

PUR 3500

Public Relations Research Methods

Spring 2020

Wednesday 9:35 – 12:35 (W 3-5), section 1497, Weimer 1076

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Office hours: Tues. 9:30-11:30 a.m., or by appointment

Phone: 352-2845191 (email is generally the fastest way to get a hold of me)

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 expect that you attend class, and you will have the opportunity to gain points by completing in-class assignments. **In-class assignments will only be distributed to students who attend the class.** I do not take formal attendance. Slides, activities, any announcements, changes, etc. will be posted on the course website.

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: All written assignments must be turned in to Canvas prior to the start of class the day the assignment is due. Canvas will automatically mark assignments as late if they are uploaded even one second after the class period has begun. **You have 24 hours after the due date to turn in your assignment for a 10% grade reduction. A grade of ZERO will be assigned after the initial 24 hours.** It is your responsibility to make sure you properly uploaded your paper, blaming a group member doesn't work as it is the group's joint responsibility. There are no make-ups for exams or in-class activities, for any reason beyond university or religious excused absences. Please see the exam section below in the "How you Get Points" section for more details.

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 to others via your cell phone or computer usage, talking with others during lecture, or arriving or leaving late.

Special note: In-class laptop usage is restricted to taking notes about this particular class (No Internet, No email, No SNSs). Inappropriate use of a laptop—using the internet for reasons not related to this class—will not be accepted. Please make sure at the beginning of each class period that your cell phones are turned OFF (no text messages).

Online Course Evaluation: Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course based on 10 criteria. These evaluations are conducted online at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu>. Evaluations are typically open during the last 2-3 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>.

Note: 10-point extra credits will be given if everyone in the class complete the course evaluation

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
Final Report Presentation	25 pts
Group Evaluation	25 pts
In-class activities	50 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 be as fair and impartial as is humanly possible in the grading process. Each of you will be graded on the same basis. Normally, by the time I return your graded assignment, I have looked at each person's work at least several times and feel comfortable with the grade assigned to it. Grades are earned; they are not gifts, nor are they negotiated. Grades are awarded on the basis on the quality of the work performed, not the amount of time expended.

I will work my hardest to make this course enjoyable and interesting. However, some students struggle with the material. Please see me if you are having problems understanding the concepts covered in class. I am your resource for this class, see me in office hours or make an appointment if you can't come to office hours. 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

Two unit exams will be given, in addition to the **OPTIONAL** final, which if taken would replace your lowest unit exam grade. All exams will be worth 250 points. You must be on time for exams. **As soon as one person has completed their exam, no more exams will be handed out.** Only students enrolled in the course may be present during exam days. No make-up exams are given regardless of the reason. 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 that you may not be pleased with.

The exams will cover the material in the readings and lectures – that includes the textbook chapters and any supplemental material posted online to Canvas. 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 intentionally cumulative, but some chapters will utilize concepts from previous chapters. I will try to point these instances out when covering the material in lecture. **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.

Research project

A key objective of this class is to provide you with hands-on experience conducting research that is commonly used in various communication professions. Students will be required to engage in creating, conducting and analyzing information from both a focus group and a survey. Students will be allowed to choose their own client and research question for the semester within their assigned teams. Yes, this will require group work, but life is a group project, and communication research in the real world almost always will require group work. There will be multiple assignments related to the research projects that will be completed throughout the semester. There is an overview of the entire project on Canvas. These projects will be discussed in significant depth later in the course and materials will be provided in class and is available 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. 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.

Tentative Course Schedule*

WEEK	TOPICS	READINGS
Week/Dates		
1 1/8	Intro to course, purpose of research	Chapter 1 & 2
2 1/15	Intro to focus groups	Chapter 11
3 1/22	Focus groups continued, Background Report Due	Focus Group Supplement
4 1/29	Other qualitative methods, Focus Group Protocol Due	Chapter 9 & 10
5 2/5	Measurement	Chapter 4 & 5
6 2/12	Exam #1	Ch. 1, 2, 4, 5, 9, 10, 11 & Supplement
7 2/19	Survey design, Focus Group Report Due	Chapter 13
8 2/26	Sampling	Chapter 12
9 3/4	Spring Break – No class	
10 3/11	Content analysis, Survey Questions Due	Chapter 8
11 3/18	Experimental design	Chapter 14
12 3/25	Descriptive statistics	Chapter 6
13 4/1	Hypothesis testing	Chapter 15
14 4/8	Report creation	
15 4/15	Exam #2, Survey Report Due	Ch. 6, 8, 12-15
16 4/22	Presentations Final Report Due to Canvas by 11:59pm Group Evaluation Due by 11:59pm	Chapter 16
Final 4/27 3-5pm	Final Exam Monday April 27th, 3:00 – 5:00 pm	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.