

## RESEARCH METHODS IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES (SOSC 2140)

3 Credits, No pre-/co-requisites

Rm 4582

Thursday, 13:30 -14:50

Fall Semester, 2025

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### **Course Description**

The best way to learn social scientific methods is to use them. First-hand experience will help you master the “tools of the sociological trade.” While the course begins with a discussion of the theory and logic of social scientific research, the second half of the course will require you to engage with social scientific methods. You will carry out your own research project as a group and produce a final research paper.

This course will be delivered in a blended mode, i.e., “a blend of self-paced online and face-to-face teaching”. Blended-learning courses at HKUST are supposed “to replace 30-50% of contact hours with online components for self-study and keep the remaining 50-70% of the contact hours for face-to-face learning activities”. For a significant portion of the semester (see schedule below), we meet in person only once a week on *Wednesdays*. On *Mondays* when we do *not* meet in person, instructional videos and a quiz (about the content covered in the videos) will be released through Canvas. You are expected to spend about 45~60 minutes watching the videos and 15~25 minutes working on the quiz. The course is designed in such a way that the minimum amount of time required is no more than other 3-credit bearing courses.

This course is a combination of experiential and blended learning. Experiential learning means that you are ‘learning by doing’. In the course of this course, you will be ‘learning by doing’ in terms of creating, as a group, a viable qualitative research project. In order to do this project, you will be asked to identify a ‘real life’ social issue/topic which will serve as a lens’ through which you will develop and hone your skills as a social science researcher. During the weeks that follow, you will work in your groups, utilizing a set of resources including a series of specially recorded videos, provided reading and your own independently sourced reading to work on the project.

In order to complete the project, it will be necessary for you to watch the online lectures. This is what we call a ‘blended learning’ approach. The advantage of this approach is that you will be able to utilize the time of the instructors more effectively in our class time. However, this approach requires you to take responsibility for engaging with the online materials and other reading. To be clear, you will not be able to complete the course without watching the online videos. You will, however, be closely guided about how to use the online lectures, which to watch and when. A comprehensive Canvas site will be constructed which will allow you to freely download the videos, as well as other relevant materials such as reading and a course calendar.

### **Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)**

1. Gain a comprehensive understanding of quantitative and qualitative social scientific research methods.
2. Develop practical skills in conducting real-world social scientific research.
3. Learn basic skills of reading and appreciating and writing social scientific papers.

### **Course Requirements**

It goes without saying that you must attend class with ALL the readings completed. In addition to your on-going participation, you will be required to complete 2 assignments and 1 presentation (at the end of the semester) as a group (3-6 students a group). You can also form your own, one-person group if you prefer that (e.g., if you are worried that your teammates’ performance may negatively affect your marks on the final paper).

### **Assessment and Grading**

#### **Assessments:**

Class Participation and Quizzes — 40% (attendance records on five randomly selected sessions 15% (each worth 3%) + blended-learning quizzes 25%)

Assignment 1 (at most four pages): Statement of Research Question + Plan for Data Collection (at most two pages) + Topic Guides (at most two pages) — 15%

Assignment 2: Interview Transcripts — 20%

Final Research Paper (including 5% peer review, see below for details) — 25%

<b>Assessment Task</b>	<b>Contribution to Overall Course grade (%)</b>	<b>Due date</b>
Class Participation and Quizzes	40% (attendance on five randomly selected sessions 15% + quizzes 25%)	Due dates vary; See Canvas
Assignment 1: Statement of Research Question + Plan for Data Collection (at most two pages) + Topic Guides (at most two pages)	15%	03/10/2025
Assignment 2: Interview Transcripts	20%	07/11/2024
Final Research Paper (including 5% peer review; see below for details)	25%	12/12/2024

If you must miss a class for medical reasons, you must email the TA **at least one hour before the class start time** and provide valid medical documentation in which the doctor explicitly recommends leave for the specific day of absence. **Do not email the instructor about attendance issues.**

### Mapping of Course ILOs to Assessment Tasks

Assessed Task	Mapped ILOs	Explanation
Class Participation and Quizzes	ILO1	This task assesses students' ability to explain key theoretical concepts in social science research methods.
Assignment 1 and 2	ILO2	This task assesses students' ability to apply theoretical knowledge of research methods to real-life questions.
Final Research Paper	ILO3	This task assesses students' ability to write social science research papers based on their real-life research project.

### Grading Rubrics

Class participation and assignment 2 will be graded on an individual basis (each student receives their own grade). Assignment 1 and the final research paper are graded on a group basis (everyone in the same group receives the same grade). Below are detailed grading rubrics.

#### Assignment 1:

- Can the research questions be answered by in-depth interview? Be aware that the method of in-depth interview may not answer the research questions you are interested in.
- Feasibility of the research plan.
- Extensiveness of the literature review and the extent to which the difference between the current research and prior studies is made clear. Try to state clearly the unique contribution of the research within the context of the literature.
- The extent to which the topic guides are properly phrased. Avoid questions containing ethical assumptions.

#### Assignment 2:

The student receives full grade as long as the transcript is handed in on time and looks original and has a reasonable length.

#### Final Research Paper (including 5% peer review; see below)

The aim of this assignment is to plan, conduct, and write up a project using **qualitative** interviews, applying what you have learned at different stages during the course.

The length of the report should be around 2500 words or 3000 words at most (excluding bibliography). Formatting: double-spaced, 12- point font. Referencing: APA format (7<sup>th</sup>

edition; available in *Zotero*), see:

- <http://www.apastyle.org/learn/tutorials/basics-tutorial.aspx>
- <http://flash1r.apa.org/apastyle/basics/data/resources/references-example.pdf>

Each person in your group should conduct interviews with at least 1 person (lasting typically 45 minutes each). So as a group you should have 3~6 interviews that you can analyze. Note that typically you need to spend two to three hours to transcribe a 45-min interview, so do plan ahead. The structure of the report should follow: (1) Introduction; (2) Motivation; (3) Methods; (4) Findings; (5) Discussion; (6) References.

Since this course deals with *social research methods*, the most important sections for this assignment are (3), (4), and (5). So a *possible* length for each section could be:

(1) Introduction: ~200 words

- A short description of the research topic.
- The explicit formulation of one or more research questions.

(2) Motivation: ~300 words

- A short literature review and a concise explanation about your motivation of studying this particular topic (why this topic matters or, if it is not directly related to public policies, why it is intellectually interesting).

(3) Methods: ~800 words

- Methodological considerations: A discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the chosen method (what aspects of your research question are captured well by your method and which it aspects if may be missed).
- Data collection: A detailed description of how you collected your data.

(4) Findings: ~1000 words

- An analysis and report of your interviews.
- One focus could be the differences between the accounts given by your participants in Hong Kong to those in the original study. Note that this is merely a suggestion. You should definitely pursue other possibilities within the context of your study.

(5) Discussion: ~300 words

- For this assignment, you may use this section to reflect on the whole exercise (research design and conducting of interviews).

Below you can find a list of exemplary studies, based on qualitative interviews that you could, in a sense, replicate in Hong Kong.

Note that you should not spend too much time on selecting a research topic, since the focus of the course is on ‘doing’ the research rather than ‘finding’ an interesting research topic/question.

### **Peer Review (5%)**

The peer review component aims to address free-rider issues in group project. You will fill in a survey on Canvas, where you **only** provide the full name (in the format of **CHAN, Kin Man**) and your rating of the group members that you think should receive a mark less than 5 and add one or two sentences explaining why you want to give them a lower-than-5 score. Those not mentioned by you will automatically receive 5 marks from you. You do NOT need to fill in the survey if you want to give 5 to

everyone in the group.

For example, suppose a group consists of John, Emily, and Steve. Steve filled in the survey with "Emily, 4". Emily filled in the survey with "Steve, 2". John did not respond to the survey. Then John will get 5 pts, Emily will get 4.7 ( $= (5+5+4)/3$ ), Steve will get 4 ( $= (5+5+2)/3$ ).

### **Free-rider Policy**

If all the other team members agree that they don't want to keep collaborating with one person, each one will need to send an email to TA to justify their request. The "free rider" may choose to a) leave the group, construct a new proposal and complete all the remaining assignments independently, or b) stay in the group, stick to the group topic, complete the remaining assignments that are graded on an individual basis, and receive zero score for the remaining assignments that are graded on a group basis.

### **Final Grade Descriptors:**

<b>Grades</b>	<b>Short Description</b>	<b>Elaboration on subject grading description</b>
A	Excellent Performance	Demonstrates a comprehensive grasp of subject matter, expertise in problem-solving, and significant creativity in thinking. Exhibits a high capacity for scholarship and collaboration, going beyond core requirements to achieve learning goals.
B	Good Performance	Shows good knowledge and understanding of the main subject matter, competence in problem-solving, and the ability to analyze and evaluate issues. Displays high motivation to learn and the ability to work effectively with others.
C	Satisfactory Performance	Possesses adequate knowledge of core subject matter, competence in dealing with familiar problems, and some capacity for analysis and critical thinking. Shows persistence and effort to achieve broadly defined learning goals.
D	Marginal Pass	Has threshold knowledge of core subject matter, potential to achieve key professional skills, and the ability to make basic judgments. Benefits from the course and has the potential to develop in the discipline.
F	Fail	Demonstrates insufficient understanding of the subject matter and lacks the necessary problem-solving skills. Shows limited ability to think critically or analytically and exhibits minimal effort towards achieving learning goals. Does not meet the threshold requirements for professional practice or development in the discipline.

### **Course AI Policy**

Use of AI is allowed as long as it does not lead to plagiarism.

### **Communication and Feedback**

Assessment marks will be communicated via Canvas within two weeks of submission. Feedback on assignments will include a few suggestions for further improvement. Students who have further questions about the feedback including marks should consult the instructor or the TA within five working days after the feedback is received.

### **Late submission Policy**

Late submissions will receive a penalty of 5 marks for each day after the deadline (until reaching zero).

**Required Texts and Materials**

Required readings and video materials will be posted on Canvas.

**Academic Integrity**

Students are expected to adhere to the university's academic integrity policy. Students are expected to uphold HKUST's Academic Honor Code and to maintain the highest standards of academic integrity. The University has zero tolerance of academic misconduct. Please refer to [Academic Integrity | HKUST – Academic Registry](#) for the University's definition of plagiarism and ways to avoid cheating and plagiarism.