

## **SYLLABUS: RESEARCH METHODS IN MASS COMMUNICATION (MMC 6421)**

**Instructor information and virtual office hours:** Judith Donohue 352-603-3941 (cell)

You can call me any day, 7 days a week, between 8 a.m. and **8 p.m.** PLEASE do not call after 8 p.m. If I am not available when you call, leave your name and phone number and I will return your call within a few hours if possible.

**Description:** This 12-module course provides an overview of common mass communication research methods. We will discuss quantitative and qualitative research, content analysis, experiments, surveys and focus groups. In addition, students will be introduced to SPSS, a software program used to analyze data.

### **Course Textbooks:**

**Required:** Wimmer, Roger D., and Dominick, Joseph R., *Mass Media Research: An Introduction* (10<sup>th</sup> Edition), Wadsworth, Cengage Learning: Boston MA.

**Helpful, but not required:** Cronk, Brian C. (2012). *How to Use SPSS* (7<sup>th</sup> Edition), Pryczak Publishing : Glendale CA.

You will also be exploring mass communication professional journals and other trade and academic publications which are available online through the UF Library.

<http://www.uflib.ufl.edu/>

**Technology requirements:** A reliable computer and internet access

**Course Goals:** Upon completion of this course students will:

- Understand the various types of research methods and tools, including their benefits and shortcomings
- Become aware of the ethical issues surrounding communication research
- Understand the practical applications of research methods in the field of mass communication
- Be able to design and execute a research project using the methods learned in the class.

### **Course Activities:**

**In addition to the assigned reading,** there will be online **discussions**, five **quizzes** based on the reading to ensure that students are comprehending the material. There will also be **10** activities and assignments, including two short papers (3-5 pages) and a final research project (15-20 pages).

**Assignment will be weighted as follows:**

- Participation in online discussions, with “substantive” posts (not just “I agree.”) - 15 percent
- Assignments – 35 percent, which includes 2 short papers (3-5 pages) . The papers will count for 10 percent each and the remaining assignments account for 15 percent, total.
- 5 quizzes - Total 10 percent (2 percent each)
- Final research project (15-20 pages) -40 percent

**Grading is based on 100 points. Here is the grading scale:**

Grade Percentage A 93% and above A- 90-92% B+ 87-89% B 83-86% B- 80-82% C+ 77-79% C 73-76% C- 70-72% D+ 67-69% D 63-66% D- 60-62% F Below 60

**Honesty and Integrity:** The highest standards of ethical behavior and integrity are expected in this class. Students are expected to comply with the letter and the spirit of the UF Honor Code which reads as follows:

**Student Honor Code Preamble:** In adopting this Honor Code, the students of the University of Florida recognize that academic honesty and integrity are fundamental values of the University community. Students who enroll at the University commit to holding themselves and their peers to the high standard of honor required by the Honor Code. Any individual who becomes aware of a violation of the Honor Code is bound by honor to take corrective action. The quality of a University of Florida education is dependent upon the community acceptance and enforcement of the Honor Code.

**The Honor Code** We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honesty and integrity. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: "On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment."

**Academic Honesty Guidelines** All students are required to abide by the Academic Honesty Guidelines which have been accepted by the University. The academic community of students and faculty at the University of Florida strives to develop, sustain and protect an environment of honesty, trust and respect. Students are expected to pursue knowledge with integrity. Exhibiting honesty in academic pursuits and reporting violations of the Academic Honesty Guidelines

will encourage others to act with integrity. Violations of the Academic Honesty Guidelines shall result in judicial action and a student being subject to the sanctions in paragraph XIV of the Student Conduct Code. The conduct set forth hereinafter constitutes a violation of the Academic Honesty Guidelines (University of Florida Rule 6C1-4.017).

For more information about academic honesty, contact the Dean of Students Office. You can review UF's academic honesty guidelines in detail at: <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/judicial/academic.php> (University of Florida Honor Code, 2008)

You are assumed to be the sole author of all work presented. Submitting work written by another or stolen from another (i.e. plagiarized) is not only unethical, it is foolish, embarrassing and may result in course failure. When quoting the work of others, be sure to credit the author properly. I will be using software to detect plagiarism.

### Inclusiveness

Every attempt is made to make all courses non-sexist, diverse and multicultural in content. Please visit with me should you feel this goal is not being met.

### Students with Special Needs

Students requesting classroom accommodation must first register with the Dean of Students Office. The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the student who must then provide this documentation to the instructor when requesting accommodation.

### Mental Health or Emergency Resources

You can reach the University Counseling Service at 352-392-1575 or go to this link. <http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc/Default.aspx>

(For emergencies, call 9-1-1)

## **NETIQUETTE GUIDE FOR ONLINE COURSES**

It is important to recognize that the online classroom is in fact a classroom, and certain behaviors are expected when you communicate with both your peers and your instructors. These guidelines for online behavior and interaction are known as netiquette.

### Security

Remember that your password is the only thing protecting you from pranks or more serious harm.

- Don't share your password with anyone
- Change your password if you think someone else might know it
- Always logout when you are finished using the system

### General Guidelines

When communicating online, you should always:

- Treat instructor with respect, even in email or in any other online communication
- Always use your professors' proper title: Dr. or Prof., or if you in doubt use Mr. or Ms.
- Unless specifically invited, don't refer to them by first name.
- Use clear and concise language
- Remember that all college level communication should have correct spelling and grammar
- Avoid slang terms such as "wassup?" and texting abbreviations such as "u" instead of "you"
- Use standard fonts such as Times New Roman and use a size 12 or 14 pt. font
- Avoid using the caps lock feature AS IT CAN BE INTERPRETTED AS YELLING
- Limit and possibly avoid the use of emoticons like :) or ☺
- Be cautious when using humor or sarcasm as tone is sometimes lost in an email or discussion post and your message might be taken seriously or offensive
- Be careful with personal information (both yours and other's)
- Do not send confidential patient information via e-mail

### Email Netiquette

When you send an email to your instructor, teaching assistant, or classmates, you should:

- Use a descriptive subject line
- Be brief
- Avoid attachments unless you are sure your recipients can open them
- Avoid HTML in favor of plain text
- Sign your message with your name and return e-mail address
- Think before you send the e-mail to more than one person. Does everyone really need to see your message?
- Be sure you REALLY want everyone to receive your response when you click, "reply all"
- Be sure that the message author intended for the information to be passed along before you click the "forward" button

### Message Board Netiquette and Guidelines

When posting on the Discussion Board in your online class, you should:

- Make posts that are on topic and within the scope of the course material
- Take your posts seriously and review and edit your posts before sending

- Be as brief as possible while still making a thorough comment
- Always give proper credit when referencing or quoting another source
- Be sure to read all messages in a thread before replying
- Don't repeat someone else's post without adding something of your own to it
- Avoid short, generic replies such as, "I agree." You should include why you agree or add to the previous point
- Always be respectful of others' opinions even when they differ from your own
- When you disagree with someone, you should express your differing opinion in a respectful, non-critical way
- Do not make personal or insulting remarks
- Be open-minded

### **When you need technical HELP!**

Please note that there are several good places to go for help. There are tutorials posted on the e-learning Support Services site, [https://lss.at.ufl.edu/help/Student\\_Faq](https://lss.at.ufl.edu/help/Student_Faq) . You can also call the UF Computing Help Desk at 352-392-4357 or visit <http://helpdesk.ufl.edu> . Often you can get help from your classmates on the course discussion board. **I will not be your source for technical help.**

All email should go through the Canvas tool. No private emails will be exchanged. I will respond to your email within 48 hours, and probably within 24 hours.

In the unlikely event of a UF system-wide technology failure, any quizzes or other deadlines will be postponed until the system is up and running again. Otherwise, internet problems and computer problems on your end will not be considered as an excuse for missing deadlines.

Other policies: Online tests will be timed and once a test is posted, you may not go back and make changes. You will get test scores immediately.

Unless otherwise indicated, **deadlines for papers and discussion postings will be Saturdays at 11 p.m. Late work is not accepted and no extra credit work is offered.**

**Free advice:** Log into the course often and stay on top of the assignments and discussions.

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## **Weekly modules for Research course**

## Week 1 - Introduction

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In this first module, we will review the syllabus for the course and spell out the expectations. We will also define what research is and how it plays a role in our everyday lives. We will consider several different ways of knowing, focusing on the scientific method.

## Objectives

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By the end of this module students will have completed the following objectives:

- 1.1 Summarize the syllabus and the course requirements.
- 1.2 Describe the characteristics of the scientific method and how it differs from other ways of knowing.
- 1.3 Identify the steps in the research process.
- 1.4 Distinguish between academic and private research.
- 1.5 Define some basic terms in the research field, such as variables, operational definition, replication, algorithm, internal and external validity.
- 1.6 Locate and examine professional journals and trade publications in the field of mass communication.

## Readings & Videos

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**Familiarize yourself with the syllabus.**

- Chapter 1, Wimmer and Dominick
- Carl Sagan's Baloney Detection Kit
- Spend some time on the [UF Library website](#), perusing at least two of the mass communication professional journals, research summaries and trade publications listed on page 16-17 of the Wimmer and Dominick textbook.

**Watch lecture:** Research Methods in Mass Communication (13:25)

## Discussions

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Discussions are an important part of this course. You are expected to read all the comments of your classmates and to respond to at least two with substantive posts.

**Introduce Yourself:** Post a couple of paragraphs to the "Introduce Yourself" discussion

## Week 2 Elements of Research

### Introduction

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Before we can learn about research, we need to have a basic understanding of the basic elements that are necessary to conduct effective research. We will explore many of those in this module so that we will have a good foundation for the weeks ahead.

### Objectives

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- 2.1 Identify important elements of research including concepts, constructs, variables and measurement.
- 2.2 Explain validity and reliability.
- 2.3 Describe measurement scales commonly used in research.
- 2.4 Analyze a literature review.

### Readings and Videos

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- Chapter 2, Wimmer and Dominick
- [Gap Between Number Of Male, Female Super Bowl Viewers Is Shrinking](#)

Watch: Elements of Research lecture (12:31)

### Discussion

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**Discussions are an important part of this course. You are expected to read ALL your classmates posts and to respond to at least two with substantive posts.**

After viewing the SuperBowl research article above, discuss whether you think this research has the essential elements of good research. What other methodologies might the researchers have used to gather their data?

### Assignment

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#### Analyzing literature reviews

Researchers usually begin with a review of the literature - a summary of research that has already been done in the field. In the last module, you developed a research question and a hypothesis and you spent some time looking at professional journals. Using the same research question or hypothesis, find and read at least two literature reviews on prior research on that topic. (If you have decided to change your research topic, or thesis, that is fine.) Post at least two **ABSTRACTS ONLY** and at least two of the citations quoted in the studies you chose onto the assignment link.

## Week 3 Ethics in Research

### Introduction

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Ethical concerns are paramount when planning, conducting and evaluating research. Since most mass media research involves humans, we must be vigilant in protecting the rights of participants. In this module, we will explain ethical issues in detail, and examine the guidelines for dealing with those issues.

### Objectives

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By the end of this module students will have completed the following objectives:

- 3.1 Describe the guidelines that help researchers answer ethical questions.
- 3.2 Discuss UF's IRB and understand its role in university research.
- 3.3 Summarize the four basic ethical principles of research: autonomy, nonmaleficence, beneficence, justice.

### Readings & Videos

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Read:

- Chapter 3 Wimmer and Dominick
- UF Institutional Review Boards This is **required reading** for all mass communication students.
- **Watch:** Research Ethics lecture (08:27)

### Discussion

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**Discussions are an important element of this course. You are expected to read ALL posts by your classmates and to respond to at least two with substantive posts.**

What ethical challenges do you see with researchers using data they gather on Facebook?

- Post your thoughts and discuss with your classmates.

### Assignment

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Using the unethical examples on the first page of this chapter, **briefly** suggest alternative, more ethical, ways of conducting each study. Post your thoughts on the assignment page.

**QUIZ 2 this week.**



## Week 4 Sampling

### Introduction

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Although some scientific research examines every member of a population, usually that is not possible. Instead, researchers depend on a sample, a subset of the population that is representative of the entire population. As one researcher put it, you only need to taste a spoonful of the sauce to know what the whole pot tastes like. In this module we will explore several different kinds of samples and sampling techniques used in mass communication research.

### Objectives

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By the end of this module students will have completed the following objectives:

- 4.1 Differentiate among the various types of probability and non-probability sampling
- 4.2 Distinguish between population and census
- 4.3 Locate and analyze mass communication research studies in professional journals

### Readings & Videos

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**Read:** Chapter 4 Wimmer and Dominick and handout

**Watch two different videos on sampling**

### Assignments

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#### Probability vs. Non-Probability Sampling

You want to know whether the majority of daily newspaper readers in Gainesville read "hard copies" or online editions. Since you can't possibly ask everyone in town, you decide to use a sample of the population.

1. Briefly describe a possible sampling procedure using a nonprobability sampling technique.
2. Then describe how you might sample people using a probability sampling technique.
3. Briefly explain the difference between probability and non-probability sampling.
4. Now speculate on the ways that the outcomes might differ using the two techniques.

#### Paper #1 (3-5 pages, double-spaced).

Choose a research paper from one of the journals in the field of mass communication and summarize the findings. State the reason for the research, the hypothesis or research question, the methodology and the sample used. Provide a few details about the sampling method. State the conclusions.

## Week 5 Qualitative Research

### Introduction

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All scientific research requires careful observation. In this module we will discuss various ways to conduct this observation. We will explore how researchers conduct qualitative research in an attempt to gain an in-depth understanding of human behavior. Qualitative research investigates the why and how of decision making, not just the *what, where, when*. We will explore several types of qualitative research methods, including field observations, focus groups, interviews, case studies and ethnography.

**There will be a quiz on Chapter 4, 5 and 6 at end of Module 6.**

### Objectives

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By the end of this module students will have completed the following objectives:

- 5.1 Compare and contrast quantitative and qualitative research methods, including the advantages and disadvantages of each
- 5.2 Describe various qualitative methods, including focus groups, case studies, field observation, interviews and ethnography
- 5.3 Discuss the pros and cons of online research.
- 5.4 Lead a focus group and analyze the results

### Readings & Videos

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**Read:** Chapter 5 Wimmer and Dominick

**Watch: Lecture :** [Qualitative Research \(10:42\)](#) and focus group video.

### Assignment

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#### PAPER # 2

Select a mass media research topic and conduct a one-hour focus group of at least five people -- use your family, friends, classmates or co-workers. (Emailing several people separately for their opinion is not a focus group. Interaction among participants is key in a focus group. A group Skype meeting is acceptable.) Remember that open-ended questions work best in this method. Take good notes, then write a 3-5 page summary (double-spaced) describing the experience, including the challenges. How did you analyze the data you gathered? Post on assignment page.

## Week 6 Content Analysis

### Introduction

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Content analysis is the systematic analysis of existing documents. This approach is popular with mass media researchers because it is an efficient and cost-effective way to investigate the content of the media. We will explore the advantages and challenges of this approach, including its place in internet research.

### Objectives

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By the end of this module students will have completed the following objectives:

- 6.1 Define content analysis and articulate how it can be used in mass communication research.
- 6.2 State the advantages and limitations of content analysis as a research method.
- 6.3 Describe the sampling challenges in content analysis and the use of multistage sampling.

### Readings & Videos

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**Read:** Wimmer and Dominick, Ch. 6 **Watch:** Content Analysis lecture (12:35)

### Discussion

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What are some of the problems associated with analyzing content on the internet?

### Assignment

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Devise a simple coding system to do a content analysis of a media outlet of your choice. This could be issues of a magazine, a local newspaper, print or TV ads, news coverage or even lyrics of popular songs. Decide what you want to look for/measure. For example, one student in the past analyzed several issues of Runners World to compare coverage of male vs. female runners. Others have analyzed beer ads to compare their messages. Write a brief summary (1-2 pp, double-spaced) of your findings. Be sure to describe the coding system you used.

### Quiz 3

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Take the Quiz on Chs. 4, 5, 6.

## Week 7 Surveys

### Introduction

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In this chapter we will delve into the world of survey research, learning about both descriptive and analytical surveys. We will learn how researchers design effective questionnaires that will elicit the information they need. We will learn about a team of Florida researchers who are currently analyzing the results of one of the largest surveys ever done among older Americans.

### Objectives

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By the end of this module students will have completed the following objectives:

- 7.1 Distinguish between descriptive and analytical surveys.
- 7.2 Design a survey with well-constructed questions.
- 7.3 Collect and analyze data obtained through surveys.
- 7.4 Summarize the advantages and disadvantages of survey research.

### Readings & Videos

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**Read:** Wimmer and Dominick Ch. 7

Below is a comprehensive survey conducted among older Americans in The Villages, Florida. USF researchers utilized surveys and focus groups to conduct some of the most comprehensive research ever done in the field of aging in the USA. While retirement is probably a long way off for most of you, I think you will find both the material and the methodology interesting. Note the various elements of the report, since you will be including many of the same elements in your final project, i.e. abstract, literature review, hypothesis, methodology, data analysis.

[Villages of Opportunity: Increasing Health and Quality of Life In Older Adults](#)

### Assignment 1 – Go to the Pew Research Center for Journalism and Media

#### website.

Find a survey in the field of mass communication that interests you. After reading it, briefly answer the following questions. What was the purpose of the survey? How was the survey administered? Sample? What was the response rate?

### Assignment 2 -- Your survey

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Please follow the directions on page 222 for conducting your own survey, using the Qualtrix platform. Complete # 1, a-d. Include the purpose of the study and demographics of the respondents. Is there a hypothesis or research question you are testing? Post a 2-3 page report summarizing your findings. Include a copy of your survey instrument. **Take Quiz 4.**

## Week 8

### Introduction

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In this module we will consider two research methods which are not commonly used in Mass Communication research. Nonetheless, they are important methods that research students should be aware of. Longitudinal studies involve the collection of data at different points in time. Experimental methods are done in a controlled environment. Quasi-experimental designs and field experiments will also be discussed.

**There will be a Quiz on Ch. 8 and 9 at the end of Module 9.**

### Objectives

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By the end of this module students will have completed the following objectives:

- 8.1 Define longitudinal research and its application in mass communication.
- 8.2 Differentiate between trend studies, cohort studies and panel studies.
- 8.3 Describe steps researchers take in conducting experiments.
- 8.4 Explain confounding variables.
- 8.5 Discuss strengths and weaknesses of field experiments.

### Readings & Videos

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Read:

- Wimmer and Dominick, Ch. 8 and 9
- [Conducting an Experiment](#)
- [Abstract of longitudinal study on effect of video games on youth](#)

### Assignment

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Select a longitudinal research paper in an academic journal and summarize the purpose and findings in a one page report. Post your summary.

### Discussion

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Our class is going to design an **experimental research** study to measure the effect of watching horror movies. What are some ways we can recruit subjects? How will we define and measure effects? What kind of ethical issues may be involved?

## **Week 9 Analyzing Data/ SPSS**

### **Introduction**

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Statistics help us understand the data collected in research investigations so that we can make inferences and draw conclusions about a population. This module will introduce some of the common mathematical methods that researchers use to collect, organize and analyze data.

### **Objectives**

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By the end of this module students will have completed the following objectives:

- 9.1 Discuss some of the more common descriptive and inferential statistics used by mass media researchers
- 9.2 Define common terms used in analyzing and interpreting data, including data distribution, frequency distribution, sample distribution, dispersion, the normal curve.
- 9.3 Understand how SPSS software can be used to analyze and interpret data.

### **Readings & Videos**

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#### **Read:**

- Wimmer and Dominick Chapter 10: Introduction to Statistics

#### **Watch:**

- Analyzing Data (4:19)
- [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ADDR3\\_Ng5CA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ADDR3_Ng5CA)

### **Take Quiz 5 (on Chs. 8/9)**

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## Week 10 Newspaper and Magazine Research

### Introduction

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As newspaper and magazines have been struggling to keep afloat in recent years, print media research has taken on an increasingly important role. Print media companies are not only using research to improve their readership and circulation, but also to examine their management. More recently, research techniques are being used to examine newspaper websites. This module will examine all those areas.

### Objectives

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By the end of this module students will have completed the following objectives:

- 10.1 Explain research methods used by newspapers and magazines.
- 10.2 Analyze various types of readership and circulation studies.
- 10.3 Discuss the use of management research in the newspaper industry
- 10.4 Analyze the impact of the internet on the print media industry.

### Readings & Videos

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#### Read:

- Read Chapter 13, Wimmer and Dominick
- Research study on newspapers <http://stateofthedia.org/2012/newspapers-building-digital-revenues-proves-painfully-slow/newspapers-by-the-numbers/>
- Readership study at Northwestern University sponsored by Newspaper Association of American and American Society of Newspaper Editors, pp 1-14. [www.readership.org/impact/power\\_to\\_grow.pdf](http://www.readership.org/impact/power_to_grow.pdf)

#### Watch:

- UK media research in a nutshell: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BbphbBH\\_dio&feature=autoplay&list=PL2874C8319A544C49&index=73&playnext=2](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BbphbBH_dio&feature=autoplay&list=PL2874C8319A544C49&index=73&playnext=2)

### Discussion

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In the 2001 Northwestern University study above, researchers concluded that the trend toward declining newspaper readership could be reversed if newspapers took some specific steps to change the way they operate and present the news. Here we are 13 years later. Have newspapers been successful reversing the downward trend? Give specifics supporting your answer.

## **Week 11 Research in Electronic Media**

### **Introduction**

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Advertisers who place commercials on radio or television shows understandably want to know how many people are seeing or hearing their ads and how effective their messages are. Broadcasters have the responsibility to provide this empirical data to their advertisers and they do this through ratings companies. In this module we will look at how the ratings system works. We will also explore several types of non-ratings methods used to measure programming and audiences.

### **Objectives**

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By the end of this module students will have completed the following objectives:

- 11.1 Describe ratings research in broadcast media.
- 11.2 Explain non-rating approaches, such as music research and program testing.

### **Readings & Videos**

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#### **Read:**

- Wimmer and Dominick Ch. 14
- **Radio Station Ratings: Where Do the Numbers Come From?**
- [Top 10 Companies In Social Media Research \(](#)

#### **Watch**

- [The Ratings Game](#)

### **Discussion**

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This class is a laugh a minute. Well, maybe not exactly. But researchers do track how many laughs a TV show generates. What type of research can be used to measure laughs - and what's the value of such research?



## Module 12 Public Relations and Advertising Research

### Introduction

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Advertising and public relations people rely heavily on research to help them develop strategies for creating effective campaigns. Good research can increase their understanding of consumer attitudes, can provide data to determine how, when and where to tell their story, and can provide ways for them to evaluate and, if necessary, modify their medium and their messages. Research can also help them understand their competition. This module will provide an overview of how research is used in these two specialty areas of mass communication.

### Objectives

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By the end of this module students will have completed the following objectives:

- 12.1 Explain copy testing.
- 12.2 Discuss the cognitive and affective dimensions of advertising research.
- 12.3 Define the concepts of “frequency” and “reach” in media research.
- 12.4 Explain the four step process in developing a Public Relations plan.
- 12.5 Discuss how research is used to formulate a public relations plan.

### Readings & Videos

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**Read:**Ch. 15 and 16, Wimmer and Dominick

- [IPA: Effective Ads Work on t \(Links to an external site.\)](#)[he Heart, Not on the Head \(Links to an external site.\)](#)
- How To Do A Public Relations Audit: <http://www.ccmc.org/sites/default/files/WorkingPaper1.pdf>

**Watch:** [Research in Advertising and Public Relations lecture \(8:02\)](#)

### Discussion

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Post a one-page summary of your final project on the discussion page, with highlights of the research, including the results of your study. Read summaries posted by your classmates and post feedback comments on at least three projects on discussion board.

## **Assignment: Final Project**

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Turn in your **final** project by Saturday at 11 p.m.