

## **J 380 Introduction to Research Methods**

Fall 2017 (08105)  
TTH 11-12:30, CMA 3.130  
School of Journalism  
The University of Texas at Austin

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### **Course Description and Objectives**

Social science research allows scholars to make sense of the social world -- to discover why people think and act the way they do. The main purpose of this course is to provide students with an introduction to the methodological foundations and tools to address journalism, media, and communication issues. Students will learn how to conduct surveys, content analyses, experiments, focus groups, and in-depth interviews. Specifically, after taking this course, students will be able to:

- (1) understand the purpose of research;
- (2) describe and compare the major research methods in journalism, media, and communication;
- (3) identify a meaningful research topic;
- (4) select an appropriate method and theory;
- (5) propose a research study;
- (6) understand the importance of research ethics and integrate ethics into the research process;
- (7) evaluate existing research that uses one of the primary research methods in the field;
- (8) reflect on the role of social science and the impact of academic research on society.

### **Required Readings**

Schutt, R. K. (2015). *Investigating the Social World: The Process and Practice of Research* (8th edition). Sage.

Additional readings from different sources will be made available on the course's Canvas site at <http://canvas.utexas.edu>.

### **Course Requirements**

#### **Assignments**

**Participation and Exercises (15%):** A series of exercises and activities are designed to help students achieve learning goals. Students are expected to: 1) read and respond to assigned readings, 2) complete exercises in time, and 3) actively participate in in-class and online discussions. Everyone is expected to think critically and exchange ideas with others.

The instructor will monitor attendance or give in-class exercises from time to time. No make-ups for such exercises will be granted. There is no need to justify your absence, but more than 4 absences will result in an F (60/100) for participation, and more than 6 absences will result in a zero for participation.

**Design Survey and Content Analysis Instruments (20%):** You will design a survey questionnaire for an online platform (e.g., Qualtrics) and a codebook for a content analysis.

Exam (30%): The exam, scheduled after the mid-term of the semester, will cover materials discussed in class and readings and will include multiple-choice and short answer questions.

Research Proposal (35%): This will be developed in several stages, including the description of the topic, research questions, draft of the proposal, and final version. During the process, the instructor would serve as your consultant and your classmates would also provide feedback.

Always turn in professional-level written work, using the most recent edition of *American Psychological Association* (APA) style or the *Chicago Manual of Style* for citing references. Points will be deducted for spelling, grammatical, punctuation, and capitalization errors.

### **Grading Scheme**

A = 94 or above  
A- = 90-93  
B+ = 87-89  
B = 84-86  
B- = 80-83  
C+ = 77-79  
C = 74-76  
C- = 70-73  
D+ = 67-69  
D = 64-66  
D- = 60-63  
F = below 60

### **Missed Classes/Deadlines and Late Assignments**

If an emergency prevents a student from taking a scheduled exam or meeting the deadline of a presentation, the student must notify the instructor prior to the exam or presentation. Otherwise, the student will not be eligible for a make-up. Make-up exams/presentations will be granted only for a limited time and only for valid, documented reasons, such as serious illness, family emergency, jury duty or military reserve obligation. Absence excuses are subject to verification. Presenting a false excuse will be considered a violation of the academic integrity rules.

If the deadline of an assignment is missed, all late work must be turned in within one week after it is due and will be downgraded for one letter grade no matter it is 1 or 7 days late. No late work beyond the one-week period will be accepted. Missed assignments will receive a zero.

### **Disruptive Behavior**

Mutual respect is essential in this class. Therefore, please do not use your laptop computer or other electronic devices in class for purposes other than note-taking. In accordance with university policy, disruptive behavior will be documented and may lead to sanctions. Examples of disruptive behaviors in the classroom include arriving late to class, chatting, etc.

### **Academic Integrity**

Be academically honest in every aspect of class work. All students are subject to the student code of conduct, including the University Code of Academic Integrity. For this course, *academic dishonesty* includes (but is not limited to) the following: fabrication (i.e., making up data, sources or information), plagiarism (using someone else's work in your work without giving proper credit), duplication (doing an assignment for this course and for any other course in this or any prior semester without the express consent of the instructor), and cheating (exchanging information with another individual during an exam). Violations of the academic integrity code will result in penalties in this course and all violations will be reported to the University. It is your responsibility to be aware of the rules of academic dishonesty -- ignorance is not a defense. When in doubt,

consult the instructor before doing anything about which you are uncertain.

### **The University of Texas Honor Code**

Each student in the course is expected to abide by the University of Texas Honor Code: "As a student of The University of Texas at Austin, I shall abide by the core values of the University and uphold academic integrity."

### **University Electronic Mail Notification Policy**

All students should become familiar with the University's official e-mail student notification policy. It is the student's responsibility to keep the University informed as to changes in his or her e-mail address. Students are expected to check e-mail on a frequent and regular basis in order to stay current with University-related communications, recognizing that certain communications may be time-critical. It is recommended that e-mail be checked daily, but at a minimum, twice per week.

In this course, e-mail will be used as a means of communication with students. You will be responsible for checking your e-mail regularly for class work and announcements. We will use your e-mail address in Canvas.

### **Use of Canvas**

This course uses Canvas, a Web-based course management system in which a password-protected site is created for each course. Canvas can be used to distribute course materials, to communicate and collaborate online, to post grades, to submit assignments, and to take online quizzes and surveys.

You will be responsible for checking the Canvas course site regularly for class work and announcements. As with all computer systems, there are occasional scheduled downtimes as well as unanticipated disruptions. Notification of these disruptions will be posted on the Canvas login page. Scheduled downtimes are not an excuse for late work. Canvas is available at <http://canvas.utexas.edu>. Support is provided by the ITS Help Desk at 475-9400 Monday through Friday 8 am to 6 pm, so plan accordingly.

### **Religious Holy Days**

By UT Austin policy, you must notify me of your pending absence at least fourteen days prior to the date of observance of a religious holy day. If you must miss a class, an examination, a work assignment, or a project in order to observe a religious holy day, I will give you an opportunity to complete the missed work within a reasonable time after the absence.

### **Behavior Concerns Advice Line (BCAL)**

If you are worried about someone who is acting differently, you may use the Behavior Concerns Advice Line to discuss by phone your concerns about another individual's behavior. This service is provided through a partnership among the Office of the Dean of Students, the Counseling and Mental Health Center (CMHC), the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), and The University of Texas Police Department (UTPD). Call 512-232-5050 or visit <http://www.utexas.edu/safety/bcal>.

### **Q Drop Policy**

If you want to drop a class after the 12th class day, you'll need to execute a Q drop before the Q-drop deadline, which typically occurs near the middle of the semester. Under Texas law, you are only allowed six Q drops while you are in college at any public Texas institution. For more information, see: <http://www.utexas.edu/ugs/csacc/academic/adddrop/qdrop>

### **Services for Students with Disabilities**

This class respects and welcomes students of all backgrounds, identities, and abilities. If there are circumstances that make our learning environment and activities difficult, if you have medical information that you need to share with me, or if you need specific arrangements in case the building needs to be evacuated, please let me know. I am committed to creating an effective learning environment for all students, but I can only do so if you discuss your needs with me as

early as possible. I promise to maintain the confidentiality of these discussions. If appropriate, also contact Services for Students with Disabilities, 512-471-6259 (voice) or 1-866-329- 3986 (video phone). <http://ddce.utexas.edu/disability/about/>

### **Counseling and Mental Health Services**

Taking care of your general well-being is an important step in being a successful student. If stress, test anxiety, racing thoughts, feeling unmotivated or anything else is getting in your way, there are options available for support.

For **immediate** support:

- Visit/Call the Counseling and Mental Health Center (CMHC): M-F 8-5p | SSB, 5th floor | [512-471-3515](http://512-471-3515) | [cmhc.utexas.edu](http://cmhc.utexas.edu)
- CMHC Crisis Line: 24/7 | [512.471.2255](http://512.471.2255) | [cmhc.utexas.edu/24hourcounseling.html](http://cmhc.utexas.edu/24hourcounseling.html)

**CARE Counselor** in the Moody College of Communication is: Abby Simpson, LCSW

- |CMA 4.134 | [512-471-7642](http://512-471-7642) (Please *leave a message* if she is unavailable)

**FREE Services** at CMHC:

- Brief assessments and referral services
- Mental health & wellness articles - [cmhc.utexas.edu/commonconcerns.html](http://cmhc.utexas.edu/commonconcerns.html)
- MindBody Lab - [cmhc.utexas.edu/mindbodylab.html](http://cmhc.utexas.edu/mindbodylab.html)
- Classes, workshops, & groups - [cmhc.utexas.edu/groups.html](http://cmhc.utexas.edu/groups.html)

### **Important Safety Information:**

If you have concerns about the safety or behavior of fellow students, TAs or Professors, call BCAL (the Behavior Concerns Advice Line): 512-232-5050. Your call can be anonymous. If something doesn't feel right – it probably isn't. Trust your instincts and share your concerns.

The following recommendations regarding emergency evacuation from the Office of Campus Safety and Security, 512-471-5767, <http://www.utexas.edu/safety/>

Occupants of buildings on The University of Texas at Austin campus are required to evacuate buildings when a fire alarm is activated. Alarm activation or announcement requires exiting and assembling outside.

- Familiarize yourself with all exit doors of each classroom and building you may occupy. Remember that the nearest exit door may not be the one you used when entering the building.
- Students requiring assistance in evacuation shall inform their instructor in writing during the first week of class.
- In the event of an evacuation, follow the instruction of faculty or class instructors. Do not re-enter a building unless given instructions by the following: Austin Fire Department, The University of Texas at Austin Police Department, or Fire Prevention Services office.
- Link to information regarding emergency evacuation routes and emergency procedures can be found at: [www.utexas.edu/emergency](http://www.utexas.edu/emergency)

## Course Calendar & Readings 1.0 (Subject to Change)

1. Week of Aug. 31: Overview of the course; class survey; Why research? What is social science research/communication research? Does academic research matter?
2. Week of Sept. 5: Identify problems in our world  
"What's the problem?" exercise due  
Read:  
Overcoming "physics envy,"  
<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/01/opinion/sunday/the-social-sciences-physics-envy.html>  
  
The research process  
Read: Ch 1 & 2
3. Week of Sept. 12: Conceptualization, operationalization & measurement  
Read: Ch 4
4. Week of Sept. 19: Survey research design; sampling; questionnaire construction; survey data collection  
Read: Ch 5 & 8  
  
Preliminary research topic due
5. Week of Sept. 26: Quantitative data analysis  
Read: Ch 9  
  
Online survey questionnaire due
6. Week of Oct. 3: "Meet the Grads!" Event  
  
Research ethics  
Read: Ch 3  
"Recommended Ethical Research Guidelines for AEJMC Members,"  
<http://www.aejmc.org/home/2011/03/ethics-research/>
7. Week of Oct. 10: Introduction to Qualtrics  
  
Focus groups; in-depth interviews (qualitative methods)  
Read: Ch 10
8. Week of Oct. 17: Content analysis  
Read: Ch13 (p. 495-505)  
  
Speech by Dr. Pamela Shoemaker, recipient of the Wayne Danielson Award
9. Week of Oct. 24: Causality & experiments  
Read: Ch 6 & 7  
  
Content analysis codebook due

10. Week of Oct. 31: Exam (Oct. 31)  
Human subjects research & IRB  
Read: p. 85-58
11. Week of Nov. 7: Research that makes sense  
Read: Sample study for critique  
Research questions due
12. Week of Nov. 14: Explore academic journals in Journalism and Mass  
Communication  
Consultations on research questions
13. Week of Nov. 21: Consultations on research questions  
*Thanksgiving (holiday)*
14. Week of Nov. 28: Consultations on research proposal
15. Week of Dec. 5: Presentations of research proposal  
Research proposal due (Dec. 7)

## J380 Student Information Form

1. Name: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Master's (Research/Professional/Hybrid) / Ph.D. student
3. Do you already have a communication/journalism degree?
  1. No
  2. Yes. At which level (undergraduate/graduate)?  
From which institution?
4. Research method courses taken before (specify undergraduate or graduate level) and textbooks used:
5. On a 10-point scale, how would you evaluate your familiarity with social science research methods in general? (1 = Not familiar at all; 10 = Very familiar) \_\_\_\_\_

Specifically, how familiar are you with the following research methods?  
(1 = Not familiar at all; 10 = Very familiar)

- a. Survey \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. Focus group \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. Content analysis \_\_\_\_\_
  - d. Experiment \_\_\_\_\_
  - e. In-depth interview \_\_\_\_\_
  - f. Secondary data analysis \_\_\_\_\_
  - g. Digital media metrics \_\_\_\_\_
  - h. Statistics \_\_\_\_\_
  - i. SPSS \_\_\_\_\_
6. Have you conducted any social science research before? If so, with what kind of method(s)?
  7. Briefly describe your current research interest.
  8. What do you expect of this course?
  9. Do you have any concerns about taking this course? If so, what are they?