



Public Relations Research

Fall - 2023

Thursdays 3:00pm to 6:00pm

Room: Weil Hall 0273

Professor: Alexandra Matthews

Office: Virtual

Email: amatthews@ufl.edu

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/alexandreamatthews/>

Office Hours: Via Zoom by appointment

*This syllabus is subject to change as the professor deems appropriate and necessary.

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.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this course, you should be able to:

- Identify strengths and weaknesses of various methods frequently used in PR (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.

REQUIRED READING

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 POLICIES

INSTRUCTOR INTERACTION

I am happy to meet with students by appointment on Zoom. The best way to reach me is by e-mail. I will try to send a response as soon as possible but it may take up to 48 hours to get a reply. If I haven't responded within that timeframe, please re-send your email. 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. Come talk to me *before* you must hand in the assignment.

ASSIGNMENT PROFESSIONALISM

Everything submitted for this course, including emails with the professor, should be written with a level of professionalism that would be expected by an employer. If you need assistance with professional writing skills, grammar, APA formatting, or other writing needs please visit the campus writing center for help. If assignments are submitted with writing mistakes it will harm your grade and I may direct you to the writing center. The center can be reached at Writing Studio, 302 Tigert Hall, 352-846-1138.

CLASS ETIQUETTE

Please be considerate of the ideas of others, and treat everyone in class with kindness, tolerance, and respect, regardless of your own personal views. Being respectful also 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. Cell phones should not be used during class other than during break times or to complete assignments. While drinks and light snacks are permitted, please be respectful and mindful not to be distracting.

LATE OR MISSED WORK

Students are expected to meet deadlines just as professionals in the workplace are. Late assignments for this course **will not be accepted**. Some consideration, however, might be given (at the discretion of the instructor) if there are extenuating circumstances such as prolonged hospitalization, family death, or extended individual sickness. Please do not submit Pages documents. Submit assignments preferably as Word documents or you may also submit them as PDFs.

ATTENDANCE

I will have you sign an attendance sheet during each class. You must arrive on time and stay through the whole class session to get full credit for in-class points that day. Attendance will also be tied to whether you can accrue bonus/extra credit points. If you miss more than two classes, you won't be eligible for bonus/extra credit points. I will post slides, activities, etc. on the course website. If you have questions regarding the content, please send me an email. If you miss more than three classes, you will lose 10% from your grade for each additional class you miss during the course of the semester. Please be courteous and arrive to class on time and

do not leave until you are instructed the class is over. If you will need to arrive late or leave early, please let the instructor know ahead of time.

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

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 set up a meeting with me to discuss grades. While you are welcome to email me, I may indicate that you need a Zoom 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. Only send things via email that you would say to another person in a face-to-face setting.

ACADEMIC HONESTY

All work submitted for this course must adhere to the university's honor code as follows:

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."

All work submitted for this course must be original and not previously submitted for any other course. Plagiarism or having another student complete an assignment for you will not be tolerated and will be considered academic dishonesty. All cases relating to such behavior will result in a failing grade or more severe measures may need to be taken in compliance with university guidelines.

You may review the Student Conduct & Honor Codes here:

<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honorcode/>.

ACCOMODATIONS

Students requesting classroom accommodation should first register with the Dean of Students Office's Disability Resource Center. The Dean of Students Office will provide an accommodation letter that must be presented to me when requesting accommodation. Students should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester. To contact the Disability Resource Center, visit www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/ or call 352-392-8565. Students with disabilities should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester.

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/>.

SOFTWARE USE

All faculty, staff, and students of the University are required and expected to obey the laws and legal agreements governing software use. Failure to do so can lead to monetary damages and/or criminal penalties for the individual violator. Because such violations are also against university policies and rules, disciplinary action will be taken as appropriate. We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to uphold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honesty and integrity.

STUDENT PRIVACY

There are federal laws protecting your privacy with regards to grades earned in courses and on individual assignments. For more information, please see: <http://registrar.ufl.edu/catalog0910/policies/regulationferpa.html>

COURSE RECORDING POLICY

Students are allowed to record video or audio of class lectures. However, the purposes for which these recordings may be used are strictly controlled. The only allowable purposes are (1) for personal educational use, (2) in connection with a complaint to the university, or (3) as evidence in, or in preparation for, a criminal or civil proceeding. All other purposes are prohibited. Specifically, students may not publish recorded lectures without the written consent of the instructor.

A “class lecture” is an educational presentation intended to inform or teach enrolled students about a particular subject, including any instructor-led discussions that form part of the presentation, and delivered by any instructor hired or appointed by the University, or by a guest instructor, as part of a University of Florida course. A class lecture **does not** include lab sessions, student presentations, clinical presentations such as patient history, academic exercises involving solely student participation, assessments (quizzes, tests, exams), field trips, private conversations between students in the class or between a student and the faculty or lecturer during a class session.

Publication without permission of the instructor is prohibited. To “publish” means to share, transmit, circulate, distribute, or provide access to a recording, regardless of format or medium, to another person (or persons), including but not limited to another student within the same class section. Additionally, a recording, or transcript of a recording, is considered published if it is posted on or uploaded to, in whole or in part, any media platform, including but not limited to social media, book, magazine, newspaper, leaflet, or third-party note/tutoring services. A student who publishes a recording without written consent may be subject to a civil cause of action instituted by a person injured by the publication and/or discipline under UF Regulation 4.040 Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code.

STUDENT RESOURCES

U Matter, We Care

If you or a friend is in distress, please contact umatter@ufl.edu or 352-392-1575 so that a team member can reach out to the student.

Counseling and Wellness Center

<http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc> and 352-392-1575; and the University Police Department: 352-392-1111 or 9-1-1 for emergencies.

Sexual Assault Recovery Services (SARS)

Student Health Care Center, 352-392-1161.

University Police Department

352-392-1111 (or 9-1-1 for emergencies), or <http://www.police.ufl.edu/>

Academic Resources

E-learning technical support, 352-392-4357 (select option 2) or e-mail to Learning-support@ufl.edu. <https://lss.at.ufl.edu/help.shtml>

Career Resource Center

Reitz Union, 352-392-1601. Career assistance and counseling. <https://www.crc.ufl.edu/>

Library Support

<http://cms.uflib.ufl.edu/ask> Various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources.

Teaching Center

Broward Hall, 352-392-2010 or 352-392-6420. General study skills and tutoring. <https://teachingcenter.ufl.edu/>

Writing Studio

302 Tigert Hall, 352-846-1138. Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers. <https://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/>

Student Complaints

Campus: https://www.dso.ufl.edu/documents/UF_Complaints_policy.pdf

On-Line Students Complaints

<http://www.distance.ufl.edu/student-complaint-process>

ASSIGNMENTS

Grading Policy

The grading scale for the course is as follows:

A 93-100%	C 72-77%
A- 90-92%	C- 70-71%
B+ 88-89%	D+ 68-69%
B 82-87%	D 62-67%
B- 80-81%	D- 60-61%
C+ 78-79%	E below 60%

Each part of the course will be based on a total of 1000 points which will count toward the final letter grade for the course as follows:

Exams: 500 points

Research Project: 425 points

Group Contract: 15 points

Background Report: 40 points

Focus Group Protocol: 50 points

Focus Group Report: 75 points

Survey Questions: 45 points

Survey Report: 75 points

Final Report: 100 points

Presentation: 25 points

In-class Activities: 50 points

Out-of-Class Activities: 25 points

Exams: 500 points

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. 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. All exams will be worth 250 points.

Research Project: 425 points

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 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 Activities: 50 points & Out-of-Class Activities: 25 points

Most weeks we will complete at least one activity in class. These are designed to get you to apply the knowledge you've learned to a real-world type of situation. You will get full credit for these if 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 a few 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 up to 30 extra credit points over the semester. However, you can only miss two classes if you want to earn these points. Missing more than two classes will result in forfeiting these points.

Participation

You can gain up to 20 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.

SONA Research

You can also gain up to 10 points for participating in research studies through SONA (UF's internal system for conducting research). For this class, you can participate in research studies for up to 1 full SONA point which will equal 10 extra credit points. Each study is worth different amounts of SONA points. For example, some studies are worth .25 of a point, others are worth .5 of a point, etc. so pay attention to how much each study is worth. Earning 1 full SONA point earns a total worth 10 extra credit points toward your final grade. You may participate in any of the studies on SONA, but you can only get up to 10 points so participating beyond 1 SONA point is up to you, but it will not accumulate additional points. You can access the studies here:

<https://ufl-cjc.sona-systems.com/>

COURSE SCHEDULE

Tentative Course Schedule*

WEEK	TOPICS	READINGS
Week/Dates		
1 8/24	Intro to course, purpose of research, Info Sheet Due	Chapter 1 & 2
2 8/31	Intro to focus groups	Chapter 11
3 9/7	Focus groups continued, Group Contract Due, IRB Assignment Due	Focus Group Supplement
4 9/14	Other qualitative methods, Background Report Due	Chapter 9 & 10
5 9/21	Measurement, Focus Group Protocol Due	Chapter 4 & 5
6 9/28	Exam #1	Ch. 1, 2, 4, 5, 9, 10, 11 & Supplement
7 10/5	Survey design	Chapter 13
8 10/12	Survey Design cont. & Sampling, Focus Group Report Due, Midterm Group Eval Due	Chapter 12
9 10/19	Sampling cont. & Content analysis, Qualtrics Assignment Due	Chapter 8
10 10/26	Descriptive statistics, Survey Questions Due	Chapter 6
11 11/2	Hypothesis Testing, Descriptive Stats Due	Chapter 15
12 11/9	Experimental design, Inferential Stats Due	Chapter 14
13 11/16	Report creation, Survey Report Due	Chapter 14
Holiday 11/23	No class. Happy Thanksgiving!	
14 11/30	Exam #2 Presentations, Final Group Evaluations, & Final Report Due to Canvas by 11:59pm	Ch. 6, 8, 12-15
Final 12/12	Final Exam 12/12 10:00am to 12:00pm	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.