

USC Annenberg

School for Communication
and Journalism

COMM 305: Understanding Social Science Research

Summer 2022 – Tue & Thu – 9:30 - 1:40 pm

4.0 Units, Section: 20477R

Location: Zoom (<https://usc.zoom.us/j/94290498992>)

Instructor: Mingxuan (Elaine) Liu

Office Hours: Tuesday 3-4 pm PST on Zoom (<https://usc.zoom.us/j/5090603243>) or by appointment

Email: mliu@usc.edu.

I. Course Description

COMM305, Understanding Social Science Research, is designed to introduce students to the basics of social science research, with a specific focus on communication research. Students will learn the knowledge, skills, and resources necessary to understand, evaluate, conduct, write up, and present empirical research. Lectures will focus on both conceptual aspects of social science research as well as the basics of research methodology, data analysis, and interpretation of findings. Course lectures and assignments are designed to benefit students both academically and professionally.

II. Student Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of this course, students will be able to . . .

- Explain basic concepts, theories, and methods in social science research;
- Critically evaluate the strengths, limitations, and implications of social science research;
- Understand the basics of various qualitative and quantitative research methods and the contexts in which they ought to be used;
- Conduct and interpret basic statistical analyses in R;
- Develop and present your own research proposal that details all aspects of your empirical study.

Prerequisite(s): There is no prerequisite for this course.

Co-Requisite(s): There is no co-requisite for this course.

Concurrent Enrollment: There is no concurrent enrollment for this course.

III. Course Notes

We will meet on Zoom. Offline meetings are available upon request. Copies of lecture slides and other class information will be posted on Blackboard. Class recordings will also be posted on Blackboard.

IV. Policies and Procedures

a. Additional Policies (including DIEA statement)

The course strongly embraces the DIEA (diversity, inclusion, equity, and accessibility) statement. While the class provides numerous opportunities for student participation and engagement, participation must be respectful of others. Please recognize and/or remember that we have different backgrounds. Criticize ideas, not individuals or

groups. We will work in partnership to foster an inclusive environment that respects diverse perspectives and promote a safe space to critically evaluate social scientific studies and ideas.

The class works best when students actively participate and share their insights. Attendance and participation are not part of your grade, but substantially improve the learning outcomes for all and make the homework assignments easy. Please turn on your video when possible. Being able to see each other creates a sense of social presence and connection. However, we do recognize that there will be some “hiccups” along the way. Technology may fail, it might be hard to find a quiet learning environment, etc. While you are encouraged to turn on your video/use chat functions/unmute yourself to participate in discussions, you are not required to do so. Please be patient and flexible as I or your fellow classmates figure out what works and what does not work. I will also be as patient and flexible as I can for you.

b. Communication

If you cannot come during office hours, feel free to arrange a meeting via email. I’m also open to in-person meetings on campus. Emails are usually replied to within two business days, if not sooner.

c. Technological Proficiency and Hardware/Software Required

Required (free) Software: (Note: We will learn how to install R and R Studio during class).

- R Software Environment: <https://www.r-project.org/>
- R Studio: <https://rstudio.com/>

d. Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

Course materials will be available on Blackboard. There is no required textbook.

Recommended Texts:

- Hayes, A. F. (2015). *Statistical Methods for Communication Science*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates (ISBN: 978-1-138-98293-2, Paperback)
- *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (7th ed.)* (2020). Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association. (ISBN: 978-1-433-83216-1, Paperback)

V. Description and Assessment of Assignments

In-Class Exercises (10%)

During each sessions (except the first and last sessions), students will participate in in-class exercises (10 in total) that provide experience including but not limited to designing research, conducting research, and performing data analyses. If students miss a session for any reason, they can complete the exercise posted on Blackboard within 48 hours (i.e., Thursday & Saturday by end of day, Pacific Time) to get credits.

Weekly Homework Assignments (50%)

There will be 5 homework assignments for students to apply the concepts and techniques discussed in class to analytic problems or research development. The assignments may cover multiple choices, conceptual questions, critiquing research articles, or developing your own research projects that will lead to your final research proposal. Students will have one week to submit the homework. Please submit your work electronically to Blackboard by the following Thursday 11:59 p.m. Pacific Time.

Presentation of Research Proposal (15%)

On June 28, the last class, you will give a 20-minute presentation (including Q&A) on your project. The final presentation should include the following four sections: introduction, literature review, methods, and discussion of potential findings/limitations/implications. You will also need to submit your slides to Blackboard for grading on the day of your presentation. If you are unable to join the class on June 28 synchronously for any reason, please record your presentation and send it to your instructor (mliu@usc.edu) by the end of June 26, PST. Your presentation recording will be played on June 28 during class. A grading rubric on the research presentation will be posted on Blackboard.

Peer-Evaluation of Presentation (5%)

During the last class on June 28, each student will give specific comments to all the other students' presentations. Feedback includes but not limited to: presentation effectiveness, research design, methodology, questions and suggestions, etc. More information on what feedback to give will be covered before the date. If students miss the presentation session for any reason, please submit your peer-evaluation to Blackboard within 48 hours (i.e., June 30 by end of day, Pacific Time) to get credits.

Final Research Proposal (20%)

The final paper should include four sections: introduction, literature review, methods, and discussion of potential findings/limitations/implications. The final paper should be 8-15 double-spaced pages of text (i.e., excluding title page, abstract, references, tables, figures, and appendices), written in APA format. Final paper is due on June 30 by end of day, Pacific Time. No late submissions will be accepted due to the fast turnaround time of the summer session.

VI. Grading**a. Breakdown of Grade**

Assignment	Points	% of Grade
In-Class Exercises (10 total)	10*1	10
Weekly Homework Assignments (5 total)	5*10	50
Presentation of Research Proposal	15	15
Peer-Evaluation of Presentation	5	5
Final Research Proposal	20	20
TOTAL	100	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

c. 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.

d. Grading Timeline

Grading Timeframe and Missing or Inaccurate Score Inquiries/Disputes

For effective learning, students should receive timely feedback on assignments and exams. Therefore, every attempt will be made to grade assignments/exams and post grades within two weeks. Scores for all assignments and exams are regularly updated on Blackboard.

There is a 24-hour “wait period” after receiving a grade, and you are responsible for notifying the Instructor **within one (1) week** of a score posting if you think a score is missing or inaccurate. Moreover, you only have this period of time to contest a score on an assignment/exam. If you fail to inquire/notify us 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. Requests for grade changes must be written and include justification. A re-grade could lead to either higher or lower points.

VII. Assignment Rubrics

Assignment rubrics will be posted on Blackboard before each assignment distribution.

VIII. Assignment Submission Policy

- A. All assignments are due on the dates specified. Late work will be penalized by a 10% deduction in the assignment grade every 24 hours late unless due to an emergency excused by the instructor. Email the instructor as soon as possible to discuss alternate arrangements due to an emergency.
- B. Assignments must be submitted via Blackboard.

IX. 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, news events, and/or guest speaker availability.

	Topics/Daily Activities	Readings and Homework	Deliverable/Due Dates
Week 1 Thur Dates: 05/19	Course welcome and overview; Introduction to social science research; R installation		
Week 2 Tue Dates: 05/24	Presentation of theories; Fundamentals of empirical research; Defining research questions and testable hypotheses; Ethics and making claims	Week 2 Module on Blackboard	1. In-Class Exercise, submit after class or by Thursday (05/26)
Week 2 Thur Dates: 05/26	Literature review; APA formatting; Paper outline; Fundamentals of measurement, distribution, and data description	Week 2 Module on Blackboard	1. In-Class Exercise, submit after class or by Saturday (05/28); 2. Homework 1, due next Thursday (06/02)
Week 3 Tue Dates: 05/31	Quantitative Research Methods – Survey	Week 3 Module on Blackboard	1. In-Class Exercise, submit after class or by Thursday (06/02)
Week 3 Thur Dates: 06/02	Quantitative Research Methods – Survey	Week 3 Module on Blackboard	1. In-Class Exercise, submit after class or by Saturday (06/04); 2. Homework 2, due next Thursday (06/09)
Week 4 Tue Dates: 06/07	Quantitative Research Methods – Experiment	Week 4 Module on Blackboard	1. In-Class Exercise, submit after class or by Thursday (06/09)
Week 4 Thur Dates: 06/09	Quantitative Research Methods – Experiment	Week 4 Module on Blackboard	1. In-Class Exercise, submit after class or by Saturday (06/11); 2. Homework 3, due next Thursday (06/16)
Week 5 Tue Dates: 06/14	Quantitative Research Methods – Data Analysis	Week 5 Module on Blackboard	1. In-Class Exercise, submit after class or by Thursday (06/16)
Week 5 Thur Dates: 06/16	Quantitative Research Methods – Data Analysis	Week 5 Module on Blackboard	1. In-Class Exercise, submit after class or by Saturday (06/18); 2. Homework 4, due next Thursday (06/23)
Week 6 Tue Dates: 06/21	Qualitative Research Methods – interview, ethnographics	Week 6 Module on Blackboard	1. In-Class Exercise, submit after class or by Thursday (06/23)

Week 6 Thur Dates: 06/23	Content analysis; Mixed-Methods Research; Final presentation & proposal Q & A.	Week 6 Module on Blackboard	1. In-Class Exercise, submit after class or by Saturday (06/25); 2. Homework 5, due next Thursday (06/30)
Week 7 Tue Dates: 06/28	Final Presentations		Student feedback is essential to the instructor and the Department to keep improving this course. Students are encouraged to respond to the standard USC course evaluation survey at the end of the semester.
FINAL Research Proposal and Other Graded Work Submission Dates: 06/30			Date: Graded work (assignments, presentation slides, final paper, peer-evaluations etc.) must be due by the end of 06/30 PST.

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

USC School of Journalism Policy on Academic Integrity

The following is the USC Annenberg School of Journalism’s policy on academic integrity and repeated in the syllabus for every course in the school:

“Since its founding, the USC School of Journalism has maintained a commitment to the highest standards of ethical conduct and academic excellence. Any student found plagiarizing, fabricating, cheating on examinations, and/or purchasing papers or other assignments faces sanctions ranging from an ‘F’ on the assignment to dismissal from the School of Journalism. All academic integrity violations will be reported to the office of Student Judicial Affairs & Community Standards (SJACS), as per university policy, as well as journalism school administrators.”

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 or Learning Lab, without approval of the instructor.

b. 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 and 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.