Department of Sociology, Anthropology and Social Work

SOCI 360 Research Methods

Fall 2025 – Section 2230

Instructor: Dr. Muriel Rand, mrand@njcu.edu
Credit Hours: 3 credits

What is this course about?

Major types of research design and techniques are studied: interviewing, questionnaires, experiment, social survey, and participant observation. Methods of data processing and analysis are also examined. The course emphasizes critical reading and understanding of research studies.

What will I learn in this class?

- ✓ Develop appropriate research questions
- ✓ Operationalize variables
- ✓ Apply principles of ethics in research from The Belmont Report
- ✓ Critically read and summarize research articles
- ✓ Choose an appropriate research technique based on theoretical perspectives
- ✓ Conduct research interviews
- ✓ Conduct a focus group
- ✓ Write and analyze field notes from an observational research exercise
- ✓ Use secondary data sets and existing statistics to develop research questions
- ✓ Create an outline of an experiment for evaluation research
- ✓ Conduct a short single subject research project
- ✓ Use Excel to organize and analyze simple data
- ✓ Identify a grant opportunity and create an outline for a grant proposal

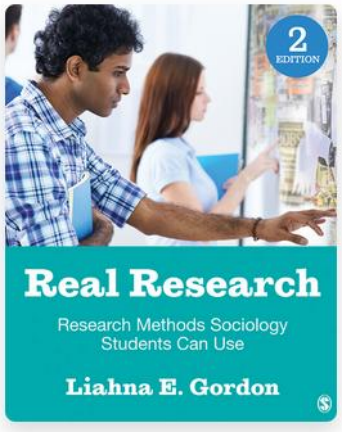
SLO1. Differentiate between the scientific method of social work research from unscientific sources of knowledge of social work practice.
SLO2. Apply research findings to inform and improve practice, policy, and programs (CSWE 4a).
SLO3. Identify ethical, culturally informed, anti-racist, and anti-oppressive strategies that address inherent biases for use in quantitative and qualitative research methods to advance the purposes of social work (CSWE 4b).
SLO4. Identify a research problem and formulate a research question by conducting a literature search and writing a literature review that is relevant to social work policy, practice and research.
SLO 5. Describe the differences of research designs as it applies to quantitative and qualitative studies
SLO 6. Critically analyze outcomes and apply evaluation findings to improve practice effectiveness with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities (CSWE 9b).
SLO 7. Articulate various modes of operation for research.

When does the class meet?

The class meets in person on Wednesdays, 2:10-3:25, Professional Building Room 347

How do I get the textbook for class?

Gordon, L., (2019). *Real Research: Research Methods Sociology Students Can Use*. Chico, CA: Sage.



To access the textbook, click on the "content" tab in Blackboard and scroll down to BibliU. Click on this and it will take you to the textbook. Once you open the textbook, you can click on the three dots in the upper right-hand corner and download the BibliU app so you can read your textbook when you are not online. You can also download a pdf of the textbook (90 pages at a time). Or you can read it online.



Who is the Professor of this class?

Dr. Muriel Rand is the professor this semester. I work full-time at NJCU in the Sociology, Anthropology, and Social Work Department. My office is in Kartnousis Hall, Room 205 (go down the hall to Room 223).
My research interests are focused on education and young children in schools.

How can I get in touch with the Professor?

Email: mrand@njcu.edu
Office Hours: On Zoom, Tuesdays 6:00-9:00 pm and in person Wednesdays 9:00-11:00 am (Room K205)

- If you want to meet, make an appointment here: https://calendly.com/mrand-njcu/office-hours-meeting
- Or if those times don't work, then email me to meet at a different time.
- Join Zoom with this link:

https://NJCU.zoom.us/j/4391782663?pwd=VEtLZVZiaW1iS3h3WHcrVURydFhXdz09
You can also send a message through Blackboard.

How will I be graded in the course?

Research Portfolio: You will develop a research portfolio that you can use for a job interview or to document your learning in the course. You will complete a series of short exercises on different types of research techniques. Each exercise will be graded, and the total of all exercises will be the final grade. There are no tests in the class. Attendance is required.

1. Research Questions & Operationalizing Variables & Ethics	10%
2. Research Abstracts	10%
3. Interview Research and Focus Group	10%
4. Observational Research Exercise	10%
5. Survey and Secondary Data Research Exercise	10%
6. Experimental Program Evaluation Exercise	10%
7. Single Subject Research Exercise	10%
9. Class Attendance and Group Work	30%

Rubrics for scoring each assignment are found on Blackboard.

Grade Range:

90-100=	A	75-77=	C+
88-89=	A-	70-74=	C
85-87=	B+	67-69=	C-
80-84=	B	61-66=	D
78-79=	B-	Below 60=	

What are the assignments and homework for this course?

Review the topics and assignments below. These are also on Blackboard.

SOCI 360 Research Methods - Course Outline

Topic 1: Foundations of Research Inquiry and Ethics, Due October 1

- ✓ *Introduction to the course*
- ✓ *Definition of research*
- ✓ *Research methods overview*
- ✓ *Research-based practice*
- ✓ *Developing research questions*
- ✓ *Operationalizing variables*
- ✓ *History of unethical research*
- ✓ *Belmont Report and Federal Guidelines*
- ✓ *Institutional Review Boards*
- ✓ *Ethical reporting and use of data – validity, reliability, fraud & misconduct*

Readings:

- *Real Research*, Chapter 1
- *The Belmont Report*

Assignment 1

Part A: Research Questions and Conceptualizing and Operationalizing Variables. During class, you will choose a topic and develop a research question based on the criteria for effective research questions. Working with your study group, practice conceptualizing and operationalizing three variables related to your research question. Hand in the assignment on the template provided.

Part B: Research Ethics. Imagine you are on an Institutional Review Board and you've been asked to consider three research proposals. During class, read each proposal and write what additional information you would want, what benefits, or harm would result from the research and what your recommendation would be. Hand in the template provided for your responses.

Topic 2: Guiding Research with Literature Reviews – Due October 10

- ✓ *Features of literature reviews*
- ✓ *Finding peer reviewed articles*
- ✓ *Using Google Scholar and NJCU Library Databases*

Reading: *Real Research, Appendix A, page 277*

Assignment 2: Research Article Abstract Assignment

1. Use the research question that you wrote in Week 1 to choose 3 journal articles that report original research on your topic. (You can change your topic if you want to). You

can tell you have a research article because it will have headings such as: Purpose of the Study, Method and Procedures, Results, Discussion. If it does not have these headings, it's probably not a research article. See separate page for hints on finding journal articles.

2. Read the article, paying attention to the literature review (the first part of the article that discusses other research on this topic), the method and procedure, and the discussion. You might not understand too much of the results section because of the statistics. Don't worry about it. A good author will explain the results in the discussion section.

3. Copy the abstract of the study onto the template provided.

4. Include the complete citation for each article.

5. Summarize what you learned from your three articles in your own words. Do not use ChatGPT or other AI programs for the summary.

Topic 3: Qualitative Research - Interviewing and Focus Groups – Due October 29

- ✓ *Developing interview questions*
- ✓ *Interviewing skills*
- ✓ *Drawing conclusions from data*
- ✓ *Purpose of focus groups*
- ✓ *Developing questions*
- ✓ *Facilitating focus groups*

Readings:

- *Real Research*, Chapter 2
- *Interview Strategies* (on Blackboard)
- *Real Research*, Chapter 9

Assignment 3:

Part A: Interviewing – During class, meet with your study group and create an interview protocol with questions. Carry out an interview with three of the classmates in your group or other friends. Transcribe the interviews, analyze your data and draw conclusions. Hand in your questions, results, and conclusions.

Part B: Assignment: Focus Group – In class, create focus group questions with your study group. Carry out a focus group discussion following the directions provided, take notes, and analyze your notes. Hand in the questions, notes, and summary.

Topic 4: Qualitative Research - Observation and Ethnography – Due November 5

- ✓ Ethnographic field notes
- ✓ Interpretivist methodology
- ✓ Sampling
- ✓ Data collection – thick description

Reading: *Real Research,* Chapter 3

Assignment 4: Observational Research Exercise –
During class, do a webcam observation of a public space with your study group for 10 minutes. You will take field notes, write interpretive notes and then compare them with your study groups' notes, and write up a short report.

Topic 5: Single Subject Research and Data Analysis (See Due Dates Below)

- ✓ *Research designs*
- ✓ *A-B-A Designs*
- ✓ *Multiple Baseline Designs*
- ✓ *Alternating Treatments Design*
- ✓ *Strengths and Limitations*
- ✓ *Quantitative data analysis with Excel*

Reading*: Single Subject Research Design (provided on Blackboard)*

Assignment 5: Single Subject Research and Analysis:

Week 1 - Measuring Stress at Baseline – Due 11/12, Stress is a common occurrence in many students' lives. After our class meeting, measure the frequency, duration, interval, and magnitude of school-related stress in your life in a 1-week period of time. Take care to provide a clear operational definition of stress, and construct a meaningful scale to rate magnitude. Which of the measurement processes did you find most feasible? Finally, do you believe that your operational definition was sufficient to capture your target problem and detect changes?

Week 2 – Measuring Stress after Intervention – Due 11/19, After doing the stress reduction intervention during class, practice the stress-reducing breathing techniques for a week. During that week, measure your stress level again.

Week 3 – Analyze Data – **Due 11/26**, Compare your data from week 1 and week 2. Create a time series (2-D line graph) using Excel. We will practice this in class. Describe your results and what you learned from the study. Hand in your Excel file and the assignment template.

Topic 6: Quantitative Research – Surveys, Secondary Data Analysis and Existing Statistics – Due Dec. 3

- ✓ *Types of surveys*

- ✓ *Positivist methodology*
- ✓ *Independent and dependent variables*
- ✓ *Google Forms and Qualtrics*
- ✓ *Levels of measurement*
- ✓ *Sampling*
- ✓ *Causation and Research Design*
- ✓ *Conceptualizing and operationalizing*
- ✓ *Secondary data and statistics methodology*
- ✓ *Reliability and validity*

Readings:

- *Real Research*, Chapter 4, 5, and 6

Assignment 6

Part A: Survey Research – During class create a survey instrument on Google Forms with your study group. Then distribute it to at least 10 subjects, organize and analyze the data, and write a short report using the template provided.

Part B: Secondary Data Set Questions: Using a secondary data set or existing statistics, develop 4 research questions that are appropriate for the data set you chose. We will work on this during class. Use the template provided.

Topic 7: Experiments for Evaluation Research – Dec. 17

- ✓ *Variables and Treatments*
- ✓ *Study Designs*
- ✓ *Sampling and Probability*
- ✓ *Validity and Reliability*
- ✓ *Causation and Research Design*

Reading: *Real Research,* Chapter 8

Assignment 7: Planning an Experiment for Evaluation Research
Pretend you are hired to evaluate a mentoring program that is intended to help high school students improve their academic performance and reduce criminal behaviors. Design an experimental study that could evaluate this program. Fill out the provided template with your plans. Include your research question, operationalized variables, sampling, procedures, and hypothesis.

Due Date Chart

Date	Topic/Class Activity	Readings	Assignment Due
9/3	Overview of the Course –	*Real Research*,	

	Harvard Study on Aging – what questions do you have?	Chapter 1 *The Belmont Report*	
9/10	Research Questions: Come up with questions in class – turning topics into research questions		
9/17	Operationalizing Variables		
9/24	Research Ethics		
10/1	Literature Reviews	*Real Research, Appendix A, page 277*	Assignment #1 Due – Research Questions and Ethics
10/8	Interviewing – writing interview questions during class in study groups	*Real Research*, Chapter 2 *Interview Strategies* (on Blackboard)	Assignment #2 Due – Literature Review
10/15	Interviewing – Studying interview skills. Interviewing during class		
10/22	Focus Groups – write questions and do focus group during class	*Real Research*, Chapter 9	
10/29	Observation and Ethnography Do Observation during class – they write on templates and hand them in	*Real Research,* Chapter 3	Assignment #3 Due: Interview and Focus Group Paper
11/5	Single Subject Research – Overview of SSR -Info on measuring behaviors - Measure stress this week	*Single Subject Research Design (provided on Blackboard)*	Assignment #4 Due: Observation and Ethnography Paper Due
11/12	Data Analysis - Do Breathing Exercises for Stress Reduction - Now measure next week - Show how to create graphs in Excel		Single Subject Research Week 1 – Baseline Data

11/19	Surveys – Create survey questions in groups, then create survey in Google Docs.	*Real Research*, Chapter 4	Single Subject Research Week 2-Intervention Week Data
11/26	Secondary Data Analysis -Analyzing survey data -Choosing secondary data set and coming up with questions – during class	*Real Research,* Chapter 5 & 6	Assignment #5: Single Subject Research Final Paper Due
12/3	Experiments for Evaluation Research - Plan experiment Focus on dependent and independent questions	Real Research, Chapter 8	Assignment #6: Surveys, Secondary Data Analysis Paper Due
12/10	Reading Days		
12/17	Final Exam Week	Real Research, Appendix B	Assignment #7: Planning an Experiment for Evaluation Research

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What if I don't do well on an assignment?

This course is about learning new ideas. I will give you feedback on each assignment. If you would like to revise your work, you can resubmit it and I will grade it again. My philosophy is focused on "mastery learning" in which we keep working on learning something until we get good at it.

What if I can't make an assignment's due date?

Life happens. Deadlines and due dates are part of professional life, but sometimes life gets in the way. Please email me if you need an extension and we will set up a new due date.

What is considered cheating? What happens if I cheat?

Academic Integrity:

Adherence to ethical academic standards is obligatory. Cheating is a serious offense, whether it consists of taking credit for work done by another person or doing work for which another person will receive credit. Taking and using the ideas or writings of another person without clearly and fully crediting the source is plagiarism and violates the academic code as well as the Student Code of Conduct. Use of artificial intelligence (AI) such as ChatGPT is only permitted as directed by your instructor. All material submitted in the course must be your own work as per the Academic Integrity policy. If it is suspected that a student in any course in which s/he is enrolled has knowingly committed such a violation, the faculty member should refer the matter to the College's Disciplinary Officer and appropriate action will be taken under the Student

Code of Conduct. Sanctions may include suspension from the course and a failing grade in the course. Students have the right to appeal these actions to the Disciplinary Committee under the terms outlined in the Student Code of Conduct.

What are some important dates and policies I should know?

NJCU Office of Registrar – Academic Calendar including last day add/drop, withdrawal, etc.
https://www.njcu.edu/directories/offices-centers/registrar
NJCU Attendance Policy
https://catalog.njcu.edu/graduate/academic-requirements-policies-procedures/attendance/
NJCU Code of Conduct
https://www.njcu.edu/about/njcu-policies-and-standards/student-services-and-responsibilities-policies/student-code-conduct
NJCU Integrity Policy
https://catalog.njcu.edu/undergraduate/academic-requirements-policies-procedures/academic-integrity/

Additional Support Services:
SOAR – various financial aid and other support services on campus at NJCU
https://www.njcu.edu/directories/offices-centers/student-outreach-and-retention-soar/soar-staff-and-hours
NJCU Advisement Center
https://www.njcu.edu/academics/resources-services/university-advisement-center
NJCU HUB – academic tutoring and more
https://www.njcu.edu/academics/resources-services/free-tutoring/centralized-tutoring-academic-support-services
NJCU Library
https://www.njcu.edu/library
NJCU Office of Counseling Services
https://www.njcu.edu/student-life/campus-services-resources/counseling-center/meet-counseling-center-staff
NJCU Office of Specialized Services & Supplemental Instruction
https://www.njcu.edu/directories/offices-centers/office-specialized-services-and-supplemental-instruction
National Institute of Mental Health Hotlines
https://www.naminj.org/where-to-get-help/hotlines/

What are some additional resources I can use?

Banks, S., (2012). *Ethics and values in social work*. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.

Banks, S. (2016). Everyday ethics in professional life: Social work as ethics work. *Ethics and Social Welfare, 10*, 35-52.

Brueggemann, J. (2002). Racial considerations and social policy in the 1930s: Economic change and political opportunities. *Social Science History, 26*, 139-177.

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Cox, R. (2015). *Where Do We Go from Here: Mass Incarceration and the Struggles for Civil Rights*. Economic Policy Institute. Retrieved from https://www.epi.org/files/2014/MassIncarcerationReport.pdf

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Davis, L. E. (2016). *Why are they angry with us? Essays on race*. Chicago, IL: Lyceum Books.

Deepak, A. C. (2015). Delivering diversity and social justice in social work education: The power of context. *Journal of Progressive Human Services, 26*, 107-125.

Desmond, M. (2016). *Evicted: Poverty & profit in the American city*. New York, NY: Crown Publishers.

Falk, G., Lynch, K. & Tollestrup, J. (2018) Federal Spending on Benefits and Services for People with Low Income: In Brief. Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service. Retrieved from https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R45097.pdf

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Franke, N. D., Treglia, D., & Cnaan, R. A. (2017). Reentry program and social work education: Training the next generation of criminal justice social workers. *Journal of Evidence-Informed Social Work, 14*, 409-420.

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https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3407978/pdf/nihms389585.pdf

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Moffitt, R. A. (2015). The deserving poor, the family, and the US welfare system. Demography, 52, 729-749. Retrieved from https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007%2Fs13524-015-0395-0.pdf

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Reamer, F. G. (2017). Evolving ethical standards in the digital age. *Australian Social Work, 70*, 148-159.

Reichert, E. (2011). Human rights in social work: an essential basis. *Journal of Comparative Social Welfare, 27,* 207-220.

Shaefer, H.L. & Edin, K. (2013). Rising Extreme Poverty in the United States and the Response of Federal Means-Tested Transfer Programs, *Social Service Review, 87*, 250-268

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Stanford Center on Poverty & Inequality (2011). 20 Facts about U.S. Inequality that Everyone Should Know. Retrieved from https://inequality.stanford.edu/publications/20- facts-about-us-inequality-everyone-should-know