

PUR 3500

Public Relations Research Methods

Fall 2019

W 12:50 – 3:50 (W 6-8), section 21828, Weimer 1078

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Office hours: Tues. 1-2p.m., or by appointment

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Office hours: Thursdays 1:00pm to 3:00pm

Required Texts

Stacks, D. W. (2016). *Primer of public relations research*, (3rd Ed.). New York: Guilford.

**Supplemental readings will be made available to you through the course website.*

Course Goals

This course has two goals. The first is to provide you with a general framework for understanding and evaluating social science research so when you encounter it in almost any PR-related job you can understand and apply the information to your own project with a reasonable level of competence. The second goal is to provide you with some first-hand experience in conducting a research project. This practical experience will be beneficial both in future courses you take in the CJC and your professional careers. Given my desire for this course to be practically useful we will spend the majority of our time learning how to collect and analyze data from surveys and focus groups, which are the most commonly used methods for public relations professionals. We will also spend some time briefly learning about other common techniques used by PR researchers.

Course Learning Objectives

- Identify strengths and weaknesses of various methods frequently used in communication (e.g. focus groups, surveys, etc.)
- Practice creating various data collection tools used in PR research
- Practice interpreting common types of data used in PR research
- Practice reporting PR research in an easily understood format

College of Journalism and Communications Objectives

The Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications requires that by graduation all students should be able to:

- understand and apply the principles and laws of freedom of speech and press for the US;
- demonstrate an understanding of the history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications;
- demonstrate an understanding of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and, as appropriate, other forms of diversity in domestic society in relation to mass communications;
- demonstrate an understanding of the diversity of peoples and cultures and of the significance and impact of mass communications in a global society;
- understand concepts and apply theories in the use and presentation of images and information;
- demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity;
- think critically, creatively and independently;
- conduct research and evaluate information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they work;

- write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve;
- critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness;
- apply basic numerical and statistical concepts;
- apply current tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work, and to understand the digital world.

Course Policies

Attendance: I will take attendance. Attendance will be tied to whether you can accrue bonus points. If you miss more than two classes, you won't be eligible for bonus points. I will post slides, activities, etc. on the course website. If you have questions regarding the content, please send me an email or make an appointment to talk to me or the TA assigned to the class.

Email Policy: As a state employee, my email is considered a public record. Therefore, it can be requested via an open-records request. Because emails are considered public records, federal privacy laws prevent me from discussing grades or other personal matters via email. As a result, you will need to visit me in my office to discuss grades. In general, face-to-face meetings tend to take less time, and result in less confusion than emailed conversations. While you are welcome to email me, I may indicate that you need an in-person meeting depending on the complexity of the issue. In addition, please be aware that email is considered formal communication, which means you should practice professionalism. In other words, try to avoid treating emails like text messages (i.e., don't use text abbreviations). Moreover, only send things via email that you would say to another person in a face-to-face setting.

Honor Code: Please note that all of your work in this class should conform to the university's honor code, which states: We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honesty and integrity by abiding by the Student Honor Code. 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." For more information please see <http://regulations.ufl.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/4.040-1.pdf>

I will document and report all honor code violations, including cheating and plagiarism. The minimum penalty for a violation of the honor code is a zero on the assignment or exam, but may be higher depending on the severity of the violation.

Accommodations: 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.

Late Work/Make-up Work: You will hand in assignments to the course drop box. It is your responsibility to hand in the assignments before the due date. You must submit assignments before midnight of the due date. Therefore, if a paper is due Tuesday, it must be in the drop box by 11:59 p.m. **Be sure to verify that your assignment has been downloaded to the drop box. The only way I do not consider an assignment late is if it's in the drop box before the deadline.** In addition, I will consider any assignments that can't be opened as late. That is, if you upload a file type I can't open or your assignment is in limbo because you didn't let it finish uploading I will still consider the assignment late. I would strongly advise you to upload a .doc or .rtf file as these are the ones that can be opened on most computers. Fifteen percent will be deducted from your grade **each day** your paper is late or for each day the correct file type is not uploaded to the drop box (this means a total of 30% if it is handed in two-days late). I will NOT accept assignments after the second day (48-hours past the due date). Late assignments will not be given grading priority. They will be handed back by the end of the semester. Late assignments will also receive few, if any, comments.

Professionalism: As PR students I expect you to maintain a high level of professionalism in all of our interactions. This includes being courteous and respectful to all members of the course. Being respectful includes making sure

you are not distracting others with your cell phone or computer. If you are using your computer to take notes, only have your notes page open. If technology becomes a distraction for others in class, I reserve the right to ban computer use in the classroom.

How You Get Points

Point Distribution

Exams	500 pts
Research Project	450 pts
Background Report	50 pts
Focus Group Protocol	50 pts
Focus Group Report	75 pts
Survey Questions	50 pts
Survey Report	75 pts
Final Report	100 pts
Presentation	25 pts
In-class activities	50 pts
Online/out of class activities	25 pts
TOTAL	1000 pts

Letter grades will be calculated using this formula:

Letter	Course Points	Percentage	Grade Points
A	1000-930	100-93	4.0
A-	929-900	92.9-90	3.7
B+	899-870	89.9-87	3.3
B	869-830	86.9-83	3
B-	829-800	82.9-80	2.7
C+	799-770	79.9-77	2.3
C	769-730	76.9-73	2
C-	729-700	72.9-700	1.7
D+	699-670	69.9-67	1.3
D	669-600	66.9-60	1
F	599-0	59.9-0	0

I don't round up. I will keep grades posted on Canvas - it is your responsibility to check it and make sure you know where you are at.

Overview of Course Components

I will do my best to be fair and impartial when it comes to grading assignments. Each of you will be graded on the same basis. In this class, the TA will be responsible for the initial grading. I will then look at their work and make any necessary changes. In the end, when grades have been posted the assignment has been examined several times. I am just serving as an umpire/referee of the course rules. The grade you received is the grade you have earned based on the criteria outlined in the syllabus, assignment directions, etc. If you have questions or would like to discuss your grade (or a specific assignment), please contact me and we can set up a time to meet.

If you are struggling with the course material, exams, having problems with members of your group, etc., it is imperative that you talk to me as soon as you think you're having a problem. In essence, if you're struggling with an assignment, talk to me before you have to hand in the assignment. I will do all I can to help you before a deadline. After a deadline has past, or an exam has been given, there is nothing I can do to help you.

Exams

There will be three exams given during the semester: Two unit exams and one final exam. Two of the three exams will count toward your final grade. There will be no make-up exams. If you do well on the two unit exams, and are satisfied with your grade, you can skip the final exam without consequence. If you miss an exam, or do poorly on an exam, you can take the final to replace the earlier exam grade. The exams will cover the material in the readings and lectures – this includes the textbook chapters and any supplemental material posted on the course website. I will provide you with reading guides for each week's readings. These will serve as the study guide for the course readings. I will also provide review guides each week for the lectures. Combined, the reading and lecture review guides will serve as your study guide for each unit exam. The unit exams will not be cumulative. That being said, some content/concepts might rely on the cumulative knowledge you have built up during class. For the most part, these will be topics that are important to the course. However, I will try to make note of situations where cumulative knowledge is important for the upcoming exam. **The final exam will be cumulative, covering the whole semester and must be taken during the scheduled final exam period.** The tests will be multiple choice/true-false/matching.

All exams will be worth 250 points. You must be on time for exams. **As soon as one person has completed their exam, you will not be allowed to take the exam.** Only students enrolled in the course may be present during exam days.

Research project

A key objective of this class is to provide you with hands-on experience conducting research utilizing methods that are commonly used across various communication professions. During the course of the semester, you will develop instruments to collect focus group and survey data. You will then collect both types of data and analyze them. The research project for this course will be a group assignment. As you may know already (or will soon learn), much of the work you do in communication professions happens in groups. I will provide you with an overview of the entire project along with specific directions for each assignment on the course website.

In-class/online activities

I believe, and research has shown, that active participation in learning is crucial for long term learning. Most weeks we will complete at least one (or more) activity in class. These are designed to get you to apply the knowledge you've learned to a real-world type situation. You will get full credit for these as long as you put forth a reasonable amount of effort. In addition to the in-class activities, there will be a couple of brief assignments/activities you will finish outside of class. For the in-class activities, I typically offer one or two more than the minimum number needed to get full credit for this component of your grade. Therefore, if you miss a class there won't be make up assignments. Instead, you should be able to get full credit if you keep attending class throughout the semester.

Extra credit

I will offer a maximum of 20 extra credit points if you talk during class when I propose questions or we go over in-class activities. I will give you 1 point for talking in class, up to two points for a day. You can get a maximum of 20 points during the semester. This is the only extra credit offered in this class (there will be no extra credit questions on the exams or other extra credit opportunities). Moreover, you can only miss two classes if you want to earn these points. Missing more than two classes will result in forfeiting these points.

Tentative Course Schedule*

WEEK	TOPICS	READINGS
Week/Dates		
1 8/21	Intro to course, purpose of research	Chapter 1 & 2
2 8/28	Intro to focus groups	Chapter 11
3 9/4	Focus groups continued, Background Report Due	Focus Group Supplement
4 9/11	Other qualitative methods, Focus Group Protocol Due	Chapter 9 & 10
5 9/18	Measurement	Chapter 4 & 5
6 9/25	Exam #1	Ch. 1, 2, 4, 5, 9, 10, 11 & Supplement
7 10/2	Survey design, Focus Group Report Due	Chapter 13
8 10/9	Sampling	Chapter 12
9 10/16	Content analysis, Survey Questions Due	Chapter 8
10 10/23	Experimental design	Chapter 14
11 10/30	Descriptive statistics	Chapter 6
12 11/6	Hypothesis testing	Chapter 15
13 11/14	Report creation	
14 11/20	Exam #2,	Ch. 6, 8, 12-15
15 11/27	No Class (Turkey Break). Open office hours 11/26 Survey Report Due 11/26	
16 12/4	Presentations Final Report Due to Canvas by 11:59pm	Chapter 16
Final TH 5/2 3-5pm	Exam Wednesday Dec. 11th from 12:30pm to 2:30pm	ALL CONTENT

*This schedule is tentative and subject to change. Changes to the schedule will be discussed in class. You are responsible for attending all classes unless it is marked as a holiday.