

# Sociological Research Methods Syllabus

SOCI 335 – Spring 2025

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“We must study, we must investigate, we must attempt to solve; and the utmost that the world can demand is not a lack of human interest and moral conviction, but rather the heart-quality of fairness, and an earnest desire for the truth despite its possible unpleasantness.”

- W.E.B. Du Bois (1899: 3), *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study*

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**Instructor:** Dr. Erick Axxe, PhD

**Office:** Mills 220

**Class time:** MWF 10:10-11am

**Email:** axxe@hendrix.edu

**Student hours:** TR 10-11am, MWF noon-1pm

**Class location:** Mills 307

## Course Description

This course introduces the research methods employed in anthropological and sociological inquiry. While our understanding of society is often shaped by personal experiences or the experiences of those close to us, developing a comprehensive understanding of the social world requires systematic methods combined with theoretical insights into human interaction and social structures. By using these methods, we can challenge assumptions and construct a more accurate and holistic view of reality than reliance on individual perceptions alone allows.

Like any tool, research methods require training and practice to use effectively. This course will guide you through the foundations of sociological research, equipping you with the skills to develop research questions, design and implement research projects, and critically evaluate empirical studies. You will also explore the principles and precautions essential for conducting high-quality research.

The course is organized into three sections:

1. Overview of social research: We will examine the theoretical frameworks that underpin social research, highlighting why sociology utilizes diverse methodological approaches and how these connect to broader theoretical perspectives.
2. Methods training: You will gain hands-on experience with sociology's primary methods: interviews, surveys, and secondary data analysis. This includes designing interview guides and survey instruments, collecting and analyzing data, and working with secondary data.

3. Independent research project: During the final five weeks, you will apply what you have learned to conduct your own research project. This will culminate in an extended abstract and a research presentation, preparing you to submit your work to a research conference.

This course is built on a specifications grading system, meaning assignments and projects are assessed based on clear criteria for completion, with opportunities to revise and improve work to meet expectations. By meeting assignment specifications, you progress through defined achievement levels (Basic, Proficient, or Mastery), empowering you to take control of your learning and focus on skill development.

This course meets in person three times per week. Throughout the semester, you will complete assignments, quizzes, and participate in a final essay and presentation. Except for the textbook (see below), all course materials will be available through Microsoft Teams.

By the end of the course, you will have developed a strong foundation in sociological research methods, enabling you to design and conduct your own studies and critically assess the research of others.

## Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, students will:

- Develop a comprehensive understanding of the diverse methodological techniques used in sociological research.
- Recognize the interplay between research justification, design, and the limitations inherent to different methodologies.
- Enhance their ability to critically evaluate research, including its ethical dimensions, methodological rigor, and effectiveness in presenting findings.
- Navigate the research process from start to finish: formulating a research question, conducting a literature review, operationalizing key concepts, analyzing data, and effectively communicating results.

## Required Materials and/or Technologies

- Please bring a laptop, tablet, or cell phone to class.
- Please obtain access to a copy of this text:
  - Babbie, Earl R. 2017. *The Basics of Social Research*. 7th edition. Boston, MA, USA: Cengage Learning.
- All other course materials will be distributed through Microsoft Teams.

## Course Schedule [subject to change]

# Grading and Faculty Communication

## How Your Grade is Determined

Grades in this course will follow a specifications grading model, with assignments assessed on a pass/fail basis based on clearly defined criteria. Your final grade will be determined by the **bundle** of assignments you successfully complete. Students must meet all criteria within a bundle to earn that grade.

## Grading Bundles

- A (Mastery):
  - Complete 95% or more of course assignments with specifications met.
  - Fully participate in 95% or more of class activities.
  - Submit a final paper (extended abstract) that meets all core specifications.
  - Deliver a research presentation that meets all core specifications.
- B (Proficiency):
  - Complete 85–94% of course assignments with specifications met.
  - Participate in 85–94% of class activities.
  - Submit a final paper (extended abstract) that meets all core specifications.
  - Deliver a research presentation that meets all core specifications.
- C (Basic):
  - Complete 75–84% of course assignments with specifications met.
  - Participate in 75–84% of class activities.
  - Submit a final paper (extended abstract) that meets basic specifications.
  - Deliver a research presentation that meets basic specifications.
- F (Fail):
  - Does not meet specifications in one or more bundles.

**Attendance Policy:** Students with three or more unexcused absences will be ineligible for grades above a “C” due to the importance of class participation in this course. Excused absences include illness, religious observances, or college-related activities, with prior notice required when possible.

## Course Assignments

**Description:** Course assignments are designed to deepen your understanding of research methods and build the skills necessary to complete your independent project. These include exercises related to readings, research design, data analysis, and critical evaluation of research. Rubric or specific checklists will accompany assignments to clarify expectations.

## **Specifications for Passing:**

- Complete the assignment fully, correctly addressing the assignment’s specifications.
- Use appropriate grammar and ASA citation formatting when referencing sources.

**Academic Integrity:** Assignments must reflect your original work. Properly cite any sources used. The use of large language models (e.g., ChatGPT, Bard) to complete assignments is discouraged, as assignments are designed to develop critical thinking and research skills.

### **Class Participation**

**Description:** Participation includes completing in-class activities, short reading quizzes, and engaging in class discussions. Active involvement is crucial for collaborative learning.

### **Specifications for Passing:**

- Participate in at least 95% of activities for Bundle A, 85% for Bundle B, and 75% for Bundle C.
- Demonstrate preparedness and engagement in discussions.

**Academic Integrity:** Complete all quizzes and activities independently unless instructions explicitly permit collaboration.

### **Final Paper (Extended Abstract)**

**Description:** The final paper will be an extended abstract of your research project. This assignment will synthesize your research question, methods, and key findings, providing a concise yet comprehensive overview of your work. Detailed specifications and grading criteria will be provided later in the semester to guide your preparation.

**Academic Integrity:** The final paper must be entirely your own work. While you are encouraged to seek feedback on proofreading, no one else should rewrite or substantially revise your submission. Properly cite all sources using ASA style to avoid plagiarism.

### **Research Presentation**

**Description:** During the final exam period, you will deliver a research presentation summarizing your project and findings. This presentation is an opportunity to share your work with your peers and demonstrate your understanding of research methods. Detailed specifications and grading criteria will be shared later in the semester.

**Academic Integrity:** Your presentation must be original and based on your independent research and analysis. Collaboration is not permitted unless explicitly stated. Any visuals or materials used must adhere to academic integrity standards and cite sources where applicable.

### **Late Assignments**

To encourage consistent progress and timely feedback, assignments must be submitted by the due date.

- Revisions: If an assignment does not meet specifications, you may revise and resubmit within one week of receiving feedback. Revisions must address all identified issues.
- Late Submissions: Late assignments must still meet all specifications to pass. Extensions may be granted at the instructor's discretion if requested in advance.

**Instructor Feedback and Response Time**

I am providing the following list to give you an idea of my intended availability throughout the course.

- **Preferred contact method:** If you have a question, please contact me first through our course's **discussion board Q & A on Teams**. If your question is specific to you, please email my Hendrix email address (axxe@hendrix.edu). I will reply to the discussion board and emails within **48 hours on days when class is in session at the college**.
- **Class announcements:** I will send all important class-wide messages through the **General** tab on Teams.
- **Grading and feedback:** For assignments submitted before the due date, I will try to provide feedback and grades within **three days**. Assignments submitted after the due date may have reduced feedback, and grades may take longer to be posted.

**Academic integrity:** Hendrix College is committed to high standards of honesty and fairness in academic pursuits. Such standards are central to the process of intellectual inquiry, the development of character, and the preservation of the integrity of the community.

Please familiarize yourself with the statement of Academic Integrity, which can be found at:

<https://www.hendrix.edu/catalog/default.aspx?id=103330>

**Statement on diversity:** Hendrix College values a diverse learning environment as outlined in the College's Statement on Diversity. All members of this community are expected to contribute to a respectful, welcoming, and inclusive environment for every other member of the community. If you believe you have been the subject of discrimination, please contact the Dean of Students Office (Donna Eddleman, Eddleman@hendrix.edu or the Title IX Coordinator (Jennifer Fulbright titleix@hendrix.edu, 501-505-2901). If you have ideas for improving the inclusivity of the classroom experience please feel free to contact Dr. Axxe. For more information on Hendrix non-discrimination policies visit Hendrix.edu/nondiscrimination.

**Title IX Reports of Discrimination Based on Sex, including Sexual Harassment, Sexual Assault, Stalking, Dating Violence, or Gender-Based Harassment:**

All faculty and staff at Hendrix College are designated as a "Responsible Employee" and are mandated reporters required to report Sexual Misconduct. Hendrix College requires all faculty and staff to report sexual harassment, sexual assault, dating and domestic violence, and stalking against a student or employee to the Title IX Coordinator, Dr. Jennifer Fulbright at fulbright@hendrix.edu or 501-505-2901. Hendrix College cares about the safety of our employees and students and has created this notice because interpersonal violence and sex discrimination in all forms are unacceptable. Hendrix College is committed to holding perpetrators accountable and keeping reporting parties safe. Student's privacy is of utmost importance and Hendrix College will strive to protect your privacy to the extent possible while complying with all applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations as well as Hendrix College policy. Students who desire that details of the incident be kept confidential have two options.

1. Request to speak with a licensed counselor (service available free to students and employees can utilize the Employee Assistance Program), or
2. contact an off-campus rape crisis center.

**Pregnant and Parenting Students:** Title IX prohibits discrimination against a student based on pregnancy, childbirth, false pregnancy, termination of pregnancy, or recovery from any of these conditions; and for parenting a child under one year of age. To learn more about how to request support.

For pregnant and parenting students, contact Title IX Coordinator, Dr. Jennifer Fulbright at fulbright@hendrix.edu or 501-505-2901.

**Health and wellbeing:** Hendrix recognizes that many students face mental and/or physical health challenges. If your health status will impact attendance or assignments, please communicate with me as soon as possible. If you would like to implement academic accommodations, contact Julie Brown in the office of Academic Success (brownj@hendrix.edu). To maintain optimal health, please utilize campus resources like Hendrix Medical Clinic or Counseling Services (501.450.1448). Your health and wellbeing are important.

**Class attendance:** At Hendrix, we believe that regular student attendance in class is necessary for student learning, constitutive of student professional development, and a central component of the Hendrix experience. Therefore, students who do not attend classes have failed to meet an important standard of achievement by not living up to their responsibilities as a member of the campus community. This is particularly true given the emphasis on student discussion and participation in many Hendrix courses. Classroom teachers often consider attendance a significant factor in the evaluation of student performance. Thus, students are expected to attend all class meetings, even in cases when the classroom teacher chooses not to take attendance.

**If students must be absent from class, they are expected to email Dr. Axxe before class.** Without prior notification, absences are unexcused (barring true emergencies). Students will be excused for absences resulting from observance of religious holidays, cases of illness, and athletic competition, as well as any additional reasons as determined by the classroom teacher (e.g., conference travel, Model UN). Students do not need to present third-party documentation for absences related to physical or mental illness. Misrepresenting reasons for an absence to a classroom teacher is a violation of the Academic Integrity Policy.

Students are expected to review the materials they miss during class. In-class assignments can be submitted for excused absences but not for unexcused absences. Because repeated absences impair academic performance regardless of the reason for the absences, **classroom teachers shall contact the student and report repeated absences to their advisor.** If attendance does not improve, the classroom teacher shall inform the Office of Academic Success.

**After following this procedure, classroom teachers may, at their professional discretion, remove from their courses any student whose unexcused absences over any three-week period reach or exceed 50% by notifying the Registrar prior to the deadline for withdrawing from a course.** A student removed from a course under these circumstances will be notified by the Office of the Registrar through the student's Hendrix email account. A student may appeal this action by contacting the Registrar within three business days of the drop notice date. The Registrar will forward the appeal to the Academic Appeals Committee for review and action.

**Technology:** I ask that you please bring a laptop, tablet, or cell phone to class for handouts and quizzes. All readings will be distributed digitally, so this will also allow you to have the materials in class. Much of the technology we interact with is made to be addictive. I suggest you find and use resources that will help you resist distractions. [Here's](#) a website with a list of website blockers. Similar software exists for apps on phones and tablets.

## Other Useful Resources

*Any student who has difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat every day, or who lacks a safe and stable place to live, and believes this may affect their performance in the course, is urged to contact*

*the Dean of Students for support. Furthermore, please notify me if you are comfortable in doing so. This will enable me to provide any resources that I may possess.*

- **Local housing shelters and women's shelters:** Research indicates that a number of low-income college students face homelessness or transient/insecure housing accommodations. Affordable Colleges Online's website provides statistics about college homelessness as well a way to locate local services.
- **Food Pantries:** Here's a list of local food pantries.
- **Zotero:** Zotero is a free citation management software.
- **Grammarly:** Grammarly is a free software that checks and suggests fixes to grammatical errors.
- **The Writing Center:** The Writing Center is a community of peers ready to assist you with your writing projects, in all genres and fields, and at any stage of development. We work with you in one-on-one meetings that you can book in advance or request during our office hours. In-person appointments will follow all pertinent COVID safety protocols. Virtual appointments are available for medical reasons or by special arrangement. To book appointments, and for more information, visit <https://www.hendrix.edu/writingcenter/> or contact [pruneda@hendrix.edu](mailto:pruneda@hendrix.edu). We look forward to working with you!
- **Hendrix Bailey Library:** Bailey Library's mission is to collaborate and empower all members of our community so that they become their best selves, cherish the scope of human knowledge, and positively contribute to the librarians are happy to help locate quality resources supporting research and classroom work and to assist with the critical evaluation of academic information. Librarians and Library Associates provide individual research assistance by appointment. The library building is open seven days a week, and access to the library's online resources is available 24/7. You can visit the library's website at <https://www.hendrix.edu/baileylibrary/> for more information, to book an appointment, and to access the library's Discovery search, Class Guides, and full-text article databases.
- **ADA accommodations:** As your instructor, it is my legal obligation to ensure that all students have equal access to course materials and equal opportunity to perform well in the course. In addition, "It is the policy of Hendrix College to accommodate students with disabilities, pursuant to federal and state law. Students should contact Julie Brown in the Office of Academic Success (505.2954; [brownj@hendrix.edu](mailto:brownj@hendrix.edu)) to begin the accommodation process. Any student seeking accommodation in relation to a recognized disability should inform the instructor at the beginning of the course.