



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

**Spring 2022 – Tuesday, Thursday – 11:00 AM-  
12:20 PM**

**Section:** 20477

**Location:** ZOOM Meetings found on blackboard.usc.edu AND  
ASC 204

**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: Essence Wilson**

**Office Hours:** 10 – 11 AM PST on Thursday

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

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

**Teaching Assistant: Donggyu Kim**

**Office Hours:** 3-4 PM PST on Monday

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

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

**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.

## **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.

### **Course Notes**

Meeting first week on Zoom (find the meeting links on blackboard.usc.edu) and in ASC 204, thereafter. Please be ready to meet through Zoom at different points of the semester, if needed.

### **Course Expectations/Policies**

#### **Student Contributions to Learning Environment**

The course is more dynamic (and fun) when students participate during class. I will provide numerous opportunities for engagement through questions, comments, and activities. The class time works best when lecture is integrated with insights from students. Please be prepared to bring your views to class.

#### **DIEA statement**

I strongly encourage participation during course time, but participation must be respectful of others. As we create our learning environment, we must strive to foster an inclusive space that will respect diverse perspectives and views. We will promote a safe space to question, challenge, and critique ideas that are relevant to the course content. Also, I request that we remain respectful of one another and refrain from making any remarks that relate to personal decisions, attitudes, and attributes.

## Attendance

- Showing up for class in person (and in Zoom when required) is not a part of the grade but **SUBSTANTIALLY** improves the learning experience. When coming to class, be present and ready to contribute.
- While it is expected that students will make every effort to attend classes, it is recognized that personal circumstances will arise which preclude class attendance. In such circumstances, the student is responsible for obtaining the materials presented in missed classes and for making up missed assignments.
- It is expected that students attend class in person as required unless alternative arrangements have been made due to illness, medical reasons, or the need to isolate or quarantine due to COVID-19.
- In the event that you find yourself experiencing COVID-19 related symptoms, in keeping with university recommendations, you should:
  - Stay home! This is the best way to prevent spreading COVID-19 as supported by scientific evidence; Please do not come to an in-person class if you are feeling ill, particularly if you are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19. Nothing we do in our class is worth risking your health, my health, or the health of your peers.
  - Contact your Instructor to identify options available for keeping up with course requirements and content.

## Notes about Zoom - Zoom Participation [First Week of Class (and potentially other meetings)]

- Turn on your video when possible. It is helpful to be able to see each other, just as in an in-person class. However, we do recognize that if you have limited Internet bandwidth or no webcam, it may not be possible. If you are unable to find an environment without a lot of visual distractions, it is ok to turn off your video.
- In order to maximize collaboration in the delivery of courses in remote learning, I am strongly encouraging the use of tools such as cameras, mics, and chat features in order to mimic the face-to-face classroom experience environment as much as possible. While you are encouraged to use your webcam and mic whenever possible/appropriate during the classes conducted via Zoom, you are not required to do so.

- Additional Note Regarding Audio: Mute your microphone when you are not talking. This helps eliminate background noise. Use a headset when possible. This will improve audio quality. If you are not able to find a quiet, distraction free spot where you can use your microphone, use the chat window for questions and comments relevant to the class.

#### **b. Communication**

For 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.

Dr. Twyman and 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.

#### **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

## **Description and Assessment of Assignments**

### **Weekly Homework Module Completion**

There are eight weekly modules that include learning materials and assignments each week. The modules will also include materials covered during lecture time and should be considered as evidence that the student paid attention to in-class lecture slides and videos. Therefore, in many cases class notes will contribute to completing the weekly homework for the course.

### **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.

### **Team Project**

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 to create deliverables related to the required topic that will be provided in an assignment description during the semester.

- 1. Project Deliverable #1:** Team member introductions. Within the first week of assignment, all members must communicate with one another and learn about one another. Consider this an “ice-breaker” for collaboration.
- 2. Project Deliverable #2:** A report directly related to the project (will be relatively short and must respond to provided prompts) including a list of references.
- 3. Team Project Presentation:** All team members must either have a speaking role or contribute to developing the presentation. Maximum of 20 minutes with a minimum of 14 minutes. Teams that create a presentation outside of this time

range will be penalized. Record the presentation using Zoom and upload the link to Blackboard according to forthcoming assignment description.

### **Take-Home Final Exam**

The assignment will be “open notes” and will require students to respond to a “research challenge” developed by Dr. Twyman that will test students’ understandings of multiple concepts that were taught during the course. Collaboration will be unhelpful for this assignment and will require students to reflect on their own intuition, biases, and opinions about the “research challenge.” Must be completely independently.

### **Breakdown of Grade**

<b>Assignment</b>	<b>Points</b>	<b>% of Grade</b>
Homework Modules (8 total)	25	25
Research Article Assessments (2 total)	20	20
Team Project Deliverable #1	5	5
Team Project Deliverable #2	10	10
Team Project Presentation	15	15
Take-Home Final Exam	20	20
Class Participation	5	5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100%</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

## Grading Standards

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

## 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 the Instructor and 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.

### **Assignment Submission Policy**

All assignments should be uploaded to Blackboard. Please submit all assignments by the posted due dates.

Late assignments will not be accepted more than 48 hours after the assignment deadline unless there is a documented and reasonable excuse. Also, a maximum of 80% is possible for late work.

## 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. Students should consult the [University Registration Calendar](#) for dates associated with add/drop deadlines, fees, and grading options.

	Topics/Daily Activities	Readings/Homework	Deliverable/Due Dates
<b>Week 1</b> Dates: 1/10-1/14	Introduction to Social Science Research		
<b>Week 2</b> Dates: 1/17-1/21	Universities, Research Institutes, and Funding Sources	Week 2 Module	[MLK Day: Monday, January 17] Week 2 Module Due: 1/22 by 11:59 PM PST
<b>Week 3</b> Dates: 1/24-1/28	Ethics and Biases in Designing and Conducting Research	Week 3 Module	Week 3 Module Due: 1/29 by 11:59 PM PST
<b>Week 4</b> Dates: 1/31-2/4	Reading Research Articles and Understanding Research Questions	Week 4 Module	Week 4 Module Due: 2/5 by 11:59 PM PST
<b>Week 5</b> Dates: 2/7-2/11	The Scientific Method and Hypothesis Development	Week 5 Module	Week 5 Module Due: 2/12 by 11:59 PM PST
<b>Week 6</b> Dates: 2/14-2/18	Quantitative Research Approach	Week 6 Module	Week 6 Module Due: 2/19 by 11:59 PM PST
<b>Week 7</b> Dates: 2/21-2/25	Qualitative Research Approach	Week 7 Module	[Presidents' Day: Monday, February 21] Week 7 Module Due: 2/26 by 11:59 PM PST
<b>Week 8</b> Dates: 2/28-3/4	The Research Loop: How Quantitative and Qualitative Research Mix	No Module Random Team Assignments	Team Project Deliverable #1 Due: 3/5 by 11:59 PM PST
<b>Week 9</b> Dates: 3/7-3/11	Audience Analysis	Research Article Assessment #1	Research Article Assessment #1 Due: 3/12 by 11:59 PM PST
Dates: 3/14-3/18	<b>No Classes</b>		[Spring Break]
<b>Week 10</b> Dates: 3/21-3/25	Polling Public Opinion	Team Project Deliverable #2	Team Project Deliverable #2 Due: 3/26 by 11:59 PM PST
<b>Week 11</b> Dates: 3/28-4/1	Experimental Design and Laboratory Experiments	Research Article Assessment #2	Research Article Assessment #2 Due: 4/2 by 11:59 PM PST
<b>Week 12</b> Dates: 4/4-4/8	Natural Experiments and	Week 12 Module	Week 12 Module Due: 4/9 by 11:59 PM PST

	Online Experiments		
<b>Week 13</b> <b>Dates: 4/11-4/15</b>	Computational Research Approaches and Data Science	Week 13 Module	<b>Week 13 Module Due: 4/16 by 11:59 PM PST</b>
<b>Week 14</b> <b>Dates: 4/18-4/22</b>	Information about Statistics	Team Project Presentation	<b>Team Project Video Due: 4/23 by 11:59 PM PST</b>
<b>Week 15</b> <b>Dates: 4/25-4/29</b>	Social Network Analysis	No Module	<b>Course Evaluations</b>
<b>STUDY DAYS</b> <b>Dates: 4/30-5/3</b>			
<b>FINAL EXAMS</b> <b>Dates: 5/4-5/11</b>	Take-Home Final Exam will be made available on 5/5 at 11 AM		<b>Take-Home Final Exam due: 5/10 by 1 PM PST</b>

## 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](#).” 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).

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](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 and 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. 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.symlicity.com/care\\_report](http://usc-advocate.symlicity.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 Student Accessibility Services - (213) 740-0776*

[osas.usc.edu/](http://osas.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 Support and Advocacy - (213) 821-4710*

[uscса.usc.edu](http://uscса.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/annenberg-scholarships-and-awards>

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.