Sociology 205: Introduction to Social Research

Fall 2018 (Online)           Instructor: Alian Kasabian, PhD
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Office Hours: TBD, and by appointment

“Research is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose.” ~Zora Neale Hurston

Prerequisite: 3 hours of sociology or related social sciences

Course Description: Introduction to the techniques of collecting and analyzing data and techniques of research reporting. Emphasis on interpretation and evaluation of sociological research.

More specifically, this course will introduce you to sociological research and methods, and provide a foundation for future research. Sociology is a science, and we use the scientific method to investigate the social world, and build upon previous knowledge and research. In this class, you will become familiar with the variety of concerns and methods available to sociological researchers, through lectures, discussions, and exercises. At end of this course you should be able to:

- Understand the ethics of social research
- Assess the existing literature and research
- Construct sociological research questions and hypotheses
- Compare and contrast methodological approaches

Besides preparing you for future coursework and research, this class should make you a better consumer of information.

Required Text:
Open source (free) text Principles of Sociological Inquiry: Qualitative and Quantitative Methods, by Amy Blackstone available here: https://saylordotorg.github.io/text_principles-of-sociological-inquiry-qualitative-and-quantitative-methods/index.html (for the online version). Pdf. chapters are also available on Canvas. Additional materials will be available on Canvas.

“Classroom” Guidelines:
Without face to face interaction, on-line etiquette is especially important. Please remember that the tone of what you are trying to communicate may not come across in text. Be staying enrolled in this class, you are expected to do the following:

- Be respectful and courteous of others’ points of view, and the confidentiality of personal experiences that may be shared.
- Keep track of assignment deadlines and turn work in when it is due. All assignments are due by 11:59pm on the due date.
- Communicate any issues or needs to me in a timely manner. You need to take responsibility for your own learning.

As your instructor, I will do my best to be responsive to class needs, and open to learning from you.
Communication:
The best way to reach me is **via email**. Online office hours are open to anyone who logs in. Private meetings can be arranged for on-line (Zoom), phone, or face to face.

A note on Zoom: Zoom has a chat feature, and a voice feature, so you do not have to use the video if you don’t want to.

A note on email etiquette: Emails to your instructors need to include a subject line, a greeting, an identification of the class you are referring to, a description of any attachment(s), and the name used in class. Failure to include these details may result in your message being deleted or flagged as spam. I am unlikely to respond to emails when the information requested is available in the syllabus. If these conditions are not met, and you have not received a reply within 2 business days, please send a follow-up email.

To reach you, I will use Canvas, and it is your responsibility to make sure your contact information is current in Canvas and MyRed.

Resources:
- Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD): 132 Canfield Administration. (402) 472-3787
- Writing Assistance Center: 129 Andrews Hall (402) 472-8803
- Sociology Department: 711 Oldfather Hall (402) 472-3631

Policies:
- **Academic Honesty/Dishonesty:** Cheating and plagiarizing are very serious academic offenses. Please be academically honest in this and every course. It is your responsibility as a student to be familiar with UNL policies concerning academic dishonesty, and what qualifies as academic dishonesty. If a student is caught cheating, the following protocol will be utilized: The student will receive a “0” on the assignment or exam. The incident will be reported to Dr. Julia McQuillan, the Chair of the Sociology Department. The incident will be reported in writing to UNL’s Judicial Affairs.

  Plagiarism is an unfortunately common occurrence on college campuses. Taking someone else’s work/words and using them as your own is a serious offence. The Office of Graduate Studies has put together a website to help students better understand plagiarism and how to avoid it. If you are ever unclear about what constitutes plagiarism or if you just want a refresher, please take advantage of this resource, which can be found at: [http://www.unl.edu/gradstudies/current/plagiarism.shtml](http://www.unl.edu/gradstudies/current/plagiarism.shtml)

- **Disabilities:** Students with disabilities are encouraged to me for a confidential discussion of their individual needs for academic accommodation. It is the policy of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln to provide flexible and individualized accommodation to students with documented disabilities that may affect their ability to fully participate in course activities or to meet course requirements. To receive accommodation services, you must be registered with the Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) office, 132 Canfield Administration, 472-3787 voice or TTY.

- **Personal Emergencies:** Life happens. In the event of a personal emergency, it is your responsibility to contact me and make arrangements. You are still responsible for your school work. I can be flexible, and am willing to work with a student to complete the course, but it must be done in a timely manner.
• **Grading:** I will do my best to grade your materials in a timely manner. That being said, there are certain rules to be followed.

1. Unless otherwise specified, all work should be submitted within Canvas. I only accept emailed work by prior arrangement. Late work will be docked 10% for each day (counting weekends and holidays) it is late.

2. The final grade is based on points, not percentages, so rounding issues should not a concern.

3. As a busy human, I have been known to make mistakes. Should I make a mistake unrelated to content (i.e. grade entered wrong, bad math, etc.), you may approach me at any time. If it a content related issue (i.e. question wording, or you disagree with my grading), you may contest it in writing. You must submit your well written argument for your case with the graded assignment, and it should draw on class materials to make your case.

F = No work done, or work done to such a low standard that it wastes the professor’s time to grade it. When students turn in F-level work (if they turn it in at all), it is obvious that they did not prepare, did not study, or simply did not care enough to do the work at the level expected in college.

D = Some work done, but not well enough to meet the standard set by the professor for basic completion of the work assigned. When students turn in D-level work, they have skimmed, skimped, or skipped over the important points and simply filled in a space or checked off a box. There is very little, if any, thought apparent in work at this level.

C = Average. This is the basic level that all professors expect of college students. When students turn in C-level work, they have answered all questions at the minimum level expected for competency in the course, but they have not pressed beyond that point. If all you’re doing is completing homework to the bare minimum standard or writing papers by their page count, this is the grade you can probably expect.

B = Above average. This is the level of a student who goes the extra mile. Instead of just answering a question, this student makes a point of investigating the question and responding at a level above the baseline. This student’s work shows a better level of comprehension of the material than is expected. This level of work may show a few errors, but the quality of the work exceeds the expectations of the course.

A = Superior. This is a level not easily achieved. This student goes beyond the extra mile and does their best to produce professional-quality work. This level of work has been combed over and checked to reduce and eliminate errors, it shows a high level of understanding and comprehension of the material, and the quality of the work is observably better than B-level work.

**Class Organization:**
The lectures are broken up into modules. Each module has multiple parts – lecture powerpoints, readings, assignments, etc. Tasks have deadlines, but the modules do not precisely align with weeks. Some cover multiple weeks, but most are intended to prepare you for the following assignment(s). For example, in week 2, I have listed Chapter 4 of the text (about beginning a research project), and the lectures for Understanding Research and Finding Literature. These are to help you start you literature search, and give you direction for the assignment due in weeks 3 and 5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Final Grading Scale</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>750 - 698</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>697 - 675</td>
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<td>B+</td>
<td>674 - 653</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>652 - 623</td>
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<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>622 - 600</td>
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<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>599 - 578</td>
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<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>577 - 548</td>
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<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>547 - 525</td>
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<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>524 - 503</td>
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<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>502 - 473</td>
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<tr>
<td>D-</td>
<td>472 - 450</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>449 or less</td>
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Assignments:
Unless instructed otherwise, all written assignments for this class should be typed, in 12pt Times New Roman, 12pt Arial, or 11pt Calibri (or similar font) with 1” margins. All assignments must be saved as a .doc, .docx, or .pdf file via Canvas. I will fail assignments I cannot open. All essay type assignments should be double-spaced, and any references presented in ASA format, including in-text citations. All assignments are graded for writing ability, as well as content. The UNL libraries has resources on plagiarism and citation styles: http://unl.libguides.com/content.php?pid=135579&sid=1161809

Also, Wikipedia is not a valid academic source for this class. It is a great place to start, but you should never plagiarize from the site or use it as a primary source of information. We will be going over how to find scholarly information in class. If you need further help getting academic sources, see me.

CITI Training: Complete a self-paced, online training course by September 13th. You create an account at https://www.citiprogram.org/, register as a UNL student, and complete the Social/Behavioral Research Investigators and Key Personnel – Basic Course. When finished, save a copy (or paste a screenshot into a .doc file) of your completion certificate to submit via Canvas. There is an example of what this looks like on Canvas.

Module Assignments: At the end of many modules, there is a small task to be completed. These are intended to help expose you to ideas outside of class, advance your research, and/or interact with your classmates.

Online Interaction: Throughout the semester, you will be required to complete tasks online, and respond to other students in the class. The responses are due within 2 days of the posting deadline. (So if the assignment was due on Tuesday (as most assignments are), the responses are due on Thursday.)

Doing Research
The majority of the points in this class will be based off of the topic and research questions you choose in the 2nd week of class. You may change your topic as the class goes on, but it will make the work harder for you, as many of the early assignments are components of the later assignments. Your research question defines the steps you will take to complete a research project. In this course, you will lay the foundation for a research project, completing what we call “the front end” of a research paper.

Research Question: We will start on this the first week, and you will submit your sociological research question in the second week. A sociological research question investigates the social world – patterns, meaning, or phenomena across groups. You will have a chance to edit it after the class responses.

Library Search: This is a research task. You will find a book on your topic and scan the title page and a page inside that is related to your topic. Then find two peer-reviewed research articles through Jstor/Sociological Abstracts/Ebscohost/etc. and save the title and abstract. Turn in 4 scanned pages.

Theories: Sociological research is guided by theory. Find two theories that could be used to explain your research question. Turn in a description of each theory, with an explanation of how each are related to your research question. Cite your sources.

Literature Details: Find three peer-reviewed research articles that are related to your research question. For each article, describe the goal of the research, the measures they used that are relevant to your
topic, the method they used to answer their research question(s), who was included in their analysis, and a brief (2-3 sentence) summary of the relevant findings.

**Concepts & Measures:** Now that you have examples of how other research has done it, conceptualize and operationalize the variables you would use to conduct your own research. This must include the dependent variable, and at least one independent variable.

**Foundation Assignment:** Use what you have learned, and the Doing Research assignments so far, to describe the foundation of your research. This includes your research question, theory, concepts, operationalization, and examples of different ways to measure your concepts. Cite your sources.

**Literature Review:** Summary of the relevant research related to the specific topic. It should show your understanding of the current research, relationships between previous studies, gaps and limitations in previous research, and how it relates to your own research. Look at how peer-reviewed articles structure their literature reviews for examples. Cite your sources.

**Sampling Design:** Describe your target population, and the type of sampling method that would be most appropriate. Explain the strengths and weaknesses of the design you chose.

**Survey Questions:** Write a ten question questionnaire that could be used to collect data to answer your research question. You can use only one open-ended question. Explain why you chose these questions (extra consideration for discussions of validity and reliability). Cite sources, if appropriate.

**Cognitive Interviews:** Evaluate your survey questions using cognitive interviews with at least 3 people. You will turn in an interview protocol, the results of your interviews, and your response to the process.

**Rough Drafts:** In week 13, you will turn in your first rough draft of the final paper (see below for more details) to me, which I will forward to an assigned reviewer. You will get 10 points for turning it in. This draft will not be graded for content, but it is in your best interest to provide as much material as possible. This is where I will give you the most detailed feedback before the final paper. Failing to turn in this draft reduces the number of points possible for your reviewer. To combat this, you will be penalized 20 points on your final paper grade if you do not turn it in.

After the first peer review, you will have a week to address what issues you can before submitting a 2nd draft on Canvas for a second peer review. Again, you will be penalized 20 points on your final paper grade if you do not turn it in.

**Peer Review:** In the last month of class, you will be a reviewer for two of your peers. It is your job to provide feedback to the writers. For each review, submit a short report to me, summarizing what was good, bad, and how the writer can improve. For the first review only, search for two new academic sources that will help your author’s paper. Include the citations for these, and the explanation of how they would improve the paper in your report to me. Reviewers will not be penalized for receiving poor papers, but must still address what is lacking. Examples of good reviews will be available on Canvas.
The Final Paper: The final paper will be similar to the front end of the academic research you reviewed. The primary difference is that you will describe two different methods to address your research question – both qualitative and quantitative. You will use previously completed work that you have had a chance to improve upon, as well as new information. This is a high stakes assignment, and failing to complete it will result in failing the class. The final rubric is available on Canvas.

- Cover page: Using ASA format
- Introduction: Set up your research for the reader
- Literature Review
  - Theory
- Research Questions
- Methods:
  - Qualitative Design:
  - Quantitative Design:
  - Critique of Methods
- Reference page: Cite all source materials in ASA format

Note: Extra credit will be offered over the course of the class, but no more than 25 points can be accumulated.

The instructor reserves the right to make changes to the syllabus and course schedule (including reading assignments) as deemed appropriate for educational purposes. All such changes will be announced on Canvas.
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<thead>
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<th>Due Date</th>
<th>Pts</th>
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<td>Intro</td>
<td>Icebreaker</td>
<td>August 21 (Tuesday)</td>
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<td>Research 101</td>
<td>CR: Icebreaker</td>
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<td>Soc Imagination</td>
<td>M: Intro Quiz</td>
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<td>M: Soc Imagination</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Finding Literature</td>
<td>Research Question</td>
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<td>CH. 4, 14</td>
<td>CR: Research Question</td>
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<td>Theory</td>
<td>Library Search</td>
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<td>M: Ethics</td>
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<td>September 13 (Thursday)</td>
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<td>CR: Theory (2)</td>
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<td>Conceptualization</td>
<td>Literature details</td>
<td>September 18 (Tuesday)</td>
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<td>M: Levels quiz</td>
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<td>Validity &amp; Reliability video</td>
<td>CR: Conceptualization</td>
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<td>Intro to Qualitative</td>
<td>Foundation assignment</td>
<td>October 2 (Tuesday)</td>
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<td>October 8 (Monday)</td>
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<td>Writing about Data</td>
<td>Literature Review</td>
<td>October 9 (Tuesday)</td>
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<td>Sampling Design</td>
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<td>Sampling Design</td>
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<td>Writing Survey Questions</td>
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<td>CR: Sampling Design</td>
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<td>CR: Survey Questions</td>
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<td>Week 11</td>
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<td>Cognitive Interviews</td>
<td>November 1 (Thursday)</td>
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<td>Week 12</td>
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<td>Work on Rough draft/Meet with Dr. Kasabian</td>
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<td>Week 13</td>
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<td>Rough Draft</td>
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<td>Week 14</td>
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<td>1st Peer Review</td>
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<td>Week 15</td>
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<td>2nd draft due</td>
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<td>Week 16</td>
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<td>2nd Peer Review</td>
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<td>Week 17</td>
<td>FINALS WEEK</td>
<td>Final Paper</td>
<td>December 11 (Tuesday)</td>
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**Total points** 750

M= Module assignment; CR= Class response to posted work