SAMPLE course outline only
Course contents will vary if taught by different teachers.
Please refer to the course teacher for the actual course content offered in each term.

THE CHINESE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG

Department of Sociology

SOCI 2003 Social Research Methods

First Term 2025-26

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Time: 4:30 pm – 6:15 pm (Monday)
Venue: CKB LT3
Course websites/online tools:
https://blackboard.cuhk.edu.hk/
https://padlet.com/hli_cuhk

Course Description

This course introduces the fundamental principles and procedures of empirical research in sociology. We will address the theoretical and practical challenges involved in problem formulation, research design, data collection, and data analysis. The course will cover major types of both quantitative and qualitative social research methods, such as survey research, qualitative interviews, and ethnography. We will also discuss sampling and measurement, and analysis issues associated with their use. Students are required to conduct and report on a basic research project using quantitative and qualitative methods.

Learning Outcomes

After completing this course, students should be able to:

1. Explain the process of scientific inquiry and the steps in social research.
2. Compare and contrast various methods of conducting social research.
3. Evaluate the reliability and validity of research findings.
4. Formulate a research project using appropriate research design.

Course Syllabus

1. Introduction to Social Research
- 1.1. Course orientation
- 1.2. Nature and process of social research

2. Conceptual Issues in Social Research
- 2.1. Theory and research
- 2.2. Differentiating between qualitative and quantitative research
- 2.3. Quality criteria in social research

3. Building Blocks of Social Research
- 3.1. Research design
- 3.2. Formulating research questions
- 3.3. Importance of literature review

4. Quantitative Research
- 4.1. The nature of quantitative research
- 4.2. Survey research
- 4.3. Experimental research
- 4.4. Evaluation research

5. Qualitative Research
- 5.1. The nature of qualitative research
- 5.2. In-depth interviewing
- 5.3. Focus group
- 5.4. Ethnography

6. Materials-Based (or "Unobtrusive") Methods
- 6.1. Analysis of existing quantitative data
- 6.2. Content analysis

7. Sampling in social research
- 7.1. Probability sampling
- 7.2. Non-probability sampling
- 7.3. Sampling in student projects

8. Ethics and Politics in Social Research
- 8.1. Ethical issues in social research
- 8.2. Artificial Intelligence in social research
- 8.3. Taking sides in research

Course Components

The lecturer in person will conduct all lectures according to the schedule provided below. The teaching assistant will guide students through the completion of group research projects and provide help to students in understanding the course content during tutorials. The teaching assistant will schedule the class time for tutorials early in the term.

A 3-unit course typically includes about 39 hours of classroom time and 78-107 hours of self-study. With 2-3 hours for assessment, students should expect to spend a total of 117-146 hours on a 3-unit course.

Teaching Modes and Learning Activities	
On-site face-to-face	**Percentage of time**
Lectures	18%
Tutorials	9%
Assessments (In-class Quiz)	2%
Self-study hours	71%

Assessment Type and Percentage

(I) Group Research Project 40%

Students will form groups in your tutorial class for the group research project. The number of students per group will depend on the size of the class. Your group will complete three tasks on a simple research question of your choosing. One major goal of this assessment task is for students to understand the **strengths** and **limitations** of both **quantitative** and **qualitative** approaches by answering the same research question. Your group will first formulate a research question in Task 1. You will then design a questionnaire in Task 2 and conduct an in-depth interview in Task 3.

Key Guidelines for AI Tool Usage in Group Research Project

Students may use AI tools in the Group Research Project, provided they **explicitly cite or acknowledge** their use. AI should serve as a thinking partner, not a replacement for your own thinking. Appropriate uses include grammar checking, literature searching, paper planning, idea generation, and asking for examples of data collection instruments. **For all AI usage, you must include detailed information about the tools and prompts used in your work**. For examples of how the usage of AI can be acknowledged, please refer to the examples provided towards the end of the course outline.

(II) Tutorial Participation 20%

Tutorials are an integral part of the learning experience. They give you opportunities to engage in the group research project through tasks 1 to 3 with your groupmates under the guidance of a teaching assistant. Students are expected to participate actively in the tutorial class.

(III) In-class Participation 10%

The lecturer will lead interactive activities and in-class exercises **during selected lectures** to help students better grasp course content and fundamental social research concepts. Active participation in these activities will form the basis of the assessment. Each exercise or activity will be worth 1–2 points, depending on its size and scope. Students can earn a maximum of 10 points (10% of their overall grade) for in-class participation.

(IV) In-class Quiz 30%

A **closed-book** quiz will take place during the final lecture on **November 24**. **Electronic devices and AI tools are prohibited during this assessment.** The quiz aims to evaluate your understanding of key course concepts rather than present unnecessary challenges. Please note that alternative arrangements will only be considered for medical reasons or exceptional circumstances, which must be supported by appropriate documentation and approval. Details about the quiz format will be provided to all students toward the end of the term.

Grade Descriptors (Course Level)

Grade	**Grade Descriptors**
A	Outstanding performance on all learning outcomes. • Demonstrates exceptional understanding of scientific inquiry and articulates all research steps with remarkable clarity. • Comprehensively compares various research methods with sophisticated insights into their foundations and limitations. • Critically applies methodological knowledge with exceptional ability to design rigorous research protocols using advanced principles. • Formulates innovative research projects that show mastery of methodological principles. • Skilfully integrates quantitative and qualitative approaches with exemplary attention to ethical considerations.
A-	Generally outstanding performance on most learning outcomes. • Demonstrates comprehensive understanding of scientific inquiry and articulates most research steps clearly. • Thoroughly compares various research methods with well-developed insights into their applications. • Critically applies methodological knowledge with strong ability to assess reliability and validity. • Formulates well-designed research projects showing strong command of methodological principles. • Effectively integrates quantitative and qualitative approaches with careful attention to ethics.
B+ / B / B-	Substantial performance on all learning outcomes, OR high performance on some learning outcomes which compensates for less satisfactory performance on others. • Demonstrates solid understanding of scientific inquiry and explains most research steps accurately. • Compares major research methods, identifying key similarities and differences though analysis may lack depth. • Evaluates reliability and validity using appropriate criteria, though application may be uneven. • Formulates research projects with appropriate designs, though some aspects may need refinement. • Shows good ability to incorporate both quantitative and qualitative approaches with awareness of ethics.
C+ / C / C-	Satisfactory performance on the majority of learning outcomes, possibly with a few weaknesses. • Demonstrates basic understanding of scientific inquiry, though explanation may lack detail. • Distinguishes between major research methods but comparisons may be simplistic. • Recognizes basic issues of reliability and validity but may struggle with consistent application. • Formulates basic research projects that may contain methodological inconsistencies.

	• Shows awareness of quantitative and qualitative approaches but may struggle with integration.
D+ / D	Barely satisfactory performance on a number of learning outcomes. • Demonstrates limited understanding of scientific inquiry with significant gaps. • Identifies some research methods but struggles to make meaningful comparisons. • Shows minimal awareness of reliability and validity issues. • Attempts to formulate research projects but designs contain significant flaws. • Shows limited understanding of either quantitative or qualitative approaches.
F	Unsatisfactory performance on a number of learning outcomes, OR failure to meet specified assessment requirements. • Unable to demonstrate basic understanding of scientific inquiry or research steps. • Cannot meaningfully distinguish between different research methods. • Shows insufficient awareness of reliability and validity concepts. • Unable to formulate coherent research projects or misunderstands methodological principles. • Shows inadequate comprehension of quantitative and qualitative approaches.

Required and Recommended Readings

Textbook

Clark, T., Foster, L., Sloan, L., & Bryman, A. (2022). *Bryman's social research methods* (6th International edition). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- 6th International edition available for purchase at the university bookstore
- 6th International edition available for borrow at CC library (Reserve 2 hours)
- Online textbook (6th UK edition) available on the library website

Other Recommended Textbooks

Babbie, E. R. (2021). *The Practice of Social Research* (15th ed.). Boston, Massachusetts: Cengage Learning.

Course Schedule (2025-26 First Term)

Week	Date	Topic
1	Sep 1	1. Introduction to Social Research
2	Sep 8	2. Conceptual Issues in Social Research
3	Sep 15	3. Building Blocks of Social Research
4	Sep 22	4. Quantitative Research
5	Sep 29	4. Quantitative Research
6	Oct 6	4. Quantitative Research
7	Oct 13	5. Qualitative Research
8	Oct 20	5. Qualitative Research
9	Oct 27	5. Qualitative Research
10	Nov 3	6. Materials-Based Methods
11	Nov 10	7. Sampling in social research
12	Nov 17	8. Ethics and Politics in Social Research
13	Nov 24	In-class Quiz

Due date for ***Group Research Project Reports***: **Dec 8 (23:59)**