

**SOCI 5320: Seminar in Research Methods**  
**Fall 2022**  
**Course Syllabus**

**Instructor:** Dr. Jayajit Chakraborty  
Professor, Department of Sociology and Anthropology  
Director, Socio-Environmental and Geospatial Analysis (SEGA) Lab  
University of Texas at El Paso  
**Email:** [jchakraborty@utep.edu](mailto:jchakraborty@utep.edu)

This course provides a comprehensive and critical introduction to principles of systematic inquiry, research design, and methodological techniques used in social scientific analysis within academic and 'real-world' professional contexts. It is a required course for graduate students in the Sociology MA program. Specifically, this course focuses on the rationale behind planning and conducting research projects in the social sciences, as well as conventional approaches for systematically collecting and analyzing data to arrive at answers to relevant social scientific questions. Students will learn how to understand, interpret, and critically evaluate information obtained from the application of social scientific methods, and be introduced to a variety of specific methodological approaches. This course should provide students with the introductory skills to both evaluate and conduct research in sociology and other social sciences. Students will also take the important step from being critical "consumers" of information to begin learning how to be "producers" of information through a final project that require students to identify research problems of interest to them and design their own methods for studying their chosen research topic.

This hybrid version of the course is partitioned into 11 learning units. Its organization generally follows the process of carrying out social scientific research, from the formulation of a problem or question to data collection, and then to analysis and interpretation. We will begin with a general introduction to social research (Unit 1), as well as the scientific foundations of social research and ethical considerations (Unit 2). This will be followed by an introduction to the basic language of social research and overview of the overall research process (Unit 3). We will then examine the two key considerations in planning or designing a study: devising operations to measure the phenomenon of research interest (Unit 3) and selecting a representative set or sample of cases for observation (Unit 4). The next phase focuses on four basic approaches to social research: experiments, surveys, field research, and use of available/secondary data (Units 5-8). We will examine the distinctive process of executing a study based on each of these approaches, strengths and weaknesses of each approach, as well as the technical aspects of experiments and survey design. We will also consider mixed methods designs that combine one or more of these traditional approaches (Unit 8). This phase will be followed by a brief overview of data processing and elementary analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data (Unit 9). The final phase of the course will focus on the writing of research reports and research proposals (Units 10-11), based on combining specific information and subject matter covered in previous units. We will specifically examine how to recognize research problems and formulate problem statements, research questions and hypotheses, review literature that informs the research problem and questions, develop an appropriate study design, select data collection and analytic strategies, consider ethical issues, and draw conclusions about research problems.

## Course Objectives

- To understand various quantitative/qualitative research concepts and approaches, as well as apply them in conducting research and social scientific analyses.
- To identify and evaluate diverse sources of social scientific data and gain familiarity with the methods for collecting such information.
- To understand and critically evaluate social research presented in the popular press and academic journals - i.e., be a good consumer of research.
- To plan your own research - specifically, to identify research topics that are suitable for examination with quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods, translate such topics into meaningful research questions or hypotheses, and design a study to answer them.
- To develop and refine academic/professional writing skills by preparing a complete research proposal.

## Course Requirements

This course is designed using a modular format where each week is packaged as a single module (learning unit) on Blackboard, so that all reading materials, exercises, discussion handouts, and/or discussion forums are located in a single area for a given week. The course will be run as an interactive seminar at the graduate level. In other words, it is structured around a set of readings from academic books and journals that will form the basis for assignments and class discussions. Class discussions will take place in both face-to-face (F2F) and online (virtual/synchronous) class sessions, as well as online discussion forums, as described in more detail later in this section. Students are expected to actively participate by completing all reading assignments, submitting written exercises, and engaging in thoughtful discussion of the assigned readings in weekly discussions. *The course does require an intensive and substantial level of engagement with the reading material.* This course is designed based on the premise that all students will take active roles in their own learning, as well as interact with each other through both class sessions and discussion forums to form a collaborative and supportive learning environment. All students are expected to participate in a manner that demonstrates adequate reflection and understanding of the subject matter, respect for your colleagues in the class, and a willingness to learn and grow. Everyone should feel comfortable sharing their thoughts freely in our class meetings and online discussion forums. Specific course requirements are described in more detail below:

**Weekly exercises:** For Units 1 to 10, all students will be required to complete and submit a written exercise every week. These assignments will be based on the topics, issues, and concepts covered in the assigned readings associated with that particular Unit. Each exercise must be prepared using the Microsoft Word document provided and uploaded through the Exercise link for the Unit available on Blackboard. These weekly exercises will be due at 6:00 pm every Wednesday. I will attempt to grade and return these assignments (with my feedback) on the Blackboard course website within seven days of the posted deadlines. Late work will not be accepted or graded, with the exception of documented family or medical emergencies.

***Class sessions:*** This class requires you to participate in eight scheduled class sessions on Wednesday evenings, which includes the Course Introduction discussion (August 24) and the final meeting designated for student proposal presentations (November 30). Our face-to-face (F2F) classes will be held in the Old Main conference room, and in-person attendance is mandatory. The online or virtual classes will be held synchronously and can be accessed using the *Zoom Meeting Link* on Blackboard. To participate in these online meetings, you will need to use a desktop computer/laptop/tablet with a webcam (or smartphone) that has an internet connection. If you are unable to attend a class session, please let me know as early as possible so that accommodations can be made when appropriate.

***Leading class discussions:*** For Units 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9, each student will team up with another student to lead class discussion of assigned readings, in the six class meetings listed in the Course Schedule as either F2F or Online (see page 7). Students leading class discussion (discussion leaders) will be required to: (1) summarize, synthesize, and critically evaluate the assigned readings; and (2) outline key issues and questions that can be used to generate class discussion. The use of class discussion handouts is mandatory. Discussion leaders are required to send me their handout document (class discussion outline and questions) via email at least 24 hours before our online class meeting (by 6:00 pm that Tuesday). I will post this document on the Blackboard course website under a link within the Unit webpage called Discussion Handout. The class discussion of each assigned reading should not exceed 20-25 minutes. Discussion leaders should begin with a brief introduction or summary (no more than 5 minutes) of each reading, but most of the time should be spent on discussion questions that include and/or extend the topics covered in the readings. At least 4-5 discussion questions should be included for each reading. *You are required to post meaningful questions that generate debate and discussion, and not questions that just require reproducing information from the assigned readings.* Discussion leaders are responsible for moderating the class discussion and ensuring that we do not spend too much class time on any single reading. They will be graded on the following: (1) submitting their handout document on time; (2) preparing an adequate number of meaningful questions that encompass all the assigned readings; (3) the quality of their discussion questions (in terms of stimulating thinking, accuracy, and depth); and (4) their leadership during the discussion. A sign-up spreadsheet, available on the Blackboard course website from August 24 to 28, will allow students to select the two Units for which they wish to co-lead the class discussion with another student.

***Moderating online discussion forums:*** For Units 3, 4, 10, and 11, reading assignments will be discussed using the online Discussion Forum available on the Blackboard course website. A separate Discussion Forum will be created for each of these four units. Three students will be assigned to serve as discussion moderators to post discussion questions and these students are required to collectively post at least nine questions based on the assigned readings for that particular Unit. Each discussion question must be posted as a new Thread within the Discussion Forum. These discussion questions must be posted before 6:00 pm Tuesday during the week corresponding to the Unit. All remaining students (those who are not discussion moderators for that Unit) are required to post a short response to each Thread in the Discussion Forum. The Discussion Forum will remain open until 11:00 pm Thursday of that week, the deadline for posting student responses.

**Research proposal:** The final course requirement is the preparation of an original research proposal that relies on the application of quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods. You are expected to work individually on a project of your own choosing. Specifically, you are required to develop a research proposal that addresses a particular problem and seeks to answer a single research question or a set of research questions. Your proposal will include an explanation of the research problem, a series of research questions and/or hypotheses, a brief review of the literature, and a detailed description of the methodology. *You will not collect or analyze data for this project.* Additional guidelines for the proposal will be posted on the course website. Your research topic should be chosen in consultation with me. You are encouraged to use this proposal to develop your own thesis research, a conference paper, and/or a journal article, but this is NOT a requirement. Completion of the final research proposal will proceed in three steps:

1. A short *proposal outline* must be submitted approximately a month (exact date to be announced later) before the final proposal due date, to enable me to provide initial guidance and suggestions. This proposal outline should briefly describe your research topic and question(s), key variables, the data to be collected and used, the proposed method(s) you want to use, and how you plan to analyze the data. You are encouraged to contact me earlier in the semester to discuss your research topic/problem.
2. Each student will make a formal presentation of her/his research proposal to the class at during our class meeting on [Wednesday, November 30](#). The ability to present research is something that is expected of all students who receive a graduate degree. You will deliver a short presentation of your research proposal (8-10 minutes long), to be followed by about 5-7 minutes of discussion. You will be required to upload your presentation as a PowerPoint document at least 24 hours before (6:00 pm Tuesday, November 29). All students will be required to provide constructive feedback on the other presentations. Questions, comments, and suggestions received during the presentation should be addressed and incorporated in the written research proposal.
3. The *final research proposal* will be due on [Wednesday, December 7](#), exactly a week after the proposal presentation discussions. The text of the final proposal should be double-spaced, 12-point font, with 1-inch margins, and at least 3,000 words in length (but no more than 4,500). It also needs a reference list (in addition to the 3,000 or more words of text) and in-text citations (using APA style).

## Course Evaluation and Grading

The final course grade\* will be computed on the basis of the following components/weights:

- Participation in class meetings and discussion forums: 10%
- Weekly exercises: 30%
- Leading class discussion of assigned readings: 15%
- Moderating discussion forums of assigned readings: 10%
- Research proposal: 35%; comprising:
  - Outline: 2%
  - Presentation and feedback: 10% & 3%
  - Written proposal: 20%

\*A= 90%-100% / B= 80%-89.9% / C= 70%-79.9% / D= 60%-69.9% / F= 59.9% and lower

## Course Text

The textbook for this course is: Singleton, R. A. and Straits, B. C. (2017). *Approaches to Social Research* (6th edition); New York: Oxford University Press. All students are required to purchase this latest edition of the book. Two other books from which weekly readings will be assigned frequently include:

- Bhattacharjee, A. (2012). *Social Science Research: Principles, Methods, and Practices*. Tampa, Florida: University of South Florida Scholar Commons.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (4<sup>th</sup> edition); Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Both these books are available in the 'Course Texts' folder on the Blackboard course website. Additional book chapters and journal articles are available for download as PDF documents within the webpages of relevant Units.

## Course Communication

Since this is a hybrid class with an online component, we may not be able to meet or see each other in the ways you may be accustomed to (except for the F2F class meetings). However, there are several ways through which we can keep the communication channels open. These are listed below:

**Email:** UTEP e-mail is the easiest and quickest way to reach me. If you contact me via email [[jchakraborty@utep.edu](mailto:jchakraborty@utep.edu)], I will make every attempt to respond within 24 hours of receipt. When e-mailing me, make sure to send the email from your UTEP student account and include the course number (SOCI 5320) in the subject line. In the body of your e-mail, clearly state your question. At the end of your email, be sure to include your name. You need to send me an email to schedule an appointment for a meeting via phone or *Zoom* in Blackboard.

**Virtual meeting:** One-on-one online (virtual) meetings with me can be scheduled for any issues or questions related to the course via email. These will be held on the course website via *Zoom Meeting Link* in Blackboard.

**Announcements:** You are required to check posted 'Announcements' as well as the 'Home Page' of our Blackboard course website regularly and frequently for any updates, deadline changes, and other important course-related messages.

## Technology Requirements

Course content is delivered via the Internet through the Blackboard learning management system. Ensure your UTEP e-mail account is working and that you have access to the Web and a stable web browser. *Google Chrome* and *Mozilla Firefox* are the best browsers for Blackboard; other browsers may cause complications. When having technical difficulties, update your browser, clear your cache, or try switching to another browser.

You will need to have access to a computer/laptop, scanner, a webcam, and a microphone. You will need to download or update the following software: *Microsoft Office*, *Adobe Acrobat Reader*, *Windows Media Player*, *QuickTime*, and *Java*. Check that your computer hardware and software are up-to-date and able to access all parts of the course.

If you do not have a word-processing software, you can download Word and other *Microsoft Office* programs (including Excel, PowerPoint, Outlook and more) for free via UTEP's Microsoft Office Portal. Click the following link for more information about [Microsoft Office 365](#) and follow the instructions.

If you encounter technical difficulties beyond your scope of troubleshooting, please contact the UTEP Help Desk as they are trained specifically in assisting with technological needs of students. Please do not contact me for this type of assistance. The Help Desk is much better equipped than I am to assist you!

## Netiquette for Online Discussion Forums

As you may already know, online communication can be challenging. It is possible to miscommunicate what we mean or to misunderstand what our classmates mean given the lack of body language and immediate feedback. Therefore, please keep these netiquette (network etiquette) guidelines in mind. Failure to observe them may result in disciplinary action.

1. Always consider audience. This is a college-level course; therefore, all communication should reflect polite consideration of other's ideas.
2. Respect and courtesy must be provided to classmates and to the instructor at all times. No harassment or inappropriate postings will be tolerated.
3. When reacting to someone else's message, address the ideas, not the person. Post only what anyone would comfortably state in a face-to-face situation.
4. Blackboard is not a public internet venue; all postings to it should be considered private and confidential. Whatever is posted on in these online spaces is intended for classmates and professor only. Please do not copy documents and paste them to a publicly accessible website, blog, or other space.

## Course Schedule and Deadlines: Fall 2022

Unit	Topic	Meeting Format	Dates	Exercise Due Dates
	Course introduction	Online	Aug 24	
1	Introduction to social research			Ex 1: Aug 31
2	Scientific & ethical contexts	F2F	Sept 7	Ex 2: Sept 7
3	Research design & Measurement	<i>Diss. forum</i>	Sept 13-15	Ex 3: Sept 14
4	Sampling	<i>Diss. forum</i>	Sept 20-22	Ex 4: Sept 21
5	Experiments & experimental designs	Online	Oct 5	Ex 5: Oct 5
6	Survey research & instrumentation	F2F	Oct 12	Ex 6: Oct 12
7	Field research & qualitative approaches	F2F	Oct 19	Ex 7: Oct 19
8	Secondary data & Mixed methods	F2F	Oct 26	Ex 8: Oct 26
9	Data analysis & GIS	Online	Nov 2	Ex 9: Nov 2
10	Writing research reports & proposals	<i>Diss. forum</i>	Nov 8-10	Ex 10: Nov 9
11	Research proposal design	<i>Diss. forum</i>	Nov 15-17	
	Student presentations & discussions	F2F	Nov 30	PPT: Nov 29
	Final written proposal			<b>Paper: Dec 5</b>

### PLEASE NOTE:

- **F2F** and **Online** (class meetings with students leading class discussion): These sessions will be held at 6:00 pm *Wednesday* either in 110 Old Main (F2F) or Zoom in Blackboard (online). Discussion leaders must email their Discussion Handout to me by 6:00 pm *Tuesday* of that week. Each student will lead class discussion twice during the semester. A sign-up spreadsheet that can be accessed through the Blackboard course website (link will be available from August 24 to 28) will allow students to choose the two Units for which they wish to co-lead the class discussion (first come/first-served basis).
- *Diss. forum*: Discussion forum only (no F2F or online class meetings that week), open for 53 hours. Discussion moderators will need to post their questions on the Discussion Forum for the Unit by 6:00 pm *Tuesday*. Students need to post answers/responses to these questions by 11:00 pm *Thursday* of that week. Each student will serve as a discussion moderator twice in the semester.
- Weekly exercises for each Unit will be due at 6:00 pm *Wednesday*.
- No class meetings will be held on *Wednesday, August 31* and *Wednesday, September 28*.

## **Supplementary Course Information**

**ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:** Academic dishonesty is prohibited. It includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, and collusion. Cheating may involve copying from or providing information to another student, possessing unauthorized materials during a test, or falsifying research data on reports. Plagiarism occurs when someone intentionally or knowingly represents the words or ideas of another person as one's own. Collusion involves collaborating with another person to commit any academically dishonest act. It is expected that UTEP students will understand and subscribe to the ideal of academic integrity and that they will be willing to bear individual responsibility for their work. Materials submitted to fulfill academic requirements must represent a student's own efforts. Any act of academic dishonesty attempted by a UTEP student is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. Violations will be taken seriously and will be referred to the Dean of Students Office for possible disciplinary action, as per UT Board of Regents' Rules and Regulations and UTEP's Handbook of Operating Procedures. Students may be suspended or expelled from UTEP for such actions. Refer to <https://www.utep.edu/student-affairs/osccr/student-conduct/> for more information.

**LATE AND MISSING WORK:** Assignments will be allowed to be turned in late only in the event of a documented medical or family emergency. If you do encounter an emergency, you must notify the instructor on or before the due date. Documentation could include a note from a physician, a hospital admittance slip, or correspondence from an academic advisor or the Dean of Students. Foreseeable excused absences (such as participation in university-sanctioned events) also require documentation as well as notifying the instructor at least one week in advance. In the case of foreseeable absences, you must turn work in early rather than late. In each of these situations it is the student's responsibility to communicate with the instructor.

**ALTERNATIVE MEANS OF SUBMITTING WORK IN CASE OF TECHNICAL ISSUES:** I strongly suggest that you submit your work with plenty of time to spare in the event that you have a technical issue with the course website, network, and/or your computer. I also suggest you save all your work in a separate Word document as a back-up. This way, you will have evidence that you completed the work and will not lose credit. If you are experiencing difficulties submitting your work through the course website, please contact the UTEP Help Desk. You can email your back-up document as a last resort.

**INCOMPLETE GRADES:** Incomplete grades (I) will not be given in the course except under exceptional circumstances, based on written documentation, and at the discretion of the instructor.

**SPECIAL FACILITIES:** The University is committed to providing reasonable accommodations and auxiliary services to students, staff, faculty, job applicants, applicants for admissions, and other beneficiaries of University programs, services and activities with documented disabilities in order to provide them with equal opportunities to participate in programs, services, and activities in compliance with sections 503 and 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 and the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (ADAAA) of 2008. Reasonable accommodations will be made unless it is determined that doing so would cause undue hardship on the University.



Students requesting an accommodation based on a disability must register with the UTEP Center for Accommodations and Support Services (CASS). Contact the Center for Accommodations and Support Services at 915-747-5148, or email them at [cass@utep.edu](mailto:cass@utep.edu), or apply for accommodations online via the CASS portal.

**PLAGIARISM DETECTING SOFTWARE:** Some of your assignments and final paper may be submitted to SafeAssign, a plagiarism detecting software. SafeAssign is used to review assignment submissions for originality and will help you learn how to properly attribute sources rather than paraphrase.

**COPYRIGHT STATEMENT FOR COURSE MATERIALS :** All materials used in this course are protected by copyright law. The course materials are only for the use of students currently enrolled in this course and only for the purpose of this course. They may not be further disseminated.

**COVID-19 ACCOMMODATIONS:** Students are not permitted on campus when they have a positive COVID-19 test, exposure or symptoms. If you are not permitted on campus, you should contact me as soon as possible so we can arrange necessary and appropriate accommodations.

**COVID-19 PRECAUTIONS:** You must **STAY AT HOME** and **REPORT** if you (1) have been diagnosed with COVID-19, (2) are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms, or (3) have had recent contact with a person who has received a positive coronavirus test. Reports should be made at [screening.utep.edu](http://screening.utep.edu). If you know of anyone who should report any of these three criteria, you should encourage them to report. If the individual cannot report, you can report on their behalf by sending an email to [COVIDaction@utep.edu](mailto:COVIDaction@utep.edu).

For each day that you attend campus—for any reason—you must complete the questions on the UTEP screening website ([screening.utep.edu](http://screening.utep.edu)) prior to arriving on campus. The website will verify if you are permitted to come to campus. Under no circumstances should anyone come to class when feeling ill or exhibiting any of the known COVID-19 symptoms. If you are feeling unwell, please let me know as soon as possible, and alternative instruction will be provided. Students are advised to minimize the number of encounters with others to avoid infection.

Wear face coverings when in common areas of campus or when others are present. You must wear a face covering over your nose and mouth at all times in this class. If you choose not to wear a face covering, you may not enter the classroom. If you remove your face covering, you will be asked to put it on or leave the classroom. Students who refuse to wear a face covering and follow preventive COVID-19 guidelines will be dismissed from the class and will be subject to disciplinary action according to Section 1.2.3 Health and Safety and Section 1.2.2.5 Disruptions in the UTEP Handbook of Operating Procedures.