

MMC 6421: Research Methods in Mass Communication
Fall 2012
Wednesdays 10:40 a.m. to 1:40 p.m.

Dr. Wayne Wanta

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2070 Weimer Hall, 392-0500

Office hours: Wednesday 8:30-10:30 a.m. and by appointment

Course description

This course is intended to provide a basic overview of how researchers ask and attempt to answer questions about the mass media. You will become familiar with the scientific method of inquiry, frequently used quantitative data gathering methods and data analysis techniques. The focus will be on content analysis, surveys and experiments, although other methods will also be evaluated.

Goals:

In this class, students will:

- become familiar with social science research
- practice research conceptualization, design and statistical analysis
- critically assess designs and results of published studies in mass communication field
- identify and solve reliability and validity issues in the design
- apply the appropriate statistical analysis technique to answer your research questions
- run statistical tests on SPSS
- interpret the results of major statistical tests

Required text:

Babbie, E. (2010). *The Practice of Social Research* (12th Edition). Belmont: Wadsworth.

Several additional readings will also be required each week.

Grading:

Grading for the course will be done quantitatively and will be based on five variables:

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| • Midterm exam | 20 percent |
| • Assignments | 25 percent |
| • Assignment presentations | 20 percent |
| • Class participation/attendance | 10 percent |
| • Final research proposal | 25 percent |

Note: There is no final exam.

Midterm exam: An in-class exam is scheduled for Oct. 3. Part of the exam will involve statistical tests. Questions will be short-answer or short essays.

Assignments: Seven assignments dealing with topics of the week are assigned. A detailed description of each assignment will be distributed in class. Most of the assignments involve critiquing published articles on topics of that week. The assignments will be 2 to 3 pages and are due at the beginning of class. Late assignments will be docked severely.

Assignment presentations: Each student will do two in-class presentations, one dealing with Assignments 1-4 and one dealing with Assignments 5-7. The first set of presentations will be a short description of the assignments students completed for that week. These presentations will be no longer than 5 minutes. The second set of presentations will involve a description of their article critiques. These presentations will be about 15 minutes. A signup sheet for presentation times will be distributed next week.

Class participation/attendance: Since this is a graduate seminar, students are expected to attend every class and to participate in class discussions. Excuses for absences must be legitimate. DO NOT tell me that you have to go to Wrestlemania (unless you have an extra ticket for me). More than one absence will affect your final grade. Students will receive a failing grade for missing 3 or more classes.

Final papers: Each student will produce a proposal for a potential research project. The paper must be between 12 and 15 pages. Papers will be graded on the quality of the conceptualization of variables, the measurement of variables and the soundness of the research design. Because the paper should be of professional quality, grammar also matters.

Plagiarism; Cheating or other Academic Misconduct: Each graduate student signed an Academic Integrity Statement when they entered the College of Journalism and Communications. For a reminder, here is a link to the statement:

<http://www.jou.ufl.edu/grad/forms/Plagiarism-Guideline.pdf>

In addition, all students are bound by the university's Honor Code Policy at

<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/judicial/honorcode.php>. **Anyone who violates these policies in this course will receive a failing grade in this course and face further sanctions from the college and university.**

Special needs: Students requesting classroom accommodation must first register with the Dean of Students Office. The Dean of Students will provide documentation to the student who must then provide this documentation to the instructor when requesting an accommodation. This course conforms to all requirements of the ADA and handles with sensitivity all matters related to gender, race, sexual orientation, age, religion or disability. Please alert the instructor if any issues arise.

Syllabus Changes: The instructor reserves the right to alter the syllabus or course schedule as the need arises. Note: Some of the content for this syllabus was taken from syllabi from previous classes.

Tips for getting good grades: Come to class on time. Turn off your cellphone. Complete all of the readings before class. Laugh at my jokes.

Tentative Schedule

Week 1, Aug. 22

Course introduction

Week 2, Aug. 29

Research introduction

SPSS Intro

Readings: Babbie Ch. 1 & 2

Week 3, Sept. 5

Elements of research; Ethics

Assignment I: IRB training: <http://apps.research.uci.edu/tutorial/>

Take tutorial as a visitor. Print out completion sheet and put your name on it.

Unit of analysis; Conceptualization and operationalization

Readings: Babbie Ch. 4-5

Assignment II: Concept creation

Week 4, Sept. 12

No Class!!!

Wayne in Europe

Week 5, Sept. 19

Measurement; Sampling

(If Wayne decides to return....)

Babbie Ch. 6-7

Assignment III: Measurement/Sampling critique

Week 6, Sept. 26

Statistical analyses

Assignment IV: Index creation/reliability test

Week 7, Oct. 3

Midterm

Week 8, Oct. 10

Content Analysis I

Readings: Babbie Ch. 11

Week 9, Oct. 17

Content Analysis II

Assignment V: Content analysis study critique

Week 10, Oct. 24

Surveys I

Readings: Babbie Ch. 9

Week 11, Oct. 31

Surveys II

Assignment VI: Survey study critique

Week 12, Nov. 7

Experiments I

Readings: Babbie Ch. 8

Week 13, Nov. 14

Experiments II

Assignment VII: Experiment critique

Week 14, Nov. 21

No Class, Thanksgiving

Week 15, Nov. 28

Final presentations

Week 16, Dec. 5

Final presentations

Final papers due