

## **J380 Introduction to Research Methods (08070)**

WF 9-10:30 CMA 6.172

**Instructor:** Dr. Tom Johnson

**Office:** BMC 3.130

**Office Hours:** MWF 10:30-11:30

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### **Course Description and Objectives**

Catalog description: “Research methods and ethics, from design to data analysis and report writing.”

Social science research allow scholars to make sense of the social world, to discover why people think and act like they do and how important institutions act. The main purpose of this class is to provide you with a broad introduction to the methodological foundations and tools to study mass communications. But a secondary purpose is to convince you that the process of scientific discovery can be fun. Most of the semester will focus on the fundamentals of quantitative social science and applied research, although we will also explore qualitative research. You will learn how to identify problems to study, develop hypotheses and research questions, specify independent and dependent variables, check for the validity and reliability of studies and design research projects. You will be exposed to the broad range of designs used in communication research from laboratory and field experiments, surveys, content analysis, focus groups and in-depth interviewing. Specifically, at the end of this course, you should be able to:

1. Define research; explain and apply research terms; describe the research process and the principle activities, skills and ethics associated with the research process.
2. Explain the relationship between theory and research.
3. Describe and compare the major quantitative and qualitative research methods in mass communication research.
4. Propose a research study and justify the theory as well as the methodological decisions, including sampling and measurement.
5. Understand the importance of research ethics and integrate research ethics into the research process.
6. Be able to assess and critique a published journal article that uses one of the primary research methods in the field.
7. Be able to construct an effective questionnaire that employs several types of survey questions.

8. Construct an effective research proposal that will serve as the launching point for the study you conduct next semester.

### **Textbooks**

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

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

### **Course Assignments and Grading**

**Exam:** There will be exam just after the midterm of the semester. The exam will be a combination of definitions, multiple choice and short answers. Find a word and connect the dots is also possible, but highly unlikely. The exam is scheduled for **Oct. 14**.

**Critiques:** You will each critique and from the four kinds of research we will discuss in class: survey research, content analysis, experiments or qualitative analysis. The critique should be 3-5 pages long. Your critiques should analyze the articles based on our discussions of what are the criteria used to judge good research in that research methodology. The critiques are due the week after we talk about the methodology. More detail about the assignment can be found in assignment #1.

**In class exercises:** We will have several in-class exercises to help you learn the concepts introduced in class. You need to be in class that day to receive credit for the exercises. The exercises are part of your participation grade.

**Questionnaire:** Everyone will create a portion of a survey questionnaire that will focus on main independent and dependent variables. A fuller discussion is contained in assignment #2. The questionnaire is due **Sept 25**.

**Research Proposal:** This will be a 5-7 page document where you spell out your topic, provide a brief description of the literature review and theoretical framework, and explain your methodology. This will be completed in three parts. The description of the topic will be due **Sept. 18**. The rough draft of the proposal is due **Nov. 13** and the final draft is due **Nov. 25<sup>th</sup>**. During the last class period you will provide a powerpoint presentation of your study you will write the next semester.

## Grading

Exam	100 points
Research Status Report	100 points
Critique	25 points
Participation	25 points

There will also be a potential to earn up to 15 points extra credit by participating in surveys or experiments by college faculty.

I have also created a Facebook group for this class: J380 Introduction to Research Methods: Add it Up. This will be used to send messages to the class as well as to post links.

## Learning Objectives and Assessment

This is a core course required of all doctorate and theory and research master's students

<b>Learning Objectives.</b>	<b><i>Assessment Techniques.</i></b>
After this course:	
Students will be able to select appropriate quantitative methodologies for use in a study to be performed in the spring. These methodologies include, but are not limited to, experimental, survey and content analysis.	Class discussions and instructor lectures Examination
Students will be able to describe basic approaches to qualitative research. These methodologies include, but are not limited to, case studies, in-depth interviews and focus groups.	Class discussions and instructor lectures Examinations
Students will be able to identify and critique articles based on different research methods	Class discussions and instructor lectures Examination
Students will be able to construct a questionnaire relying on several types of questions	Class discussions and instructor lectures
Students will be able to write an effect research proposal that spells out a project they will conduct spring semester	Class discussions and instructor lectures

## **Important Course Rules and Policies**

### **1. Attendance:**

This is a course that deals with some difficult issues, so attendance is essential for good performance. I will allow you three unexcused absences. After the third absence, I will deduct half a letter grade for each additional absence. You need to contact me **in advance** if you are going to miss a class. All tests must be taken during their scheduled time unless you have made prior arrangements.

Assignments are due at the beginning of class on the date indicated except for the final draft of the Research Status Report, which is due at 4:30. I will deduct 10 percent for every day the assignment is late. I will not accept any papers more than a week late.

### **2. Religious Holy Days Observance Policy:**

The Texas Education Code specifies that an institution of higher education shall excuse a student from attending classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day, including travel for that purpose. A student whose absence is excused under this subsection may not be penalized for that absence and shall be allowed to take an examination or complete an assignment from which the student is excused within a reasonable time after the absence. A student who misses classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day should inform the instructor as far in advance of the absence as possible, so arrangements can be made to complete an assignment within a reasonable time after the absence.

<http://www.utexas.edu/student/registrar/catalogs/gi03-04/ch4/ch4g.html#attendance>

### **Students with Disabilities:**

Please notify your instructor of any modification/adaptation you may require to accommodate a disability-related need. You will be requested to provide documentation to the Dean of Student's Office in order that the most appropriate accommodations can be determined. Specialized services are available on campus through Services for Students with Disabilities.

<http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/>

### **Policy on Scholastic Dishonesty:**

The University defines academic dishonesty as cheating, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, falsifying academic records, and any act designed to avoid participating honestly in the learning process. Scholastic dishonesty also includes, but is not limited to, providing false or misleading information to receive a postponement or an extension on a test, quiz, or other assignment, and submission of essentially the same written assignment for two courses without the prior permission of the instructor. By accepting this syllabus, you have agreed to these guidelines and must adhere to them. Scholastic dishonesty damages both the student's learning experience and readiness for the future demands of a work-career. Students who violate University rules on scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and/or dismissal from the University.

[http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/acint\\_student.php](http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/acint_student.php).

### **The 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, fairness, and respect toward peers and community.

### **Computers and Cell Phones**

I will provide powerpoints before class on Blackboard for each of the lectures, so you are encouraged to bring your laptop to take notes. Cellphones need to remain silenced and put away during the class. I had a colleague who required people to sing "I am little teapot" if their cell phone went off. Don't force me to enforce that rule.

### **Make-up Exams**

No make-up exams will be given except in the cases of family emergency, incarceration, official University of Texas business, or serious health issues. You must notify me **no later than the day of the exam or you will not have the opportunity to make it up** and show me an adequate written documentation to qualify for a make-up exam. If the exam schedules conflict with a religious holiday, bring this to my attention by the end of the second week of class. After the second week of class, only those with a formal, written excuse from a doctor will have exams rescheduled.

## LECTURE TOPICS AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

### Course Outline (Subject to Change)

<b>Weeks</b>	<b>Topics</b>	<b>Readings/Assignments</b>
Week 1 (Aug. 26, 28)	Introduction to class What is Social Science and Communication Research?	Schutt, chapt. 1
Week 2 (Sept. 2, 4)	The Scientific Method, Research ethics	Schutt, chapt. 2 and 3 Recommended: “Ethical Research Guidelines for AEJMC Members,” <a href="http://www.aejmc.org/home/2011/03/ethics-research/">http://www.aejmc.org/home/2011/03/ethics-research/</a> “Faculty Council Research Policy Committee’s Recommended Standards of Ethical Research at UT Austin,” <a href="http://www.utexas.edu/faculty/council/2009-2010/legislation/ethical_rschr_stnds.html">http://www.utexas.edu/faculty/council/2009-2010/legislation/ethical_rschr_stnds.html</a>
Week 3 (Sept. 9, 11)	Conceptualization and measurement	Schutt, Chapter 4
Week 4 (Sept 16, 18)	Sampling and survey Research	Schutt, Chapters 5 & 8 <b>Recommended:</b> Poindexter (P) and McCombs (M), chapt. 4 & 5  <b>Research topic due Sept. 18</b>
Week 5 (Sept 23, 25)	Research Design & Experiments	Schutt, Chapter 6 & 7 <b>Due: Survey questionnaire (Sept. 25)</b>
Week 6 (Sept. 30, Oct. 2)	Content Analysis	Schutt, Chapter 13 Poindexter & McCombs, chapt. 11 <b>Survey or experiment critique due Oct. 2</b>
Week 7 (Oct. 7, 9)	Qualitative analysis: focus groups, in-depth interviews	Schutt, chapt. 9 <b>Content analysis critique due Oct. 9</b>

Week 9 (Oct. 14, 16)	<b>Midterm Oct. 14</b> , clean up	<b>Qualitative critique due Oct. 16</b>
Week 10 (Oct. 21, 23)	IRB and Developing Research Proposal; Research Ethics	Schutt, p. 57-58
Week 11 (Oct. 28, 30)	Secondary analysis of data	Schutt, chapt. 13
Week 12 (Nov. 4, 6)	Clean up week	
Week 13 (Nov. 11, 13)	Consultation on Research proposal	<b>Due: Proposal Rough draft Due Nov. 13</b>
Week 14 (Nov. 18, 20, 25)	Work on your Research Proposals	<b>Due: Final proposal Due Nov. 25</b>
Week 15 (Dec 2, 4)	Present your results	<b>Due: Powerpoint Presentation</b>

## Assignment #1 Critiques of articles

Everyone will critique an article found in a major mass communication journal. The critiques should be 3-5 pages long and are due the week *after* we talk about the method in class. You do not need to critique **ALL** of these methods, only **ONE**. So critiques based on survey or experimental studies are due on **Oct. 2**. Critiques based on content analysis are due **Oct. 9**. Critiques based on an empirical qualitative method is due **Oct. 16**

Go online and examine the most recent issues of the following journals: *Communication Research*, *Journal of Communication*, *Mass Communication & Society*, *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, *Journalism Practice* and *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*. Find an article that interests you among the articles and that employs one of the research techniques we will discuss in class: surveys, experiments, content analysis, in-depth interviews, focus groups, case studies or participant observation. It makes sense to choose an article employing the methodology you will use for your study. Copy the article so that you can turn it in with your critique. Your critique should contain the following elements:

1. Provide a complete citation of the article (Title, authors, journal, volume, year and pages).
2. What are the research questions/hypotheses?
3. What are the major theories that it examines (be sure to briefly explain the theory)?
4. What is the research methodology (sample size, independent variables, dependent variables and how were they measured)?
5. Summarize the major results
6. What does the author say is the major contribution of the study?
7. What would you say are the strengths and weaknesses of the study with a focus on its methodology?

Again, you only need to do one critique



## Assignment #2

### Writing a survey questionnaire

Based on class discussion and your readings on writing good valid survey questions, write a survey questionnaire about a topic in mass communications that interests you. If you are doing a survey for your study in this class it would be logical to do questions you can use in that study. As we indicated in class, you do not need to re-invent the wheel. Indeed, it is better to use existing measures because you can better argue their validity. While I indicate you need at least one question of each of the type listed below, it is better if you can find related ones that you could use to form into a scale. You should label each question for the type of question it is and if you took it from an existing study please give the citation for the study. Labels should appear adjacent to the question.

- a. cover sheet with title that reflects the focus of your questionnaire, name, class and date
- b. At least one dichotomous question
- c. At least one nominal question
- d. At least one ranking question
- e. At least one question using a Likert scale
- f. At least one question using a semantic differential scale
- g. At least one question involving a thermometer scale
- h. 2 pt bonus: At least one question involving a Guttman scale
- i. At least one question involving an interval level scale
- j. At least one question involving a ratio level scale

This assignment is due at the beginning of class **Sept. 25**

## Assignment #3

### Research Proposal

The research proposal is a detailed plan of the study that you will be conducting next semester. You need to write a 5-7 page research proposal on the topic that you had approved early in the semester (or on a revised topic that you had approved by me). For your research methodology you may select a survey, content analysis, secondary analysis of data or an empirical qualitative method such as focus groups or in-depth interviews.

The research proposal will be submitted in four stages: A topic page, a rough draft of your proposal, a final draft of the proposal, and a powerpoint presentation of your research project

**1. Term paper topic memo (due Sept. 18) 10 points:** You must choose a narrow, specific topic. For instance use of mobile devices is too broad. However, examining motivations for why Korean students use smart phones for political information is more specific. You are going to spend a lot of time with this topic, so it is important to choose one that suits your interests.

Your discussion of your topic needs to include two things:

1. Clearly describe the issue you will investigate. Explain the topic itself as well as who are the subjects you will investigate (e.g. Korean students), what is the method you will use (e.g survey) and ideally what concept or theories you will use to investigate the topic
2. Explain why you think this is an important topic to investigate. That is, what will this add to the existing literature? Therefore, you might want to spend some time researching the topic to see what has been done on the topic and what are other areas that still need to be explored.

Your description of the topic should be typed and should be at least one good size paragraph long.

**2. Rough Draft of the Topic Proposal (Due Nov. 13) 20 points:** For those of you who are doing studies involving human subjects such as surveys, experiments, focus groups or in-depth interviews (content analysis and secondary analysis of data is exempt), you will need to fill out the Required Research Proposal Format

found on the IRB Human subjects page

<http://www.utexas.edu/research/rsc/humansubjects/forms.html>. I have attached an example.

For those doing studies not involving humans, you can leave out part VI of the Human Subjects form.

**3. Final Draft of the Topic Proposal (Due Nov. 25) 45 points:** This will be a revised version of the proposal that you turned in Nov. 13. I will be giving detailed instructions on what you need to do to improve the proposal, but you are welcome to make an appointment to talk to me about. The final proposal is due 4:30 on Nov. 25.

**4. Research Study Status Report Powerpoint Presentation (25 points):** During the final everyone will do a 8-10 minute powerpoint presentation on their topic.