

MMC 6421

Mass Communication Research Methods

Fall 2023. Mondays from 1:55-4:55pm in Weil 0238.

Instructor: Dr. Ben Lynn

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Office hours: Immediately following class or online by appointment.

Course description: This course provides a basic overview of common research methods employed in mass communication research. Students will be introduced to both qualitative and quantitative methods, including interviews, focus groups, content analysis, surveys, and experiments. The course will provide students with a basic understanding of the research process, from conceptualization to analysis and reporting.

Course objectives: Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Demonstrate a working knowledge of mass communication research methods.
- Logically develop research questions and testable hypotheses.
- Select appropriate research methods for answering RQ's and H's.
- Apply ethical standards while conducting research.
- Explain key methodological terms such as reliability, validity, measurement, sampling, and research design.
- Collect, analyze, and interpret both qualitative and quantitative data.
- Clearly articulate the limitations of each research method.

Instructional approach: Learning in this course happens through a combination of lectures, readings, projects, and dialogue. For effective learning to occur, students must come to class prepared, with all readings and assignments completed before class. Students are expected to be active participants in discussions and activities during class. Because research methods are a challenging topic to cover, questions are welcomed and encouraged.

Course requirements: Readings, class attendance, participation, and assignments.

Required texts:

The Practice of Social Research (15th ed.) by Earl R. Babbie (2020). ISBN: 9780357360767

IBM SPSS for introductory statistics: Use and interpretation (6th Ed.) by Morgan, Barrett, Leech, and Gloeckner (2019). ISBN: 9781138578210

Grading:

Percentage distribution

Attendance	5%
Assignments	80%
Research project	15%

Point distribution

Attendance	10
Assignment 1	20
Assignment 2	20
Assignment 3	20
Assignment 4a	20
Assignment 4b	20
Assignment 5	20
Assignment 6	20
Assignment 7	20
Final project	30
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Total points	200

Grade assignments

A	93% – 100%
A-	90% - 92.99%
B+	85% - 89.99%
B	80% - 84.99%
C+	75% - 79.99%
C	70% - 74.99%
D+	65% - 69.99%
D	60% - 64.99%
E	< 60%

Assignments*:

Assignment 1 –IRB training and certification. For this assignment, you must complete the required training for [IRB2 \(IRB803\)](#). Once you've completed the training, submit a copy of your completion form and create a [myIRB account](#).

Assignment 2 – Develop logical research questions and hypotheses. Based on a concise review of the literature, you will propose two research questions or hypotheses.

Assignment 3 – Conduct interviews or focus groups. In groups, you will develop a research question that is best answered using interviews or focus groups. You will also develop an interview protocol and conduct interviews or focus groups to answer your research question.

Assignment 4 – Part a – In groups, develop a protocol for conducting a content analysis. You will develop a protocol for analyzing content in your area of research.

Part b – Conduct content analysis. Using a different groups protocol, your group will conduct a brief content analysis.

Assignment 5 – Build a Qualtrics survey. Create an online survey using Qualtrics. The survey should measure at least 3 variables, with at least 4 items for each variable. The survey must also include screening questions and capture the participant's demographic information. Part of this assignment is to complete your peers' surveys.

Assignment 6 – Design an experiment. In groups, you will develop an experimental design to test a hypothesis. The design must manipulate your independent variable, measure your dependent variable(s), and include a manipulation check.

Assignment 7 – Clean and analyze a data set in SPSS. Using the data from either your experiment or survey assignment, you will clean the data and analyze the results.

Final project: Research proposal – You will create a research proposal demonstrating your grasp of mass communication research methods. The proposal will include a brief review of the literature to frame your research question or hypothesis. The methods section will include a rationale for why you chose your method, with detailed explanations for how you will collect and analyze your data.

*All research assignments will be conducted within the context of the classroom and are for instructional purposes only. As such, you will not need IRB approval to complete your assignments. However, should you wish to implement your final research proposal, depending on the research design you have chosen, you may need to submit a protocol for IRB approval to complete your study.

Administrative Policies

Plagiarism and academic dishonesty: The University of Florida's policies on plagiarism and academic dishonesty can be found [here](#). The policies can be summarized as follows: Do your own work and never take credit for someone else's work and be honest with yourself and others. You will be under a great deal of pressure as you advance through your graduate studies and it will be tempting to plagiarize someone's work or use AI to do the work for you.

Special learning accommodations: Students who need learning accommodations should first register with the UF Disability Resource Center (<https://disability.ufl.edu/contact-us/>) at (352) 392-8565 by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter which must be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodations. Students needing accommodations should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester.

Class Values Around Diversity and Inclusion: The University of Florida's College of Journalism and Communications embraces a commitment toward an intellectual community enriched and enhanced by diversity along several dimensions, including gender identity, race, ethnicity, nationality, sexuality, class, and religion.

My goal is to create a learning environment in which everyone feels comfortable enough to share their ideas and respects the ideas of others. Respecting other's perspectives does not mean we have to agree with them. Rather, we acknowledge our unique positions, and we can

discuss similarities and differences. Our diversity, and our ability to be inclusive of other's ideas, fosters growth in us that leads to better performance in our work.

Participation and attendance: Your presence and contribution are important, and they are required for a successful class. Therefore, you will be graded for both attendance and active class participation. If you are ill or have another excusable type of absence (court appearance, medical emergency, religious holiday, conference presentations), you need to notify me before class in order for it to be excused. Things that aren't excused are holiday travel, meetings for other classes, sporting events, social engagements and the like. More than one unexcused absence will result in the loss of a full letter grade from your final grade.

Graduate courses require a lot of reading, so please come to class prepared and ready to discuss the content we cover. This is your opportunity to critically engage with the course material and your peers.

Weekly Planner

Date	Topic	Readings (need to be read before class)	Assignments
Aug. 28	Basics of research	Babbie Chapters 1 and 2	
Sept. 4	Holiday – Labor Day		Assignment 1 – Due on Sept 8th
Sept. 11	Research process and design	Babbie Chapters 4 and 5	
Sept. 18	Research and ethics	Babbie Chapter 3	Assignment 2 – Due on Sept. 22
Sept. 25	Interviews	Babbie Chapter 10	
Oct. 2	Focus groups	Babbie Chapter 11	
Oct. 9	Analyzing qual data	Babbie Chapter 13	Assignment 3 – Due on Oct. 13
Oct. 16	Content analysis	Riffe et al. Chapter 6	Assignment 4a – Due on Oct. 20
Oct. 23	Scales and sampling	Babbie Chapters 6 and 7	Assignment 4b – Due on Oct. 27
Oct. 30	Survey design	Babbie Chapter 9	Assignment 5 – Due on Nov. 3
Nov. 6	Experimental design	Babbie Chapter 8	Assignment 6 – Due on Nov. 10
Nov. 13	Stats and SPSS Part 1	Babbie Chapters 14 and 15	
Nov. 20	Stats and SPSS Part 2	Babbie Chapter 16	Assignment 7 – Due on Nov. 24
Nov. 27	Writing about methods	Babbie Chapter 17	
Dec. 4	Reporting results		
Dec. 11	Final projects due		Final project – Due on Dec. 10th