

# Sociological Research Methods Syllabus

SOCI 335 – Fall 2023

---

*We must study, we must investigate, we must attempt to solve; and the utmost that the world can demand is not a lack of human interest and moral conviction, but rather the heart-quality of fairness, and an earnest desire for the truth despite its possible unpleasantness.*

- W.E.B. DuBois (1899)

---

**Instructor:** Dr. Erick Axxe (he/they)

**Office:** Mills 220

**Class time:** MWF 12:10-1pm

**Email:** axxe@hendrix.edu

**Student hours:** MW9-11AM (or by [appointment](#))

**Class location:** Mills 106

## Course Description

This course introduces the research methods implemented in anthropological and sociological research. Our understanding of society is typically based on our own experiences, or the experiences of people close to us; however, a holistic understanding of the social world requires the use of systematic methods in combination with theories about how people interact and social structures function. Through our systematic analysis of the social world, we can challenge assumptions and paint clearer images of reality than if we were to rely solely on individual perception. Like most tools, research methods require training before they can be properly implemented. Through this course, you will understand why sociology relies on a diverse range of methods to interpret reality, how to formulate a research question, how to design a research project, and how to implement a method to investigate your own research question. In doing so, you will understand the precautions required to carry out high-quality research and develop the ability to critique empirical research.

The course is split into four parts. First, this course introduces you to the conceptual frameworks that underpin social research. The goal of this section is for you to understand why sociology implements a diverse range of methodological techniques and, ultimately, to connect method with theory. Second, you will learn how to develop a research project: to formulate a research question, to uncover scientific evidence on a topic, and to connect your question to an appropriate method. Third, you will learn to implement sociology's predominant research techniques: interviews, surveys, and secondary data analyses. This includes how to craft interview guides and survey items, best practices for collecting interview and survey data, and how to analyze these data. (Relative to secondary data, you will learn to use the statistical software R.) Fourth, you will implement your own research project. During the last five weeks of

our course, your analyses will culminate into an extended abstract and a research presentation, the two items necessary to submit your project to a research conference.

This course meets in-person three times a week (see above for more information). During the semester, students are expected to contribute to a weekly journal entry, complete weekly assignments and/or quizzes, write one end-of-semester essay, and give an end-of-semester presentation. Course materials will be distributed through Microsoft Teams.

## Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, students will:

- Be familiar with the wide range of methodological techniques that sociologists implement.
- Understand the connection between research justification, design, and subsequent limitations.
- Develop the ability to critically assess research, including its ethical considerations, execution, and presentation.
- Undergo the research process: develop a research question, review the relevant literature, operationalize concepts, analyze data, and present findings.

## Classroom Etiquette

Please do your best to support each other and the instructor with your attention and participation during class time, and to avoid distracting behavior. During class time, you are strongly encouraged to ask questions and participate in class discussions. To have productive discussions, students (and the professor) must come prepared, having read the assignments, and will treat differing points of view with respect. Disagreements will occur, and I encourage the expression of differing viewpoints as long as they are made in a respectful manner. Hostile or derogatory comments or behavior will not be permitted.

## Why is Attendance so Important?

**Right now, being a full-time student is your full-time job. The most important part of this job is showing up. Our class meets for exactly 150 minutes a week; your engagement during that limited time is crucial to your success in this course.**

Just like your future employers, I expect you to come to work consistently and on time by attending class consistently and on time, even on days when you're not at your best, you don't feel like you're at 100%, and you don't feel excited about coming to work. You don't have to be a rockstar every day, but you do have to show up and do the work on all or most of the days. If you cannot attend class, I expect you to let me know before class starts. I do not require a reason for missing class. Without prior notification (a.k.a. no call, no show), your absence will be unexcused.

As is stated in the Hendrix catalog [here](#), regular student attendance in class is necessary and central component of the Hendrix experience and your learning. Failing to attend class can negatively impact your own learning and the experience of other students and your professor.

I recognize that all of us can face mental and/or physical health challenges that can impact our ability to attend class and do work. If you're feeling less than 100%, it is up to you to determine if your health status is so poor that it will prevent you from learning in class or put others at risk. It is also up to you to determine if the benefits of missing class outweigh the costs of missing class for yourself, your colleagues, and your instructor. Please consider the likelihood of spreading illness when making these decisions.

If you feel like your health status will impact attendance or assignments, please communicate with me as soon as possible. For further information about the class attendance policy, see "class attendance" below.

**\*COVID:** If you are experiencing COVID symptoms or test positive for COVID, please refrain from coming to class and adhere to the Hendrix protocol found [here](#).

## Required Materials and/or Technologies

- Please bring a laptop, tablet, or cell phone to class.
- Later in the semester, we will work with [R](#) (a statistical software) and [RStudio](#) (a user-friendly interface for R). If you don't have a personal computer, please let me know and we will make arrangements.
- Below are the books we will be reading throughout the semester. You do not need to buy any books for the course. The materials are either accessible through the Hendrix library (typically as an E-book) and/or I will share items through Teams.
  - Babbie, Earl R. 2016. *The Basics of Social Research*. 7th edition. Boston, MA, USA: Cengage Learning.
  - Booth, Wayne C., Gregory G. Colomb, Joseph M. Williams, Joseph Bizup, and William T. Fitzgerald. 2016. *The Craft of Research*. Chicago, United States: University of Chicago Press.
  - Denscombe, Martyn. 2010. *Ground Rules for Social Research: Guidelines for Good Practice*. 2nd ed. Maidenhead, Berkshire, England; Open University Press/McGraw-Hill.
  - Luker, Kristin. 2008. *Salsa Dancing into the Social Sciences*. Harvard University Press.

## Optional Materials

- *Style: The Basics of Clarity and Grace* by Joseph M. Williams
  - [An old version is available free online as a PDF.](#)

[Course Schedule](#) [click link to see]

# Grading and Faculty Communication

## How Your Grade is Calculated

Assignment Category	Percent of Grade
Quizzes	35%
Weekly journal responses	35%
Final paper	15%
Research presentation	15%

## Descriptions of Major Course Assignments

### Quizzes

**Description:** There will be six quizzes throughout the semester. Quizzes will review main concepts from the course and readings. Your lowest quiz grade will be dropped, meaning your final grade is calculated based on your best five quiz results. Quizzes will be completed outside of class and are generally due *Fridays at 5:59 pm*.

**Academic integrity and collaboration:** You must complete quizzes and assignments yourself, without collaborating with your peers, unless the instructions state otherwise. You may use your notes and the resources made available through the course to complete the quizzes.

### Weekly Journal

**Description:** Each week, you will be asked to respond to a journal prompt on OneNote (accessible via Teams). Journals responses will be graded on whether they address the week's prompt, engage with the readings, and use appropriate grammar (this includes citation formatting). Responses are (typically) due *Fridays at 9 am (before class)*. Please check the course schedule for actual due dates.

**Academic integrity and collaboration:** Your written assignments, including journal responses, should be your own original work. In formal assignments, you should follow ASA style to cite the ideas and words of your research sources. I develop journal responses to elicit your thoughts on the week's topic or to incrementally complete the course's final assignment. Using a large language model (e.g., ChatGPT, Google's Bard) to produce your answers is unnecessary (assignments are largely graded based on participation) and is a disservice to your future self, who will benefit from the skills you gain and ideas you engage with throughout the course.

## **Final Paper (Extended Abstract)**

**Description:** The main deliverable of the course is an extended abstract. This document is due *December 11<sup>th</sup>, 2023 at 2:00 p.m.*

**Academic integrity and collaboration:** Your written assignments should be your own original work. In formal assignments, you should follow ASA style to cite the ideas and words of your research sources. You are encouraged to ask a trusted person to proofread your assignments before you turn them in but no one else should revise or rewrite your work. In general, you are prohibited in university courses from turning in work from a past class to your current class, even if you modify it.

## **Research Presentation**

**Description:** During the period scheduled for our final exam (*December 11<sup>th</sup>, 2023 from 2 to 5 p.m.*), you will give a research presentation. Additional details will be provided closer to the due date.

## **Late Assignments**

Please refer to Teams for due dates. Due dates are set to help you stay on pace and to allow timely feedback that will help you complete subsequent assignments.

Unexcused, late assignments will receive a maximum of 85% of the original grade. *Assignments will not be accepted a week after the original deadline.*

## **Instructor Feedback and Response Time**

I am providing the following list to give you an idea of my intended availability throughout the course.

- **Preferred contact method:** If you have a question, please contact me first through our course's [discussion board Q & A on Teams](#). If your question is specific to you, please email my Hendrix email address (axxe@hendrix.edu). I will reply to the discussion board and emails within **48 hours on days when class is in session at the college**.
- **Class announcements:** I will send all important class-wide messages through the [General](#) tab on Teams.
- **Journal responses:** I will check the journal responses once per week. Depending on the information I request, I will either incorporate your responses into that week's lecture or read through them to check for comprehension of the material.
- **Grading and feedback:** For assignments submitted before the due date, I will try to provide feedback and grades within **seven days**. Assignments submitted after the due date may have reduced feedback, and grades may take longer to be posted.

**Grading Scale**

89.5–100: A

79.5–89.49: B

69.5–79.49: C

59.5–69.49: D

Below 59.49: F

**Academic integrity:** Hendrix College is committed to high standards of honesty and fairness in academic pursuits. Such standards are central to the process of intellectual inquiry, the development of character, and the preservation of the integrity of the community.

Please familiarize yourself with the statement of Academic Integrity, which can be found at:

[https://www.hendrix.edu/Catalog/2021-2022/Academic\\_Policies\\_and\\_Regulations/Policies\\_and\\_Appeals/Academic\\_Integrity/](https://www.hendrix.edu/Catalog/2021-2022/Academic_Policies_and_Regulations/Policies_and_Appeals/Academic_Integrity/)

**Statement on diversity:** Hendrix College values a diverse learning environment as outlined in the College's Statement on Diversity. All members of this community are expected to contribute to a respectful, welcoming, and inclusive environment for every other member of the community. If you believe you have been the subject of discrimination, please contact the Dean of Students Office (Mike Leblanc, [leblanc@hendrix.edu](mailto:leblanc@hendrix.edu) 501-450-1222 or the Title IX Coordinator (Jennifer Fulbright [titleix@hendrix.edu](mailto:titleix@hendrix.edu), 501-505-2901). If you have ideas for improving the inclusivity of the classroom experience please feel free to contact Dr. Axxe. For more information on Hendrix non-discrimination policies visit [Hendrix.edu/nondiscrimination](https://www.hendrix.edu/nondiscrimination).

**Title IX Reports of Discrimination Based on Sex, including Sexual Harassment, Sexual Assault, Stalking, Dating Violence, or Gender-Based Harassment:**

All faculty and staff at Hendrix College are designated as a "Responsible Employee" and are mandated reporters required to report Sexual Misconduct. Hendrix College requires all faculty and staff to report sexual harassment, sexual assault, dating and domestic violence, and stalking against a student or employee to the Title IX Coordinator, Dr. Jennifer Fulbright at [fulbright@hendrix.edu](mailto:fulbright@hendrix.edu) or 501-505-2901. Hendrix College cares about the safety of our employees and students and has created this notice because interpersonal violence and sex discrimination in all forms are unacceptable. Hendrix College is committed to holding perpetrators accountable and keeping reporting parties safe. Student's privacy is of utmost importance and Hendrix College will strive to protect your privacy to the extent possible while complying with all applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations as well as Hendrix College policy. Students who desire that details of the incident be kept confidential have two options.

1. Request to speak with a licensed counselor (service available free to students and employees can utilize the Employee Assistance Program), or
2. contact an off-campus rape crisis center.

**Pregnant and Parenting Students:** Title IX prohibits discrimination against a student based on pregnancy, childbirth, false pregnancy, termination of pregnancy, or recovery from any of these conditions; and for parenting a child under one year of age. To learn more about how to request support. For pregnant and parenting students, contact Title IX Coordinator, Dr. Jennifer Fulbright at [fulbright@hendrix.edu](mailto:fulbright@hendrix.edu) or 501-505-2901.

**Health and wellbeing:** Hendrix recognizes that many students face mental and/or physical health challenges. If your health status will impact attendance or assignments, please communicate with me as soon as possible. If you would like to implement academic accommodations, contact Julie Brown in the office of Academic Success ([brownj@hendrix.edu](mailto:brownj@hendrix.edu)). To maintain optimal health, please utilize campus resources like Hendrix Medical Clinic or Counseling Services (501.450.1448). Your health and wellbeing are important.

**Class attendance:** At Hendrix, we believe that regular student attendance in class is necessary for student learning, constitutive of student professional development, and a central component of the Hendrix experience. Therefore, students who do not attend classes have failed to meet an important standard of achievement by not living up to their responsibilities as a member of the campus community. This is particularly true given the emphasis on student discussion and participation in many Hendrix courses. Classroom teachers often consider attendance a significant factor in the evaluation of student

performance. Thus, students are expected to attend all class meetings, even in cases when the classroom teacher chooses not to take attendance.

**If students must be absent from class, they are expected to email Dr. Axxe before class.** Without prior notification, absences are unexcused (barring true emergencies). Students will be excused for absences resulting from observance of religious holidays, cases of illness, and athletic competition, as well as any additional reasons as determined by the classroom teacher (e.g., conference travel, Model UN). Students do not need to present third-party documentation for absences related to physical or mental illness. Misrepresenting reasons for an absence to a classroom teacher is a violation of the Academic Integrity Policy.

Students are expected to review the materials they miss during class. In-class assignments can be submitted for excused absences but not for unexcused absences. Because repeated absences impair academic performance regardless of the reason for the absences, **classroom teachers shall contact the student and report repeated absences to their advisor.** If attendance does not improve, the classroom teacher shall inform the Office of Academic Success.

**After following this procedure, classroom teachers may, at their professional discretion, remove from their courses any student whose unexcused absences over any three-week period reach or exceed 50% by notifying the Registrar prior to the deadline for withdrawing from a course.** A student removed from a course under these circumstances will be notified by the Office of the Registrar through the student's Hendrix email account. A student may appeal this action by contacting the Registrar within three business days of the drop notice date. The Registrar will forward the appeal to the Academic Appeals Committee for review and action.

**Technology:** I ask that you please bring a laptop, tablet, or cell phone to class for handouts and quizzes. All readings will be distributed digitally, so this will also allow you to have the materials in class. Much of the technology we interact with is made to be addictive. I suggest you find and use resources that will help you resist distractions. [Here's](#) a website with a list of website blockers. Similar software exists for apps on phones and tablets.

## Other Useful Resources

*Any student who has difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat every day, or who lacks a safe and stable place to live, and believes this may affect their performance in the course, is urged to contact the Dean of Students for support. Furthermore, please notify me if you are comfortable in doing so. This will enable me to provide any resources that I may possess.*

- **Local housing shelters and women's shelters:** [Research](#) indicates that a number of low-income college students face homelessness or transient/insecure housing accommodations. [Affordable Colleges Online's website](#) provides statistics about college homelessness as well a way to locate local services.
- **Food Pantries:** [Here's](#) a list of local food pantries.
- **OneNote:** I recommend all students use a note-taking software. I recommend [OneNote](#) as a good option (plus we use OneNote in Teams for our course).
- **Zotero:** [Zotero](#) is a free citation management software.
- **Blue light filtering glasses:** College requires you to look at screens for unhealthy amounts of time. I bought a pair of blue light filtering glasses years ago and I cannot recommend them more.
- **Grammarly:** [Grammarly](#) is a free software that checks and suggests fixes to grammatical errors.
- **The Writing Center:** The Writing Center is a community of peers ready to assist you with your writing projects, in all genres and fields, and at any stage of development. We work with you in



one-on-one meetings that you can book in advance or request during our office hours. In-person appointments will follow all pertinent COVID safety protocols. Virtual appointments are available for medical reasons or by special arrangement. To book appointments, and for more information, visit [www.hendrix.edu/writingcenter/or](http://www.hendrix.edu/writingcenter/or) contact [pruneda@hendrix.edu](mailto:pruneda@hendrix.edu). We look forward to working with you!

- **Hendrix Bailey Library:** Bailey Library's mission is to collaborate and empower all members of our community so that they become their best selves, cherish the scope of human knowledge, and positively contribute to the librarians are happy to help locate quality resources supporting research and classroom work and to assist with the critical evaluation of academic information. Librarians and Library Associates provide individual research assistance by appointment. The library building is open seven days a week, and access to the library's online resources is available 24/7. You can visit the library's website at <https://www.hendrix.edu/baileylibrary/> for more information, to book an appointment, and to access the library's Discovery search, Class Guides, and full-text article databases.
- **ADA accommodations:** As your instructor, it is my legal obligation to ensure that all students have equal access to course materials and equal opportunity to perform well in the course. In addition, "It is the policy of Hendrix College to accommodate students with disabilities, pursuant to federal and state law. Students should contact Julie Brown in the Office of Academic Success (505.2954; [brownj@hendrix.edu](mailto:brownj@hendrix.edu)) to begin the accommodation process. Any student seeking accommodation in relation to a recognized disability should inform the instructor at the beginning of the course.