

## **SOC 300: Introduction to Sociological Research Methods**

Syllabus, Spring 2019

**Meetings** 9:30 – 10:45 on Mondays and Wednesdays  
4105 Behavioral Sciences

**Instructor** **Mahesh Somashekhar**  
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Office Hours: 11:15 – 12:30 on Mondays, and by appointment

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| <b>Teaching Assistants</b> | <b>Haley Volpintesta</b>   | <b>Mariya Khan</b>   |
|                            | Sections: AD1, AD2<br>OH: Thursdays, 12pm – 2pm (BSB 4111)<br>Email: hvolpi2@uic.edu | Sections: AD3, AD4<br>OH: Wednesday/Fridays, 11am – 12pm (BSB 4111)<br>Email: mkhan252@uic.edu |

**Course Webpage** Available on Blackboard

**Contact** For simple questions, email is the best way to reach me or your TAs. We will respond to your messages within 72 hours. For more involved questions or discussions, please use our office hours.

### **Course Description and Objectives:**

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This introductory course in social research methods offers an overview of how sociologists study the social world. It provides basic tools needed to conduct social research while also developing the skills necessary to critically evaluate the research of others. We will begin with a discussion of the fundamental concepts and issues involved in sociological research, and move on to consider a variety of approaches to social research. This course, more concretely, aims to: (1) introduce you to the basic elements of research design; (2) improve your ability to critically evaluate the research of others; (3) enhance your understanding of what it means to be a sociologist; (4) familiarize you with the problems and limitations of studying the social world through firsthand experience with data collection and hypothesis testing; and (5) demonstrate the relevance of sociological research methods to your everyday lives.

### **Prerequisites:**

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SOC 201; and sophomore standing or above; or SOC 201 and one additional 200-level course in sociology.

## **Required Equipment:**

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There is one required textbook for the course:

Schutt, Russell K. 2018. *Investigating the Social World: The Process and Practice of Research*. 9th ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

There will be other readings that complement the required textbook. These other readings will be provided to you through the course website.

## **Assignments and Grading:**

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Your course grade will be based on the following:

- **Homework (35%)**

Throughout the course, there will be 7 homework assignments worth 5 points each. These homeworks will be in the style of “mini-projects” in which you apply the methods we are learning to a real-world research context. Each homework will be posted on the course website and must be turned in there as well. Late homework assignments will be accepted up to 2 days after the due date, and 20% will be deducted from your assignment grade for each day it is late. Homework that is more than 2 days late will not be accepted. For the final grade, your lowest score will be dropped, and your highest score will be doubled.

- **Two Midterms (10% each) and a Final Exam (20%)**

There will be three exams administered over the course of the semester, two midterms and one final. The midterms will be non-cumulative, but for the final, you will be tested on material covered during the full semester. No make-up exams will be administered except under extreme circumstances and with approval *prior to* the scheduled examination time.

- **Laboratory Assignments (20%)**

You will meet in lab sections once each week, a total of 12 times throughout the semester. Each week, in addition to attending lab section, you will be given a “thought question” based on the week’s lecture and reading material. Students will be required to prepare a brief response to the thought question in writing. Generally, one or two paragraphs should be sufficient to satisfactorily respond to thought questions. You should submit your response to the thought question by 11:59 pm on the Wednesday before your lab section meets. Late responses will not receive credit. Your TA will grade each of your responses on the following scale: “0” (no response submitted), “0.5” (a minimally sufficient response that adequately addresses lecture and reading material), or “1” (a thorough, thoughtful response to the question that synthesizes course material in order to provide an evidence-based assessment of the topic). You will also get 1 point for each week that you come to lab and participate in lab activities. To account for circumstances, the lowest two grades on thought questions and lab section activities will be dropped.

▪ **Participation (5%)**

On 8 randomly determined class days, you will receive a pop quiz in which you have to respond to something like the thought questions that you will answer for lab section. You will receive one participation point for each of these pop quizzes that you turn in. To receive full credit for participation in the course, you must turn in at least 5 pop quizzes. In other words, if you miss three pop quizzes, you still get full participation credit. More than three absences will decrease your participation grade.

**Academic Accommodations:**

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The University of Illinois at Chicago is committed to maintaining a barrier-free environment so that students with disabilities can fully access campus programs, courses, services, and activities. Students with disabilities must inform the instructor of the need for accommodations. Those who require accommodations for access and participation in this course must be registered with the Disability Resource Center. Please contact DRC at 312/413-2183 (voice) or 312/413-0123 (TTY).

**Things You Should Do to Succeed in This Class:**

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This course tries to engage you in active rather than passive learning. That means it is not a standard lecture course. You will be expected to participate in activities and discussion in class. The following things will help you to succeed in this kind of course:

1. Read and study the assigned sections of the text *before* class. This is where you will learn the content of the course.
2. Come to and participate in class and laboratory section. This is where you will learn how to use the content in the textbook.
3. Do homework assignments soon after class. Doing assignments soon after you have read the textbook and participated in class activities will help solidify your learning and ensure better retention.
4. Think about how the methods you learn in class connect to the data you see on the internet, in the newspaper, on TV, or in other classes. How were these data collected? What concepts from class relate to those data? How could the data have been gathered and presented in a more effective way?
5. Most importantly, ASK QUESTIONS. If you are confused, others likely are too. You will be doing your classmates a favor, and make it easier to keep up, by asking the question early.

**Class Rules:**

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1. Maintain a good learning environment by:
  - entering quietly and politely if you happen to arrive late
  - turning off the ringers on your cell phones and any other devices
  - avoid loud eating or talking
2. Respect your class partners by:
  - participating honestly and earnestly
  - pulling your weight during group activities
  - listening carefully to other students, TAs, and the instructor.

**Academic Honesty:**

All students are expected to do their own work on all assignments and exams. Students representing the work of others as their own or cheating in any other way will receive a zero for the assignment in question and may fail the course or be referred to the college for disciplinary action.

**Schedule of Topics and Required Readings:**

**\*\*\*Dates listed below are subject to change. Changes will be announced in class and/or the class website. Also, any required supplementary readings, such as journal articles, will be announced in class and provided to you on the course website.\*\*\***

| Dates | Topics  | Required Reading | Due Dates and Notes   |
|-------|---|------------------|---|
| 1/14  | Introduction to the Course and Overview of Sociological Methods | None             | <i>No Lab This Week</i>   |
| 1/16  | The Scientific Study of the Social World                        | Chapters 1 & 2   | <i>No Class on MLK Day, 1/21</i>  |
| 1/23  | Writing a Literature Review                                     | None             | <i>1/23 Class Held in Daley IDEA Commons, 1-010</i><br><br><i>No Class on 1/28, Professor at Conference</i> |
| 1/30  | Measurement I   | Chapter 4        | <i>Homework #1 (Literature Review) Due on 2/2 at 11:59pm</i>  |
| 2/4   | Measurement II  | None             |   |
| 2/6   | Sampling and Generalizability                                   | Chapter 5        |   |
| 2/11  | Causality and Association                                       | Chapter 6        |   |
| 2/13  | Review (or Jump Start to Next Section)                          |                  | <i>Homework #2 (Sampling Activity) Due on 2/16 at 11:59pm</i>   |
| 2/18  | <b>EXAM 1</b>   |                  |   |
| 2/20  | Experiments I   | Chapter 7        |   |

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| 2/27 | Experiments II                                     | <b>Marked</b> (Pager), Ch. 4                              | <i>No Class on 2/25,<br/>Professor Out of Town</i><br><br><i>Homework #3 (<b>Audit Study</b>) Due on 3/2 at 11:59pm</i>                  |
| 3/4  | Survey Research I                                  | Chapter 8   |  |
| 3/6  | Survey Research II                                 | <b>"Drawing Blood from Stones"</b> (Harris et al.)        |  |
| 3/11 | Statistics in Social Research I                    | Chapter 9   |  |
| 3/13 | Statistics in Social Research II                   | <b>"Country Music and Suicide"</b> (Stack)                | <i>Homework #4 (<b>Do File Exercise</b>) Due on 3/16 at 11:59pm</i>  |
| 3/18 | Evaluation & Policy Research                       | Chapter 13  |  |
| 3/20 | Secondary Data & Big Data                          | Chapter 14  | <i>No Class on 3/25 &amp; 3/27, Spring Break</i><br><br><i>Homework #5 (<b>Social Media Data</b>) Due on 3/30 at 11:59pm</i>             |
| 4/1  | Review (or Jump Start to Next Section)             |   | <i>No Lab This Week</i>  |
| 4/3  | <b>MIDTERM 2</b>                                   |   |  |
| 4/8  | Qualitative Methods I: Ethnography                 | Chapter 10  | <i>No Class on 4/10,<br/>Professor at Conference</i><br><br><i>Homework #6 (<b>Ethnography</b>) Due on <b>SUNDAY</b> 4/14 at 11:59pm</i> |
| 4/15 | Qualitative Methods II: Interviews                 | <b>"Now Why Do You Want to Know About That?"</b> (Garcia) |  |
| 4/17 | Qualitative Methods III: Data Analysis             | Chapter 11  |  |
| 4/22 | Comparative/Historical Research & Content Analysis | Chapter 15  |  |
| 4/24 | Social Network Analysis                            | <b>"Uncloaking Terrorist Networks"</b> (Krebs)            |  |

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| 4/29 | Research Ethics                                    | Chapter 3 |  |
| 5/1  | Review (and a Sneak Peek at More Advanced Methods) |           | <i>Lab Is a No-Credit Review Session This Week</i><br><br><i>Homework #7 (<b>Archival Work</b>) Due on 4/27 at 11:59pm</i> |
| 5/XX | <b>FINAL EXAM, TIME AND LOCATION TBD</b>           |           |  |