

## MMC 6421 Research Methods

Summer A 2016 / Section 01FC / Periods 2-4 Tuesdays; 2-3 Thursdays / Weimer 3024 / 3 credits



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About me: See my [website](#) or follow me (@bikeprof) on [Twitter](#)

Office hours are first-come, first-served. If those hours don't work for your schedule, make an appointment or drop in whenever the office door is open.

## ABOUT THE COURSE

### Course Description

This is an overview of qualitative and quantitative methods (data collection and analysis) in mass communication research. It is designed to help students conduct research suitable for a peer-reviewed journal, thesis, or dissertation.

### Course Objectives

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

- Distinguish between mediocre and good research.
- Evaluate strengths and weaknesses of commonly used methods.
- Identify and resolve ethical issues in research involving human subjects.
- Choose statistical or analytical evaluations appropriate for each method.
- Compose the shell (everything but the data) of a study you plan to conduct.

### Required Textbooks

1. Wimmer, R.D., & Dominick, J.R. (2014). *Mass media research: An introduction* (10th ed.). Boston, MA: Wadsworth Cengage. ISBN: 9781133307334
2. Pallant, J. (2013). *SPSS survival manual* (5th ed.). Berkshire, England: Open University Press / McGraw Hill. ISBN: 9780335262588

### About the Textbooks

1. Wimmer & Dominick is a classic overview text that gives a solid introduction to the most-used methods. Read it all.
2. Pallant offers a gentle introduction to statistics while walking you through SPSS: everything from which buttons to press to how to write the results. Only three chapters are assigned (1, 2, and 10) with the rest listed as "skim" because stats is a secondary purpose to this course. But read the entire book as you have time. It's an amazing resource aimed at those of us who are not stats whiz kids.

**Class Schedule**

Because of the International Communication Association (ICA) conference in Japan, the class will meet in person only for the first four weeks of the term, or May 10 through June 2. The final two weeks will have no classes so you can work on your course paper.

Wk	Dates	Topic	Details	Readings
1	May 10 May 12	Science	What makes research scientific Ontology, epistemology, axiology Naturalism vs. interpretation Data and variables; reliability and validity Samples and populations The role of theory in research How to read a research paper What distinguishes good research Choosing a research topic Ethics; Institutional Review Boards (IRB)	Wimmer & Dominick chapters 1, 2, 3, 4; Pallant chapters 1-2
2	May 17 May 19	Qualitative	Case study (and analysis) Ethnography (and analysis) Focus group (and analysis) Historical (and analysis) Interview (and analysis)	Wimmer & Dominick chapters 5, 8
3	May 24 May 26	Quantitative	Content analysis Experiment Survey Current issues in the field issues	Wimmer & Dominick chapters 6, 7, 9, 13, 14, 15, 16
4	May 31 June 2	Statistics	Elements of statistical reasoning Matching the statistic to the data Benefits and dangers in statistics	Wimmer & Dominick chapters 10-12; Pallant chapter 10 (read); skim chapters 3-9; 11-22
5	June 7 June 9	No class	Work on your paper	
6	June 14 June 16	No class	Work on your paper	

A preliminary draft of the final paper is due by email by noon Saturday, June 4. The final paper is due by noon Saturday, June 18, uploaded to the Canvas website for the course.

**ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING**

**Assignment Weighting**

- Current research presentation ..... 10%
- Method presentation ..... 20%
- Eight method one-sheets ..... 30%
- Research paper shell ..... 40%

### **Current Research Presentation (10%)**

Each student will give a roughly 15-minute presentation on current research in the field, either your own or a related field. The goal is to supplement the Wimmer & Dominick text by exploring current research in the field, such as social media, newer techniques, or evolving theories. We will choose those on May 10.

### **Method Presentation (20%)**

Each student will give a class teaching presentation of 30 to 60 minutes that supplements the Wimmer and Dominick text on a particular method. We will choose those on May 10.

Although you are welcome to use presentation software like PowerPoint, the main takeaway will be a one-page (front and back OK) handout for your peers that summarizes your presentation.

These presentations are intended to enable you to become sufficiently familiar with a method to teach it to your peers. However, a presentation does not have to be a lecture. Engaging the class helps facilitate learning.

The presentations should cover:

1. An overview of the method.
2. Hypotheses or research questions suitable to be addressed by the method.
3. Best practices (and pitfalls to avoid) for conducting the method.
4. Examples of good (and bad) research that used the method.
5. Ways to analyze the data generated by the method.

### **Method One-Sheeters (10%)**

These are eight, single-page, bullet-point listings of the key strengths and weaknesses of each method. These don't have to be comprehensive but should hit the highlights – the benefits and pitfalls – of each method.

Each method is a different sheet. By definition, some methods (such as case study) have fewer strengths and weaknesses than others (such as a survey).

State your sources at the top of the page. You are welcome to draw from other material beyond the textbooks but are not required to do so.

Here is the schedule for uploading your summaries to Canvas:

- Due midnight Monday, May 16: Five qualitative methods (case study, ethnography, focus group, historical, interview).
- Due midnight Monday, May 23: Three quantitative methods (content analysis, experiment, survey).

**Research Paper Shell (50%)**

This is the shell of a research paper – the introduction through the methods section with a reference section and any appendices required (such as a survey questionnaire or a content analysis code book). In short, it is everything except the data.

This can be on any subject you like. But this will hold the most meaning if you focus on a topic you think might become your thesis or dissertation, or which is a research paper you’d like to conduct so you can submit it to an academic conference and then submit it to a peer-reviewed journal.

About the paper:

- Length: Roughly 5,000 words, including references
- Style: APA (preferred) or Chicago
- Introduction
  - Define the problem to be solved: the “so what?”
  - Identify the academic “donut hole” the study will fill
  - Sketch the theoretical foundation for the study
- Literature Review
  - Define and explicate all concepts and variables
  - Justify each H and RQ (about 4 to 10) with literature or theory
    - Use a directional H if theory or literature justifies
    - Use an RQ if literature insufficient or contradictory
    - Situate H’s and RQs at the end of justifying section
- Method
  - Defend the method(s) as suitable to address the H’s and RQs
  - Detail and justify the research design
  - Operationalize all variables
  - Identify whether variables are independent or dependent
  - Identify the statistical tests or analytical techniques to be used for each

**Draft Deadline:** A preliminary draft of the final paper is due by noon, Saturday, June 4. I will read them that afternoon and give you feedback. The completeness of your draft is up to you and your schedule.

**Final Paper Deadline:** The final paper is due by noon Saturday, June 18, uploaded to the Canvas website for the course (and thus to Turnitin, the plagiarism detector UF uses).

**Grading Scale**

		B+	89 to 87	C+	79 to 77	D+	69 to 67
A	100 to 93	B	86 to 83	C	76 to 73	D	66 to 63
A-	92 to 90	B-	82 to 80	C-	72 to 70	D-	62 to 60

Consult the UF graduate school catalog for details about the [grading policy](#).

## MORE IMPORTANT DETAILS

### Attendance

Punctual attendance is expected of graduate students unless an absence is allowed under UF [policy](#). If you are going to be absent, let me know ahead of time.

### Academic Integrity

UF students live by an honor code that prohibits academic dishonesty such as (but not limited to) cheating, plagiarism, fabrication, engaging in unauthorized collaboration, reusing a paper from another class, writing a similar paper for two classes, drawing too heavily on another's work for your own, and having someone else write your paper.

Be aware of the UF graduate school [academic honesty policy](#) as well the one in the college's Doctoral Handbook. Students have an affirmative obligation to know what is in the handbook and to abide by it. The handbook includes a detailed description of plagiarism, copies of which are available in Chinese, Korean, Mandarin, Portuguese, and Spanish. If you are unsure of citation rules or what requires attribution, ask me *before* turning in a paper. Ignorance is not an excuse.

My default practice for an academic integrity violation is a failing grade for the course and to recommend the student be removed from the graduate program.

### Students with Disabilities

If you would benefit from disability-related accommodations, contact the [Disability Resource Center](#) as early in the semester as possible. The center will provide documentation so appropriate accommodations can be made. The center is in Reid Hall, 392-8565.

### Help with Coping

The UF [Counseling and Wellness Center](#) is a terrific, free resource for any student who could use help managing stress or coping with life. The center, at 3190 Radio Road on campus, is open for appointments and emergency walk-ins from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. To make an appointment or receive after-hours assistance, call 352-392-1575.

The UF Police can be reached at 392-1111 or, in an emergency, by dialing 911.

### Course Evaluations

Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online [evaluations](#). You will be notified by email when the evaluations are open, near the end of the semester. Summary [results](#) are available to you and the general public.