USCAnnenberg

COMM 305: Understanding Social Science Research
4 Units

Spring 2024 – Tuesday, Thursday – 12:30-1:50 PM
Section: 20477
Location: ANN L105A

Instructor: Dr. Marlon Twyman
Office: ASC 121
Office Hours: Thursdays at 3:30-4:30 PM or By Appointment
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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.

Prerequisite(s): None
Recommended Preparation: None

Course Notes
Dr. Twyman expects consistent attendance, participation, and dialogue within the classroom environment. Blackboard will contain course materials (e.g., lecture slides, readings, etc.).

Technological Proficiency and Hardware/Software Required
The course requires the following software technologies freely available through USC
- Blackboard: blackboard.usc.edu
    - Assignment Submissions
    - Email Announcements
- Google Drive
    - Archive of reading materials
- Google Drive OR Microsoft Office 365: https://software.usc.edu/free-to-campus/
    - For preparation of assignments
- Adobe Creative Cloud: http://www.annenbergdl.org/adobe/
    - For PDF reading and editing
    - Other media editing software that may be of interest
- Citation Manager: e.g., Zotero (https://www.zotero.org/) or Mendeley (https://www.mendeley.com/). Both freely available to cite any references used in writing assignments.

Laptop Policy
All undergraduate and graduate Annenberg majors and minors are required to have a PC or Apple laptop that can be used in Annenberg classes. Please refer to the **Annenberg Digital Lounge** for more information. To connect to USC's Secure Wireless network, please visit USC's **Information Technology Services** website.

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.*

Description and Assessment of Assignments

1. **Mandatory:** Introduction Survey
   To better understand the student population, a survey will be administered to gain information about student interests, expectations, and academic backgrounds. This assignment **MUST BE SUBMITTED ON TIME** in order for a student's weekly homework modules to be graded. The survey is graded based upon completion.
2. Weekly Homework Module Completion
   There are ten 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.
3. **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.

4. **In-Class 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 to create deliverables related to provided topics throughout the semester.
5. **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.

Participation
- Showing up for class **SUBSTANTIALLY** improves the learning experience. When coming to class, be present and ready to contribute.
- **FOR THOSE WHO DO NOT ATTEND CLASS, YOU RISK PENALTIES BASED ON ASSIGNED ACTIVITIES**
- I expect to behave in a manner consistent with other professional environments. Therefore, show up on time and engage.

Grading Breakdown
Description of assessments and corresponding points and percentage of grade. Students will be graded based on the quality of their submissions. Quality includes the clarity of the explanation as well as having minimal errors in the submission. Assignments will have a fact-based component and/or interpretative component where students will be able to justify their perspectives on specific topics. Throughout the semester, consistency is expected from students in the submission of their assignments.

Assessment Tool (assignments)	Points	% of Grade
MANDATORY: Introduction Survey **MUST BE SUBMITTED ON TIME TO HAVE HOMEWORK MODULES GRADED**		
Homework Modules (10 total)	30	30
Research Article Assessments (2 total)	30	30
In-Class Team Projects	20	20
Take-Home Final Exam	20	20
TOTAL	**100**	**100%**

Course Grading Scale
Letter grades and corresponding point value ranges. There will be no rounding of grades.

Letter grade and corresponding numerical point range		
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

Course Specific Policies

A course is only as good as its students. USC Annenberg is a highly selective program and this course is designed to help students prepare for the rest of their college and professional careers. Establishing a **positive, productive, and stimulating** learning environment is a collective endeavor; the professor, teaching assistants, and learners must be respectful and commit. As such, class attendance and participation is of paramount importance. A common occurrence at USC Annnenberg tends to be inconsistent attendance. Here is how this course handles attendance:

- If the average attendance during any week of class is less than or equal to 50% of registered students, then the required homework for the week will increase by 100%.
- If the average attendance during any week of class is less than 75% and greater than 50% of registered students, then the required homework for the week will increase by 50%.
- If the average attendance during any week of class is greater than or equal to 75% and less than 90%, then the baseline amount of homework will be assigned.
- If the average attendance during any week of class is greater than or equal to 90%, then the required amount of homework will be reduced by 25%.

Classroom Policies

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. Additionally, time at the end of lectures will be reserved for question-and-answer periods.

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

See the above information. Class attendance is important for your grade and the collective learning environment. Attend class, learn, and engage with your classmates.

Classroom Norms

Be respectful of your classmates and instructor. When using personal devices, please remain focused on course-related content and stay on task. Questions are welcome at all times.

Course Evaluations

Please complete course evaluations at the end of the semester when given time.

Grading Standards

No one should expect or think they deserve a specific letter grade. Grades are earned. If you do work that is done competently and is of fair quality, do not expect a grade that describes excellence.

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

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 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 or submitted through a provided Google Form. Please submit all assignments by the posted due dates.

Not accepting late assignments.

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

A weekly schedule of the topics, readings, and deliverables for the course.

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 **Dates: 1/8-1/12**	Introduction to Social Science Research		
Week 2 **Dates: 1/15-1/19**	Universities, Research Institutes, and Funding Sources	Week 2 Module	[**Martin Luther King Day**: Monday, January 15] **MANDATORY: Introduction Survey Due on 1/19 by 6 AM PST**

	Topics/Daily Activities	Readings and Homework	Deliverable/Due Dates
Week 3 **Dates: 1/22-1/26**	Ethics and Biases in Designing and Conducting Research	Week 3 Module	**Week 2 Module Due: 1/23 by 6 AM PST**
Week 4 **Dates: 1/29-2/2**	Reading Research Articles and Understanding Research Questions		**Week 3 Module Due: 1/30 by 6 AM PST**
Week 5 **Dates: 2/5-2/9**	The Scientific Method and Hypothesis Development	Week 4 & 5 Module	
Week 6 **Dates: 2/12-2/16**	Quantitative Research Approach	Week 6 Module	**Week 4 & 5 Module Due: 2/13 by 6 AM PST**
Week 7 **Dates: 2/19-2/23**	Qualitative Research Approach	Week 7 Module	[**Presidents' Day:** Monday, February 19] **Week 6 Module Due: 2/20 by 6 AM PST**
Week 8 **Dates: 2/26-3/1**	The Research Loop: How Quantitative and Qualitative Research Mix	Research Article Assessment #1	**Week 7 Module Due: 2/27 by 6 AM PST**
Week 9 **Dates: 3/4-3/8**	Audience Analysis		**Research Article Assessment #1 Due: 3/8 by 6 AM PST**
Spring Break **Dates: 3/11-3/15**			
Week 10 **Dates: 3/18-3/22**	Polling Public Opinion		
Week 11 **Dates: 3/25-3/29**	Experimental Design and Laboratory Experiments	Week 11 Module	
Week 12 **Dates: 4/1-4/5**	Natural Experiments and Online Experiments	Week 12 Module	**Week 11 Module Due: 4/2 by 6 AM PST**
Week 13 **Dates: 4/8-4/12**	Computational Research Approaches and Data Science	Week 13 Module	**Week 12 Module Due: 4/9 by 6 AM PST**

	Topics/Daily Activities	Readings and Homework	Deliverable/Due Dates
Week 14 Dates: 4/15-4/19	Statistics, Models, and Inference	Research Article Assessment #2	**Week 13 Module Due: 4/16 by 6 AM PST**
Week 15 Dates: 4/22-4/26	Social Network Analysis	Week 15 Module	Course Evaluations **Research Article Assessment #2 Due: 4/26 by 6 AM PST**
STUDY DAYS Dates: 4/27-4/30			
FINAL EXAM PERIOD Dates: 5/1-5/8	Take-Home Final Exam will be made available on 5/3 at 8 AM PST		**Week 15 Module Due: 5/2 by 6 AM PST** **Take-Home Final Exam Due: 5/8 by 4 PM PST**

Policies and Procedures

Additional Policies
Please bring at least one personal device to class for use during class activities.

Communication
For accommodations and emergencies, please email Dr. Twyman. 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.

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Integrity
The University of Southern California is foremost a learning community committed to fostering successful scholars and researchers dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and the transmission of ideas. Academic misconduct is in contrast to the university's mission to educate students through a broad array of first-rank academic, professional, and extracurricular programs and includes any act of dishonesty in the submission of academic work (either in draft or final form).

This course will follow the expectations for academic integrity as stated in the USC Student Handbook. All students are expected to submit assignments that are original work and prepared specifically for the course/section in this academic term. You may not submit work written by others or "recycle" work prepared for other courses without obtaining written permission from the instructor(s). Students suspected of engaging in academic misconduct will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity.

Other violations of academic misconduct include, but are not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication (e.g., falsifying data), knowingly assisting others in acts of academic dishonesty, and any act that gains or is intended to gain an unfair academic advantage.

The impact of academic dishonesty is far-reaching and is considered a serious offense against the university and could result in outcomes such as failure on the assignment, failure in the course, suspension, or even expulsion from the university.

For more information about academic integrity see the student handbook or the Office of Academic Integrity's website, and university policies on Research and Scholarship 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 or Learning Lab, without approval of the instructor.

If found responsible for an academic violation, students may be assigned university outcomes, such as suspension or expulsion from the university, and grade penalties, such as an "F" grade on the assignment, exam, and/or in the course.

Course Content Distribution and Synchronous Session Recordings Policies
USC has policies that prohibit recording and distribution of any synchronous and asynchronous course content outside of the learning environment.

Recording a university class is prohibited without the express permission of the instructor and announcement to the class, or unless conducted pursuant to an Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) accommodation. Recording can inhibit free discussion in the future, and thus infringe on the academic freedom of other students as well as the instructor. (Living our Unifying Values: The USC Student Handbook, page 13).

Distribution or use of notes, recordings, exams, or other intellectual property, based on university classes or lectures without the express permission of the instructor for purposes other than individual or group study is also prohibited. This includes but is not limited to providing materials for distribution by services publishing course materials. This restriction on unauthorized use also applies to all information, which had been distributed to students or in any way had been displayed for use in relationship to the class, whether obtained in class, via email, on the internet, or via any other media. (Living our Unifying Values: The USC Student Handbook, page 13).

Policy for the use of AI Generators in the course
Permitted on specific assignments
In this course, I encourage you to use artificial intelligence (AI)-powered programs to help you with assignments that indicate the permitted use of AI. You should also be aware that AI text generation tools may present incorrect information, biased responses, and incomplete analyses; thus they are not yet prepared to produce text that meets the standards of this course. To adhere to our university values, you must cite any AI-generated material (e.g., text, images, etc.) included or referenced in your work and provide the prompts used to generate the content. Using an AI tool to generate content without proper attribution will be treated as plagiarism and reported to the Office of Academic Integrity. Please review the instructions in each assignment for more details on how and when to use AI Generators for your submissions.
- AI will NOT be required for ANY assignment given during this semester
- In instances where AI is used as part of an assignment, students are REQUIRED to include their prompts

Students and Disability Accommodations
USC welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. The Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) is responsible for the determination of appropriate accommodations for students who encounter disability-related barriers. Once a student has completed the OSAS process (registration, initial appointment, and submitted documentation) and accommodations are determined to be reasonable and appropriate, a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) will be available to generate for each course. The LOA must be

given to each course instructor by the student and followed up with a discussion. This should be done as early in the semester as possible as accommodations are not retroactive. More information can be found at osas.usc.edu. You may contact OSAS at (213) 740-0776 or via email at osasfrontdesk@usc.edu.

Support Systems

Annenberg Student Success Fund
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.

Annenberg Student Emergency Aid Fund
Awards are distributed to students experiencing unforeseen circumstances and emergencies impacting their ability to pay tuition or cover everyday living expenses. These awards are not intended to cover full-tuition expenses, but rather serve as bridge funding to guarantee students' continued enrollment at USC until other resources, such as scholarships or loans, become available. Students are encouraged to provide as much information in their application, as well as contact their academic advisor directly with questions about additional resources available to them.

Counseling and Mental Health - *(213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call*
Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline - *988 for both calls and text messages – 24/7 on call*
The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline) provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the United States. The Lifeline is comprised of a national network of over 200 local crisis centers, combining custom local care and resources with national standards and best practices. The new, shorter phone number makes it easier for people to remember and access mental health crisis services (though the previous 1 (800) 273-8255 number will continue to function indefinitely) and represents a continued commitment to those in crisis.

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - *(213) 740-9355(WELL) – 24/7 on call*
Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender- and power-based harm (including sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and stalking).

Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title IX (EEO-TIX) - *(213) 740-5086*
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*
Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

The Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) - *(213) 740-0776*
OSAS ensures equal access for students with disabilities through providing academic accommodations and auxiliary aids in accordance with federal laws and university policy.

USC Campus Support and Intervention - *(213) 740-0411*
Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion - *(213) 740-2101*

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*
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) 442-1200 – 24/7 on call*
Non-emergency assistance or information.

Office of the Ombuds - *(213) 821-9556 (UPC) / (323-442-0382 (HSC)*
A safe and confidential place to share your USC-related issues with a University Ombuds who will work with you to explore options or paths to manage your concern.

Occupational Therapy Faculty Practice - *(323) 442-2850 or* otfp@med.usc.edu
Confidential Lifestyle Redesign services for USC students to support health promoting habits and routines that enhance quality of life and academic performance.

TrojansAlert
TrojansAlert is an alert system that allows university officials to contact you during an emergency. It is your connection to real-time updates, instructions on where to go, what to do, or what not to do, who to contact and other important information. Visit the website to sign up.

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.

ITS Customer Support Center (CSC): (213) 740-5555
The ITS Customer Support Center (CSC) provides support to the USC community for connecting to the USC Network and using supported applications. For help with network connectivity and software, contact CSC. Walk-in support is available in Leavey Library's Information Commons.

Violence-Free Campus
Visit the website to read more about prohibited behaviors, reporting responsibilities and where to report.

Student-Athlete Travel Excuse Letters
Prior to a university-sponsored away competition, Student-Athletes are responsible for providing their Instructor with a Competition Excuse Letter (provided by their academic counselor) for the classes missed while on the road (i.e., excused absence). It is the responsibility of the Student-Athlete to provide the letter prior to leaving on their trip and to make arrangements for a make-up of any missed assignments or exams. Please refer to the SAAS site where they detail travel and travel excuse letters.

Add/Drop Dates for Session 001
(15 weeks: 1/8/2024 – 4/26/2024; Final Exam Period: 5/1-8/2024)
Link: https://classes.usc.edu/term-20241/calendar/
Last day to add: Friday, January 26, 2024
Last day to drop a class without a mark of "W," except for Monday-only classes, and receive a refund: Friday, January 26, 2024
Last day to change enrollment option to Pass/No Pass or Audit: Friday, January 26, 2024 [All major and minor courses must be taken for a letter grade.]
Last day to add/drop a Monday-only class without a mark of "W" and receive a refund or change to Audit:

Tuesday, January 30, 2024

Last day to withdraw without a "W" on transcript or change pass/no pass to letter grade: Friday, February 23, 2024 [Mark of "W" will still appear on student record and STARS report and tuition charges still apply.
*Please drop any course by the end of week three for session 001 (or the 20 percent mark of the session in which the course is offered) to avoid tuition charges.]

Last day to drop with a mark of "W": Friday, April 5, 2024

About Your Instructor

Dr. Marlon Twyman is Assistant Professor of Communication at the Annenberg School for Communication & Journalism. He is a quantitative social scientist specializing in advanced computational methods, focusing on social network analysis. He holds a Ph.D. from Northwestern University (Evanston, IL) in Technology and Social Behavior (Communication Studies and Computer Science), and a B.S. and M.S. in Biomedical Engineering from Wright State University (Dayton, OH). His research interests focus on issues related to digital collaboration and online commtunities.