

# Research Methods (SYA 3300)

Instructor: Dr. Katie Rainwater ([krainwat@fiu.edu](mailto:krainwat@fiu.edu))

Virtual Office Hours, Wednesdays, 3:00 – 4:00 pm or by appointment

Zoom: <https://fiu.zoom.us/j/5456764451>

## Course Description and Purpose

Welcome to Research Methods! Together we will learn basic principles of social research and use them to explore *working in the education sector*.

This course is divided into two modules. First, we will explore the foundations of social research. What is it? What makes research valid? Second, we will consider and try our hand at methods of data collection and analysis. We will also reflect upon the ethics and purpose of social research.

Course materials include models of exemplary research, how-to-guides on the nuts and bolts of research, and a textbook. Much of the exemplary research will be drawn from literature on work and labor given this semester's theme of *working in the education sector*.

### Course Objectives

Upon completing this course, students will be able to:

- Articulate the goals and limitations of social research
- Identify and apply principles of social research design
- Use different research methods to collect social data
- Analyze social research data
- Report the findings, importance, and limitations of social research data
- Identify and apply principles of social research ethics

### How to Succeed in this Course

Learning social research methods is incredibly rewarding. A firm understanding of research methods will enable you to better evaluate social research. Social research skills are applicable in many contexts beyond the university such as in community organizations, government offices, and for-profit companies.

Many students find social research methods difficult. You may find it helpful to designate a regular time to do the readings and coursework for this class (e.g. Mondays and Fridays from 10am – noon). Keeping up with the material as we progress is essential – it is simply too much material to try to learn the week before the exam.

Pedagogy experts speak of two general categories of assessments: *formative* and *summative*. *Formative assessments* help me monitor how you are learning. The memos and participation assignments are formative assessments that require you to apply concepts learned in the readings and give me an understanding of how well you are comprehending the material. I will give you

feedback on these assignments to help you develop your understanding prior to the exam. When you don't understand my feedback, you should ask clarifying questions. On the other hand, the Module 1 and Module 2 exams are *summative assessments*. By the time we reach the end of each module, I expect you to have learned the content. These exams will assess your knowledge of the content.

How can you ensure that you perform well on summative assessments? My advice would be to take the formative assessments seriously. Read my feedback and ask questions when you don't understand. In addition, at the beginning of each module, I provide a study guide with the concepts that I expect you to understand and be able to apply from each module. I recommend consulting this study guide while reviewing the material from each unit and not just right before the exams.

One additional point for success in this course is not to put the interview assignment off until the last minute. It often takes students longer than they anticipate because it has multiple components.

### **Textbook and Course Materials**

Chambliss and Schutt, *Making Sense of the Social World: Methods of Investigation*, 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (Sage Publications). [Note, if you purchase the 6<sup>th</sup> edition it may be expensive. Used, inexpensive copies of the 5<sup>th</sup> edition may be found for purchase or rent online].

Other readings are available via Canvas under the Module tab in the "Readings and Overview" section for each module.

### **Course Communication**

I regularly post announcements. I expect all student to check canvas announcements regularly and to read all announcements.

I will comment on your work through the submission comments and rubric feature on canvas.

I am happy to answer short questions about assignments and grading over email (krainwat@fiu.edu). However, if you have a question requiring extended discussion, please come to my office hours or make an appointment to discuss over zoom.

I will reply to student messages within 2 business days. (This means if you email me on a Friday afternoon, you should not expect to receive a response until Tuesday afternoon. Nevertheless, I try to get to most emails on the same day on which they were sent).

### **Office Hours**

- Email: [krainwat@fiu.edu](mailto:krainwat@fiu.edu)
- Virtual office hours Wednesdays, 3:00 – 4:00pm via Zoom: <https://fiu.zoom.us/j/5456764451>) OR by appointment

Office hours are not only for students who are struggling with the material. (However, if you are having difficulties, please reach out sooner rather than later). I'm also here to help you engage more deeply with the readings, to recommend further readings, or to talk about applications of course material beyond school. So please stop by!

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## Assignments and Grading

### Memos (25%)

“Memos” are short assignments that give you the opportunity to apply a course concept or skill. The idea of memos is to offer a low-stakes way of developing your understanding of the course material. These will be completed individually and submitted to the instructor on Sunday evenings. You should expect to complete 1 memo for most weeks although for a couple weeks you will be required to submit more than 1 memo.

### Participation (15%)

Interaction among learners is positively associated with good learning outcomes in online courses. This course will have an interactive component. There are 5 participation assignments. For 3, you will do individual work and then engage with the individual work of a classmate. For 2, you will complete groupwork. The individual work + engagement assignments, have 2 due dates, one for the submission of your individual work and one for the submission of your engagement with your peer's work. Here is the timeline for the participation assignments and their due dates:

#### 1. Participation Assignment 1: Introductions

Part One Assigned: Aug 26

Part One Due: Sep 1

Part Two Assigned: Sep 3

Part Two Due: Sep 8

Type: Independent posting & engagement with classmate's work

#### 2. Participation Assignment 2: Conceptualization and Operationalization

Assigned: Sep 16

Due: Sept 29

Type: Group work

#### 2. Participation Assignment 3: Sampling

Assigned: Sept 23

Due: Oct 6

Type: Group work

#### 3. Participation Assignment 4: Ethnographic Fieldnotes

Part One Assigned: Oct 28

Part One Due (Independent work): Nov 3

Part Two Assigned (Peer Review): Nov 4

Part Two Due (Peer review assessment): Nov 10  
Type: Peer review assignment

#### 4. Participation Assignment 5: Survey questions

Part One Assigned: Nov 11  
Part One Due (Independent work): Nov 17  
Part Two Assigned: Nov 18  
Part Two Due (Peer review assessment): Nov 24  
Type: Peer review assignment

### **Interview Assignment (20%)**

The interview assignment is designed to give you experience carrying out qualitative social research. It is divided into three parts. It is due on Dec 8.

1. Interview Assignment 1: Interview Audio & Transcript (5%)
2. Interview Assignment 2: Coded Transcript (5%)
3. Interview Assignment 3: Memo & Debrief (5%)

### **Exams (40%)**

Exams will be assigned at the end of Module One (covering the material from Module One) and at the end of Module Two (covering the material from Modules). Exams will consist of multiple-choice and short essay questions. Study guides are available at the beginning of each module.

The due dates for the Exams are as follows:

1. Module One: Oct 20
2. Module Two: Dec 14

### **Grading**

#### **Late Assignments**

Memos are not accepted late. I understand that sometimes your internet connection fails, you get sick, or you have an important work or caregiving responsibility. To account for how life sometimes gets in the way of deadlines, I will drop your two lowest memo grades.

**Participation assignments** are not accepted late. For the interactive component of these assignments to function, they must be submitted on time. (The exception is I will accept Participation Assignment 1 late if you add the class late).

If something major happens (illness etc.) which is going to prevent you from being able to submit **multiple** memos on time, then please get in touch with me **before** the deadline to see if

we can work out an alternate deadline/arrangement. If you contact me after the fact, I will not be able to accept your assignments.

**Exams are accepted late but with a penalty.** (I deduct 5% when submitted within 24-hours of the due date; 10% when submitted within two weeks of the due date; 15% when the assignment is submitted more than two weeks after the due date.)

**The Interview assignment is accepted late but with a penalty.** (I deduct 5% when submitted within 24-hours of the due date; 10% when submitted within two weeks of the due date;

**Letter Grade Distribution Table**

Letter	Range%	Letter	Range%	Letter	Range%
A	92.5 or above	B	82.5 - 87.4	C	70 - 77.4
A-	90 - 92.4	B-	80 - 82.4	D	60 - 69
B+	87.5 – 89	C+	77.5 - 79	F	59 or less

### Course Grades Distribution Table

Course Requirements	Weight
Participation	15%
Interview Assignment	20%
Memos	25%
Exam <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Exam 1: Intro to Social Research and Research Design</li><li>• Exam 2: Data Collection and Analysis</li></ul>	40%
Total	<b>100%</b>

## Policies

Before starting this course, please review the following pages:

- [Policies](#)
- [Netiquette \(Links to an external site.\)](#)
- [Technical Requirements and Skills](#)
- [Accessibility and Accommodation](#)
- [Panthers Care & Counseling and Psychological Services \(CAPS\)](#)
- [Academic Misconduct Statement](#)
- [Inclusivity Statement](#)

## Religious Holidays

The University's policy on religious holy days as stated in the University Catalog and Student Handbook will be followed in this class. Any student may request to be excused from class to observe a religious holy day of his or her faith.

## **Statement on Academic Freedom from UFF-FIU Collective Bargaining Agreement with the Administration:**

Academic freedom and responsibility are essential to the integrity of the University. The principles of academic freedom are integral to the conception of the University as a community of scholars engaged in the pursuit of truth and the communication of knowledge in an atmosphere of tolerance and freedom. The University serves the common good through teaching, research, scholarship/creative activities, and service. The fulfillment of these functions rests upon the preservation of the intellectual freedoms of teaching, expression, research, and debate. The University and UFF affirm that academic freedom is a right protected by this Agreement in addition to a faculty member's constitutionally protected freedom of expression and is fundamental to the faculty member's responsibility to seek and to state truth as he/she sees it.

### **Academic Honesty Statement**

FIU defines academic misconduct in the Student Conduct and Honor Code (Code) as, "any act or omission by a Student, which violates the concept of academic integrity and undermines the academic mission of the University in violation of the Code." Code violations include, but are not limited to: academic dishonesty, bribery, cheating, commercial use, complicity, falsification, and plagiarism. The Code is available here: <https://studentaffairs.fiu.edu/get-support/student-conduct-and-academic-integrity/student-conduct-and-honor-code/index.php> (Links to an external site.)

### **A Note on Plagiarism**

Plagiarism is a serious offense. **Don't do it.** The minimum penalty for plagiarism will be a zero on the assignment. I will pursue the case with the Office of Academic Integrity. The reason I take this so seriously is that plagiarism completely undermines our educational aims. You are expected to think for yourself in this class and passing off someone else's work as your own is the worst way to fail at this.

Not knowing what plagiarism is does not count as an excuse. Even quoting someone's definition of a term can count as plagiarism. Whenever you use someone else's wording, *you must put it in quotation marks and cite the source.* Do not use someone else's words as if they were your own.

If you are unsure, you should familiarize with the definition and the university's policy. Here is a list of things that count as plagiarism (the list is not exhaustive):

1. Using someone else's words without attribution (even for something as small as a definition). You are welcome to use someone else's words. Quoting other people is fine. Just put those words in quotation marks and *cite the source.*
2. Paraphrasing someone else's words. This even applies to assigned readings. Do not simply paraphrase something or replace words with synonyms. That's plagiarism.
3. Using someone else's ideas and arguments. Let's say you consult a secondary source. You do not steal their words or paraphrase them (so you are not breaking the rules mentioned above). But you take the structure of their argument and their ideas and you present them as your own. That's plagiarism.

4. Using text from a chatbot like ChatGPT. If I suspect that you have used a chatbot to write your paper, I will ask you to meet with me to explain the paper. If you cannot explain the paper to me, you will not receive credit for it

Avoiding plagiarism is not hard. All you have to do is give credit to the source. Be very careful about consulting outside materials. If you do decide to use an outside source, you **must** tell me about it by citing the source.

### **Disability Services**

FIU is committed to providing reasonable accommodations for all persons with disabilities under the Americans with Disabilities Act. Students who require course accommodations are required to register with the Disability Resource Center (DRC) by the beginning of the semester and to follow the DRC's procedures. Contact information:

- MMC, Graham Center 190, (305) 348-3532, email: [drcupgl@fiu.edu](mailto:drcupgl@fiu.edu)
- BBC, Wolfe University Center 131, (305) 919-5345, email: [drcbbc@fiu.edu](mailto:drcbbc@fiu.edu)