

Guidelines for Choosing a Topic

To get off to a great start on your SC212 project, you should carefully consider your topic. The best projects tend to have research questions of the form: Is “X” associated with “Y”. The more specific, the better! A less desirable research question is: What is associated with “Y”. Avoid those!

You can choose to find a dataset that already exists or collect your own. If you are planning to design your own survey and collect data, great! But consider that you don’t necessarily have to collect data on people. You could, for example, sample cars, books, webpages, cities, etc. If you do decide to sample individuals, DO NOT attempt to use an online survey unless you’ve somehow taken steps to implement random selection of participants and are addressing the strong possibility of non-response bias.

When determining your research topic, give serious thought to your response variable. Don’t go for the obvious (e.g. “Is ‘hours studied’ associated with ‘gpa’?”) Instead, try to capture a more complex outcome. For example, “Stress”, “Academic Motivation”, “Connectedness/Isolation”, “Online presence”, “Social Media Use”, “Personality traits”, “Academic integrity/propensity to cheat”, “Weekend Activities”, etc.

Other researchers have already created tools to measure things like these – do some investigating and use what’s already been developed.

If you choose to use an existing data source – that’s fine too. But, beware that many existing datasets will require you to do a considerable amount of research (to find out what each variable actually represents) and data cleaning. Make sure the dataset you choose is REAL data (e.g. some online datasets are generated and do not come from real studies).

If you need help finding a dataset or are having trouble coming up with a research topic – come talk to me! I can help.

In the spirit of branching out and to encourage originality, the following project topics are no longer allowed:

Major and GPA

GDP and Life Expectancy

Dining Hall Preference (used as a response)

Athlete status/Varsity Sport and GPA

Alcohol consumption and GPA

If you’re unsure if you have a good topic, run it by me first!!!