

Kennesaw State University
Fall 2015

Course Syllabus
Research Methods in Sociology
SOC 3305/ W01 - CRN 83973

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Questions about the class should be addressed in D2L

I expect students to read this syllabus in its entirety! I will not be able to respond separately to every individual inquiry related to information already provided here.

REQUIRED TEXTBOOK:

Neuman, Lawrence W. 2009: Understanding Research, Pearson, 1st Ed,
0-205-47153-6 / 978-0-205-47153-9

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Have you ever made an assertion such as “kids don’t play outside anymore like they used to?” or “women earn less money and work in less prestigious occupations than men”, or “social ties are weakening in modern society” only to have people disagree with you? They may have replied with an argument such as “everybody is different” or “in my area it is not like that” or “I think it depends”? How do we know that what “we know” is truly a trend that is happening?

It is only through **social science research** that we can test whether our “common sense” and perceptions are accurate. Arguments based on scientific social research do not reflect someone’s opinion or perception; nor are they a collection of anecdotes obtained from random, “man-on-the-street” media interviews. They are not “what everyone knows” or what “people have always known”, though often times, results of scientific research can confirm what people already knew intuitively. Alternatively, results can surprise us by revealing unexpected patterns of behavior. Understanding the principles of the scientific method gives people the priceless advantage of being able to separate cultural beliefs, myths, ideology, or propaganda from reality - a skill that should serve you quite well both in college and in life.

This is an introductory course, the first of a three-course sequence required in the major. The course provides an introduction to concepts and techniques of social science research. Students will acquire a foundational understanding of research methods in sociology, the nature of sociological investigation, the relationship between theory and research, the advantages and disadvantages of various methods of investigation, their benefits and limitations, as well as their ethical and practical implications.

Students will acquire the foundational knowledge needed to conduct data collection in both quantitative and qualitative research methods during the next two parts of the sequence.

COURSE OBJECTIVES (Learning Outcomes):

- CO 1 - Understand, describe and exemplify the main principles of social science research methods.
- CO 2 - Describe and apply appropriate ethical practices in doing human-based research, including IRB processes.
- CO 3 - Critically assess published research articles and explain how the studies could have been improved.
- CO 4 - Design and pre-test an original survey; bring necessary modifications based on pretest results.
- CO 5 - Consider opposing hypotheses and how viewpoints are critically assessed and supported by empirical data.
- CO 6 - Write a literature review in an area of choice.

TECHNOLOGY REQUIREMENTS

This is an entirely online course and will be conducted entirely through the D2L platform. Students are expected to have the necessary computer background to work in this format, and are advised to seek additional technical assistance from computer services if needed [See resource links in Welcome Module]. Students will be expected to read each assigned chapter carefully, and then use the linked Lecture Notes and PowerPoint presentations as review material. Then, for each chapter, students will be expected to make at least 2 substantive dialogue contributions to ongoing discussions that will occur online, on **discussion boards**. The assigned chapters will be grouped together into two modules of several chapters each, and after each module there will be an online exam.

The **e-mail function** and the **Announcement** section in D2L will be our other forms of communication. I will email everyone or post a message under the “Announcements” section with important updates and general comments. Students can always contact me via e-mail. Expect responses within 48-72 hours, except in rare cases when I might be traveling or otherwise away from my computer.

You will begin by logging in at the address below and then by clicking on the SOCI 2301 link to the course.

<https://kennesaw2.view.usg.edu/>

Course Assignments (% of final grade)

| | |
|--------------------------|-----|
| Discussion Board Leaders | 15% |
| Weekly discussions | 10% |
| Literature Review | 20% |
| Survey | 15% |
| Midterm | 20% |
| Final | 20% |

100%

Discussion Board Leader Team - DBL (15%)

How it works

During the week a student is assigned to be part of a Discussion Board Leaders team (DBL), he/she must work with the specified colleagues to post a comprehensive message addressing ALL questions asked in the prompt. The teams will typically include 3-5 students. Some drop-outs may modify this number as the course progresses.

Every week, a DBL team will be responsible for the well-functioning of the board activity. This means:

- The instructor will begin by writing at the top of the Discussion Board of the week some type of questions/instructions. These can include springboard questions or some small assignment/class activity that would initiate and facilitate student participation on the board.

Every week, the DBL team will be responsible for addressing the questions in the prompt by Tuesday of the week in question! Therefore PLAN ACCORDINGLY

The team will work together to produce ONE well-formulated post that addresses all questions in the prompt!

- Students in the team can divide the questions, edit each other's work before posting, and collaborate as they see fit in order to produce one overall quality post.

- The ability to collaborate instead of strictly chasing individual gains will be considered when calculating the grade on this assignment for each student. Please avoid being the student who leaves no other option to colleagues but to report him/her for lack of willingness or interest to collaborate, to answer e-mails, etc. If I receive such reports, your grade is guaranteed to suffer significantly! At the same time, please avoid frivolous reports of colleagues for "not pulling their weight".

Grading Criteria: content, collaboration as suggested by cohesiveness of post

Weekly posts (10%)

- On each weekly board, all other students (non-DBL) will post in reply to the DBL team's main post with specific related topics, questions, or remarks. **This must be done by Sunday** of the week in question.

- The DBL team will also be responsible for engaging classmates by replying to their posts. Every team member must respond to at least 5 posts by classmates. Do try to cover as many colleagues' posts as possible instead of the entire team focusing on a few colleagues only.

- Note that there will be some questions/activities that ALL students will be expected to address directly, even if they are not part of the DBL team that week (details on each board). If the question ends with (ALL), then all students must post on it.

- The posts in reply to the DBL team plus the (ALL) activities will dictate the grade for the general weekly participation for each student.

Generally speaking, the Discussion Boards are where class interaction takes place and the best place for students to ask questions, make comments, clarify concepts, and especially demonstrate that they have read and understood the chapters.

The discussions/dialogue on boards will be multi-directional: student-student, student-content, student-instructor, and instructor-student. From past experience, around 800 postings are likely to be made by students during the term. The instructor will often reply to the DBL main post with feedback, often engaging a whole thread at one time and addressing key concepts that several students bring up.

Grading Criteria: Content; In addition, the instructor will get statistics of how many postings each student reads, how many posts are made, and how many hours are spent on the site.

For both components, basic grammar and writing style will be taken into account. Spell checking, proof reading and avoiding colloquial language are always a good idea. Consult the Writing Center [see: Links Page in Welcome Module] for assistance with writing.

Content remains foremost for assessment purposes.

Online Etiquette

Questions are encouraged, and polite disagreements are fine. However, *respect is a basic necessity in all online interactions*. According to KSU Computer Usage Policy and Guidelines [www.kennesaw.edu/infosec]: You may not employ lewd or threatening language in any electronic communication. This would violate the bounds of good taste as well as laws and regulations. Please see the Etiquette Statement in the Welcome Module for a more detailed discussion.

Literature Review (20%)

Students will write a literature review (term paper) on a topic of their choice.

The topic must be well defined by a main research question and several detailed sub-questions. The literature must be comprehensive and mainly sociological, although in some cases it may be appropriate to include findings from psychology, anthropology or other social sciences, as long as they are **sociologically relevant** and they inform the chosen topic successfully.

More detailed instructions on this requirement will be provided in D2L.

Minimum reference requirements for the paper:

- 7-10 peer-reviewed journal articles,
- 1 book or chapter-books and
- 1 or more government sources on the topic (such as statistical reports, if available).
- Length of the paper: 800-1000 words (**without the abstract**) (2.5-3 pages – without the abstract)
- Format: Times New Roman, 12, double spaced

Survey 15%

Students will create an original survey instrument/questionnaire (used in quantitative research), for possible use during a future Senior Seminar course. Students you will construct a survey questionnaire RELATED to your literature review topic!

For example, if your topic of choice for your literature review is “Parenting among High-Skill Immigrants”, you should think about how you might build an instrument of research if you were to conduct your own specific study related to this topic and you had a specific research question in mind. Remember that in this class you will NOT complete an original research study of your own - but you will build the foundation so you can design such a study in the Senior Seminar course.

You will prepare the survey instrument in this class but will not actually administer it widely to collect the data!

Your questions must be designed in such way that their answers reflect the topic and research question of the study. For instance, if you want to identify how much high-skilled immigrants involve in their children's education you may ask "*How many hours a day do you help your child / children with their homework?*" A question such as "*How many hours a day do you exercise?*" will not provide you with an answer about parenting style among high-skilled immigrants.

When you build the instrument, you must ask yourselves: what would we be trying to find out if we were to conduct a study? Do our questions reflect an overall purpose of the study or are you just throw some vaguely related questions together?

To build your SURVEY you will check instructor guidance on D2L, readings on pg. 144, and the example on pg. 352.

You will have to be very explicit as in mail-administered or Internet surveys the respondent cannot usually ask for clarifications. Note that the example on pg. 352 does not include a scale/index, whereas I will expect you to include these. Your survey should include:

- 7 close-ended questions (CE)
- 1 open-ended question (OE)
- 1 contingency question (CONT)
- 5-8 demographic questions (DEM) – relevant to your topic
- 2 index/scale (at least) (INDEX)

*** Identify the type of question with the code in the parenthesis at the end of each question**

(e.g.) What is your gender? (DEM)

- a. male
- b. female
- c. other

*** All your questions have to be relevant to the topic you chose for your literature review**

After designing the questionnaire, students will have to pre-test it on at least two subjects. Students should have an initial version of their questionnaire (prior to pretesting) and the final version (after pretesting) with a half page explanation of the changes resulted from pretesting and why they felt compelled to make these changes.

Submit final version in D2L.

Midterm (20%)

Final (20%)

There will be two multiple-choice exams (a Midterm and a Final) testing your textbook/theoretical knowledge of the topics we will discuss throughout the semester. Please make a note of the exam schedule and plan accordingly. Exams are essentially open book; but study and preparation are necessary because the exams are *timed* and the clock starts as soon as you begin, so there will not be time to look up answers. You must be prepared in advance to do well on the tests. Both the Midterm and the Final will have 40 questions and will be allotted 1 hour and 15 minutes. The questions asked in exams will primarily cover the major concepts covered in the textbook and on the Discussion Boards.

OTHER INFORMATION

Course grade: 90-100=A 80-89=B 70-79=C 60-69=D Lower than 60=F

Academic Integrity Statement: Every KSU student is responsible for upholding the provisions of the Student Code of Conduct, as published in the Undergraduate and Graduate Catalogs. Section II of the Student Code of Conduct addresses the University's policy on academic honesty, including provisions regarding plagiarism and cheating, unauthorized access to University materials, misrepresentation/falsification of University records or academic work, malicious removal, retention, or destruction of library materials, malicious/intentional misuse of computer facilities and/or services, and misuse of student identification cards. Incidents of alleged academic misconduct will be handled through the established procedures of the University Judiciary Program, which includes either an "informal" resolution by a faculty member, resulting in a grade adjustment, or a formal hearing procedure, which may subject a student to the Code of Conduct's minimum one semester suspension requirement.

Disability Clause: Kennesaw State University provides support for students with disabilities. It is the student's responsibility to identify himself/herself as an individual with a disability. A qualified individual in the area of the identified disability must provide the documentation of the disability. This documentation must show how the disability creates a significant impact on the individual's academic performance; it should include suggested accommodations that are reasonable to provide in an academic setting.

Please contact instructor privately for all personal hardships.

Course Outline (subject to change based on progress)

| Week/Date | Readings | Topic |
|------------------|-----------------|--|
| 1/17-23 Aug | | Introduction – Introduce yourself <i>read the syllabus carefully</i> |
| 2 /24-30 Aug | Chapter 1 | Why do research? |
| 3 / 31-6 Sept | Chapter 2 | Planning a Study |
| 04 / 7-13 Sept | Chapter 3 | Becoming an Ethical Researcher <i>Deciding upon a Research Question and Literature Review</i> <i>Topic - Wednesday Sept.9th</i> |
| 05/14-20 Sept | Chapter 4 | Sampling |
| 06 /21-27 Sept | Chapter 5 | Measuring Social Life |
| 07/28-4 Oct | | MIDTERM – Thursday Oct. 1 st |
| 08 /05-11 Oct | Chapter 6 | The Survey (1) |
| 09 /12-18 Oct | Chapter 6 | The Survey (2) |
| 10 /19-25 Oct | Chapter 9 | Making Sense of Numbers (1) |
| 11/26-01 Nov | Chapter 9 | Making Sense of Number (2) <i>Survey due – Wednesday, Oct. 28th</i> |
| 12/02-08 Nov | Chapter 8 | Research With Non-reactive Measures (Quantitative and Qualitative Research) |
| 13/09-15 Nov | Chapter 10 | Observing People in Natural Settings (1) |
| 14 /16-22 Nov | Chapter 10 | Observing People in Natural Settings (2) <i>Literature Review Due – Sunday, Nov. 22nd</i> |
| 15/23-29 Nov | | FALL BREAK ☺ |
| 16 /30-06 Dec | Chapter 11 | Looking at the Past and Across Cultures |
| 17 /07-13 Dec | | FINAL EXAM - Thursday Dec. 10 th |

****The professor reserves the right to make changes to the syllabus throughout the semester****