

SOCIAL RESEARCH METHODS (SO227R)  
TISCH 302  
FALL 2017  
MW 2:30-3:50 PM & F 9:05-10:00 AM

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Office hours: M 4-6 PM and W 9-11 AM (schedule an appointment in advance at <https://alindner.youcanbook.me/>)

### **Introduction**

This course introduces students to fundamental principles in the logic and execution of social research methods. Students will develop skills in critically analyzing social scientific research by examining issues pertaining to research design, sampling, conceptualization and operationalization of measures, and a range of social scientific methods including surveys, ethnographies, content analyses, and experiments. We will learn about how social researchers use theory as well as ethical and practical considerations to make decisions as they gather and analyze data. The class will also have the opportunity to gain experience in preparing a literature review and developing a research proposal on a sociological topic of your choosing. Along with “Statistics for the Social Sciences” (SO226), this course provides sociology majors with the necessary background to carry out their own survey research study in Senior Seminar (SO375). However, the primary goal of this course is to cultivate skills of informed citizenship by preparing students to evaluate truth claims about the social world more effectively.

### **Learning Outcomes**

Students who successfully complete the course will be able to:

1. Explain how researchers use theory and empirical evidence to develop sociological insights.
2. Construct testable research questions and appropriate strategies for answering them.
3. Compare the strengths and weaknesses of various research methods.
4. Critically evaluate the design and execution of current social research.

### **Required Texts**

Dixon, Jeffrey C., Royce A. Singleton, Jr., and Bruce C. Straits. 2016. *The Process of Social Research*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Other readings for the course are available on the course’s Blackboard site (<http://learn.skidmore.edu>).

### **Requirements**

The following are the course assessments:

1. **Examinations** (30%) – There will be two exams on Oct. 11 and Nov. 20. Exams will include multiple choice, short answer, and essay questions. They are non-cumulative, except in the sense that all knowledge is cumulative.
2. **Research Proposal** (30%) – Over the course of the semester, each student will produce their own proposal for an original sociological research study. The research proposal product has three components: a) a literature review (due: Nov. 1), b) an in-class presentation of the proposed research (due: Dec. 14), and c) a complete research proposal including revised literature review (due: Dec. 14). More details included in forthcoming hand-outs.

3. **Homework Assignments (25%)** – Students will be asked to complete a number of smaller homework assignments over the course of the semester. All assignments will be announced in class and posted on Blackboard.

4. **Scholarly Attitude (15%)** – Many faculty members evaluate “participation” as a part of students’ course grades. But mere “participation” – how much you do or don’t talk, sit up or fall asleep – isn’t really what most of us want from our students. Instead, most of us hope to see students accept our invitation to “the life of mind” by adopting a “scholarly attitude.” Having a “scholarly attitude” involves developing intellectual curiosity and a genuine engagement with the ideas presented in the course. Students with a scholarly attitude take the role of the student seriously and demonstrate their commitment to academic pursuits by actively engaging in the material, reflecting deeply on the readings, raising thoughtful questions and comments in class, bringing unsolicited materials to share that are directly relevant to the topics being covered, come early and/or stay late to raise their own questions about the material, and generally go above and beyond the requirements of the course. Students who lack a scholarly attitude passively complete the readings and responses, occasionally engage in other activities during lecture (playing with phones, texting, daydreaming, and so on), and are primarily concerned with obtaining a particular grade in the course. I will send you a course grade report several times over the course of the semester that includes a current scholarly attitude score.

**Summary**

Two Exams	30%
Research Proposal	30%
Homework	25%
Scholarly Attitude	<u>15%</u>
	100%

**Grades:**

94%-100%	A	90-93%	A-	87-89%	B+
84-86%	B	80-83%	B-	77-79%	C+
74-76%	C	70-73%	C-	67-69%	D+
64-66%	D	60-63	D-	<60	F

**Course Outline**

All listed readings are required. The readings are listed using the following shorthand: (D) *The Process of Social Research* (Dixon, Singleton, and Straits) and (E) available electronically on Blackboard. Please let me know immediately, if you have difficulty accessing the electronic files.

**Part One: Introduction to Inquiry**

Sept. 6	Introductions
Sept. 8	Asking Social Questions (D) Ch. 1
Sept. 11	Beginning with Theory (D) Ch. 2
Sept. 13	Ethics and Research (D) Ch. 3 (pgs. 38-58)

- Sept. 15      The Ethics of Studying People  
(E) Goffman, Footnote to *On the Run*
- Sept. 18      Politics and Sociology  
(E) Szelenyi, “The Triple Crisis of Sociology”
- Sept. 20      Unit of Analysis and Variables  
(D) Ch. 4
- Sept. 22      The Logic of Elaboration  
(E) Firebaugh, Excerpt from Ch. 1 of *Seven Rules for Social Research*
- Sept. 25      Logic of Elaboration Continued  
**Due: CITI Responsible Conduct Completion Report**
- Sept. 27      Working with Variables in SPSS
- Sept. 29      Conceptualization and Operationalization  
(D) Ch. 5 (pgs. 103-115)
- Oct. 2        Levels of Measurement  
(D) Ch. 5 (pgs. 116-136)
- Oct. 4        Probability Sampling  
(D) Ch. 6 (pgs. 137-160)
- Oct. 6        Non-Probability Sampling  
(D) Ch. 6 (pgs. 161-172)
- Oct. 9        Reading for Methods  
(E) Stack and Gundlach, “The Effect of Country Music on Suicide”  
(E) Houle, “How to Read (Quantitative) Journal Articles: A Primer”  
**Due: Journal Article Report Worksheet for Stack and Gundlach**
- Oct. 11      **Exam 1**
- Oct. 13      Literature Reviews  
(D) Ch. 14
- Part Two: Data Collection Options**
- Oct. 16      Reading and Writing Social Science  
(E) Gusfield, “Two Genres of Sociology”
- Oct. 18      Basics of Survey Research  
(D) Ch. 8
- Oct. 20      Challenges in Survey Research  
(E) Lavin and Maynard, “Standardization vs. Rapport: Respondent Laughter and Interviewer Reaction During Telephone Surveys.”

- Oct. 23 Social Theory and Quantitative Research: A Love Story  
(E) Gross and Simmons, "Intimacy as a Double-Edged Phenomenon? An Empirical Test of Giddens"  
**Due: Journal Article Report Worksheet for Gross and Simmons**
- Oct. 25 Introducing Qualitative Methods  
(D) Ch. 9
- Oct. 27 Qualitative Design  
(E) Duneier, "How Not To Lie With Ethnography"
- Oct. 30 Asking Questions and Thick Description  
(E) Mears, "Working for Free in the VIP"  
**Due: Journal Article Report Worksheet for Mears**
- Nov. 1 The Experimental Method  
(D) Ch. 7  
**Due: Literature Review**
- Nov. 3 Flex Day
- Nov. 6 Experiments in the Lab  
(E) Correll, "Constraints into Preferences: Gender, Status, and Emerging Career Aspirations"  
**Due: Journal Article Report Worksheet for Correll**
- Nov. 8 Experiments in the Field  
(E) Pager, "The Mark of a Criminal Record"  
**Due: Journal Article Report Worksheet for Pager**
- Nov. 10 "Unobstrusive" Research  
(D) Ch. 10
- Nov. 13 Asking Questions with Somebody Else's Data  
(E) Freese, "Secondary Analysis of Large Social Surveys"
- Nov. 15 Content Analysis  
(E) Rafail et al., "Media Salience, Institutional Dynamics, and Coverage of Collective Action in the *New York Times*, 1960-1995"  
**Due: Journal Article Report Worksheet for Rafail et al.**
- Nov. 17 Review Day  
(D) Ch. 11
- Nov. 20 **Exam 2**

**\*\*\*Thanksgiving Break\*\*\***

### Part Three: Data Analysis and Reporting

Nov. 27	Quantitative Data Analysis (D) Ch. 12
Nov. 29	Analyzing Quantitative Data in Excel and SPSS
Dec. 1	Simple Hypothesis Testing in SPSS
Dec. 4	Qualitative Data Analysis (D) Ch. 13
Dec. 6	Qualitative Data Analysis, Cont'd
Dec. 8	Course Wrap-up
Dec. 14	Research Proposal Presentations (12:00 PM) <b>Due: Research Proposal</b>

#### Course Policies

**Disabilities:** If you are a student with a disability and believe you will need academic accommodation, you must formally request accommodation from Meg Hegener, Coordinator for Student Access Services. You will also need to provide documentation which verifies the existence of a disability and supports your request. For further information, please call 580-8150 or stop by the office of Student Academic Services in Starbuck Center. I would also encourage you to communicate with me about any accommodations well in advance of exams and due dates.

**Electronic Devices:** Unless directed to do so, I expect that students will not use laptops or other electronic devices in class. Many studies have shown that people are extremely poor multi-taskers. Looking at Facebook, Twitter, Wikipedia, etc. or even doing Google searches that may seem relevant all distract from lecture and discussion. Moreover, most people retain information better when taking handwritten notes. If you feel that your learning will be hampered by not having access to your laptop for note-taking or other legitimate purposes, please speak to me privately. Otherwise, keep your laptop as well as your cell phone and any other devices will be turned off and stowed away during class.

**Late Policy:** On all assignments, your grade will be reduced by one unit for each day late (e.g., 1 day, from A to A-; 2 days, B+; 3 days, B, and so on). *After two weeks from the due date, you will receive a zero for the assignment.*

**Missed Exam:** Students who will miss an exam due to an official school absence must schedule an alternative exam date and time *in advance*. As a general rule, I do not allow students with unscheduled exam absences to reschedule. In extreme circumstances, a make-up exam will be given at my discretion and I reserve the right to change the format.

**Cheating and Plagiarism:** By enrolling at the college, all students have agreed to abide by the *Skidmore Honor Code*, which says, "I hereby accept membership in the Skidmore College community and, with full realization of the responsibilities inherent in membership, do agree to adhere to honesty and integrity in all relationships, to be considerate of the rights of others, and

to abide by the College regulations.” Part of that code means not to misrepresenting others’ work as your own. Please review the detailed description of the rules and regulations surrounding cheating and plagiarism as described in the *Skidmore College Student Handbook* ([http://www.skidmore.edu/student\\_handbook/honor-code.php](http://www.skidmore.edu/student_handbook/honor-code.php)). If you are unclear on what constitutes plagiarism and/or cheating, please discuss it with me in advance of due dates or exams. In the case of a violation, the offending student will receive a zero (“F”) for the assignment and I am required to report all offenses to the Dean of Academic Studies, which may result in disciplinary action. Please don’t let this happen!

**Title IX Statement and Reporting Responsibilities:** Skidmore College considers sexual and gender-based misconduct to be one of the most serious violations of the values and standards of the College. Unwelcome sexual contact of any form is a violation of students’ personal integrity and their right to a safe environment and therefore violates Skidmore’s values. Sexual and gender-based misconduct is also prohibited by federal regulations. Skidmore College faculty are committed to supporting our students and upholding gender equity laws as outlined by Title IX. If a student chooses to confide in a member of Skidmore’s faculty or staff regarding an issue of sexual or gender-based misconduct, that faculty or staff member is obligated to tell Skidmore’s Title IX Deputy Coordinator. The Title IX Deputy Coordinator will assist the student in connecting with all possible resources for support and reporting both on and off campus. Identities and details will be shared only with those who need to know to support the student and to address the situation through the college’s processes. If the student wishes to confide in a confidential resource, The Counseling Center Staff, Health Services, and Victim Advocates are all options available. More information can be found at <https://www.skidmore.edu/sgbm/> or by contacting the Title IX Deputy Coordinator.

**Civility and Respect:** The *Skidmore Honor Code* also has important implications for how students ought to treat each other. This course will include discussions of class, nationality, religion, gender, race, ethnicity, and sexuality. I expect students to show respect toward all the subjects of our study. More importantly, I expect you to treat your classmates and your instructor with respect and dignity at all times – especially when you disagree with them.