


VIRGINIA STATE UNIVERSITY

College of Humanities & Social Science · Department of Sociology & Criminal Justice  
Course Syllabus · Summer 2026

## Research Methods — Independent Study

SOCI 430 / SOCI 317 · Independent Study (IS)

<b>Course</b>	SOCI 430 / SOCI 317 — Research Methods (Independent Study)
<b>Format</b>	100% Online, Asynchronous + Weekly Microsoft Teams check-in (1 hr/week)
<b>Dates</b>	May 26 – July 30, 2026 (8 weeks)
<b>Credit Hours</b>	3
<b>Instructor</b>	Dr. James Fraser, Associate Professor & Sociology Program Coordinator
<b>Office</b>	Alfred Harris Academic Commons 1217 · Teams by appointment
<b>Contact</b>	<b>Email (first):</b> jfraser@vsu.edu · <b>Text:</b> 804-304-7105 · <b>Teams:</b> email/text to schedule
<b>Prerequisite</b>	SOCI 317 (for SOCI 430) or instructor permission

 **Who this is for:** This section is for **Chris, Jordyn, and Zaviyon**. Email or text me anytime this summer — don't wait until you're stuck.

## Course Description

A hands-on independent study in social science research design. You'll move through the complete research process — from a question to a professional research proposal — building one project across eight modules, with AI as a research collaborator at every stage.



## How every module works — the same 4 steps






You never have to guess what to do. Every module follows the identical path:


<b>1 Start Here</b> overview + videos	<b>2 Reading Guide</b> read + questions	<b>3 AI Lab</b> AI exercises	<b>4 Submit + Badge</b> upload & earn
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Do them top to bottom. Finish all four and you earn that module's badge. Finish all eight and you earn the **Platinum** credential.

## Your AI Toolkit

This course runs on an **exploratory AI policy** — you are *required* to use AI as a thinking partner. A full setup guide lives on the Canvas home page. Your five tools:

Tool	Where	What it's for
 <b>Claude</b>	claude.ai	Your main thinking partner — explains, quizzes, role-plays, critiques.
 <b>Gemini</b>	gemini.google.com	A second opinion and quick cross-checks.
 <b>NotebookLM</b>	notebooklm.google.com	Your research library — answers only from sources you add.
 <b>Scite</b>	scite.ai	Find real research and see if it's supported or disputed.
 <b>Google Scholar</b>	scholar.google.com	Search peer-reviewed articles; grab clean citations.

 Your course notebook: <https://notebooklm.google.com/notebook/b31b53ec-0f54-4e82-b9b3-9e181974c4ca>

**The one rule:** use AI openly, then make the work yours. Every assignment includes a 2–3 sentence **AI disclosure** (which tools, what for, how you checked/changed the output). Using AI is not cheating; turning in its words as your own thinking, with no disclosure, is.

## The AI Skill Ladder

Each module adds one new AI skill, so it gets richer without ever getting overwhelming:

Module	New skill	What it means
1	<b>Prime &amp; Ask</b>	Give the AI context (your reading, your project), then ask. The habit everything builds on.

2	<b>Compare &amp; Map</b>	Put two ideas side by side and map the connections.
3	<b>Roleplay &amp; Be Challenged</b>	Have the AI play a role (a theorist, an ethics board) and put you under pressure.
4	<b>Critique My Work</b>	Paste your own draft and demand tough, specific feedback.
5	<b>Research with Scite &amp; Scholar</b>	Find and verify real studies and measures.
6	<b>Co-Build with the AI</b>	Design something together, step by step.
7	<b>Stress-Test</b>	Make the AI attack your work to find the weak spots.
8	<b>Synthesize in NotebookLM</b>	Pull all your materials into one coherent whole.

## Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

- Articulate a sociological research question and connect it to theory
- Apply ethical guidelines in designing research
- Select and justify appropriate research methods
- Design a data collection instrument (survey, interview guide, or protocol)
- Develop an analysis plan for quantitative and/or qualitative data
- Use AI tools (Claude, Gemini, NotebookLM, Scite) responsibly as research partners
- Produce a complete, professional research proposal

## Schedule & Badges

Recommended pace below. You may work ahead. The **only hard deadline is July 30, 2026**.

#	Module	Dates	Reading	Badge	Pts
1	The Research Journey	May 26 – Jun 1	Carr Ch. 1–2	 Curious Mind (Bronze)	20
2	From Question to Theory	Jun 2 – 8	Carr Ch. 2, 4	 Theory Builder (Bronze)	25
3	Ethics & Integrity	Jun 9 – 15	Carr Ch. 3	 Ethics Board Member (Bronze)	25
4	Concepts, Validity & Sampling	Jun 16 – 22	Carr Ch. 4–6	 Concept Mapper (Bronze)	30

5	Surveys & Experiments	Jun 23 – 29	Carr Ch. 7–8	 Survey Scientist (Silver)	30
6	Qualitative Methods Deep Dive	Jun 30 – Jul 6	Carr Ch. 10–12	 Field Scientist (Silver)	25
7	Analyze & Write It Up	Jul 7 – 13	Carr Ch. 13–14	 Data Analyst (Gold)	40
8	Advanced Methods & Final Project	Jul 14 – 30	Carr Ch. 15–17	 Research Scientist (Platinum)	50
<b>TOTAL</b>					<b>245</b>

## Grading Scale

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Grade	Score
A	90% and above
B	80.0–89.9%
C	70.0–79.9%
D	60.0–69.9%
F	Below 60%

## Course Policies

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**Pace & Late Work.** No weekly hard deadlines — only the July 30, 2026 final deadline. Contact me before then if you need an accommodation. Missing two or more modules without prior communication is grounds for course failure.

**Academic Integrity.** Cite the source and the author. The line is clear: your argument, your voice, your badge. AI use without disclosure is a violation.

**ADA Accommodations.** Contact me at the start of the course; accommodations will be made.

**Wellness.** University Counseling Services (804) 524-5939 · Student Health (804) 524-5711 · 24-hour crisis line 988.