

SOCI531

Research Methods in Sociology

Spring 2025 · # 21315 · Blount Hall 403B

Wednesday 11:30 am – 2:40 pm

Instructor:

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Course Objective

Research Methods in Sociology (SOCI531) emphasizes the design of social science research and provides an overview of the commonly used social science research methods. The goal is to understand the characteristics of sociologically interesting and rigorous research and to design a research proposal that shares those characteristics. It is intended for master's students who are preparing to begin work on their thesis, but doctoral students may find it useful for beginning their dissertation proposal or preparing a dissertation improvement grant.

This class is *NOT* intended as a methods tutorial. Mastery of a craft takes longer and involves more work than talking about the craft for a week. In this class the focus will be on how to choose a method, the factors to consider in developing a research design, and critical evaluation of research results. Overall, the goal of this course is to help you to gain an understanding of the logic of the research process, understand the strengths and weaknesses of different research designs, and envision research methods as an integral part of social science knowledge that cannot be divorced from theory.

Programmatic Outcomes/Department Goals


Aligned with broader goals of the graduate program, students should leave the course with a working command of common research designs practiced in sociology and their logic of inquiry. The learning outcomes include but are not limited to the following:

1. Achieve a basic competency in research methods and acknowledge their role within the discipline of sociology and the broader social sciences.
2. Comprehend the philosophies of knowledge production that inform the premises, logics, and assumptions behind research design and practice.
3. Understand how to comprehend, criticize, and design research projects, from origination to implementation to dissemination.
4. Exhibit an awareness for how applications of sociological research remain relevant and continue to shape unfolding scholarship.

Required Material

The main textbook for this course and additional readings can be downloaded from the course website or UTK e-libraries. The main textbook is available through the VolBooks Total Access program. You will also be required to pick a book from the list and read it to complete a writing assignment.

Main Textbook

 Carr, Deborah, Elizabeth Heger Boyle, Benjamin Cornwell, Sherry Correll, Robert Crosnoe, Jeremy Freese, and Mary C. Waters. 2020. *The Art and Science of Social Research*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, second edition

Other Required Readings

 Assigned journal articles on Canvas (<https://utk.instructure.com>)

Work Load

Throughout the semester, students will be working on elements of a research proposal for their master's thesis, dissertation, or dissertation improvement grant. How much of this proposal you generate and the form by which you turn it in depend on which grading contract you wish to engage (see below).

You will also be assigned and expected to read several articles that demonstrate the methods with which we will engage. On selected weeks, there will be quizzes on the readings.

Evaluation Criteria

Format of the Submitted Documents

All submissions are to be uploaded to Canvas in either .docx or .pdf format. You should use 'letter' size (8.5" x 11.0") layout and include 1 inch margins. Use 12-point Times New Roman font and double-spacing. This applies to all submissions. The exception is when you are submitting a final research proposal tailored for specific unless you tailor proposal to fit the specific guidelines.

Research Question

Students are required to identify a focus for the proposals to be developed throughout the term. This may be stated as a research question (and sub-questions) and/or a testable hypothesis (or hypotheses). Research question and accompanying paragraph seek to introduce the proposal's central objectives, set parameters for what will be studied, and define the relevant key concepts. Submission should include a working title of the proposal and at least three academic references.

Literature Review

Literature review section should address what research has been completed and provide a persuasive justification for how the proposed study contributes new knowledge. The point of this

exercise is to 1) digest and process various arguments, 2) understand how they are (not) in conversation with one another, and 3) develop a terse, analytical writing style that concisely appraises and critiques academic literature. Minimum of five academic references are required. Submission should span the length of two-three pages.

Description of Data

Regardless of whether you opt to pursue original data, use secondary data already available, or merge existing datasets, each proposal should include a section that explains the rationale behind the selection of the data. This section can range broadly depending upon one's methodological orientation, but it typically addresses topics like a) coverage, sampling frame, sampling strategy, and weights, b) recruitment and response rates, c) mode(s) of data collection, d) questions to be asked or anticipated observations to be made, and e) question format and presentation. Submission should span the length of two-three pages.

Analytic Strategy

A proposal's analytic strategy section should detail the plans for data analyses, including any anticipated problems. It needs to consist of the following components: a concise statement of your research question, a hypothetical (or falsifiable) explanation, how key concepts will be measured, the mode(s) of data collection, and the analytic procedure(s) to be performed. Be sure to articulate the rationale behind each of these components to make your research design transparent, and justify why your methodological approach is warranted over alternative approaches. Submission should span three-four pages.

Proposal Presentation and Feedback

On the week 15, students are to present their research proposal. In 10–15 minutes, they are expected to cover the elements listed above. The purpose of having presentations prior to the final week is to get a chance to revisit what they have been working on and get feedback. You will be asked to provide feedback to peer presentations.

Research Proposal

The final project's purpose is to communicate a fully developed and methodologically rigorous plan for research. This research can feature original data collection, secondary data, or a novel joining of multiple datasets. Proposals will include a clear statement of the research objective (overview, intellectual merit, and broader impact), a review of the relevant literature, a justified field site and/or sampling strategy, and a description to the analysis to come. Submission should span around ten-eleven pages.

Weekly Quizzes

For some weeks, there will be quizzes covering the readings for the week. Most will be multiple choice questions. You will have unlimited attempts to score as high as possible. However, they are to be completed by 11:59 pm of the day before our class.

Grade by Contract

Grading by contract is a pedagogical method that allows the instructor to focus on mentorship rather than grading. Here, I give you the kind of feedback that I would give you if you were a graduate student who I was mentoring through the MA thesis or PhD proposal process, rather than the kind of nitpicky evaluation that is necessary to differentiate between *A* and *A–* work.

Students can determine for themselves how much work they will do for the course. The more work you are willing to do, the higher the grade. Each assignment is evaluated and given one of two “grades”: *A* means the work is adequately completed, and *I* means the work remains in-progress. Students who receive a grade of *I* on any assignment can revise and resubmit as many times over the semester as necessary to receive an *A*. Students will be given feedback on everything they turn in. The deadline exception is for the weekly quizzes.

C Contract

The student failed to turn in one or more components of the *B* Contract

B- Contract

The student failed to produce *A* work for all parts of the *B* Contract.

B Contract

The student produces *A* work on the following assignments:

1. Proposal Parts:
 - (a) Research Question
 - (b) Literature Review
 - (c) Description of Data
 - (d) Analytic Strategy
 - (e) Proposal Presentation
 - (f) Proposal

B+ Contract

The student produces *A* work for the *B* Contract plus:

1. Include a broader impact statement in the final research proposal
2. Provide feedback to peer proposal presentation

A Contract

The student produces *A* work for *B+* Contract plus:

1. Produces a document with: a proper formatting, citation, and bibliography for their proposal
2. Generate a project summary
3. Weekly quizzes

Participation

All students enrolled in this class are expected to participate by asking and answering questions and generally contributing to the intellectual discourse of the course. Participation is defined as contributing to the intellectual discourse of the class in a way that would not be possible without your presence. This means that simply attending class is not participating. Only answering questions when asked is not participating. Participating means coming to class having read over the course materials, making quick notes about possible discussion points, and asking questions or making comments that further the learning of others around you.

Classroom Etiquette

I find several things very distracting during class, talking while I and others are speaking and leaving early from class. I ask that students do their best to respect one another's views and not personalize disagreements. Getting educated involves building an ability to entertain viewpoints and ideas different from our own. Be respectful of each other. Diverse opinions, even controversial ones, are welcome. Incivility toward each other will not be tolerated.

Course Policies

Communication

Email is an official form of communication. You are responsible for checking your University of Tennessee official email address regularly. Email me with any possible inquiries about the class. I would like to remind students that emails are permanent records of communication; therefore, emails should be written professionally. A professional email includes a proper greeting and signature, a subject line starting with [SOCI531] and a descriptive title, and is written using complete words and sentences and all appropriate punctuation.

Discussion

I encourage thoughtful dialogue and debate. We will disagree with one another and with the readings at times, but I ask that we remain respectful of each other at all times. I recognize that you have certain assumptions, beliefs, values, and hopefully passionate ideas about the world. I welcome your views, and I hope you share them with the class often. I also caution you to remember that opinions rooted in personal experience are often not universal truths, so it is important that you ground your claims with ideas from the readings, texts, and other scholarly material.

Copyright

All classroom materials, including syllabus, lectures, slides, and others, are allowed only for personal use. Sharing them with others (except your classmates) or selling them to third parties or anyone else, including your classmates, are strictly prohibited. Seek permission from the instructor if you need to videotape or record the lectures.

Academic Integrity

Each student is responsible for their personal integrity in academic life and for adhering to UT's Honor Statement. The Honor Statement reads: "An essential feature of the University of Ten-

nessee, Knoxville is a commitment to maintaining an atmosphere of intellectual integrity and academic honesty. As a student of the university, I pledge that I will neither knowingly give nor receive any inappropriate assistance in academic work, thus affirming my own personal commitment to honor and integrity.”

AI Policy

In this course, it is expected that all submitted work is produced by the students themselves, whether individually or collaboratively. Students must not seek the assistance of Generative AI Tools like ChatGPT. Use of a Generative AI Tool to complete an assignment constitutes academic dishonesty.

Religious Holidays

While I have attempted to construct the course schedule around religious holidays, I may have overlooked some. If you are unable to attend a class due to a religious holiday, please let me know in advance, and we can make other arrangements.

Accommodations

I am available to discuss appropriate academic accommodations that you may require as a student with a disability. I will need documentation from the appropriate college office before making any changes. You will need to let me know as soon as possible so that I can make arrangements.

Record Keeping

Students are obliged to save important emails, such as class absence notifications, in their email accounts and to keep other important records.

Other Policies

Please note that the University of Tennessee has many policies regarding how classes will be conducted and the expected behaviors of students. Even though these may not be explicitly listed here, this class will be run per other policies.

Disclaimer

The syllabus and schedule are subject to change. Instructor have the right to regrade assignments if needed.

Course Calendar

Week	Date	Class Meeting	Topic	Deadlines (By Friday 11:59pm)
1	1/22	O	Course Introduction	
2	1/29	O	Research Process and Theory Use	
3	2/5	O	Concepts and Measurement	Research Question
4	2/12	O	Sampling	
5	2/19	O	Surveys and Secondary Data	Literature Review
6	2/26	O	Experiment and Evaluation	
7	3/5	O	Quantitative Inference	Hypotheses
8	3/12	O	Qualitative Research	
9	3/19	X	Spring Break	
10	3/26	O	Ethnography	Data Description
11	4/2	O	Interview	Analytic Strategy
12	4/9	X	Conference Week*	
13	4/16	X	Spring Recess	
14	4/23	O	Mixed Methods	
15	4/30	O	Proposal Presentation	
16	5/7	O	Ethics & Communicating Findings	Research Proposal

* Southern Sociological Society (SSS) & Population Association of America (PAA) Annual Meetings

Tentative Weekly Schedule and Readings

All readings are to be done before the class.

Week 1: Course Introduction

1/22

- How do social science methods differ from natural science methods?
 - 🔗 Leahey, Erin. 2008. "Methodological Memes and Mores: Toward a Sociology of Social Research." *Annual Review of Sociology* 34:33–53

Week 2: Research Process and Theory Use

1/29

- Where do we get ideas and where does theory come in?
 - 📖 Ch. 1: 3–32
 - 📖 Ch. 2: 33–64
 - 🔗 Merton, Robert K. 1968. "On Sociological Theories of the Middle Range." In *Social Theory and Social Structure*, pp. 39–72. New York, NY: Free Press
 - 🔗 Polsby, Nelson W. 1993. "Where Do You Get Your Ideas?" *PS: Political Science & Politics* 26:83–87

Week 3: Concepts and Measurement

2/5

- How do we operationalize and measure concepts?
 - 📖 Ch. 4: 99–130
 - 📖 Ch. 5: 131–154
 - 🔗 Maxwell, Joseph. 1992. "Understanding and Validity in Qualitative Research." *Harvard Educational Review* 62:279–301
 - 🔗 Kim, Andrew Taeho and ChangHwan Kim. 2025. "The Rise in Occupational Coding Mismatches and Occupational Mobility, 1991-2020." *Sociological Methods & Research* Online:00491241241303517

Week 4: Sampling


2/12





- How does sampling work in surveys?
 - 📖 Ch. 6: 155–187
 - 🔗 Berk, Richard A. 1983. "An Introduction to Sample Selection Bias in Sociological Data." *American Sociological Review* 48:386–398
 - 🔗 Winship, Christopher and Larry Radbill. 1994. "Sampling Weights and Regression Analysis." *Sociological Methods & Research* 23:230–257

Week 5: Surveys and Secondary Data

2/19

- How do we do research without collecting data?


 Ch. 7: 189–228


-  Church, Russell M. 2002. "The Effective Use of Secondary Data." *Learning and Motivation* 33:32–45
-  Smith, Emma. 2008. "Pitfalls and Promises: The Use of Secondary Data Analysis in Educational Research." *British Journal of Educational Studies* 56:323–339
-  Kugler, Tracy A. and Catherine A. Fitch. 2018. "Interoperable and Accessible Census and Survey Data from IPUMS." *Scientific Data* 5:180007
-  Stantcheva, Stefanie. 2023. "How to Run Surveys: A Guide to Creating Your Own Identifying Variation and Revealing the Invisible." *Annual Review of Economics* 15:205–234

Week 6: Experiment and Evaluation

2/26

- How do we "experiment" in social settings?





 Ch. 8: 229–266

 Ch. 9: 267–296

Week 7: Quantitative Inference

3/5



- How do we use quantitative methods to infer on theoretical relationships?

-  Lundberg, Ian, Rebecca Johnson, and Brandon M. Stewart. 2021. "What Is Your Estimand? Defining the Target Quantity Connects Statistical Evidence to Theory." *American Sociological Review* 86:532–565
-  Wysocki, Anna C., Katherine M. Lawson, and Mijke Rhemtulla. 2022. "Statistical Control Requires Causal Justification." *Advances in Methods and Practices in Psychological Science* 5:1–19
-  Li, Ting and Yu Xie. 2022. "The Evolution of Demographic Methods." *Social Science Research* 107:102768
-  Brand, Jennie E., Xiang Zhou, and Yu Xie. 2023. "Recent Developments in Causal Inference and Machine Learning." *Annual Review of Sociology* 49:81–110

Week 8: Qualitative Research

3/12

- How does "qualitative" and "data" fit together?

-  Gerring, John. 2017. "Qualitative Methods." *Annual Review of Political Science* 20:15–36
-  Collins, Caitlyn, Megan Tobias Neely, and Shamus Khan. 2024. "Which Cases Do I Need? Constructing Cases and Observations in Qualitative Research." *Annual Review of Sociology* 50:21–40

Week 9: Spring Break


3/19

No Class

Week 10: Ethnography

3/26

- How do we see things from the “native’s” point of view?


 Ch. 10: 297–334

- ⑥ Geertz, Clifford. 1973. “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture.” In *The Interpretation of Cultures*, pp. 3–30. New York, NY: Basic Books
- ⑥ Ingold, Tim. 2008. “Anthropology is Not Ethnography.” *Proceedings of the British Academy* 154:69–92
- ⑥ Small, Mario Luis. 2009. “‘How Many Cases Do I Need?’: On Science and the Logic of Case Selection in Field-Based Research.” *Ethnography* 10:5–38

Week 11: Interview

4/2

- How do we learn by “talking” to strangers?

 Ch. 11: 335–370

- ⑥ Gerson, Kathleen and Sarah Damaske. 2021. “Depth Interviewing as Science and Art.” In *The Science and Art of Interviewing*, pp. 1–29. New York, NY: Oxford University Press
- ⑥ Lareau, Annette. 2021. “Why Interviews and Participant Observation Research Are Valuable.” In *Listening to People: A Practical Guide to Interviewing, Participant Observation, Data Analysis, and Writing It All Up*, pp. 260–265. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press

Week 12: Conference Week

4/9

- Southern Sociological Society (SSS) Annual Meeting (4/9~4/12)
- Population Association of America (PAA) Annual Meeting (4/10~4/13)

No Class

Week 13: Spring Recess

4/16

No Class

Week 14: Mixed Methods

4/2

- Are quantitative and qualitative methods mutually exclusive?
- ⑥ Woolley, Claire M. 2009. “Meeting the Mixed Methods Challenge of Integration in a Sociological Study of Structure and Agency.” *Journal of Mixed Methods Research* 3:7–25
- ⑥ Small, Mario Luis. 2011. “How to Conduct a Mixed Methods Study: Recent Trends in a Rapidly Growing Literature.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 37:57–86
- ⑥ Palinkas, Lawrence A., Sapna J. Mendon, and Alison B. Hamilton. 2019. “Innovations in Mixed Methods Evaluations.” *Annual Review of Public Health* 40:423–442

Week 15: Proposal Presentation


4/30


Student Presentations


Week 16: Ethics & Communicating Findings

5/7

- For the sake of research?

 Ch. 3: 65–97

 Ch. 14: 447–482

 Moody, James W, Lisa A Keister, and Maria C Ramos. 2022. “Reproducibility in the Social Sciences.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 48:65–85

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***** Research Proposal Due on 5/9 (Friday) *****
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