 | Identifying gaps in the literature | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sternheimer, "What are Gaps in the Literature?" • Sternheimer, "Learning from the Literature: How to Find Categories and Themes" • Sternheimer, "Writing a Literature Review: Connecting Past Studies with Your Research" |

METHODS

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| 13 | T 10/5 | Choosing a method DRAFT OF LIT REVIEW DUE | <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" |
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| 14 | TH 10/7 | Ethnography READ TWO ETHNOGRAPHY JOURNAL ARTICLES/WKSHT | <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) |
| 15 | T 10/12 | Ethnography PEER FEEDBACK OF LIT REVIEW DUE | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pascoe, appendix • Sternheimer, "Researcher Reflexivity: Why who we are Matters" • Kaufman, "The Ethics of Ethnography" |
| 16 | T 10/19 | Interviews/Focus groups | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Armstrong & Hamilton, <i>Paying for the Party</i> appendix • Sternheimer, "Guys Like Me" • Sternheimer, "What Makes an Interview Sociological?" |
| 17 | TH 10/21 | Analyzing qualitative data: Coding and finding themes LIT REVIEW DUE | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Armstrong & Hamilton, College Pathways and Post-College Prospects • Mutchnick & Berg, "Qualitative Data" (pp. 183-192) |
| 18 | T 10/26 | 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" |
| 19 | TH 10/28 | Survey question construction READ TWO SURVEY JOURNAL ARTICLES/WKSHT | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sternheimer, "The Art and Science of Survey Writing" • Sternheimer, "A Random Invitation: The American Community Survey" • Sternheimer, "Sociology and the Census" |
| 20 | T 11/2 | Survey sampling, administration and using existing data sets | <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" |
| 21 | TH 11/4 | Experiments READ ONE BOOK/WKSHT | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pager, "The Mark of a Criminal Record" |
| 22 | T 11/9 | Content analysis and evaluation research | <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" |

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

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| 23 | TH 11/11 | Conducting research ethically DRAFT OF METHODS SECTION DUE | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Duneier, <i>Sidewalk</i> appendix• Mutchnick & Berg, "Research Ethics" |
| 24 | T 11/16 | Ethics and institutional review boards | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sternheimer, "Reality Television and Researching Children: Ethical Issues"• Inniss, "Institutional Review Boards: Why Do We Need Them?" |
| 25 | TH 11/18 | What conclusions can we make about previous research? PEER FEEDBACK OF METHODS SECTION DUE | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sternheimer, "Thinking Beyond the Case Study" |
| 26 | T 11/23 | Connecting data with theory DRAFT OF ETHICS/LIMITATIONS SECTION DUE | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sternheimer, "Connecting the Dots: Linking Theory with Research"• Sternheimer, "How to Speak Sociologese" |
| THANKSGIVING | | | |
| 27 | T 11/30 | Answering a research question READ ONE BOOK/WKSHT | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Raskoff, "Revisiting Research"• Raskoff, "Interpreting Research Results: Probabilities, Not Certainties" |
| 28 | TH 12/2 | Democracy, data, and the future PEER FEEDBACK OF ETHICS/LIMITATIONS SECTION DUE | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Kaufman, "Because I'm a Sociologist...."• Sternheimer, "Main Points: What I Want my Students to Learn"• Sternheimer, "Why Social Research Matters"• King, "The 2020 Census: Help Wanted" |

RESEARCH PROPOSAL DUE THURSDAY December 9 at 1 pm PST on Blackboard

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.