*Syllabus: Social Research Methods SYA 3300
Spring 2016 RVC/RPC

Social Science Research Methods is a required foundational methods course for GSS (anthropology, geography, & sociology) majors. Students gain a solid understanding and hands-on experience of how social scientists do research. You will work very hard in this course but if you do well, you will graduate from FIU with skills that will make you marketable for many jobs in community organizations, industries and government. You will be able to conduct research and analyze data; however, you will not be able to do all types of data collection and analysis. That is too much for one course which is a principal reason why GSS majors must take two methods courses, this one first and then another. There are NO statistics in this course nor does it presume any previous research methods courses although both are a plus. You will be exposed to some statistical concepts and learn to plot and graph data but you will not use statistical tests. You will learn to find, read, interpret and evaluate information about patterns in people’s behavior and thoughts whether collected by you or by others. You will also learn the relationship between theorizing about why people do what they do and collecting data (or using others’ data) to test these theories against empirical realities.

Course Objectives (see Blackboard schedule for objectives by week):

• To understand what social science is and the relationship of research to social science.
• To recognize and accurately apply professional standards for protecting human subjects in research.
• To understand and accurately apply principles of good research design.
• To understand and show the relationship between theory and methods through examining existing literature.
• To understand and accurately apply good principles for designing data collection.
• To collect good, valid data from people using at least two different data collection strategies (surveys and interviews).
• To accurately analyze simple quantitative and qualitative data collected.
• To present research findings in accurate and easy-to-understand visual and written formats.
• To summarize clearly and accurately the entire research process and to evaluate its implementation in the course.

Course Goal:
By the end of the course you will have sufficient knowledge of social science research methods and data analysis to be able to conduct simple, well-designed and valid research projects, analyze the resulting data and prepare summary reports.

Advisement: This course is likely to be the most challenging of your entire student career. Plan to spend twice as much time on this course than on your other courses. But if you devote yourself to the learning and applying the content, you will be rewarded by concrete, marketable skills for your lifetime. Just ask prior students!

Required Text & Additional Content, Software
**Note** – this is the OLDER (4th) version of this text. It is much cheaper to purchase or rent. One copy will be on reserve at the MMC library as well.
**Additional Content:** Non-text required readings and other materials such as on-line lectures, digitized videos and audio files will be available as PDF files through the website. Under the link “Course Content by Week” find the correct module for each week and go through the entire list of readings, videos to watch, etc. *before taking your quiz or attempting to do that week’s small project assignment.* You’ll find all the work you must do each week under another link called “Assessments/Assignments” directly below the content link.

**Software You Will Need to Use and Probably Download (free):**

1. Blackboard (login via online.fiu.com or through myfiu.edu)
2. For viewing streaming video from Blackboard: Download and install [www.videolan.org/](http://www.videolan.org/) player or you can download the videos to an iPod as they are in mp4 format
3. For audio recording using a computer: [http://audacity.sourceforge.net/](http://audacity.sourceforge.net/) for audio recording using your iPhone or Android you can use the Voice Memos function; BE SURE TO SAVE FILE IN MP3 or MP4 format and as ONE recording.
4. For survey question development and downloading data, use Qualtrics, an online survey software for which FIU has a site license for this software that you access through MyFIU.
5. For data analysis we will use the basic spreadsheet program Excel. Make sure that your computer has Excel or that you can get access to it or to another spreadsheet program such as through Google.

**Contacting Instructor/Other Students in the Course:**

Please use the Blackboard email tool for most correspondence with your professor. Only if/when you (1) encounter an obvious instructor-generated problem (such as a malfunctioning link in a module or a misspelling on a quiz), or (2) need an immediate response (less than 24 hours) should you email me using my FIU email: (mahlers@fiu.edu). So, please use that email to notify me of any broken links, missing info, etc.

**Technical Problems with Blackboard:** When you have another type of Blackboard-related technical problem such as an error message or you cannot log in, try to resolve by contacting FIUONLINE. More often than not, they will fix your issue faster than I can as I’m no technician nor is the TA. *In sum – for technical problems do not ask for help from your instructor/TA but go to FIUONLINE.*

**Face-to-Face & Adobe Connect Sessions:**

The instructor will coordinate opportunities for you to meet her and other students face to face as well as virtually during the semester. Meeting at least once face-to-face is great if you can do it so you meet the instructor and fellow students but it will NOT be mandatory. The exact date/time/place will be emailed to you early in the semester. Other opportunities may arise during the semester. In addition the instructor will conduct some Adobe Connect sessions in which the course content will be discussed and the instructor will take your questions. These will be one-hour sessions scheduled each week or every other week at different times (to accommodate different students’ schedules) that you can either attend live or watch at your own convenience. The instructor will work with the class to figure out good dates & times for these to occur over the semester. Most likely they will occur on Saturday or Sunday. Watch for more information in Blackboard.

**Research Project:**

You will learn how to design good research, including the instruments you need to collect data with in order to answer your research question. You will also collect some data as part of this class and you will do data analysis and write up the analysis on the data. *Everyone in this class will do the same research project; that is, address the same research problem.* That does not mean that during the class you will go about doing exactly the same work because with any given project there are typically multiple approaches to designing research, collecting and analyzing data. The reason why everyone does the same project is (1) so you pay attention to the methods not the project itself and (2) so you can collaborate with others who are also doing the same project. Additionally, when you work on the same project you can (3) compare your approach to the project against others’. We often learn best by comparing how try to solve a problem against how others try to solve the same problem.
**Course Schedule:**
You will find the schedule on Blackboard when you enter the course online. Each week there will be a course content module assigned with readings, videos, audio segments, etc. It will also contain your assignments. Make sure you cover all the material/assignments in the content module for the week it is assigned prior to class.

**Assessments/Grades:** (Assignments are found in each week’s module.)
There are different measures of your performance in this course and your mastery of the course content. Quizzes and individual assignments must be completed by Sunday at 11:59PM of the week that they are assigned unless there is a special due date/time. A grading rubric is provided on Blackboard (see Grades & Grading folder) to aid you as you prepare your assignments. There are no exams (midterm, final) in this course. For major assignments (see Blackboard) you will be encouraged to collaborate with 1-2 other classmates. If you submit an assignment with another classmate, you BOTH will receive the same grade.

**GRADING:** Maximum Points/term = 350 distributed as per below

Weekly Quizzes 20% of final grade  [7 quizzes @ 10 points per quiz = 70 points]  
READ CAREFULLY AS THESE QUIZZES INVOLVE multiple choice questions AND written substantiation answers. Almost every week during the first half of the semester you will take a 10-question, open-book “multiple choice” quiz on that week’s content. **Quizzes are to be completed by Saturdays at midnight (assignments will be due midnight Sundays).** Take the quiz after you have studied and learned the content for any given week and before you do that week’s assignment(s). **These multiple-choice questions will probably be unlike any you have taken before. Why? You will be faced with answers that all have some merit and you will have to choose the BEST or WORST answer so pay attention to the instructions. Moreover, you will not just select a choice; you will also have to substantiate that choice in writing.** The maximum for each question is 10, five for getting the right response and five for substantiating correctly and adequately. (Substantiation grades can be partial. If you make the wrong choice but provide a convincing substantiation for your choice that shows you comprehend the course content you may get partial credit.) Each quiz has a maximum of 100 but your grade for it will be the total divided by 10 (converted to a maximum of 10 points). Say you get 84 out of 100, then your grade for the quiz will be 8.4. Your final grade for the quizzes will be the sum of all your quiz grades.

Until you get used to the format, the quiz may seem a bit complicated because you will open an on-line quiz but at the same time open up the Quiz Worksheet in which you’ll type your substantiations for your responses and then submit that worksheet using Turnitin right after you submit the quiz.

**Resetting a Quiz:** If you attempt a quiz and for some reason your computer or the Internet fails and you are shut out, follow these procedures:
1. Remember that for each quiz you are given two attempts so you can just reboot your computer or re-load your browser and take the quiz again. If you experience any other problem then...
2. Take a screen shot of your desktop showing the error message or failure (if possible).
3. Notify FIUONLINE of the problem (this establishes documentation and if they can fix your problem they will).
4. Notify your instructor of the problem next via her email: mahlers@fiu.edu. She will work with you to reset the quiz. **If, however, the quiz problem occurs the hour before class (that is, you procrastinated) this option will not be available and you will receive the score whatever it is.** You are allowed one quiz reset per semester no questions asked (so long as that request does not come in the two hours before the due date/time—that is, if you ask for a reset from 10-11:59PM Saturday eve I will not reset it then but will address it on Sunday after noon.). If you need more than one quiz reset, you will be required to substantiate your need and your request may not be honored. Unless under special circumstances, you cannot take quizzes after the week of the course in which they are assigned. If you miss a quiz, you will receive a zero score for that quiz. Exceptions will be made on a case-by-case basis for documented illnesses, family deaths, etc. You must supply documentation to your instructor.
Weekly Assignments: 30% of the final grade [maximum score of 105 points]. Each week you will be given 1-3 short assignments to do. These assignments require you to apply each week’s content. That is, this course requires that you do research and not just learn about it. Each assignment will be due by Sunday midnight, the week it was assigned. Each assignment will be graded separately on a 4.0 scale (see details below and then translated into its equivalent in points). Your overall grade for these weekly assignments will be the AVERAGE of all the assignments over the term multiplied by the maximum score of 105 points. (Suppose that average were a 3.60 then your points would be 3.6 ÷ 4.0 = 90%. This is then translated into points: 105 X 90% = 95 points.) To receive full credit for these assignments, make sure to submit them on time through Turnitin. Tardy assignments will receive deductions (see policy below). MOST of these assignments can be done in collaboration with 1-2 other students (when you cannot collaborate the assignment will clearly indicate that only you can submit it). If you collaborate, carefully label your assignment with everyone’s name; everyone gets the same grade. (If a collaborator does not do his/her fair share, don’t collaborate again!) In “real” life, most people work in teams not alone. Use these experiences to learn to (or enhance) your teamwork capabilities!

***TRANSLATING GRADES ➔ POINTS: All assignment grades (including major grades but not quizzes) will be calculated on a traditional 4.0 (A-F) scale using the rubric for assignments indicated above. Your assignment will be graded on this scale; however, because the course operates on a points system (so that you can always see how well you are doing in the course), assignment grades will be translated into their equivalent in points in your Blackboard grade display. (see above for weekly assignment calculations). For example, in the first major project below suppose you received a B+ . This is a 3.3 out of a 4.0 which is 83% (a grade of 83 on a scale of 100). So out of 52 possible points for this assignment you would receive 83% or 43 points. ***

MAJOR GRADES (50% of final grade—175 points)
During the last weeks of the semester you will be analyzing and writing up your class’s research. The three projects below require that you use the acquired research skills from the semester so they are more complex than other assignments and thus have higher weight in your final grade. You are highly encouraged to collaborate with 1-2 other students in the course on these three projects. As indicated above, when you submit collaboratively each collaborator will receive the same grade.

Quantitative (Numerical) Data Analysis Project 15% of final grade [maximum of 52 points]
During the course you and the other students in the class will collect numerical data utilizing an on-line survey. This project will have you analyze that data and then present findings in both written and visual (graph/chart) formats. No statistical testing!

Qualitative (Text) Data Analysis Project 15% of final grade [maximum score of 53 points]
During the course you and the other students in the class will collect qualitative data utilizing an on-line survey with open-ended questions. This project will have you analyze that data and then present findings in both written and visual (graph/chart) formats.

Data Analysis Executive Summary 20% of final grade [maximum score of 70 points]
When many people do research that will be used by others, they summarize the research project and findings in a 2-page executive summary (plus bibliography if applicable). You will too. The summary will relate your research objective to your findings and will also examine whether or not your findings confirm or contrast with the literature by other scholars you studied.

EXTRA CREDIT: There are two types of extra credit you can receive in this course:
• Attend an optional F2F meeting or an Adobe Connect session (in real time) and you will receive 10 points extra credit added to your course total. This only applies outside of Week 8 when you are required to attend a session. The maximum extra credit you can achieve this way is 50 points.
• In the second half of the course there will be options within assignments to do extra work for extra credit. If you take those options, you can improve your assignment’s score and thus your grade overall.
General Class Policies

Plagiarism/Academic Honesty: As an FIU student, you are always expected to abide by the university’s policies particularly those governing academic honesty and plagiarism as they appear in the FIU Student Handbook. Given that this is an on-line course, you are also expected to do the required work without the assistance of anyone else unless specifically told that you may collaborate. Moreover, you cannot share the quizzes, quiz responses, etc. or any other assessment information with anyone unless expressly permitted by the instructor in writing. If you are not familiar with how to avoid plagiarism, consult FIU library tutorials and information. Additionally, should anything you produce cite any data, research or information that you have not generated and which is not general knowledge then you must cite it appropriately following the disciplinary conventions of Sociology which you can obtain here: ASA Quick Style Guide 4th edition update.pdf. Please become completely familiar with bibliographic styles and citation conventions. If you do not cite others’ work adequately you can be accused of plagiarism and FIU takes these accusations very seriously. The program Turnitin will be used for written portions of tests and most assignments to ensure that you abide by these rules regarding proper citation and plagiarism prevention. You can check to make sure that you have not submitted work that plagiarizes and your instructor will as well.

Special Needs Students: Please notify the instructor prior to or immediately upon commencement of this course about your accommodation needs. The instructor will make every effort to accommodate those needs in accordance with FIU policy.

Tardiness of Assignments: As handing in assignments past the due date provides an advantage to the student doing so, that advantage must be curbed by penalizing those handing in late assignments. Assignments submitted past their due date will lose ½ grade (on the 4.0 scale) for up to 1 week late and 1 whole grade (again, on the 4.0 scale) for over a week late. The only exception to this rule is that you have a bona fide excuse (death in immediate family, major illness, etc.) and substantiation of that excuse (obituary, doctor’s note, hospital record, etc.). Quizzes typically cannot be taken after their due date, but exceptions will be made for bona fide excuses as per above.

Accurate Recording of Your Grades: The instructor and TA (if one or more is assigned to the course) will make every effort to record your grades accurately in Blackboard’s grade book. However, YOU must check your grades to ensure that they are accurate. If you find any inaccuracies, notify the instructor by email immediately and check back that corrections are made. Once the course enters the final week of the semester no requests for changes to grades will be honored. Therefore, make sure your grades are accurate during the entire semester.

*Syllabus Caveat: Please note that the instructor reserves the right to alter the syllabus due to need and/or emergent circumstances. Students will be advised about any change made to the syllabus.