

MMC 6421: Research Methods in Mass Communication
Fall 2013
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 may 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. 9. 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 and should be sent to me as an email attachment. Late assignments will be docked severely.

Assignment presentations: Each student will do two in-class presentations, one dealing with Assignments 2-4 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. Students will do all seven assignments, but present two of them in class.

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: 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 Honor Code (<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/>) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor. **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. 21

Course introduction

Week 2, Aug. 28

Research introduction

SPSS Intro

Readings: Babbie Ch. 1 & 2

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.

Week 3, Sept. 4

Elements of research; Ethics

Unit of analysis; Conceptualization and operationalization

Readings: Babbie Ch. 4-5

Assignment II: Concept creation

Week 4, Sept. 11

Measurement; Sampling

Babbie Ch. 6-7

Assignment III: Measurement/Sampling critique

Week 5, Sept. 18

Statistical analyses

Assignment IV: Index creation/reliability test

Week 6, Sept. 25

Surveys I

Readings: Babbie Ch. 9

Week 7, Oct. 2

Surveys II

Assignment VI: Survey study critique

Week 8, Oct. 9

Midterm

(Wayne in Asia...)

Week 9, Oct. 16

Content Analysis I

Readings: Babbie Ch. 11

(Wayne in Asia, guest speaker)

Week 10, Oct. 23

Content Analysis II

Assignment V: Content analysis study critique

(Wayne back from Asia Maybe...)

Week 11, Oct. 30

SPSS

Week 12, Nov. 6

Experiments I

Readings: Babbie Ch. 8

Week 13, Nov. 13

Experiments II

Assignment VII: Experiment critique

Week 14, Nov. 20

Final presentations

Week 15, Nov. 27

No class: Thanksgiving

Week 16, Dec. 4

Final presentations

Final papers due