

J 380 Introduction to Research Methods

Fall 2014 (08145)

M 12-3, 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 study journalism, media, and communication. Students will learn how to conduct surveys, experiments, content analyses, 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 appropriate methodology and theory;
- (5) propose a research study and justify decisions about the methodology;
- (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 its impact on society.

Required Readings

Schutt, R. K. (2012). *Investigating the Social World: The Process and Practice of Research* (7th edition). Sage.

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

Recommended Readings

Poindexter, P. M., & McCombs, M. E. (2000). *Research in Mass Communication: A Practical Guide*. Bedford/St. Martin's.

Course Requirements

Assignments

Participation (20%): 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 (e.g., research critique) in time, and 3) actively participate in in-class discussions. Everyone is expected to think critically and exchange ideas with others.

We will develop a blog for this course, which will serve as a platform for everyone to discuss readings and issues covered in class or to share information and examples with one another. Every student must contribute to our online discussion on a timely basis.

URL: _____ .blogspot.com/

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 3 absences will result in an F (60/100) for participation, and more than 5 absences will result in a zero for participation.

Design an Online Survey Questionnaire (15%): You will design a survey questionnaire on an online platform (e.g., Qualtrics).

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 the *Chicago Manual of Style* or *American Psychological Association (APA)* 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

The core values of The University of Texas at Austin are learning, discovery, freedom, leadership, individual opportunity, and responsibility. Each member of the University is expected to uphold these values through integrity, honesty, trust, fairness, and respect toward peers and community.

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. The complete text of this policy and instructions for updating your e-mail address are available at <http://www.utexas.edu/its/policies/emailnotify.html>.

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 Blackboard.

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.

Student Feedback

Email or come see me during office hours if you have any questions/suggestions.

Documented Disability Statement

The University of Texas at Austin provides upon request appropriate academic accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. For more information, contact Services for Students with Disabilities at 471-6259 (voice) or 232-2937 (video phone).

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

The State of Texas has enacted a law that limits the number of course drops for academic reasons to six (6). As stated in Senate Bill 1231: "Beginning with the fall 2007 academic term, an institution of higher education may not permit an undergraduate student a total of more than six dropped courses, including any course a transfer student has dropped at another institution of higher education, unless the student shows good cause for dropping more than that number."

Course Calendar & Readings 1.0 (Subject to Change)

1. Week of Sept 1: No class (Labor Day)
2. Week of Sept 8: Overview of the course; class survey; Why research? What is social science research? What is communication research?
Read: Ch 1
Overcoming “physics envy,”
<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/01/opinion/sunday/the-social-sciences-physics-envy.html>

Set up course blog
3. Week of Sept. 15: The research process; research ethics
Read: Ch 2 & 3
“Recommended Ethical Research Guidelines for AEJMC Members,”
<http://www.aejmc.org/home/2011/03/ethics-research/>
“Faculty Council Research Policy Committee’s Recommended Standards of Ethical Research at UT Austin,”
http://www.utexas.edu/faculty/council/2009-2010/legislation/ethical_rsched_stnds.html

Explore academic journals in Journalism and Mass Communication
4. Week of Sept. 22: Conceptualization, operationalization & measurement
Read: Ch 4

Preliminary research topic due
5. Week of Sept. 29: Survey research design; sampling; questionnaire construction; survey data collection
Read: Ch 5 & 8
6. Week of Oct. 6: Secondary data analysis
Read: Ch 13

Online survey questionnaire due
7. Week of Oct. 13: Focus groups; in-depth interviews
Read: Ch 9
8. Week of Oct. 20: Content analysis
Read: Ch 11 in Poindexter & McCombs

Research critique due
9. Week of Oct. 27: Causality & experiments
Read: Ch 6 & 7
10. Week of Nov. 3: Human subjects research & IRB
Read: p. 57-58

Exam

11. Week of Nov. 10: Research that makes sense
Research questions due
12. Week of Nov. 17: Development of research proposal
13. Week of Nov. 24: Consultations on research proposal
14. Week of Dec. 1: Presentations of research proposal
Research proposal due (Dec. 3)

J380 Student Information Form

1. Name: _____
2. Master's (Research/Professional) / 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. Statistics _____
 - h. SPSS _____
6. Have you conducted any social science research before? If so, 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?