

## SOCIOLOGY 3110: METHODS OF SOCIAL RESEARCH

**Instructor:** Dr. Karin Abel  
**Office:** Old Main 224E  
**E-mail:** karin.abel@usu.edu  
**Office Hours:** MW 3:00 p.m.-4:30 p.m., or  
by appointment

**TA:** Jessica Sonderegger  
**Office:** Old Main 224B  
**E-mail:** jess.sonderegger1@gmail.com  
**Office Hours:** by appointment

**UTF:** Kennedy Olson  
**E-mail:** kolson@aggiemail.usu.edu

**Reading Materials:** I will post all reading materials in Canvas as needed.

---

### COURSE DESCRIPTION

Broadly speaking, sociology is the systematic study of society, social institutions, and social relationships. The word “systematic” is key here. To elaborate, sociologists (and other social scientists) follow particular procedures as they carry out research. In all likelihood, much of what you have learned in your other courses has to do with *what research tells us*. But, in this course, you will learn *how to conduct research*. We all live in a society that influences us in a variety of ways. Conducting sociological research offers an opportunity to better understand the ways in which the social world shapes our everyday lives. This course will give you the tools you need to formulate interesting questions and to design projects that can provide answers to these questions. You will learn about major quantitative and qualitative research approaches, as well as have opportunities to apply what you know in the form of various course assignments.

### COURSE OBJECTIVES

IDEA Objective	Course Objective	Method of Evaluation
1. Gaining factual knowledge	➤ Gaining a basic knowledge of how to conduct social science research	➤ Lectures ➤ Course assignments ➤ Quizzes
2. Learning how to find and use resources for answering questions or solving problems	➤ Learning how to find and use resources for answering questions or solving problems of interest to social scientists	➤ Lectures ➤ Course assignments ➤ Quizzes
3. Developing specific skills, competencies, and points of view needed by professionals in the field most closely related to this course	➤ Developing capacities to conduct research that social scientists need to be successful professionals	➤ Lectures ➤ Course assignments ➤ Quizzes

<p>4. Learning to apply course material (to improve thinking, problem solving, and decisions)</p>	<p>➤ Learning to apply knowledge about social science methodologies when conducting research or examining existing research</p>	<p>➤ Lectures ➤ Course assignments</p>
---	---	--

## GENERAL POLICIES

Decorum and Etiquette: You should always be respectful of each member of our class. No cell phones, laptops, etc. should be on or in use during class time without the consent of the instructor.

Late Work, Early Feedback, and Make-ups: You will earn a zero score on any assignment you turn in late. I will give you feedback on any COMPLETED assignment if you come to see me about it prior to the due date. The earlier you come, the better. Do not expect me to be available to help you last minute. Moreover, I will not allow make-up quizzes. Since I know that unexpected things can come up, I will drop your lowest quiz score. Finally, I will not allow make-ups on in-class assignments. You can receive credit for them only if you are there to participate. But, I will drop your lowest in-class assignment score.

Students with Disabilities: In accordance with the policies and procedures of the USU Disability Resource Center (DRC), I will gladly provide accommodations for students with disabilities. If you have any disability that may impact your ability to complete this course successfully, please contact the DRC at 435-797-2444.

Cheating and Plagiarism: I understand that students are often under a great deal of pressure, but I will not tolerate any form of academic dishonesty. If you are unsure of what constitutes cheating or plagiarism, please refer to *The Code of Policies and Procedures for Students at Utah State University* (<http://www.usu.edu/student-services/student-code/>). If you engage in any kind of academic dishonesty, you will fail the course.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Your success in this class will largely depend on you and your ability and willingness to proactively learn how to conduct social science research. You should take good notes. If you do not understand something, it is up to you to get clarification.

Participation: Throughout the semester, I will give several in-class assignments. The purpose of these assignments is to add to and deepen your understanding of course content. You can receive credit for these assignments **only** if you are in attendance on the days I give them. Each in-class assignment will be worth **5 points**.

Quizzes: During the course of the semester, I may opt to give quizzes. These quizzes will evaluate your knowledge of the reading material. Each quiz will be worth **10 points**.

Tasks: Throughout the course of the semester, I will require that you complete 10 different tasks. To complete these tasks, you will have to apply what you are learning about the research process to your own research. Though these tasks will sometimes require little page space, you must type them. Each task will be worth *between 5 and 20 points*. I will provide more details on each task as the semester progresses.

Final Project: For this project, I will require you to apply the methodological tools you have learned throughout the course to a specific research question of your choice. You will have to develop a research question, conduct a literature review, propose a theoretical argument, and describe your data and methods. In short, you will have to complete the “front end” of a potential journal article. This project will be worth *100 points*. I will provide more details on what you will need to do later in the semester.

## GRADING

Your grade will be based on how many points you earn relative to the total points possible. I will assign grades according to the following percent breakdown:

93-100	A
90-92	A-
87-89	B+
83-86	B
80-82	B-
77-79	C+
73-76	C
70-72	C-
67-69	D+
63-66	D
60-62	D-
Below 60	F

## COURSE OUTLINE

### Week 1

1/11	Topic: An introduction to course Reading: Syllabus
1/13	Topic: Why we do research and how to construct research questions Reading: Assortment of Articles; “Research Design” pp. 86-90 (Babbie); “Getting Started” (Giarusso et al.)
1/15	Topic: Why we do research and how to construct research questions

### Week 2

1/18	No class (Martin Luther King, Jr. Day)
1/20	Topic: Finding literature Reading: “Working with Sources” (Giarusso et al.) <b>Due: Task 1 – Compose a “starter” research question.</b>

- 1/22 Topic: The research process  
Reading: "Steps in the Social Scientific Process" (Stark and Roberts);  
"Research Design" pp. 107-14 (Babbie)
- Week 3
- 1/25 Topic: Reviewing and contributing to literature  
Reading: "Writing Introductions and Literature Reviews" (Pyrzczak and Bruce)
- 1/27 Topic: Reviewing and contributing to literature
- 1/29 Topic: Conceptualization  
Reading: "Writing Definitions" pp. 63-6 (Pyrzczak and Bruce);  
"Conceptualization, Operationalization, and Measurement" pp. 119-31  
(Babbie)
- Week 4
- 2/1 Topic: Conceptualization
- 2/3 Topic: Theoretical propositions, theory, and causality  
Reading: "Concepts and Theories" (Stark and Roberts)  
**Due: Task 2 – Refine your research question (add an independent variable), and create an outline for your literature review.**
- 2/5 Topic: Theoretical propositions, theory, and causality
- Week 5
- 2/8 Topic: Operationalization, validity, and reliability  
Reading: "Writing Definitions" pp. 66-70 (Pyrzczak and Bruce);  
"Conceptualization, Operationalization, and Measurement" pp. 132-46  
(Babbie)
- 2/10 Topic: Operationalization, validity, and reliability  
**Due: Task 3 – Compose conceptual definitions for your major concepts.**
- 2/12 Topic: Hypotheses and a review of the research process  
Reading: "The Quantitative Research Paper" (Giarusso et al.); "Writing the Research Report" (Corbett)
- Week 6
- 2/15 No class (Presidents' Day)
- 2/16 (T) Topic: Hypotheses and a review of the research process
- 2/17 Questions day  
**Due: Task 4 – State your theoretical proposition, and compose a single paragraph summary of your theoretical argument explaining it.**  
**Participation – Come prepared with a list of 3 questions concerning your project.**
- 2/19 Topic: Ethics  
Reading: "The Ethics and Politics of Social Research" (Babbie)
- Week 7
- 2/22 Topic: Ethics
- 2/24 Topic: Surveys  
Reading: "Constructing the Survey" (Trochim)  
**Due: Task 5 – Operationalize each of your concepts.**
- 2/26 Topic: Surveys
- Week 8
- 2/29 Topic: Composing survey questions, indexes, and scales

- 3/2 Topic: Composing survey questions, indexes, and scales  
**Due: Task 6 – State your hypothesis(es).**
- 3/4 Topic: Formatting a questionnaire and selecting participants  
 Reading: “Sampling Terminology”
- Week 9
- 3/7 No class (spring break)  
 3/9 No class (spring break)  
 3/11 No class (spring break)
- Week 10
- 3/14 Topic: Formatting a questionnaire and selecting participants  
 3/16 Topic: Sampling procedures  
 3/18 Topic: Sampling procedures
- Week 11
- 3/21 Topic: Survey critiques  
**Due: Task 7 – Put together a short survey that addresses your research question.**
- 3/23 Topic: Survey critiques  
 3/25 Topic: Existing data  
 Reading: “Using Available Data” (Adler and Clark)
- Week 12
- 3/28 Topic: Existing data  
 3/30 Topic: Existing data  
**Due: Task 8 – Describe your sampling frame, and give step-by-step directions for how you plan to select participants.**
- 4/1 Topic: Qualitative interviews  
 Reading: “Qualitative Interview Design: A Practical Guide for Novice Investigators” (Turner)
- Week 13
- 4/4 Topic: Qualitative interviews  
 4/6 Topic: Qualitative interviews  
**Due: Task 9 – Identify questions from an existing dataset that address your research question, and explain why these dataset questions are adequate/inadequate measures.**
- 4/8 Topic: Observational approaches  
 Reading: “Participant Observation”
- Week 14
- 4/11 Topic: Observational approaches  
 4/13 Topic: Observational approaches  
 Reading: “Criminality and Homeless Men: An Empirical Assessment” (Snow, Baker, and Anderson)
- 4/15 Topic: Content analysis approaches  
 Reading: “Content Analysis” (Adler and Clark)
- Week 15
- 4/18 Topic: Content analysis approaches  
 4/20 Topic: Content analysis approaches

4/22

Topic: Data analysis

Reading: "Quantitative and Qualitative Data Analysis" (Adler and Clark)

Week 16

4/25

Topic: Data analysis

4/27

Topic: Data analysis

4/29

Questions day

**Due: Task 10 – Indicate what types of data analysis are useful to your research project and why. Participation – Come prepared with a list of 3 questions concerning your project.**

Finals Week

5/4

**Due: Final Project**

Note: Anything in the syllabus is subject to change. Attending class and regularly checking Canvas will ensure that you do not miss any important news.