

MMC 6421: Research Methods in Mass Communication

Wednesdays 9:35am-12:35pm, Weimer 1074

PROFESSOR

Frank Waddell, Ph.D.
frank.waddell@ufl.edu
352-294-1627

OFFICE HOURS

3067 Weimer Hall
Monday 9am-11am; Friday 9am-11am
Also available by appointment

REQUIRED READINGS

No required textbook; All readings will be posted to Canvas

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Research methods in mass communication (MMC 6421) provides an introduction to the fundamentals of research methods in communication science. Methods to be covered include experimental design, surveys, and content analysis. Key terms to be covered include variables, causation, correlation, reliability, validity, and replicability, among others. Ethical issues germane to research methods in the social sciences will also be discussed.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Course objectives include (1) the ability to evaluate and conduct empirical research, (2) an understanding of basic concepts from the social sciences, and (3) the ability to formulate testable hypotheses and research questions.

GRADING

Attendance/Participation: 10%

Paper Critique: 10%

Project Proposal: 10%

Midterm Exam: 20%

Final Exam: 20%

Pre-Registered Report: 30%

Grading scale: A, 100-93; A-, 92-90; B+, 89-87; B, 86-84; B-, 83-80; C+, 79-77; C, 76-74; C-, 73-70; D+, 69-67; D, 66-64; D-, 63-60; E, 59 and below

ASSIGNMENTS

Attendance/Participation (10%): Attendance is mandatory. All students are expected to come to class on a weekly basis, completing all assigned materials in advance. Your grade for attendance/participation will be determined based on the frequency and quality of your contributions to class discussion.

Paper Critique (10%): Students will be asked to summarize and critique published communication research. Two critiques will be completed during the course of the semester, each worth 5% of your grade. The study to be critiqued must be approved by the professor at least one week prior to the due date for the assignment. Students will be required to complete 1-2 page handout for their classmates and distribute the printed version prior to their presentation. The presentation itself should be approximately 10 minutes long and be accompanied by an image-based PowerPoint presentation. The presenter will also be asked to field questions from their classmates for a period of 5 minutes following the presentation. Dates for each presentation will be determined in the second week of class.

Exams (40%): Two exams (midterm and final) will be conducted during the course of the semester, each worth 20% of your grade. The midterm exam will test material from the first half of the semester, while the final exam will be cumulative and test material from the semester overall. Each exam will feature a combination of multiple choice and short answer questions. A study guide will be distributed for each exam two weeks prior to their administration.

Project Proposal (10%): The project proposal will provide an initial summary of the topic, hypotheses, and anticipated methodology that students plan to employ in their pre-registered report. The proposal should be no more than 5 pages in length. In this proposal, students should identify their overall research question, the specific hypotheses they plan to test, any theories that inform their hypotheses, past empirical work that is relevant to the topic, and the design of the study that they plan to use. Feedback on the viability of the project will be provided to each group at the proposal stage. Proposal guidelines, including a sample proposal, will be distributed in class at least four weeks before the proposal due date.

Pre-Registered Report (30%): Groups of two to four students will complete a pre-registered report that involves formulating hypotheses, reviewing prior relevant literature, and preparing the methodology and stimuli for a prospective study. The final pre-registered report will include an abstract, introduction, literature review, and methods section along with references and appendices, all of which should be no longer than 4,000 words total. IRB approval for the

prospective study should also be obtained. This and all other assignments should be formatted according to APA style, 6th ed. Guidelines for the report, including a sample document, will be distributed in class at least four weeks before the final report due date.

CLASSROOM CONDUCT

It is expected that all students will arrive to class on time and be respectful of fellow classmates during lecture and student presentations. Please turn all cell phones to silent. While laptops are allowed, it is expected that they will only be used for class-related work such as note-taking or group assignments. In the event that you need to answer an emergency phone call, please excuse yourself from class and answer the call in the hallway. The professor reserves the right to revoke the use of technology during class if the above policies are not followed.

LATE WORK POLICY

One letter grade (-10 points) will be deducted per day for work submitted past the assignment's deadline. If an exam is missed, official documentation must be provided for the absence, with a makeup test scheduled within one week of the original examination. If students anticipate that they will be unable to meet a deadline due to university documented issues (e.g., health condition, death in family), please contact me as soon as possible to arrange an extension. In general, I am quite willing to work with students when issues arise that prevent you from submitting work on time.

HONOR CODE POLICY

This class strictly adheres to the UF honor code. Any prohibited behavior such as plagiarism, data fabrication, or cheating will result in a failing grade for the assignment in question and referral to the honor court, who may administer additional penalties such as a failing grade for the course or dismissal from the college. More information about the university honor code is available online at the following link: <https://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/>

STUDENTS REQUIRING ACCOMODATIONS

Students with disabilities requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/) by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter which must be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodation. Students with disabilities should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester.

COUNSELING AND WELLNESS

Contact information for the Counseling and Wellness Center:
<http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc/Default.aspx>, 392-1575; and the University Police
Department: 392-1111 or 9-1-1 for emergencies.

COURSE EVALUATION

Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu>. Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester, but students will be given specific times when they are open. Summary results of these assessments are available to students at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results/>.

Schedule

August 23th: Introduction to Research Methods
August 30th: Fundamentals of the Scientific Method, Part 1
September 6th: Fundamentals of the Scientific Method, Part 2
September 13th: Experimental Design and Causation, Part 1
September 20th: Experimental Design and Causation, Part 2
September 27th: Surveys, Polls and Correlation
October 4th: Midterm Exam
October 11th: Content Analysis
October 18th: Qualitative Research, Part 1
October 25th: Qualitative Research, Part 2
November 1st: Descriptive Statistics
November 8th: Inferential Statistics
November 15th: Ethical Issues in Mass Communication Research
November 22nd: University Holiday
November 29th: Final Project Presentations
December 6th: Final Exam
December 13th: Pre-Registered Report Due