Sociology 205: Introduction to Social Research I
Monday, Wednesday and Friday 9:30 to 10:20 am
Fall 2020, Oldfather 307

Professor: Dr. Christina Falci
Office: 714 Oldfather Hall
Student Hours: by Zoom appointment only
Email: cfalci2@unl.edu
Sociology Office Phone: (402) 472-3631

Teaching Assistant: Andrea Johnson
Office: 730 Oldfather Hall
Student Hours: by Zoom appointment only
Email: andrea.johnson@huskers.unl.edu

Prerequisites: sociology minor/major or sophomore/junior/senior standing

Course Description: Sociology 205 is the first in a two-part research methods sequence within the sociology curriculum at UNL. Sociology 205 addresses how to conduct and evaluate social science research. It provides a general overview of the ways sociologists collect data about the social world to answer research questions. Special emphasis is placed on the method of survey research, which is the dominant method of collecting data among sociologists. In Sociology 206, students will learn how to statistically analyze quantitative data collected from surveys.

In Sociology 205, students will learn the social research process from formulating a research question and developing theoretical hypotheses to designing a research study to answer those questions. The first half of the semester focuses on the basic elements of research design that apply to all research methods including conceptualization, operationalization, sampling, and causation. In the second half of the semester, students will apply research design elements to research methods utilized by sociologists including surveys, experiments, in-depth interview, and participant observation. For each research method, students will learn the best practices for collecting the type of data gathered by the method. Social scientists use data collected from these methods to test or develop theories. For each method, students will read an exemplar journal article that will provide an illustrative example of the research method within the academic research literature. This class will also address the ethical considerations of social science research in general and within each particular research method.

Course Goals:
- learn to formulate sociological research questions and to develop theoretical hypotheses to provide tentative answers to a research question
- learn to find, read and synthesize peer-reviewed journal articles to assess the current state of social scientific knowledge on a particular research question
- learn the elements of research design: conceptualization, measurement, sampling, and causation
  - practice critical thinking skills via the evaluation of the quality of social scientific research based on research design elements
- learn the core components of a variety of quantitative and qualitative methods for collecting the data necessary to empirically test theoretical hypotheses
  - appreciate the strengths, limitations, and ethical concerns of each method of data collection

Course Format: During this semester, about two thirds of the classes will be in person lectures where some students join via Zoom, and about 1/3 of the classes will be Zoom only method exercises where students work in groups going through an active learning exercise. Lecture classes will review some of the key points from the assigned readings, in addition to incorporating material not included in the
assigned readings. I welcome questions and comments at any point during class. Your questions give me the opportunity to clarify ambiguities and help everyone deepen their understanding of the course material. Frequently, I will ask questions to the class about the course material. These questions help me assess students’ understanding and encourage students to think further about the topic being covered. On Zoom only groupwork methods exercise days, the entire class will begin by meeting virtually on Zoom. Then, I will break students into groups of 3-4 students during class time to work through a methods exercise. Often groups will be able to complete the exercise before the end of class, but if not then students will need to finish what is left of the exercise outside of class. If you miss class on the day of a methods exercise, then the student will have to complete the exercise on their own.

**Required Readings:** The textbook can be purchased at the University Bookstore and the journal articles are available on Canvas.

**Textbook**

**Peer-Reviewed Journal Articles**


**Media Reading**

**Course Requirements:** I expect students to keep up with assigned readings, to show up for class on time, take good notes, and participate fully in method exercises.

1) **Methods Exercises** (25%) – over the course of the semester students will complete research methods exercises (each worth 10 points). While students are set up to work in groups of 3 to 4 students when completing the exercise, each student is required to write-up and turn-in their own exercise. The due dates for each exercise are posted on Canvas. I expect every student to participate in the groupwork and follow the groupwork guidelines set up for this activity – see groupwork guidelines below.

2) **Literature Review Project** (35%) – this is a progressive 3-paper assignment (i.e., each paper assignment builds from the previous one). As such, students are required to use feedback from previous paper assignments to revise the relevant parts of subsequent paper assignments. The due dates for each paper assignment and complete assignment details are posted on Canvas.

- Topic Statement........................................................................................................ 50 points
- Annotated Bibliography............................................................................................ 100 points
3) **Exams (40%)** – all exams will consist of multiple choice, matching, and true/false questions. The exams will cover all aspects of the class, including readings, lectures, in-class discussions, and methods exercises. The final exam will be cumulative. Students will have 60 minutes to complete exams 1 & 2, and 90 minutes to complete the final exam. All exams will be taken online via Canvas. Study guides for the exam are posted on Canvas along with timeframes for when students may complete the exam.

- **Exam One**
- **Exam Two**
- **Final Exam (cumulative)**

**Grade Basis:** based on your final grade percentage.

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<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<td>A +</td>
<td>97 -100</td>
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<td>A</td>
<td>93 – 96.9</td>
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<td>A -</td>
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**Course Policies:**

**Attendance, Tardiness and Participation:** Your attendance is expected by university policy and by me. I take attendance at every class, but I do not give a grade for attendance. If students are going to miss more than a single class due to illness or emergency, then get in touch with the instructor as soon as possible. Being in class is the best way to get the information you need to perform well in the class. Each student is responsible for any material missed from an absence. I do not share my PowerPoint slides or notes; therefore, students need to contact another student to get notes for missed days. While I expect students to show up for class on time, in my view, it is better to come to class late than not at all. If you show up late on the day we have already started a methods exercise, then you will likely need to complete that exercise on your own. If for any reason you anticipate being late on a regular basis to class, then you need to inform the instructor and explain this situation. Participation during class discussions and exercises requires being prepared to contribute relevant ideas, reactions, or questions. Completing the methods exercises will sometimes require having read a specified assigned reading before coming to class.

**Late Work and Make-Ups:** Assignments turned in late will lose points (half a letter grade for every weekday it is late) unless there is documentation of illness or emergency. Missed exams may only be made-up with documented evidence of illness or emergency.

**Taking the Class Pass/Fail:** Students may take this class pass/fail, but students must complete all course requirements in order to receive a passing grade. Furthermore, those taking the course Pass-No Pass will need a C or better to obtain a Pass (a C minus is a “No Pass”).

**Academic Honesty:** Academic honesty is essential to the existence and integrity of an academic institution. The responsibility for maintaining that integrity is shared by all members of the academic community. The University's Student Code of Conduct addresses academic dishonesty - [https://studentconduct.unl.edu/academic-integrity](https://studentconduct.unl.edu/academic-integrity). Students who commit acts of academic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary action and are granted due process and the right to appeal any decision. I will take all necessary steps to enforce the Honor System for the sake of fairness to all students. Importantly, all paper assignments will be checked for plagiarism using the “Turnitin” feature in Canvas. Plagiarism is
taking someone else’s ideas/work/words and using them as your own. To better understand how to avoid plagiarism by paraphrasing and using proper citation please take advantage of this UNL resource: https://www.unl.edu/gradstudies/current/integrity#plagiarism.

Accommodation: The University strives to make all learning experiences as accessible as possible. If you anticipate or experience barriers based on your disability (including mental health, chronic or temporary medical conditions), please let me know immediately so that we can discuss options privately. To establish reasonable accommodations, I may request that you register with Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD). If you are eligible for services and register with their office, make arrangements with me as soon as possible to discuss your accommodations so they can be implemented in a timely manner. SSD contact information: 232 Canfield Admin. Bldg.; 402-472-3787.

Classroom Visitors and Recordings: According to the University’s Trespass Policy (Regents’ Policy 6.4.7) only the instructor and the students registered for the course are “authorized” to be in the classroom during the scheduled class period. Only the instructor has the discretion to allow visitors into the classroom. Moreover, each student contributes to an environment that shapes the learning process. Any work and/or communication that you are privy to as a member of this course should be treated as the intellectual property of the instructor and is not to be shared outside the context of this course. Students may not make or distribute screen captures, audio/video recordings of, or livestream, any class-related activity, including lectures and presentations, without express prior written consent from me or an approved accommodation from Services for Students with Disabilities. If you have (or think you may have) a disability such that you need to record or tape class-related activities, you should contact Services for Students with Disabilities. If you have an accommodation to record class-related activities, those recordings may not be shared with any other student, whether in this course or not, or with any other person or on any other platform. Failure to follow this policy on recording or distributing class-related activities may subject you to discipline under the Student Code of Conduct.

Laptop, Tablets and Cellphones (this policy applies to in-person class attendance only): Research indicates that laptop use for note-taking during class undermines several indicators of student learning including lecture attention, comprehension & retention of course material, and lower exam grades & overall course performance (Aguilar-Roca, Williams, and O'Dowd 2012; Fried 2008; Gaudrea, Miranda, and Gareau 2014; Junco 2012; Risko et al. 2013; Wurst, Smarkola, and Gaffney 2008). Laptop use also facilitates student “multitasking” (e.g., Facebook, emailing) in the classroom that poses a serious distraction for both users and other students in the classroom (Fried 2008; Sana, Weston, and Cepeda 2013).


In light of this research, students wishing to take notes electronically on a laptop or tablet for any reason must follow the following guidelines: 1) use the electronic device for note-taking only, 2) the electronic device may only have note taking software (e.g., Word, Notepad) open, 3) mute speakers, and 4) to minimize non-laptop user distractions sit in the back row of the classroom. The instructor reserves the right to monitoring student’s use of laptops and tablets for note taking during class. There is, however, a place for electronics in education. In this class, for example, students are allowed to use electronic devices during class time to access assigned readings, the syllabus, or assignments. I highly recommend you download these documents prior to class in case Wi-Fi access to Canvas is slow or unavailable during class time.

**Group Work Guidelines**

**Basic Principles**

A) Courtesy: engage in common courtesy.
   i. Listen. Even if you think what they’re saying is wrong or off topic. Cutting someone off is rude, and not worth whatever small time gain you might make. Don’t finish someone’s sentences for him or her; they can do it for themselves. And remember: talking louder or faster doesn’t make your idea any better.
   ii. Phrase alternative ideas as questions. If someone expresses what you feel is a "bad" opinion, try to criticize it constructively rather than putting down the person. Instead of "I think we should do A, not B," try "What if we did A, instead of B?" That allows people to offer comments, rather than defend one choice.
   iii. Praise each other. Find something nice to say, even if it’s a stretch. Even the worst of ideas has a silver lining inside it, if you just look hard enough. Focus on the good, praise it, and then raise any objections or concerns you have about the rest of it.
   iv. Help team members who are struggling - everyone needs to understand the problem

B) Cooperation: is also a key factor in teamwork
   i. There is no “I” in group work. Don't let one group member have too much responsibility. Conversely, do not let any group member get out of doing their fair share of the work. Each group member needs to take initiative to participate in and complete the task.
   ii. Inclusion. All members have a chance to express themselves and to influence the group's decisions. Go around the group and hear everyone's ideas (before discussing them) or encourage divergent thinking by brainstorming. All contributions are listened to carefully, and strong points acknowledged. Be sure to include everyone when considering ideas about how to proceed as a group.
   iii. Conflict. If you notice a problem in your group, discuss it right away. Don't let the problem escalate. Apologize for upsetting your peers, even if you think someone else was primarily at fault; the goal is to work together, not start a legal battle over whose transgressions were worse.

**Group Member Roles:** Occupy each role at least one time during the semester. Before starting any group work, the group must decide who will be the moderator and who will be the presenter:

- **Moderator** – this person is in charge of soliciting ideas from or ask questions of each member of the group on the particular task at hand
- **Presenter** – this person will be in charge of summarizing the groups thoughts about how to tackle a specific task to reach consensus before moving on to the next task
Participant: all group members are responsible for providing input into the task at hand whether or not they take on one of the above roles
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<tr>
<th>Week: Dates</th>
<th>Class Schedule</th>
<th>Readings</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1: Aug 17 to 21 (asynchronous &amp; virtual)</td>
<td>Introductions and Scientific Literacy &lt;br&gt; Syllabus Quiz open on Canvas 8/17 to 8/20 &lt;br&gt; Discussion Post due by 8/21</td>
<td>Vox Media Article</td>
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<td>2: Aug 24, 26, &amp; 28&lt;sup&gt;Z&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Research Questions &lt;br&gt; Zoom only Exercise #1 (8/28)</td>
<td>Text Chapter 1</td>
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<td>3: Aug 31, Sept 2 &amp; 4&lt;sup&gt;Z&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Theory Construction &lt;br&gt; Handout: Conceptual Models &lt;br&gt; Zoom only Exercise #2 (9/4) &lt;br&gt; Topic Statement Assignment: DUE 9/18</td>
<td>Text Chapter 2</td>
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<td>4: Sept 7, 9&lt;sup&gt;Z&lt;/sup&gt;, &amp; 11</td>
<td>Research Process and Journal Articles &lt;br&gt; Zoom only Exercise #3 (9/9) &lt;br&gt; Handout: Reading the Results Section</td>
<td>Text Appendix A &amp; B Galvin (2015)</td>
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<td>5: Sept 14&lt;sup&gt;Z&lt;/sup&gt;, 16, &amp; 18</td>
<td>Research Ethics &lt;br&gt; EXAM 1: open on Canvas 9/19 to 9/22</td>
<td>Text Chapter 3</td>
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<td>6: Sept 21, 23 &amp; 25&lt;sup&gt;Z&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Concepts and Measures &lt;br&gt; Zoom only Exercise #5 (9/25)</td>
<td>Text Chapter 4 (p.65-82)</td>
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<td>7: Sept 28, 30 &amp; Oct 2&lt;sup&gt;Z&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Measurement Validity and Reliability &lt;br&gt; Zoom only Exercise #6 (10/2) &lt;br&gt; Handout: Searching the Research Literature &lt;br&gt; Annotated Bibliography: DUE 10/19</td>
<td>Text Chapter 4 (p.82-88)</td>
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<td>8: Oct 5, 7 &amp; 9&lt;sup&gt;Z&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Sampling &lt;br&gt; Zoom only Exercise #7 (10/9)</td>
<td>Text Chapter 5 review chap. 2 (p. 34-38)</td>
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<td>9: Oct 12, 14 &amp; 16&lt;sup&gt;Z&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Causation in Surveys &lt;br&gt; Zoom only Exercise #8 (10/16)</td>
<td>Text Chapter 6 (p. 115-124) review Galvin (2015)</td>
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<td>10: Oct 19, 21 &amp; 23</td>
<td>Causation in Experiments &lt;br&gt; EXAM 2: open on Canvas 10/24 to 10/27</td>
<td>Text Chapter 6 (p.124-139)</td>
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<td>11: Oct 26, 28, &amp; 30&lt;sup&gt;Z&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Survey Research &lt;br&gt; Handout: Data Collection Worksheet &lt;br&gt; Zoom only Exercise #9 (10/30)</td>
<td>Text Chapter 7 (p.143-151)</td>
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<td>12: Nov 2, 4, &amp; 6</td>
<td>Survey Research (con’t)</td>
<td>Text Chapter 7 (p.151-174)</td>
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<td>13: Nov 9, 11, &amp; 13&lt;sup&gt;Z&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Participant Observation &lt;br&gt; Zoom only Exercise #10</td>
<td>Text Chapter 8 (p.177-192) Herring (2019)</td>
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<td>14: Nov 16, 18, 20&lt;sup&gt;Z&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>In-depth Interviews &lt;br&gt; Zoom only Exercise #11 &lt;br&gt; Literature Review: DUE 11/16</td>
<td>Text Chapter 8 (p.192-203) Johnson (2019)</td>
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Final Exam: open Canvas from Nov. 23<sup>rd</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup>