Unit 1 Key Terms

**Empirical Research** – The production of knowledge based on experience and/or observation.

**Attributes** – Characteristics or qualities that describe some object such as a person, thing or place. Examples might include 'teenager,' ‘unemployed,’ ‘death row inmate,’ ‘jail,’ and ‘married.’ Any quality we use to describe something, someone, or someplace.

**Variables** – Logical categorizations of attributes. For example, the categorizations of ‘male’ and ‘female’ compose the variable of ‘gender’. Whereas, ‘single,’ ‘married,’ ‘divorced,’ ‘separated,’ and ‘widowed’ may compose the variable of ‘marital status.’

**Dependent Variable** – A variable that depends on or is caused by an independent variable. Assume the research scenario in which we determine that prison sentence length is determined by the severity of the crime committed by the offender. The sentence length, which is the dependent variable, varies according to the effects of the independent variable, or the severity of the offender’s crime.

**Grounded Theory** - A type of inductive theory that is based on (grounded in) field observation. The researcher makes observations in natural settings, and then formulates a tentative theory that explains those observations.

**Intersubjective agreement** - That quality of science (and other inquiries) whereby two different researchers studying the same problem arrive at the same conclusion. Ultimately, this is the practical criterion for what is called objectivity. We agree that something is "objectively true" if independent observers with different subjective orientations conclude that it is "true."

**Paradigm** - A fundamental perspective or model that organizes our view of the world. Thomas Kuhn (1970) coined this term in the philosophy of science. Paradigms affect how we select and define problems for research, together with the methods we use in conducting research. *Note: Compare this to the definition of theory.*

**Confidentiality** - Researchers know the identity of a research subject but promise not to reveal any information that can be attributed to an individual subject. Anonymity is similar, but sometimes researchers need to know subjects' names in order to link information from different sources. Assuring confidentiality is one way of meeting our ethical obligation to not harm subjects.

**Replication** - Repeating a research study to test the findings of an earlier study, often under slightly different conditions or for a different group of subjects. Replication results either support earlier findings or cause us to question the accuracy of an earlier study.
Conception - The mental images we have that represent our thoughts about things we routinely encounter. We use the word *speeding* (a concept) to represent our mental image (conception) of traveling above the posted speed limit.

Construct validity - (1) The degree to which a measure relates to other variables as expected within a system of theoretical relationships. (2) How well an observed cause-and-effect relationship represents an underlying causal process in which a researcher is interested. Also see validity threats.

Criterion-related validity - The degree to which a measure relates to some external criterion. For example, the validity of self-report surveys of drug use can be shown by comparing survey responses to laboratory tests for drug use.

Face Validity - The quality of an indicator that makes it seem a reasonable measure of some variable. That sentence length prescribed by law is some indication of crime seriousness seems to make sense without a lot of explanation; it has face validity.

Operationalization - One step beyond conceptualization. Operationalization is the process of developing operational definitions by describing how actual measurements will be made.

Ratio Measure - A level of measurement that describes a variable whose attributes have all the qualities of nominal, ordinal, and interval measures and in addition are based on a "true zero" point. Length of prison sentence is an example of a ratio measure.