

Research Methods

Department of Human Ecology, School of Environmental and Biological Sciences,
Fall Semester 2025

Course Information

Number Section: 11:374:201:01
Meeting Time: M/W 2 to 3.20 PM
Location: HCK 209
Website: Canvas.

Instructor

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Office Hours: Mondays from 1 PM
and/or by appointment.



N.B.: The course syllabus is a general plan for the course; deviations announced to the class by the instructor may be necessary.



Course Description:

During this course, we will explore how social scientists empirically investigate and quantify behavior within the social world. We will learn about quantitative and qualitative social science research methods. We will study definitions and concepts such as hypothesis, thesis, statistics, quantitative vs. qualitative approaches, validity, surveys, and interviews among others.

On this new adventure, I strongly encourage the critical consideration of conceptual definitions such as policy, environment, ecology, culture, society, and landscape. Critical, in this instance, means that we will not take any assumptions or explanations for granted. In class, we will reconstruct the historical and epistemological context in which definitions and arguments are used and how they have been applied to investigate the social and environmental world.

Objectives: What's in for me?

Major Objectives:

- Goal 1.5. Goals 2.1, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.10 and 2.11. Goals 3.1 and 3.2.
<https://humanecology.rutgers.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Learning-Goals-EPIB.pdf>

Thematic

- Review and evaluate major theoretical and applied frameworks for investigating research problems in human-environmental interactions.
- Explore and discuss theoretical tools and methodological techniques for studying human-environment interactions (from qualitative studies, to reconstructions and statistical models).
- Evaluate evidence and processes to generate valid evidence (methods) in terms of their scientific merit.
- Explore issues associated with the ethics of research in human-environment interactions.
- Understand general principles of scientific investigation, as well as specific challenges facing social scientists.

Instructional

- To train students in formulating a valid research problem and associated methods.

- To train students in distinguishing evidence and the processes of evidence generation in research practices.
- To expose students to different techniques to carry out research in the field of socioecological systems, human ecology, and natural resource management policies, including historical and contemporary works, with a keen eye on psychological, sociological and anthropological contributions and perspectives.
- To train students to be more effective readers and engage in discussions, to be able to identify major theses and limitations in other perspectives, to identify benefits and ways to move forward in addressing obstacles.
- To train students to be more effective in written and oral presentation, argumentation and facilitation techniques.
- Propose and conduct a small original research study, including research design, simple data analysis, and presentation.

Assignments

- 1) DISCUSSIONs and class participation.
- 2) CITI training completion.
- 3) SMALL original research study (Group work).
- 4) EXAMS: 2 short answer/ multiple choice exams. (25 points each).
- 5) FINAL: You will be responsible for developing a short and to the point research paper (2500 words, without citations). The term paper offers students (1) the opportunity to explore a topic of their choosing in greater depth, and (2) an exercise in scientific critical writing. Topics should pertain to the themes discussed in the class. **The paper is something you should be working on throughout the semester.** The assignment will have several parts and due dates. More specifics of the assignment will be provided in a separate handout.

On writing conventions and citation style:

All written materials for this class will be typed and consistently formatted. For issues of style beyond general document formatting refer to the current APA/MLA norms. Use American word spellings. If you need any help on managing citations and software, please do not hesitate to reach out. I advise the use of Zotero or any other reference manager.

Grades

To get an A, you are required to have at least 94 points. To get a B, you should score somewhere between 85 and 83, and a C anywhere between 73 and 75. A D is any score between 63 and 65. You will fail if you score below 60.

A+, A	94–100%, 94–100%, 90–93%
B+, B	86–89%, 83–85%, 80–82%
C+, C	76–79%, 73–75%, 70–72%
D+, D	66–69%, 63–65%, 60–62%

Item	Points	Due Date
Participation by discussion.	5 points	By choice
CITI training	10 points	9/24
Exams	20 points each	10/15 and 3/12
Small Research Study Group Project	30 points	Final Presentation Final two classes
Final Scientific Reflection	15 points	End of Semester, 12/10
	100 points	

Extra points will be awarded for participation and during extra-credit assignments (10 points). So, you can still make an A even when you don't get perfect scores in the class.

Expectations and Requirements:

- Punctual attendance.
- Active participation in class.
- On-time submissions (you will lose points for not submitting on time...)
- DO THE READINGS and Do your own work!
- Compliance with Rutgers policies for ethical conduct. Each student is responsible to inform themselves about those standards before performing any academic work.

<http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-policy>

Participation:

Because the design of this class is highly participatory, you will be graded on your level of participation. This includes the designated discussion days as well as all of the other class periods. Yet, the instructor recognizes that talking in public may be easier for some while difficult for others. We will work together to determine a common rubric for evaluating participation and how to improve class engagement. All of this said, you are strongly encouraged to take part in discussions, state your informed opinion (based on arguments from the class materials and evidence-based articles or case studies), and challenge any assumptions that you may find compelling or wrong.

Late Assignments/Make-ups: Can I take an exam late or submit an assignment late? Not unless you have a really good reason—trouble with the law, unforeseen illness or death, savage attack by wild geese, etc. Whether a make-up assignment will be permitted, and its format, are at the discretion of the instructor. If at all possible, please contact the instructor before the due date, or alternatively, within the following 24 hours.

Attendance: Class attendance is very important, both for individual benefits and for the collective social benefits that come from class discussion. As an added incentive to participate, you will accrue points for each class you attend. Doctors' notes, obituaries, and attendance to academic conferences are the only justifiable excuses for missing class. If weather, vehicle maintenance issues, heartache, sickness, etc. cause you to miss class, the instructor will be sympathetic, but you will not earn attendance points.

“Netiquette” Policies

- Identify yourself in all email or Canvas message correspondence. Begin messages with a greeting and close with your name.
- Avoid sarcasm. It can be misinterpreted and cause hurt feelings.
- Keep the dialog collegial and professional. Some discussion topics may be controversial.
- Do not flame - These are outbursts of extreme emotion or opinion. Think twice before you submit a response. You cannot edit or delete your posts once they have been submitted.
- Do not use offensive language or profanity.
- Use clear subject lines for your posts.
- Do not use all caps. It is the online equivalent of YELLING!
- Avoid using abbreviations or acronyms - like UNESCO - unless the entire class knows them.
- Use emoticons to clarify your emotions. They add context to your words that cannot be seen otherwise. :)
- Be forgiving. Anyone can make a mistake.

FOLLOW THE ACADEMIC INTEGRITY POLICY AT ALL TIMES:
<http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-policy>

Resources for remediation

Students can find academic support at the Rutgers Learning Centers.
<https://rlc.rutgers.edu>

Accommodations for special needs

Learning disabilities: Students with disabilities who require reasonable accommodations in order to participate in course activities or meet course requirements should contact the instructor or designate during regular office hours or by appointment. Rutgers has many resources that we can rely upon, but this requires some planning. So meeting with the instructor is the best way we can make the most out of available resources.
Students with disabilities requesting accommodations must follow the procedures outlined at the Office of Disability Services.

<https://ods.rutgers.edu>

About inclusion and diversity:

This class is a safe space. Please talk to the instructor if anything happens that threatens that. This includes: microaggressions, open aggressions, things that bothered you... etc. And remember to SPEAK UP!

<https://diversity.rutgers.edu/speakup>

<https://studentaffairs.rutgers.edu/resources/bias-prevention-reporting#tab=panel-2>

<https://diversity.rutgers.edu>

We acknowledge that the land on which we stand is the ancestral territory of the Lenape People. We pay respect to Indigenous people throughout the Lenape diaspora—past, present, and future—and honor those that have been historically and systemically disenfranchised.

Course Readings

We will read several chapters from this book:

Kanazawa, Mark. 2023. Research Methods for Environmental Studies: A Social Science Approach.

Available for free through Rutgers Libraries. You can download a PDF copy from the library website.

Readings AND Assignments by Date

Date	Topic	Reading Assignment
Wednesday, September 3, 2025	Introduction and Syllabus.	No reading assignment; get started on next week's work.
Monday, September 8, 2025	What is research? Basic knowledge and concepts	Chapter 1
Wednesday, September 10, 2025	History of Knowledge and Argumentation	Chapter 2
Monday, September 15, 2025	History Part 2: Empiricism, Inductivism, Popper and Kuhn	Chapter 2
Wednesday, September 17, 2025	General Research Design Principles: What is a research question?	Chapter 3/22
Monday, September 22, 2025	Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches in general: what to use?	Chapter 3
Wednesday, September 24, 2025	Ethical Issues in Research: Plagiarism, Evidence, and dubious research practices	Chapter 4 CITI TRAINING
Monday, September 29, 2025	Watch Documentary on the Stanford Prison Experiment on your own (no in person class) https://tubitv.com/movies/684126/the-stanford-prison-experiment	Chapter 4 CITI TRAINING DUE
Wednesday, October 1, 2025	Quantitative Research: introducing hypothesis and testing	Chapter 5
Monday, October 6, 2025	Quantitative Research: Data and Samples	Chapter 6/19
Wednesday, October 8, 2025	Quantitative Research: Playing with data and designing tools	Chapter 6/19
Monday, October 13, 2025	Basic Quantitative Analysis and Presenting Data	Chapter 7/19
Wednesday, October 15, 2025	EXAM 1	
Monday, October 20, 2025	Intro to Spatial Analysis	Chapter 10
Wednesday, October 22, 2025	Qualitative Research: Intro	Chapter 11
Monday, October 27, 2025	Qualitative Research: Intro	Chapter 11
Wednesday, October 29, 2025	Coding for Qualitative Research	Chapter 12
Monday, November 3, 2025	Playing with interviews and presenting findings	Chapter 12/20
Wednesday, November 5, 2025	Case Studies	Chapter 13
Monday, November 10, 2025	Ethnography	Chapter 14/20
Wednesday, November 12, 2025	Field notes	Chapter 14/20
Monday, November 17, 2025	Discourse Analysis	Chapter 16
Wednesday, November 19, 2025	Exercise in class	

Monday, November 24, 2025	No Class, Friday Schedule	
Wednesday, November 26, 2025	Mixed Methods	Chapter 18
Monday, December 1, 2025	Catching Up	
Wednesday, December 3, 2025	EXAM 2	
Monday, December 8, 2025	Oral Presentations I. Post 3 slides with voice over.	
Wednesday, December 10, 2025	FINAL DAY OF CLASS. Oral Presentations II. Post 3 slides with voice over. FINAL reflection DUE. Soft Deadline.	