

**MMC6936 Communication Research Methods**  
**University of Florida – Spring 2026**

**Professor: Dr. Tina McCorkindale**

**MY INFORMATION**

**E-mail:** [tinamccorkindale@gmail.com](mailto:tinamccorkindale@gmail.com)

**Bio:** <https://instituteforpr.org/ipr-bio/dr-tina-mccorkindale-2/>

**Cell:** 323-240-7822 (please note that I am based in Seattle, WA – Pacific Time)

**Twitter:** tmccorkindale

**LinkedIn:** <https://www.linkedin.com/in/tinamccorkindale/>

**CLASS INFORMATION**

**Course website:** <https://ufl.instructure.com/courses/555837>

**Office Hours:** Please email me to schedule an appointment. I will schedule some office hours once we get into the final project. We will also schedule some group/one-on-one meetings to discuss your final project.

**COURSE COMMUNICATION:** Please note that I'm located in Seattle, Washington, but I travel frequently across the U.S. and internationally.

If you have any questions about the course or your assignments, please email or call me. I will respond to you within 36 hours during the week and 48 hours on the weekend. If you request a lengthy answer, please send me your phone number and I will call you. Feel free to set up an appointment to speak with me anytime about the course.

If you email me, please include the course number – 6936 – in the subject line. If you notice yourself having trouble in the course, please speak with me immediately. I'm more than happy to chat with you on the phone about it.

I will also post announcements and upload articles/assignments in Canvas.

**BACKGROUND OF THE COURSE**

**Course Description**

**MMC 6936 Graduate Research Methods** This course equips students with advanced skills to design, conduct, and critically evaluate research

that informs communication theory, strategy, and practice across organizational and applied contexts.

Relating to [Bloom's Taxonomy of Learning](#), this course comprises level 3 (application), level 4 (analysis), and level 5 (synthesis) type of learning.

### **Course Objectives and Philosophy:**

Research methods are used to measure the content, process, and effects of communication on attitudes, knowledge, and behavior. Students must possess a basic understanding of techniques such as basic statistical methods of information analysis and be able to present results (or critique others' presentations) in an informative and appealing manner.

Upon completion of this course, you should be able to:

- Conduct and design reliable and valid social science research or studies
- Read, interpret, and critique others' research
- Report research accurately and effectively
- Practice research in an ethical manner

Research pervades society. People are bombarded with statistics, data, and "results" of research. In most instances, research methods and results must be understood. Journalists must use research every day and be able to interpret reports. Additionally, researchers must critically appraise the results, looking for potential errors in either design or the more basic questions underlying that design. He or she must be able to "read" computer-produced results. In public relations and advertising, primary and secondary research is crucial to any campaign both internally and externally. In television and radio, research must be conducted to understand attitudes and audiences. Finally, the research results must be communicated accurately to the intended audiences (internal/external, clients) in the most appropriate way.

### **Required text**

Boyle, M. P., & Schmierbach, M. (2020). *Applied communication research methods: Getting started as a researcher* (2nd ed.). Routledge.  
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429055551>

### **Recommended text (Optional)**

Additional recommended text: Wimmer & Dominick (2014). [Mass Media Research, 10th Edition - Cengage](#)

The last edition released was in 2014, but it's still relevant today (just may be a little thin on the social and mobile examples). I've reviewed a lot of research texts and many of them are too bogged down, but this one explains it the best. Try to find a used copy of the book or rent. It's not worth buying with the high price tag.

## **COURSE AND POLICIES**

### **Conduct of the course**

As this is a graduate level course, I expect graduate level participation and submissions. Each chapter may consist of reading materials, a PowerPoint guide, and objectives. Chapters may also include video clips, chapter checks, discussions, and case studies. Online classroom time may consist of lectures, video clips, discussion, in-class and out-of-class assignments, and small group projects. Readings in addition to the textbook will also be distributed during the course.

### **Late work**

All assignments and exams must be completed as scheduled. Late or make-up work will NOT be accepted. Please keep copies of your work in case there are any issues at the end of the course.

### **Special Assistance**

It is my hope that you succeed in this class and develop a deep knowledge of research methods. If you have any special needs that you feel I should be aware of to assist you in your learning process, please feel free to set up a conference with me during my office hours or at some other time.

### **Academic Dishonesty**

Academic dishonesty is a serious offense that not only comprises your personal integrity, but the integrity of University of Florida and your fellow classmates. Academic dishonesty includes plagiarism, cheating during exams, use of unauthorized study aids, and falsifying any university document. Any offense will be taken extremely seriously.

The University's Honesty Policy regarding cheating, plagiarism, etc.:

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states "We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the 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." The Conduct Code specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. [See the UF Conduct Code website for more information](#). If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor or TAs in this class.

The academic dishonesty policy can be found in the university catalog. One of the most common violations is plagiarism, defined by the university as:

"Plagiarism is intentionally or knowingly presenting words, ideas or work of others as one's own work. Plagiarism includes copying homework, copying lab reports, copying computer programs, using a work or portion of a work written or created by another but not crediting the source, using one's own work completed in a previous class for credit in another class without permission, paraphrasing another's work without giving credit, and borrowing or using ideas without giving credit."

Therefore, all assignments using sources must be documented both in-text and in a bibliography using APA style. If you are not sure if something constitutes violation of academic dishonesty, please ask me. COPYING (OR CUT AND PASTING) ANY MATERIAL FROM A WEBSITE CONSTITUTES PLAGIARISM. YOU MUST CREDIT ALL SOURCES OR YOUR TEXTBOOK. Please note that if you copy large chunks of material word for word even with a citation and direct quotes, that this is unacceptable. Also, you are not permitted to use any AI software, such as ChatGPT.

Additionally, this is an INDIVIDUAL course. You are not to work with any students in this class to complete assignments or take tests unless directly indicated. If you do, this constitutes plagiarism.

I do not tolerate plagiarism. If you plagiarize in any way, you will receive a zero for the entire course, no matter the weight of the assignment. Ignorance is not an excuse, and this will be covered on the first day of class.

Some useful resources on plagiarism and academic integrity include:

- [Guide to Avoiding Plagiarism](#)

For UF policies on class recordings, attendance, grading, disability resources, honor code, and other campus resources visit:  
<https://go.ufl.edu/syllabuspolicies>.

With the increase of use in generative AI both in academia and in the profession, we can use it, but just wisely. Generative AI content has a certain cadence so it is easy to discern created content, along with generative AI identification apps. This is taken from the ["IPR AI Disclosure and Labeling Policy."](#) With this, here are the rules pertaining to this class:

#### **Considerations When Using Generative AI**

- Generative AI cannot verify the quality or accuracy of the work it draws upon and is prone to hallucinations (or making up content, especially with research citations).
- Generative AI output may contain biased information.
- Generative AI stops collecting information at a certain period of time, so it does not use the most updated research or material.

#### **Rules and Guidelines for AI Use**

- Authors must disclose how generative AI was used and to what extent.
- Generative AI should be used primarily for editorial assistance. AI should not be used as a co-author for a research paper, as it cannot take responsibility for the work.
- Authors and creators must take full responsibility for all content created by generative AI, including the use of copyrighted material, and ensure the content is factual, credible, accurate, and supported by other reliable sources.
- AI should not be used as a primary or secondary source. Instead, it is the author's responsibility to track original content sources for proper attribution.

- Each use of generative AI within a document should be addressed individually.
- Authors are responsible for complying with relevant laws and regulations related to AI-generated content.

**Generative AI use should be labeled or disclosed when used for:**

- The research process, such as collecting or analyzing the data
- New content generation (visual or written)
- Content a reader would assume to be human-created
- Language translation (content should also be checked by a fluent speaker)
- Editing that changes the style, voice, or composition of the writing

**Generative AI typically does not require a label or disclosure for:**

- Idea or topic generation/brainstorming
- Grammatical changes or other minor edits that do not change the overall content, style, or voice of the piece
- Summarizing of material if it does not change the content

**Ways to disclose:**

- In-text citation using APA style
- A reference in a paragraph in the report
- Footnote
- Endnote

**What should be included in the label or disclosure:**

- The generative AI program used (e.g., ChatGPT 4.0)
- The prompt used (e.g., summarize these research findings in two paragraphs)
- The section where generative AI was applied (e.g., introduction)
- Who used the generative AI (e.g., Dr. Tina McCorkindale)
- The date, if applicable

*Here is an example of a footnote:*

The introduction was created by inserting the bulk of the report written solely by Dr. McCorkindale, the primary author of this report, into ChatGPT 4 and then asking it to create two introductory paragraphs. Dr. McCorkindale checked the accuracy of the content and edited the introduction.

For more information about content disclosure, please refer to Dr. Cayce Myers's IPR article, "[To disclose or not to disclose: That is the AI question.](#)"

IPR suggests that if in doubt whether AI-generated content should be labeled, it's best to over-disclose rather than under-disclose.

Please note: This policy will evolve to ensure it remains relevant and effective throughout changes in the AI disclosure landscape.

## **COURSE GUIDELINES**

The final project must be typed. ALL ASSIGNMENTS ARE DUE ON THE DUE DATE BY 11:59 P.M. Example: (Due: July 15 at 11:59 p.m. is one minute before July 16).

Each week is available, but assignments cannot be submitted until that week starts. You should use proper grammar and be free of spelling errors in both the emails you send to me and in the papers you write. I know this is not an English class, but poor grammar and spelling errors indicate you did not spend enough time editing your paper and unfortunately, reflects poorly upon you. So please make sure you are aware of this, and pay close attention to your writing in a university and business setting.

Netiquette refers to the behavior that you are expected to follow when communicating online. It covers both common courtesy in an online environment and the informal ground “rules” for navigating in cyberspace. For this course, you are asked to follow these basic guidelines:

- When sending me an email, please include the course number and a brief description in the subject line. For example: **J 594 RE: Participation for September 1.**
- Use a signature with your full name at the end of your emails.
- Remember that slang can be misunderstood or misinterpreted – use your “academic” voice. pls dnt use txt Slang when sending messages 2 me.
- Be sensitive to those with cultural and/or linguistic backgrounds, as well as different political and religious beliefs.
- Respect different views and opinions
- Provide constructive feedback and use good judgment when communicating with your classmates.
- Be professional and use good grammar and spelling. Consider writing your discussion posts, assignments, and online correspondence in a text editor to check for spelling and grammar before pasting it into an online submission.

Please read these [guidelines for online etiquette](#) for how to interact with others and your professor.

Your success is genuinely important to me. If challenges come up for you this term around attendance, please contact me as soon as you can. Together we can identify what resources or strategies might be available to support you and your learning.

**File names and type:** Please note: Assignments should all be done in Microsoft Word or PDF, not uploaded as pages, or txt or works.

## **GRADING**

The grading is as follows:

PM 1: Research Topic Proposal	(5%)
PM 2: Literature Review	(20%)
PM 3: Qualitative Research	(15%)
PM 4: Quantitative Research	(15%)
Applied Research Final Proposal	(25%)
Chapter Checks/Discussion/Assignments	<u>(20%)</u>
	(100%)

**Project Milestones (PMs) (55%):** You will have four project milestones that will be all be included in your final Applied Research Proposal. After each section is completed, take the feedback and add to your “Applied Research Proposal” that has additional requirements. Details about each of these project milestones are provided in the “Applied Proposal Research Instructions in “Important Course Documents” in Canvas. The allocations are as follows:

- PM 1: Research Topic Proposal – 5%
- PM 2: Literature Review – 20%
- PM 3: Qualitative Research – 15%
- PM 4: Quantitative Research – 15%

**Applied Research Proposal (25%):** Final project due in this class. Details about each of these project milestones are provided in the “Applied Proposal Research Instructions in “Important Course Documents” in Canvas.

#### **Chapter-Checks/Discussion/Attendance/Other assignments (20%)**

Students will receive a participation grade for the discussion boards, along with some assignments assessing your knowledge of the topic so far, along with chapter checks to make sure you are understanding the material. All assignments will be discussed in class or sent through Canvas.

- **Discussions:** Students are expected to attend class via Zoom and provide appropriate levels of discussion. Discussion boards may also be required in this course.
- **Chapter Checks:** Students may also have chapter checks for some of the chapters that may be given by Dr. McCorkindale at any time.
- **Assignments:** You will have an in-class assignment or a homework assignment in almost every class throughout the quarter, including peer reviews and presentations. Details will be provided in each class.

The grading scale for the course is as follows:

A	92-100%
A-	90-91%
B+	88-89%
B	82-87%
B-	80-81%
C+	78-79%

C	72-77%
C-	70-71%
D+	68-69%
D	62-67%
D-	60-61%
E	below 60%

**Additional Information:**

Occasionally, it may be necessary to revise the schedule to meet student needs. Additionally, I may add readings and assignments as needed. For some classes, class may start late but assignments with classmates will be given.

**COURSE CALENDAR**

Week	Date	Topic	Reading & Assignments
1	January 14	<b>Fundamentals of Research</b>	<p><b>Topics</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Importance of Research, Measurement and Evaluation</li> <li>Ethics in Research</li> <li>Assessing Sources</li> <li>Contemporary considerations (generative AI, samples, other real-world considerations)</li> </ul> <p><b>Readings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Boyle and Schmierbach, Chapter 1: Preface</li> <li>Boyle and Schmierbach, Chapter 2: Basic Concepts of Research</li> <li>Boyle and Schmierbach, Chapter 4: Ethical Research</li> </ul> <p><b>Additional Resources</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">Introduction to Communication Research: Becoming a Scholar (usg.edu)</a> (Chapter 1)</li> <li><a href="#">Read the Belmont Report   HHS.gov</a></li> <li>The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks (excerpt in Canvas)</li> </ul>

2	January 21  <span style="color: red;">Class from 3:30 – 4:55 pm</span>	<b>Categories of Research and the Research Process</b>	<p><b>Topics</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Qualitative vs. Quantitative Research</li> <li>• Primary and Secondary Research</li> <li>• Landscape Analysis</li> <li>• Independent vs. Dependent variables</li> <li>• The Research Process</li> <li>• Research Pitfalls</li> <li>• Theory and theory building</li> <li>• Overview Applied Research Project Proposal</li> </ul> <p><b>Readings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Boyle and Schmierbach, Chapter 3: Scholarly Research and the Creation of Knowledge</li> <li>• <a href="http://instituteforpr.org">The Communicator's Guide to Research, Analysis, and Evaluation - Institute for Public Relations (instituteforpr.org)</a></li> </ul> <p><b>Additional Resources</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="http://usg.edu">Introduction to Communication Research: Becoming a Scholar (usg.edu)</a> (Chapter 2)</li> </ul>
3	January 28  <span style="color: red;">Class from 2:10 - 4 pm</span>	<b>Measurement</b>	<p><b>Topics</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Validity and reliability</li> <li>• Outputs vs. Outcomes</li> <li>• Levels of Measurement</li> <li>• Likert and Semantic Differential Scales</li> <li>• Mixed Methods</li> </ul> <p><b>Additional Resources</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Boyle and Schmierbach, Chapter 5: Concept Explication and Measurement</li> <li>• Boyle and Schmierbach, Chapter 7: Effective Measurement</li> <li>• Boyle and Schmierbach, Chapter 8: Validity</li> <li>• Boyle and Schmierbach, Chapter 12: Reliability and subjectivity</li> <li>• <a href="http://unsw.edu.au">Types of Data &amp; the Scales of Measurement   UNSW Online</a></li> </ul>

4	February 4	<b>Insights into Data and Sampling</b>	<p><b>Topics</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Normal Curve</li> <li>• Margin of Error</li> <li>• Sampling</li> <li>• Types of Sampling</li> <li>• Calculating sample size</li> </ul> <p><b>Readings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Boyle and Schmierbach, Chapter 6: Sampling</li> </ul> <p><b>Additional Resources</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Sampling Methods: Types, Tips &amp; Techniques - Qualtrics</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">How to Determine the Correct Sample Size - Qualtrics</a></li> </ul> <p><b>Assignments Due</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Project Milestone 1 – Research Topic Proposal:</b> Due on Friday, February 6 (please see “Applied Proposal Research Instructions in “Important Course Documents” in Canvas)</li> </ul>
5	February 11  <span style="color: red;">Class from 3 - 4:55 pm</span>	<b>Qualitative Research Methods</b>	<p><b>Topics</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus Groups</li> <li>• Interviews</li> </ul> <p><b>Readings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Boyle and Schmierbach, Chapter 10: Studying People Qualitatively</li> </ul> <p><b>Additional Resources</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">National Library of Medicine Qualitative Study</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">How to Use and Assess Qualitative Methods</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Applying Conceptual Analysis and Inductive Research in Social Science</a></li> </ul>

6	February 18	<b>Content/Media Analysis</b>	<p><b>Topics</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding Content/Media Analysis</li> <li>• Sampling in Content Analysis</li> <li>• Intercoder reliability</li> </ul> <p><b>Readings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Boyle and Schmierbach, Chapter 11: Analyzing Texts and Other Artifacts</li> </ul> <p><b>Additional Resources</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">What is content analysis?</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Home - Content Analysis - Guides at University of North Texas (unt.edu)</a></li> </ul> <p><b>Assignments Due</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Project Milestone 2 – Literature Review:</b> Due on Friday, February 20 (please see “Applied Proposal Research Instructions in “Important Course Documents” in Canvas)</li> </ul>
7	February 25	<b>Surveys</b>	<p><b>Topics</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Designing Surveys</li> <li>• Writing Survey Questions</li> <li>• Reporting Survey Results</li> <li>• Evaluating Survey Questions</li> </ul> <p><b>Readings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Boyle and Schmierbach, Chapter 9: Studying people quantitatively (through “opinion polls” section)</li> </ul> <p><b>Additional Resources</b></p> <p><a href="#">Writing Survey Questions   Pew Research Center</a></p>
8	March 4	<b>Experimental Methods</b>	<p><b>Topics</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How to conduct experiments</li> <li>• Types of experiments</li> </ul>

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A/B testing</li> </ul> <p><b>Readings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Boyle and Schmierbach, Chapter 9: Studying people quantitatively (from “opinion polls” section)</li> </ul> <p><b>Additional Resources</b></p> <p><a href="http://Experiments on Mass Communication – Items (ssrc.org)"><u>Experiments on Mass Communication – Items (ssrc.org)</u></a></p>
9	March 11 – NO CLASS		<p><b>Assignments Due</b></p> <p><b>Project Milestone 3 – Qualitative Research:</b> Due on Friday, March 13 (please see “Applied Proposal Research Instructions in “Important Course Documents” in Canvas)</p>
10/11	March 18 – NO CLASS  March 25 Class	<b>Descriptive Statistics</b>	<p><b>Topics</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Descriptive Statistics</li> <li>• SPSS Analysis and interpretation</li> </ul> <p><b>Readings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Boyle and Schmierbach, Chapter 13: Descriptive Statistics</li> </ul>
12	April 1	<b>Inferential Statistics</b>	<p><b>Topics</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inferential Statistics</li> <li>• SPSS Analysis and interpretation</li> </ul> <p><b>Readings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Boyle and Schmierbach, Chapter 14: Estimation and Inference</li> <li>• Boyle and Schmierbach, Chapter 15: Bivariate and multivariate</li> </ul> <p><b>Project Milestone 4 – Quantitative Research:</b> Due on Friday, April 3 (please see “Applied Proposal Research Instructions in “Important Course Documents” in Canvas)</p>

13	April 8	Work on Final Research proposal	SPSS Work  Office Hours – Meet with Dr. McCorkindale and schedule peer review discussions
14	April 15	Research Discussions	Research Discussions and Presentations
15	April 22	Office Hours with Dr. M	Final Research Paper Due: Tuesday, April 28 at 11:59 pm