

SKYLINE COLLEGE
SOCI 129: Intro to Research Methods

Instructor:	Course information:
Kaylee T. Matheny	Spring 2021
Office Hours: By appointment	CRN 46499, 3 Units – Online (Zoom)
Office Location: Zoom	Thursdays 8:10am-9:25am

Course Description

Research is the core of what makes social science a form of science. Through research, we follow the scientific method to understand patterns in social trends and behaviors. In this course, we examine the social research process through a close look at each step, focusing on particular considerations of qualitative and quantitative analyses. In this course, students will learn what types of research help us draw descriptive (correlational) vs. causal conclusions and which types help us develop new theories. Students will take a critical lens to each step in the research process, identify the types of methods best suited to address different research questions, and develop their knowledge of ethical considerations in research.

Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)

Upon successful completion of this course, a student will meet the following outcomes:

1. Analyze, assess, and apply the principles of various social scientific research methods.
2. Critically evaluate research findings in quality, credibility, and applicability.
3. Identify and describe the relationship between social theory and research.

Specific Instructional Objectives

Additionally, upon successful completion of this course, a student will be able to:

1. Conceptualize and operationalize social variables in formulating testable hypotheses.
2. Identify various research methods and the process of building a research design.
3. Describe how social research can be used to understand and describe various social processes.
4. Examine various research designs, the role of quantitative techniques, and data reduction in sociological analyses.
5. Identify and review qualitative approaches in current use.
6. Demonstrate familiarity with a social science statistical software for conducting research.
7. Assess the strengths and weaknesses associated with each research method.
8. Demonstrate knowledge about the professional modes of presenting the findings of sociological research.

Course Materials

All readings and articles will be posted on Canvas.

Course Details

Prerequisites:

- Required: SOCI 100 or equivalent.
- Recommended: MATH 200 or equivalent.

Attendance, Withdrawal, and Transferability:

- This course meets on Thursday mornings, 8:10-9:25am. I am going to be trying a “flipped classroom” approach, so class sessions will be more about expanding on topics from the reading and pre-recorded lesson (posted on Canvas the preceding weekend). Attendance to online class sessions is not required.
- The last day to drop semester classes without appearing on record is February 7, 2021.
- The withdrawal deadline is April 29, 2021.
- This course is transferable to both the CSU and UC college systems.

Technology:

- Check out the Online Resources tab in the Course Information module in Canvas for resources regarding tech support.

Late Work:

- Late assignments will be taken for a portion of a letter grade off up to 24 hours after the initial due date. For example, a B+ paper would receive a B if it were turned in between 0 and 24 hours after the deadline.
- Students may not turn a paper in more than 24 hours late without prior consent of the instructor (that is, you must submit a written request to the instructor—usually this takes place via email—AND have received a consenting response to turn it in late prior to the actual date and time the paper is due).
- Your emergency is not my emergency. I will try to respond to all emails within 48 hours, but I will not immediately respond to emails sent at 11:58 PM regarding assignments due at 11:59 PM. If I don't respond within 48 hours, feel free to nudge me—I may have missed your email. *It is totally okay, and not “annoying” at all, to send a nudge!*
- I am flexible and understanding with assignment deadlines. We are in a pandemic. If you need an extension, send me an email.

Academic Integrity:

- For general academic integrity guidelines, please refer to Student Rights and Responsibilities in the Skyline College catalog, as these will apply in this course.

- Your work at all times must be your own. While you are encouraged to collaborate with others to get preliminary feedback on your work and for engagement with the material, you may not submit another person's work (or the work of a computer) as your own.
- I reserve the right to refer any incidents of academic dishonesty to the Dean of Enrollment Services/ Disciplinary Officer. Additionally, I reserve the right to award plagiarized work with a grade of zero and not to allow the opportunity for make-ups.

Class Accommodations:

- All content will be available on Canvas, and I will strive to incorporate Canvas's accessibility settings into each course page.
- Occasionally, I may occasionally post exemplary de-identified student work so students have examples from which to draw.
- If you require additional accommodations or if there is anything I can do to make the classroom experience more accessible for you, please email or set up a time to meet.
- In coordination with the DRC office, reasonable accommodation will be provided for eligible students with disabilities. If you do not yet have an accommodation letter, please contact the DSPS office in room 5132 or call them at 650-738-4280.

Grades and Assignments

Grades:

- Grades will be assigned using the assignment allocations and grading scheme described below. Students will not have the opportunity to turn papers in multiple times, nor will they get extra credit at the end of the semester. Students should plan accordingly.
- If you do not get the grade you believe you deserve on any assignments, you are welcome to discuss the grade with me in further depth during office hours. However, please note that no grades will be changed.

Grades will be assigned based on the following scheme:

A	100-93%
A-	92-90%
B+	89-88%
B	87-83%
B-	82-80%
C+	79-78%
C	77-73%
D+	72-70%
D	69-68%
D-	67-60%
F/NP	59-0%

Grades for the class will be based on assignment types as follows:

Weekly Assignments

Reflection Questions	15%
Case Study Posts	15%

Milestone Assignments

Quantitative Analysis	20%
Qualitative Analysis	20%
Final Project	30%

Weekly Assignments

Reflection Questions:

- Each **Tuesday by 11:59pm**, students will submit *three* reflection questions from the reading and weekly pre-recorded lesson (to be posted the preceding Sunday). Some examples of types of reflection questions can include...
 - Something you don't understand
 - Something you want to learn more about
 - Something you'd like to see an example of in "real life"
 - Something that doesn't seem like it "meshes well" with what you already know
 - Something the chapter/lesson didn't address that you think it should have (or, similarly, something about a "gap" in your knowledge that the lesson did not fill)
 - Something you pondered while reading/listening
 - Something else that's related to the topic!
- Each question should be appropriate in scope and have at least some context—for example, "How does sampling work?" is not an appropriate response to this assignment. A better question would be, "When reading about sampling, I started thinking about what types of people might be more likely to respond to a survey. How do researchers account for that kind of selection bias?" Note that this question includes *context* (what made you think of the question) and is *appropriate in scope* (something that can be answered in a few sentences rather than an entire lesson).
- Students will have **15** opportunities to submit questions. You must submit questions at least **10** weeks; you may skip up to **5** weeks of questions with no penalty. I recommend skipping weeks that you feel you understand particularly well.
- **Note that all students must submit a question for Week 2.** Every other week is eligible to be a "skip" week, for up to five skip weeks.
- Reflection questions are graded on a complete/incomplete basis. Questions that fail to provide context, are not appropriate in scope, or are not related to the topic will be considered incomplete. This activity helps support *all* student learning outcomes outline at the beginning of the syllabus.

Case Study Posts:

- Each **Thursday by 11:59pm**, students will respond to the week’s case study topic asking them to identify one of three types of “cases”:
 - Find a *research article* and describe how it relates to the topic for the week.
 - For example, if the topic is formulating a research question, you might pick a research article with a multi-part research question and describe how the literature review sets up the research questions. Or, you might thoroughly break down the research question into its component parts (exactly *what* the question is asking, and what you might expect of the research design given the question—then tell us if you were right!).
 - A “research article” is published in a scientific journal.
 - Find a *news article* or other publication that uses social research and describe how it relates to the topic for the week. (It can also be a video, if you like).
 - For example, if the topic is formulating a research question, you might pick a news article on a particular topic and describe why a cited research project’s central research question was selected as evidence for the news article’s claims.
 - “News article” is loosely defined—if you can find something relevant on BuzzFeed, for example, that will work fine.
 - Identify a *work of fiction* or *non-fiction*—can be a movie, book, television show, graphic novel, or some other media for recreational (or informational) consumption and make a case to connect it to that week’s topic.
 - For example, if the topic is formulating a research question, you might pick a television show and pitch a research question addressing the social dynamics of that television show. You might also consider the type of literature you would want to engage to inform your question. This is a great opportunity to exercise your sociological imagination!
- Case Study posts should be at least 250 words and will be in discussion board format.
- Students should *comment* on two peers’ posts by the following **Tuesday by 11:59pm**. Responses should be at least 50 words and are part of the grade (if you only submit a Case Study but do not comment on peers’ posts, you will not get credit).
- Students will have **15** opportunities to submit a Case Study. You must submit a Case Study at least **10** weeks; you may skip up to **5** weeks with no penalty. I recommend skipping weeks that you feel you understand particularly well.
- **Note that all students must submit a Case Study for Week 2.** Every other week is eligible to be a “skip” week, for up to five skip weeks.
- This assignment is graded on a complete/incomplete basis. This is an opportunity to connect course content to real-world scenarios and learn something new about the world we live in. Case studies that fail to engage/apply the topic or do not meet the word count will be considered incomplete. Through this activity, students will work toward Student Learning Outcome #1.

To summarize:

- Reflection questions do not have a word count, but must (1) be on topic, (2) provide some context for the question, and (3) be appropriate in scope.
- Case Studies should each be at least 250 words. Comments to peers should be at least 50 words.
- Students may skip five of each type of weekly assignment at some point during the semester (after Week 2) without penalty.
- For each of the assignment types above, posts and submissions are graded on a complete/incomplete basis. Posts and submissions that fail to engage/apply the content, are not at least 75% original content from the student, and/or do not meet the word count will be considered incomplete.

Milestone Assignments

There are three milestone assignments: one that demonstrates mastery in understanding *qualitative research*, one that demonstrates mastery in understanding *quantitative research*, and one that demonstrates mastery in understanding *the research process*.

Qualitative Analysis (Milestone #1):

- Instructions: In this assignment, students will analyze a qualitative research article using a pre-provided completion rubric. The research article will be provided to students. Students will draw on relevant lessons that have been completed up to that point in order to analyze the article.
- Students will have one week to complete the assignment.
- Assignments should be turned in via Canvas and should be labeled LastName_QualAnalysis (e.g. Matheny_QualAnalysis).
- You may submit your assignment as a Microsoft Word doc, a Google Doc, or a PDF.
- Students are expected to write at the college level (e.g., no spaces before periods, academic language, etc).
- Students will receive the grading rubric as part of the completion rubric. However, for a general idea, I will be looking for three criteria for students' responses: (i) accuracy, (ii) development, and (iii) clarity. Development refers to providing a rationale for a given answer, and clarity refers to clear writing.
- This assignment is ***due Saturday, March 20, 2021***

Quantitative Analysis (Milestone #2):

- Instructions: In this assignment, students will analyze a quantitative research article using a pre-provided completion rubric. The research article will be provided to students. Students will draw on relevant lessons that have been completed up to that point in order to analyze the article.
- Students will have one week to complete the assignment.

- Assignments should be turned in via Canvas and should be labeled LastName_QualAnalysis (e.g. Matheny_QualAnalysis).
- You may submit your assignment as a Microsoft Word doc, a Google Doc, or a PDF.
- Students are expected to write at the college level (e.g., no spaces before periods, academic language, etc).
- Students will receive the grading rubric as part of the completion rubric. However, for a general idea, I will be looking for three criteria for students' responses: (i) accuracy, (ii) development, and (iii) clarity. Development refers to providing a rationale for a given answer, and clarity refers to clear writing.
- This assignment is ***due Saturday, May 1, 2021***

Final Research Project (Milestone #3):

- **Instructions:** In this assignment, students will complete an original research project, applying either qualitative or quantitative research principles to their own endeavor. The final product includes a research presentation as well as a brief written reflection.
- **Presentation:** Students will film themselves giving a brief (7 to 10 minute) presentation on their research project. The presentation will be completed as either a Microsoft Powerpoint or Google Slides presentation, and the video will be posted in a Canvas discussion board. It should follow the anatomy of a research article discussed at the beginning of the course (see rubric below for specifics).
 - **Tips:** For the presentation, I recommend filming yourself while sharing your screen in a Zoom call with only yourself. You might consider uploading the video to YouTube and sharing that way, but you don't *have* to use YouTube.
 - **Accommodations:** If you are uncomfortable filming yourself presenting on your project, you may instead write a 7 to 10-page paper describing your project. All other components, including the reflection, remain the same.
- **Reflection:** In addition to a presentation, students will write a 1-page (double-spaced) reflection on the research process—what you learned, what went well, what challenges you encountered, and what advice you might give to future students in the course. The reflection will be submitted as a separate assignment on Canvas as either a Microsoft Word document, a Google Doc, or a PDF as LastName_Reflection.
- **Peer Comments:** The final component of the assignment is to provide “peer review” to at least two peers on their projects during Final Week. In these comments, you will choose two projects, and identify two strengths of the project and two areas of potential improvement if the project were to be conducted again, with specific feedback and concrete suggestions. Post comments in the Canvas discussion board.
- The project will be graded according to the following rubric:

Component	Worth	Criteria
<i>Topic Submission</i> (due 2/20)	5%	Student submits the topic and the topic is approved by the instructor. (5% for completion).
<i>Check-In</i> (due 4/22)	10%	Student satisfactorily submits the assigned check-in. (10% for completion).
<i>Presentation</i> (due 5/22)		
--Introduction and Literature Review	10%	Lit review describes at least four prior relevant studies (2% each) with sufficient clarity (2%).
--Research Questions and Hypotheses	10%	Research questions (5%) and hypotheses (5%) are clearly stated.
--Methods	20%	Research methods are clearly described, including a rationale for the method used (5%), a description of the method chosen (including the procedures followed) (10%), and a description of the drawbacks of the method (5%).
--Results	10%	Results are clearly described, including an overview of the patterns found (5%) and a clear description of how they can be interpreted (e.g. causal, correlational, theory-building, etc.) (5%).
--Discussion	10%	Discussion revisits the “gap in the literature” the literature review set up at the beginning (2%), describes who the findings “apply” to (to whom are they generalizable?) (5%), and describes next steps or areas for future research (3%).
--Mechanics (not a section, but for the whole presentation)	5%	Any writing is clear, accurate, grammatically correct, and citations follow ASA style (3%). Presentation is aesthetically appealing (2%).
<i>Reflection</i> (due 5/25)	10%	Student writes a reflection as described above. 2% to what you learned, 2% to what went well, 2% to what challenges you encountered, 2% to advice for future students, and 2% to writing clarity.
<i>Peer Comments</i> (due 5/25)	10%	Student provides comments to two peers as described above. 2% to strengths for Student A, 2% to areas of improvement for Student A, 2% to strengths for Student B, 2% to areas of improvement for Student B, 2% for clarity.

Course Outline

Unit I. The Building Blocks of Research

Week 1 (1/21): Conducting “Social Science” Research

Week 2 (1/28): Anatomy of a Research Article

Week 3 (2/4): Formulating a Research Question

Week 4 (2/11): Writing a Literature Review

Week 5 (2/18): Quantitative vs. Qualitative Research

Initial Topic for Final Research Project Due Saturday, Feb. 20, 11:59pm

Unit II. Qualitative Research

Week 6 (2/25): Qualitative Designs

Week 7 (3/4): Sampling

Week 8 (3/11): Entering, Coding, and Analyzing Qualitative Data

Week 9 (3/18): Results in Qualitative Studies; Research Ethics

Milestone #1 Due Saturday, March 20, 11:59pm

Unit III. Quantitative Research

Week 10 (3/25): Quantitative Designs

- Note: No class 4/1, no module – Spring Break

Week 11 (4/8): Data Collection for Quantitative Research; Secondary Data

Week 12 (4/15): Measurement Error, Reliability, Validity

Final Research Project Check-In Due Saturday, April 24, 11:59pm

Week 13 (4/22): Entering and Organizing Quantitative Data

- Note: No class on 4/22 (Flex Day), but there will still be a module

Week 14 (4/29): Analyzing Quantitative Data; Results in Quantitative Studies

Milestone #2 Due Saturday, May 1, 11:59pm

Unit IV. What Research Teaches Us

Week 15 (5/6): Discussions and Conclusions in Research

Week 16 (5/13): Presenting Research; Peer Review

Week 17 (5/20): Research Project Q&A

Final Project Due Saturday, May 22, 11:59pm
Peer Comments Due Tuesday, May 25, 11:59pm

Recommended Final Project Timeline

<i>Qualitative Projects</i>	<i>Quantitative Projects</i>
Weeks 1-5: Decide on a project topic and general methodological approach	
Week 6: Identify a qualitative design	Weeks 6-8: Begin thinking about what type of data you will need for your project. Use Week 7 to think about whether you want to gather original data (like through a survey).
Week 7: Think about the type of sample you will gather	Week 9: Focus on Milestone #1
Week 8: Sketch out an analysis plan	Week 10: Identify a quantitative design that best answers your question.
Week 9: Focus on Milestone #1	Week 11: Confirm the type of data you will use for your project. If applicable, begin collecting your data.
Weeks 10-11: Build your sample. Start reaching out to potential sites/participants, develop a plan for sampling, and collect data	Week 12: Continue collecting your data (if applicable); sketch out an analysis plan.
Weeks 12-13: Analyze your data.	Week 13: Begin analyzing your data.
Week 14: Focus on Milestone #2	Week 14: Focus on Milestone #2
Week 15: Draft your results	Week 15: Complete data analysis
Week 16: Draft your conclusion	Week 16: Draft results and conclusion
Week 17: Craft your presentation	Week 17: Craft your presentation
Finals Week: Submit peer comments	Finals Week: Submit peer comments

Project Check-In Form
Due April 22

<i>Check-In Question</i>	<i>Response</i>
1. What is your research question, and is it qualitative or quantitative?	
2. What type of data are you going to collect to answer your question?	
3. What stage of data collection are you in?	
4. What is your analysis plan?	
5. What questions do you have or support do you need?	