

### 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

- BrightSpace: <https://brightspace.usc.edu/>
  - Course Management
  - 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.