

SOC 355W Research Methods in Sociology
Spring 2021, Mo We 9:40-10:55 EST
Online and Synchronous (Zoom link on Canvas)

Instructor

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Online office hours:
Tu 12:45-1:45 and
We 11:00-12:00
(Zoom link on Canvas)

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Online office hours:
Mo 1:00-2:00
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Prerequisites

One SOC course at
Emory or equivalent
transfer credit

Course Overview

This course introduces students to the research methods commonly used in sociology and related fields. Topics include measurement validity and reliability; random and nonrandom sampling; experimental and quasi-experimental designs; survey research and questionnaire construction; ethnographic methods such as participant observation and intensive interviewing; evaluation research versus traditional social research; and ethical issues such as informed consent, privacy, and conflicts of interest.

The course has four basic objectives. First, you will learn how to translate abstract theoretical ideas into testable hypotheses. Second, you will be able to identify the strengths and limitations of different methods and determine which methods are most appropriate for answering your particular research questions. Third, you will become better equipped to critically assess the methodological soundness of research presented in scholarly journals and the news media. Fourth, you will develop a detailed understanding of research ethics, including how ethical guidelines have evolved historically and how they potentially vary across different methods.

The overarching goal of this course is to provide you with the necessary practical skills for being a discerning consumer and producer of social research. The course is required for sociology majors and fulfills a continuing writing requirement.

Textbook and Reserve Readings

Text (required): *Making Sense of the Social World: Methods of Investigation*, 2019 (6th edition), by Daniel Chambliss and Russell Schutt. This book is available in paperback and digital formats through Emory's bookstore and other online textbook sellers.

Readings (free online): To supplement the above textbook, there are several articles and book chapters that you can access through Woodruff Library's Course Reserves or through the Canvas site for this course. See the "Schedule of Topics and Readings" later in this syllabus for the list of online reserve readings.

Online Requirements

After the first week of the semester, we will settle into a weekly routine of two synchronous sessions (live and online) on Monday and Wednesday. Because this course is taught entirely online, you will need a computer with reliable internet access, speakers, and a webcam. Make sure you have an up-to-date web browser such as Chrome or Firefox. You will also need Microsoft Word (for typing up your papers and other work) and Adobe Acrobat (for opening a PDF course packet of handouts). You will be accessing the course through Emory's Canvas website (<https://canvas-support.emory.edu/>) and through Zoom, which is downloadable for free here: <https://zoom.us/>. The Zoom link for our online class meetings will be posted on Canvas.

If you have computer-related difficulties that require expert help, please call 404-727-7777 or visit this Emory site to file a ticket: <http://it.emory.edu/studentdigitalife/support/student-technology-support/index.html>.

A Note on Netiquette. There are a few simple guidelines that we all need to observe in order to make this course conducive to online learning:

- Don't be late to our live sessions, and don't leave early without first informing me that you will be doing so.
- Make sure you are dressed appropriately for a college classroom and that your background setting is not distracting to others.
- Mute your microphone during our live sessions when you are not talking. Raise your hand to indicate you would like to say something or use the "chat" tool in Zoom to do so.
- Cell phones should be turned off or muted during our live sessions.
- Typing sentences in all caps is considered to be online "screaming" and should therefore be avoided. Use appropriate language at all times, just as you would in a regular in-person course.

Workload and Grading

Your grade will be based on three papers, a midterm exam and final exam, and approximately 10 group exercises completed during class. Details provided below.

Papers. You will write two relatively short papers and a longer research proposal (based on the shorter papers). The two short papers are designed to take you through the initial stages of a research project, from formulating an empirical question to developing and defending a research design. These two papers will each be approximately eight pages long, double spaced, and each one contributes 15 percent toward your total course grade.

The two short papers will become the main sections of your **research proposal**. What is a research proposal? It's a document in which you present your research idea, link it to the existing literature on the topic, and describe in detail how you plan to conduct the research. The research proposal will be roughly 20 pages in length. The proposal will incorporate and expand

upon the work you already completed in the two earlier papers. Like those earlier papers, the proposal is worth 15 percent of your course grade. The three papers combined are thus 45 percent of your total grade in the course.

Detailed instructions for these paper assignments will be posted on Canvas. The papers will be evaluated on the basis of several factors: correct grammar and spelling; clarity of expression; overall organization and coherence; insightfulness and originality; the extent to which suitable sources are used and appropriately cited; and most importantly, the extent to which you accurately use the vocabulary of research methods, i.e., the technical terms from the readings and lectures.

Exams. There will be a midterm exam and a final exam, both consisting of only short answer questions. The exams cover the most important points of the readings and lectures. Both exams will be take-home and open-book, and you will have 24 hours to complete each one.

I will provide you with a study guide (in the first week or two of the semester) that will draw your attention to the most important issues in the readings and lectures. This guide will help you prepare for the midterm exam. After the midterm exam, I will provide you with a second study guide for the second half of the semester, and this will help you prepare for the final exam. These guides will be posted on Canvas. The topics listed on the guides represent the specific learning outcomes of this research methods course (see also the Learning Objectives listed at the beginning of each textbook chapter, which overlap to some extent with the study guides).

The midterm contributes 20 percent to your total course grade, and the final contributes 25 percent (the final counts a little more because it covers more material). Combined, then, the exams are 45 percent of your total grade.

In-class (Synchronous) Group Exercises. There will be approximately 10 short classroom exercises during the semester. Some of these are completed solo, but most will be completed in small groups of 4-5 students using Zoom's "breakout rooms" tool. These in-class group exercises give us the opportunity to dive deeper into specific methodological issues. They also allow you to work with your fellow students, drafting answers to specific questions, then sharing your group responses when the class reconvenes as a whole.

Because these exercises are completed during our live sessions and are not always announced beforehand, attendance is vitally important to your success in this course. If you miss an in-class exercise, it can't be made up for credit, except in cases involving documented emergencies and university-related events. Combined, these in-class exercises are worth 10 percent of your total grade.

Summarizing the above, your total grade in the course will be calculated as follows:

Papers	45%
Exams	45%
<u>In-class Exercises</u>	<u>10%</u>
Total	100%

Grading Scale. Letter grade ranges are shown below. Grades will not be rounded up at the end of the semester because much of the graded work in this course is open book, and I will also give you generous amounts of help if you ask. In other words, grades are already “rounded up” by virtue of the open-book and interactive nature of the work.

A	93-100	B+	87-89.99	C+	77-79.99	D+	67-69.99
A-	90-92.99	B	83-86.99	C	73-76.99	D	60-66.99
		B-	80-82.99	C-	70-72.99	F	0-59.99

Accommodations. If you have learning needs that may affect your grade, please consult the Department of Accessibility Services (DAS) and see me soon to arrange accommodations. The DAS website is here: <https://accessibility.emory.edu/>

Other Course Policies

Attendance Policy. Roll is not formally taken and there is no separate attendance grade. However, the in-class exercises function as a periodic check on attendance. If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to determine what you missed.

Late Policy. The following late policy applies to the three papers and the two exams: Each day that your work is late results in the deduction of one full letter grade. Due dates for the three papers and two exams are listed on the schedule below.

Academic Conduct. Emory College has established an Honor Code outlining an appropriate code of conduct with respect to academic honesty and plagiarism. Information on Emory’s Honor Code can be accessed here:

<http://catalog.college.emory.edu/academic/policies-regulations/honor-code.html>

It is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with the policies and procedures of the university. Violations of the Honor Code will be referred to the Honor Council.

Our schedule of topics and readings begins on the following page. I reserve the right to change the schedule and other features of this syllabus if circumstances warrant.

Schedule of Topics and Readings

In learning research methods, it is important to keep up with the readings. The lectures and group activities will be much more meaningful if you complete the readings beforehand because then you will know what to expect, what questions to ask, and how our meetings fit together with the readings.

The schedule below is arranged on a weekly basis rather than by each class meeting. In general, I recommend completing all the assigned reading(s) each week before the Wednesday meeting.

Note: **OL** = online reserve reading and **CS** = Chambliss and Schutt textbook.

<u>Week of...</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Readings</u>
1/25	Introductions and Course Overview	OL: Aims of Science, by Fred Kerlinger OL: Responding to Chaos, by Lisa McIntyre
2/1	Testable Theory and Empirical Research	CS: Ch 1. Science, Society, and Social Research CS: Ch 2. Process and Problems of Research
2/8	Research Ethics	CS: Ch 3. Ethics in Research
2/15	Research Ethics (cont.)	OL: Reasons Scientists Avoid Thinking about Ethics, by Paul Root Wolpe OL: Measuring Race and Ethnicity: Why and How? by Margaret Winker
	Rest Day 2/17 (class canceled)	
2/22	From Abstract Concepts to Measured Variables	CS: Ch 4. Conceptualization and Measurement OL: Political Democracy: Conceptual and Measurement Traps, by Kenneth Bollen
3/1	First paper due on 3/1	
	Selecting Samples	CS: Ch. 5. Sampling and Generalizability
3/8	Midterm exam on 3/8	
	Experiments and Quasi-Experiments	CS: Ch. 6. Causation and Experimental Design

<u>Week of...</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Readings</u>
3/15	Experiments (cont.)	OL: The Longitudinal Effects of a Rape-Prevention Program on Fraternity Attitudes and Behavior, by John Foubert
	Rest Day 3/16 (class canceled)	
3/22	Surveys	CS: Ch. 7. Survey Research OL: Survey of Sexual Behavior of Americans, by E.O. Laumann
3/29	Ethnographic Methods	CS: Ch. 9. Qualitative Methods: Observing, Participating, Listening OL: On Being Sane in Insane Places, by David Rosenhan
4/5	Second Paper due on 4/5	
	Ethnography (cont.)	OL: Researching Dealers and Smugglers, by Patricia Adler
	Unobtrusive/Archival Methods	CS: Ch. 11. Unobtrusive Measures; see also pp. 200-210 on secondary data, big data, and related ethical issues
4/12	Unobtrusive Methods (cont.)	OL: Narrative and Event, by Larry Griffin et al. OL: Images of Crime and Justice, by Alexis Durham et al.
	Rest Day 4/14 (class canceled)	
4/19	Evaluating Programs and Policies	CS: Ch. 12. Evaluation Research
4/26	On the History and Sociology of Statistics	OL: Lies, Calculations, and Constructions, by Joel Best
5/3	Research proposal due on 5/3 (our last meeting day)	

The final exam will be due on 5/7 by 10:30 AM EST (this is the official day and time of our final exam). It will be posted on Canvas at least 24 hours in advance.