

SOCIOLOGY II

INDUSTRIAL & ECONOMIC SOCIOLOGY II

2025: SECOND TERM

INTRODUCTION TO SOCIAL RESEARCH



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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the introductory module on social research. Social research is conducted by social scientists and other social investigators to reveal, describe, explain, critique and offer suggestions for improving the social world. At the individual level, we also try to understand the social world. For example, how are individual South Africans coping with and making sense of climate change? Scientific studies are designed to avoid the pitfalls of ordinary human inquiry. Therefore, this module aims to introduce you to the scientific method of social research, with a focus on the following:

- The nature of social research
- Social theory and research
- The research process
- Qualitative and quantitative research designs
- Research concepts, methods, procedures and techniques
- Ethics and politics in social research

The module will run from 7 April to 16 May. Beyond the class and examination mark, the module will provide you with the basic skills to become both a producer and an informed consumer of research in the social sciences and in the media, especially social media. You will learn how research is designed, and how to generate and frame research questions, test concepts, evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of various research strategies, and analyse data. You will also learn to appreciate the challenges that social scientists frequently encounter when investigating social phenomena, and the influence of ethical principles on scientific inquiry.

MODULE STRUCTURE

What we *do* in social research is guided by *thinking about* our personal position and our understanding of our place in the universe (cosmology) and axiology (values), of ontology (ways of being) and epistemology (ways of knowing). Similarly, using the logic of social research, our choices of how we study society rest on and are shaped by the particular ways in which social phenomena are viewed.

The first three weeks of the module will focus on the nature and process of social research, social research strategies and research designs. The last three weeks will involve a practical application of the theoretical discussions covered in the first three weeks, and the module concludes with a discussion of ethics and politics in social research.

PRESCRIBED TEXTBOOK

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

Prescribed Video

United Nations Climate Change (2014). Climate Adaptation Platform. Available at: <https://climateadaptationplatform.com/adapting-to-a-changing-climate-unfccc/>

You are encouraged to read beyond the prescribed book (see the list of recommended readings below). All illustrations in the module will be drawn from research conducted in sub-Saharan Africa, particularly South African studies on climate adaptation. You are also encouraged to apply research concepts and theory when reading research findings published in the media, as well as personal reflections and experiences on climate change.

WEEK 1: THE NATURE AND PROCESS OF SOCIAL RESEARCH

Reading on RUconnected (pp. 1-11)

Social research is a systematic and organised method to investigate a specific problem that needs a solution. It always takes place in specific social, political, and economic contexts. It is also heavily informed and influenced by the researchers' theoretical positions. We will discuss the main elements of social research – i.e. literature review, concepts and theories, research questions, sampling, data collection, data analysis, and writing up. We will also briefly discuss the 'messiness' of social research – i.e., "... the accounts of the findings and how they were arrived at tend to follow an implicit template that emphasizes some aspects of the research process but not others" (Bryman *et al.*, 2022: 11).

WEEK 2: SOCIAL RESEARCH STRATEGIES: QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Readings on RUconnected (pp. 13-28; 99-101; 279-280)

What is the importance of theory in research? How can theory guide research? How can data collection and data analysis be used to test theory? What is the relationship between theory and research? These questions will be answered in these week's lectures, and we will also discuss how theory can *follow upon* (deductive approach) or *arise from* (inductive approach) the collection of data.

We will also briefly discuss theory of knowledge (epistemology) which focuses on notions of what can be known and how knowledge can be acquired, and whether the social sciences should follow the same principles and procedures as the natural sciences. We will also discuss the philosophical study of being (ontology) which is concerned with the nature of things that exist. More narrowly, the ontology of a theory are the kinds of 'stuff' (objects, properties, relations, etc.) that, according to the theory, exist in reality. In simple terms, ontology is associated with what we consider as reality.

We end the week with an overview of the two approaches to research: namely, quantitative and qualitative research. A detailed account on how to do quantitative and qualitative research will be covered in weeks 4-6.

WEEK 3: RESEARCH DESIGNS

Reading on RUconnected (pp, 44-58)

A research design provides a framework for the collection and analysis of data. A choice of research design reflects decisions about a range of dimensions of the research process such as understanding individual action and the meaning of that activity in its specific social context.

WEEK 4: QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

Readings on RUconnected (pp. 99-117; 120-141; 143-160)

As discussed in week 2, quantitative research often takes a *deductive* view of the relationship between theory and research, which means that theory comes first, driving the research, rather than emerging from it. The focus will be on the process of quantitative research – e.g., how to define and formulate a research question, sampling, and data collection methods.

WEEKS 5: QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Readings on RUconnected (pp. 279-303; 305-316; 347-366; 372-391; 436-459;)

As discussed in week 2, qualitative research often takes an *inductive* view of the relationship between theory and research, which means theory emerges from research. The focus will be data collection methods in qualitative research, sampling and semi-structured interviewing.

WEEK 6: MIXED METHODS RESEARCH & ETHICS AND POLITICS IN SOCIAL RESEARCH

Readings on RUconnected (pp. 520-537; 472-491)

The discussion this week is on the mixed methods research, an approach used to gain a deeper, more comprehensive understanding of a research problem. This is accomplished by integrating the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative research. We then discuss ethics and politics in social research. All research raises ethical issues. When we talk about ‘ethics’ in social research, we are addressing those issues that concern the behaviour of social researchers and the consequences of their research for the people they study. As such, ethical issues have the potential to impact on *every* stage of the research process.

Recommended Readings

The prescribed and optional readings are available on Short Loan and 48-Hour Loan in the library. Key readings will be placed on RUconnected. You are encouraged to search for and read electronic journal articles on studies on climate adaptation in sub-Saharan Africa, especially South African studies (see the list of useful journals below).

Babbie, E. R. & Mouton, J. (2001). *The practice of social research*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press.

Babbie, E. R. (2016). *The practice of social research* (fourteenth edition). Belmont, CA: Cengage Learning. [ebook available on OPAC]

Babbie, E. R. (2017). *The basics of social research* (seventh edition). Boston: Cengage Learning.

Bryman, A. (2012). *Social research methods* (fourth edition). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Creswell, J.W. (2009). *Research design: Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods approaches* (third edition). London: Sage Publications.

Neuman, W.L. (2006). *Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Boston, Mass.: Allyn and Bacon.

Neuman, W.L. (2014). *Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Boston, Mass.: Allyn and Bacon.

Punch, K. (2005). *Introduction to social research: Quantitative and qualitative approaches*. London: Sage.

Ritchie, J. & Lewis, J. (2003). *Qualitative research practice. A guide for social science students and researchers*. London: SAGE Publications.

Terre Blanche, M. & Durrheim, K. (2006). *Research in practice: Applied methods for the social sciences*. Cape Town: UCT Press.

Sarantakos, S. (2012). *Social research*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

United Nations. Climate Adaptation Platform. Available at: <https://climateadaptationplatform.com/>

Useful Journals on South African Studies

Acta Academica. Available at: <https://0-journals.co.za.wam.seals.ac.za/journal/academ>

South African Review of Sociology. Available at: <https://0-www.tandfonline.com.wam.seals.ac.za/loi/rssr20>

Recommended Video

Prince EA. Man vs Earth. Change for Balance. Available at: <https://youtu.be/hjmKYkMMC9A>

ASSESSMENT

There will be three forms of assessment for this course – i.e., a test that will count 70% of the class mark, three workshop assignments that will count 30% of the class mark, and a June examination paper. The format for the test and examination will be one-word and short (three to four sentences) answers. The module mark is composed as follows:

Test and workshops 40%

June examination 60%

The test will be written in Bio-Science Major on: **9 May in Bioscience Major at 14h15 -15h15**

Three *compulsory* workshops will be conducted on **11 & 25 April**, and **2 May**. As earlier stated, workshop assignments count 30% of the term mark, therefore it is in your best interest to prepare and participate meaningfully in the workshops. The workshops will be facilitated by Teaching Assistants, who will also mark the workshop assignments. You must submit a copy of your answers to workshop questions on Turnitin by Thursday midnight.

Workshop I: 11 April

The focus is on the 'context of social research' covered in Week 1. The workshop topic is: '*Happiness*.'

- What does *happiness* mean to you?
- What assumptions do you have on *happiness*?
- Identify two to three concepts from Rubin (2024) and Seaver (2024) webpages that you can use in a study on *happiness*.
- What other concepts can you think of?
- Provide an explanation why the chosen concepts are ideal for your study on happiness.

Prescribed webpages on *happiness*:

Rubin G. (2024). How to be happy: 14 extremely practical tips for more happiness in your life. Available at : <https://www.realsimple.com/health/mind-mood/emotional-health/10-ways-happier>

Seaver, M. (2024). 12 everyday habits to make yourself happier. Available at: <https://www.realsimple.com/how-to-be-happier-7485523>

Workshop II: 25 April

The focus is on the main elements of social research covered in Weeks 1 and 2, and the workshop topic is *happiness*.

- Which research method (qualitative or quantitative) would you use in a study on *happiness* (provide reasons for your choice)?
- What sampling method would you use (provide reasons for your choice)?
- What data collection method will you use (provide reasons for your choice)?
- Formulate 5 structured (closed-ended) questions/items and 5 semi-structured (open-ended) questions that you will use to collect data.

Workshop III: 2 May

The focus is on research design and theory in social research covered in Weeks 1 to 3. The workshop topic is *happiness*.

- What research design (quantitative or qualitative or mixed method) can you use to study happiness (provide reasons for your choice)
- What theory can you use to research this topic (provide reasons for your choice)?

Recommended Reading

Kollamparambil, U. (2019). Happiness, happiness inequality and income dynamics in South Africa. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, Vol. 21, pp. 201-222.

Please consult the Sociology Handbook for an outline of the University's policy on plagiarism, guidelines on the formatting and writing of assignments, the departmental rules regarding citations and referencing, and the criteria for assessing written work. A copy of the Assignment Cover Sheet, which must accompany all assignments submitted to the Department, is also available in the Handbook.

MODULE EVALUATION

As a department, we are committed to reflecting on our teaching practices and module content to strengthen our courses. Towards the end of the term, you will be asked to participate in a module evaluation process. Please take this seriously and evaluate the module honestly and comprehensively. Your input will be highly appreciated and make a real contribution to enhancing teaching and learning in the department.

CONSULTATION TIMES

Tuesday: 09h30 - 12h30

Wednesday: 10h30 - 12h30

Please email me for an appointment.