

MMC 6421: Research Methods in Mass Communication

3024 Weimer Hall

Section: 03E3; Tuesdays: 11:00 a.m. to 3:15 p.m.; Wednesdays: 12:30 to 3:15 p.m.

Summer A 2013

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Office hours: Wednesdays, 10 a.m. to noon or by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course provides a basic overview of common methods employed in mass communication research. The focus will be on content analysis, surveys and experiments, although other methods will also be evaluated.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

1. To understand various mass communication research methods
2. To employ SPSS to enter and analyze numeric data
3. To evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of research studies.
4. To develop a group research project.
5. To understand key methodological issues, such as sampling, reliability and validity.

REQUIRED BOOKS:

1. Babbie, Earl (2013). *The Practice of Social Research* (13th Edition). Belmont: Wadsworth.

FORMAT:

This course will focus mainly on learning, understanding and employing methodological techniques and concepts. I have assigned book chapters each week and I expect them to be read before class. As graduate students, I assume that you are attending class to learn and that you want to be challenged. As a professor, I plan to engage in thoughtful discussion and enjoy differing viewpoints.

The course format will be a mix of lecture, discussion and workshops, with the focus on understanding the topics of the week. Often I will introduce the concept at the beginning of class and the remaining time will be spent on activities and computer work that will help apply the ideas in various settings.

GROUP WORK AND TOPIC SELECTION:

Students are encouraged to work in teams on a final research proposal. Group sizes may vary, but generally groups should be no larger than two students without instructor approval. Students may work alone but they must receive instructor approval beforehand.

While group issues may arise, the students are instructed to first attempt to solve the issue among the members before bringing it to the attention of the instructor.

GRADING:

Grading for the course will consist of six components:

- Exam #1 (100 points) 20 percent
- Exam #2 (100 points) 20 percent
- Class Exercises and Assignments (100 points each) 20 percent
- Class Participation/Attendance/Group Work 10 percent
- Group Research Proposal (100 points) 30 percent

1. EXAMS: There will be two exams, administered through E-learning, outside of class. Portions will be objective (e.g., true/false and multiple choice), while other sections will be essay.
2. CLASS EXERCISES AND ASSIGNMENTS: Students will complete several class assignments and exercises as part of their methodological training.
 - News Article Analysis
 - Survey Exercise
 - Experiment Exercise
 - Content Analysis Exercise
 - Qualitative Exercise
3. GROUP/CLASS PARTICIPATION/ATTENDANCE: This class is group-focused; therefore, evaluation of participation will stem from both class attendance and participation AND each student's role in the group projects. Within class meetings, all students are expected to attend, be prepared at each class meeting, and contribute to class discussions. In addition, group members will be asked to evaluate the participation of each member in developing the final work product—those evaluations will be part of your final participation grades. You will not receive full credit for this portion of the class if you do not regularly participate in class discussions.
2. RESEARCH PROPOSAL: Groups will develop a research proposal/study (15-20 pages) to develop research questions/hypotheses related to the examination of a mass communication topic. The paper will include a literature review, method of study, methodological instrument and discussion of how the data would be analyzed.
4. FINAL GRADING: The University's grading information can be found at <http://www.registrar.ufl.edu/catalog/policies/regulationgrades.html>. Final grades will be tallied using the following scale for the class:
 - 92-100 A
 - 90-91.99 A-
 - 88-89.99 B+
 - 82-87.99 B

- 80-81.99 B-
- 78-79.99 C+
- 72-77.99 C
- 70-71.99 C-
- 68-69.99 D+
- 62-67.99 D
- 60-61.99 D-
- Below 60 E

MISCELLANEOUS

Assignments and Readings: All assignments must be turned in at the **BEGINNING** of class or earlier. No exceptions. All readings are to be completed before the start of lecture on the day assigned. Given the fluid nature of the research project, deadlines for assignments may be delayed depending upon circumstances. If a situation arises (personal or course-related) in which a student/group may need extra time for an assignment, the instructor must be informed **IN ADVANCE** and will determine the appropriate remedy. Extensions should not be assumed, nor are they guaranteed.

Class Attendance/Participation: Attendance is expected and students with two or more unexcused absences from class meetings will receive grade reductions. Students who miss class for excused absences (as defined by university policies at <http://gradcatalog.ufl.edu/content.php?catoid=4&navoid=907&hl=attendance&returnto=search#attendance>) must make arrangements with the professor **IN ADVANCE** of the absence. In addition to attendance, I expect students to participate in discussions and add to the intellectual content of the course. Both of these criteria must be met to receive the full points of credit in this portion of the class.

Plagiarism; Cheating or other Academic Misconduct: Each graduate student signed an Academic Integrity Statement when they entered the college of Journalism and Communications. For a reminder, here is a link to the statement:

<http://www.jou.ufl.edu/grad/forms/Plagiarism-Guideline.pdf>

In addition, all students are bound by the university's Honor Code Policy at <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/>. **Anyone who violates these policies in this course will receive a failing grade in this course and face further sanctions from the college and university.**

Special needs: Students requesting classroom accommodation must first register with the Dean of Students Office. The Dean of Students will provide documentation to the student who must then provide this documentation to the instructor when requesting accommodation. *This course conforms to all requirements of the ADA and handles with sensitivity all matters related to gender, race, sexual orientation, age, religion or disability. Please alert the instructor if any issues arise.*

Miscellaneous: Given the fluid nature of a research project, the instructor reserves the right to alter the syllabus or course schedule as the need arises.

COURSE OUTLINE

Week 1:

May 14: *A) Getting Started*

Course overview

Expectations

Beginnings

Readings: Babbie, Ch. 1 and 2

B) What is research?

Main disciplines of research

Overall goals of research

SPSS Intro

May 15: *Ethical Issues in Research*

Being deceptive

Scary situations

Am I being fair?

Guest Speaker: Dr. Ira Fischler, IRB-02 Chair.

Readings: Babbie, Ch. 3

IRB training: <http://apps.research.uci.edu/tutorial/>

IRB training completed (Turn in certificate)

Week 2:

May 21: *A) Sampling*

Types of sampling

SPSS Data entry

Readings: Babbie, Ch. 7

Sampling critique due by May 28

B) Research Design

Unit of Analysis

Conceptualization and Operationalization

Readings: Babbie, Ch 4 & 5

May 22: *Measurement:*

Scale construction

Reliability and Validity

Finalize project topics

Readings: Babbie, Ch. 6

Week 3:

May 28: *Qualitative Research Methodology*

Focus groups

Participant Observation

Ethnography

Guest Speaker: Dr. Robyn Goodman, Department of Advertising

Qualitative Exercise (Due to e-learning by June 1)

Readings: Babbie, Ch. 10

May 29: Experiments

Control groups

Random assignment and cell size

Deception and Debriefing

Experimental Design

In class Experimental Design Exercise

Readings: Babbie, Ch. 8

E-learning exam completed by 11:59 p.m. on June 5

Week 4:

June 4: No class: Exam Day. Exam completed by 11:59 p.m.

June 5: Content Analysis

Intercoder reliability

Developing a codebook

Readings: Babbie, Ch. 11; E-learning reading chapter on Content Analysis

In class Content Analysis exercise

Week 5:

June 11: Surveys

Writing questions

Choosing population

In-class survey exercise

Readings: Babbie, Ch. 9

Group meetings

June 12: SPSS: All you need to know...

Readings: Babbie, Ch. 14 & 16

Group meetings

Week 6:

June 18: Class Presentations

June 19: Group Research Proposal Due by Noon

EXAM #2 DUE BY 11:59 p.m. June 20