



COM 297-003

Communication Research Methods

Spring 2024

Classroom: Fell Hall 158 (most days), Fell 108 computer lab (seven days), and Zoom (six days)

Dates & Times: Mondays, Wednesdays, & Fridays, 1:00 - 1:50 p.m.

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Office Hours: By appointment, in-person, Mondays 10 a.m. - 1 p.m. Any time via cell phone.

Course Description and Objectives:

The purpose of this class is to teach you methods of scholarly communication research, research design, data analysis, and reporting of research results. According to the undergraduate catalog, this course is to cover “methods of scholarly research and critical evaluation of research.” We will focus primarily on quantitative research methods but will also devote some attention to qualitative and rhetorical methods. Thus, this course is designed to accomplish the following objectives:

1. To provide students with a comprehensive knowledge of communication research methods.
2. To provide students with the ability to apply research skills.
3. To develop students’ competence in formulating research questions and hypotheses, constructing research designs, conducting data analysis, reporting results, and analyzing implications of findings.
4. To provide students with experience in data entry and data analysis using SPSS software.
5. To develop students’ understanding of sampling, measurement, and scale development in communication research studies.
6. To develop students’ abilities to locate, critically read, and summarize research.
7. Understand and appropriately explain research ethics.

Hybrid Course:

We use three different locations for class meetings during the semester: our Fell 158 physical classroom (most days), the Fell 108 computer lab (seven days), and Zoom via Canvas (six days). Check the tentative schedule each day to ensure you show up to the right location; the schedule will specify when we meet in the lab or on Zoom. It is possible we may have unplanned Zoom days, so also be sure to check Canvas announcements and your ISU email. Have a stable Internet connection and device with webcam, audio, and microphone when we hold Zoom classes; have your *camera turned on* and unmute to ask/answer questions. Consult the Modules feature in Canvas for tasks you must complete each week. All written assignments need to be submitted as Word documents on Canvas using the Assignments feature. I will *not* check or respond to Canvas inbox messages. Contact me through my ISU email (for quick questions or to schedule in-person appointments) or on my cell phone (for back-and-forth dialogue).

Professionalism:

Learning is maximized by reading class materials, note-taking, critical listening, cognitive engagement, and focusing one's attention by not yielding to distractions. Professionalism includes listening to others' perspectives (although not necessarily agreeing with those viewpoints), actively listening to those who are speaking during lectures and discussion, and working together in a spirit of cooperation. We are a team working collectively to improve and learn research methods. Each student must be a productive, contributing member of our team. Be on time for class. While in class, ignore cell phones, text messages, social media, or urges to surf the Internet. Respect should be demonstrated by listening, ignoring distractions, and being fully present—both physically and mentally.

Attendance Policy:

Regular attendance and active engagement are required. Come prepared to discuss and engage with the daily readings and material. Perfect attendance is expected; by enrolling in this course, you have made a commitment to be present during all class meetings. Being absent deprives you of valuable class lectures, discussions, and announcements. When you are absent in this class you will miss a ton of material. Historically, there has been a strong correlation between absences and grades; the more class periods students miss, the lower grades they tend to earn.

Late Work Policy:

If you do not take an exam during our scheduled time on an exam day, you will very likely receive a zero. Other assignments are expected at the beginning of class on the due date. An automatic 5% of the points possible will be deducted from late assignments, with an additional 5% deducted for each 24 hours it is late. As a general rule, incomplete grades will not be given.

Academic Misconduct Policy:

Students must be honest in all academic work, consistent with the *Code of Student Conduct*. All ideas are to be appropriately cited when borrowed, directly or indirectly, from a source. Inadequate citation, unauthorized and unacknowledged collaboration, and/or the presentation of someone else's work constitute plagiarism. Students found to commit intentional acts of dishonesty (including cheating on an exam, falsifying evidence, recycling work submitted for another course, or plagiarizing an assignment) will likely receive a failing assignment and course grade as well as be referred for disciplinary action to the Student Conduct and Community Responsibilities office. Reporting academic dishonesty is my professional responsibility so I do not hesitate to enforce consequences. In this course, the use of generative AI tools such as ChatGPT or Adobe Firefly is not permitted to support the completion of any assignment. This includes, but is not limited to, using generative AI tools to ideate, pre-plan, edit, translate, or otherwise create original material you claim to be solely your creation. Use of a generative AI tool to complete assignments in whole or in part constitutes academic dishonesty in this course.

Special Needs Accommodation:

I am happy to accommodate any special needs you may have—so please let me know, although I require documentation from SAAS for ongoing accommodations. Any student needing to arrange a reasonable accommodation for a documented disability and/or medical/mental health condition should contact Student Access and Accommodation Services (SAAS) in 350 Fell Hall, (309) 438-5853, or visit StudentAccess.IllinoisState.edu.

Course Assignments and Grades:

The grading scale is as follows: A= 100-90%; B= 89-80%; C= 79-70%; D= 69-60%; F= 59% and below. Percentages will be calculated based on points earned from:

	<u>Points Possible/Your Points</u>	
<u>Research Assignments</u>		
Research Questions and Hypotheses	15	/ _____
Survey Items and Scales	40	/ _____
Messy Data in SPSS	30	/ _____
Literature Review Write-ups	50	/ _____
SES Data in SPSS	20	/ _____
SES Results SPSS Write-ups	75	/ _____
Research Study Announcement Board	20	/ _____
<u>Examinations</u>		
First Examination	100	/ _____
Second Examination	100	/ _____
Third Examination	100	/ _____
Final Examination	100	/ _____
Total	650	/ _____

Examinations:

Exams are closed book/closed notes; however, you may use a handwritten study guide—the length and content of which will be specified prior to each exam. The format will consist of objective style questions, such as multiple choice, true/false, matching, and fill-in-the blank. Each examination is comprehensive, addressing all prior readings and material covered.

Proposed Research Project:

Students will compose a series of directional and non-directional research questions and hypotheses as well as a null hypothesis for a hypothetical research study using APA Style. Students will construct an original survey instrument, with items and scales for each variable, for their hypothetical research study and pilot test the survey.

Literature Review Write-ups:

Students will complete a series of brief literature review write-ups addressing six journal article studies we read. Literature reviews must follow APA Style.

SPSS Lab Assignments and Results Write-ups:

We will complete a series of SPSS lab assignments using mock data from the Messy Data and SES data sets. Results must be written-up in APA Style, in accordance with examples provided. Missing lab days will impact the grade you are able to earn on each lab assignment.

Research Study Announcement Board:

The board is at: <https://sites.google.com/site/ilstusocstudies/>. Studies go up as the semester progresses, but don't wait to get started. Participate in multiple studies to earn points. Students wishing not to participate in any studies may complete a 3-page journal article review instead; a sample is provided on Canvas.

Required Textbook:

The textbook is required and necessary for successful completion of the course. You can purchase the textbook from local bookstores or online book sellers.

Merrigan, G., & Huston, C. L. (2020). *Communication research methods* (4th ed.). Oxford University Press.

Additional required PDF readings are available through Canvas via Milner Library or Internet hyperlinks. It is helpful to have access to a copy of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (7th edition) and help sheets are available on Canvas.

Required PDF Articles (citations listed in the order we read them):

- Parks, M. R., Faw, M., & Goldsmith, D. (2011). Undergraduate instruction in empirical research methods in communication: Assessment and recommendations. *Communication Education, 60*(4), 406-421. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03634523.2011.562909>
- Klein, L. W. (2011, September 9). Statistical terms used in research studies: A primer for journalists. *Journalist's Resource*.
<http://journalistsresource.org/reference/research/statistics-for-journalists>
- Rosenau, J. (2011, May 31). The importance of being median [Web log post].
http://scienceblogs.com/tfk/2011/05/the_importance_of_being_median.php
- Siegfried, T. (2010, March 27). Odds are, it's wrong: Science fails to face shortcomings of statistics. *Science News, 177*(7). <http://www.sciencenews.org/>
- Simonds, B. K., Meyer, K. R., Quinlan, M. M., & Hunt, S. K. (2006). Effects of instructor speech rate on affective learning and student perceptions of instructor immediacy, credibility, and clarity. *Communication Research Reports, 23*(3), 187-197.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/08824090600796401>
- Min, S-J., & Feaster, J. C. (2010). Missing children in national news coverage: Racial and gender representations of missing children cases. *Communication Research Reports, 27*(3), 207-216. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08824091003776289>
- Meyer, K. R., Hunt, S. K., Hopper, K. M., Thakkar, K. V., Tsubakopoulos, V., & Van Hoose, K. J. (2008). Assessing information literacy instruction in the basic communication course. *Communication Teacher, 22*(1), 22-34.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/17404620801926925>
- Boudewyns, V., & Paquin, R. S. (2011). Intentions and beliefs about getting tested for STDs: Implications for communication interventions. *Health Communication, 26*(8), 701-711.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10410236.2011.563353>
- Ledbetter, A. M., Mazer, J. P., DeGroot, J. M., Meyer, K. R., Mao, Y., & Swafford, B. (2011). Attitudes toward online social connection and self-disclosure as predictors of Facebook communication and relational closeness. *Communication Research, 38*(1), 27-53.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650210365537>
- Allen, M. (2009). Meta-analysis. *Communication Monographs, 76*(4), 398-407.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03637750903310386>

Tentative Schedule

Week 1	Topic	Assignments Due
M, Jan. 15	*No Class (MLK Jr. Day)	
W, Jan. 17	*Introduction to and philosophy of the course *Syllabus assignments and policies	*Read Syllabus *Purchase Textbook
F, Jan. 19	*Overview of research methods and course content	*Explore Canvas and locate PDF readings
Week 2	Topic	Assignments Due
M, Jan. 22	**“Undergraduate Instruction in Empirical Research Methods in Communication: Assessment and Recommendations.”	*Read Parks et al. (2011)
W, Jan. 24	**“Statistical Terms used in Research Studies: A Primer for Journalists.” **“The Importance of Being Median.” **“Odds are, it’s Wrong: Science Fails to Face Shortcomings of Statistics.”	*Read Klein (2011) *Read Rosenau (2011) *Read Siegfried (2010)
F, Jan. 26	**“Preface” by Merrigan & Huston **“Foreword: Islands of Inquiry” by Brian Spitzberg	*Read Preface and Foreword in Merrigan & Huston (2009)
Week 3	Topic	Assignments Due
M, Jan. 29	**“Introduction to Communication Research.”	*Read Chapter 1
W, Jan. 31	**“Three Paradigms of Knowing.”	*Read Chapter 2
F, Feb. 2	**“Ethics and Research.” ** <i>Class meets on Zoom</i>	*Read Chapter 3
Week 4	Topic	Assignments Due
M, Feb. 5	**“Making Arguments for Association and Causality.”	*Read Chapter 4
W, Feb. 7	**“Measuring and Designing Quantitative Social Science Research.”	*Read Chapter 5
F, Feb. 9	*Writing Research Questions and Hypotheses *Data Visualization and Survey Construction	
Week 5	Topic	Assignments Due
M, Feb. 12	*Review for First Exam	
W, Feb. 14	*** <i>FIRST EXAMINATION</i>	
F, Feb. 16	*Debrief exam results and begin next unit	
Week 6	Topic	Assignments Due
M, Feb. 19	**“Experimental Research: Predicting Causes and Effects.”	*Read Chapter 6 ** <i>Research Questions and Hypotheses due</i>
W, Feb. 21	**“Survey Research: Explaining and Predicting Attitudes and Behaviors.”	*Read Chapter 7
F, Feb. 23	**“Content Analysis: Explaining and Interpreting Message Categories.”	*Read Chapter 8

Week 7	Topic	Assignments Due
M, Feb. 26	*Introduction to SPSS and Lab Assignment (messy data) ** <i>Class meets in Fell 108 lab</i>	
W, Feb. 28	**“Analyzing and Interpreting Quantitative Data.”	*Read Chapter 9
F, Mar. 1	*SPSS Lab Assignment (messy data) ** <i>Class meets in Fell 108 lab</i>	** <i>Survey Items and Scales due</i>
Week 8	Topic	Assignments Due
M, Mar. 4	*Review for Second Exam *How to Read Journal Articles	
W, Mar. 6	*** <i>SECOND EXAMINATION</i>	
F, Mar. 8	*Debrief exam results *SPSS Lab Assignment (messy data) ** <i>Class meets in Fell 108 lab</i>	** <i>Messy Data due</i>
Week 9	Topic	Assignments Due
M, Mar. 11	*No Classes (Spring Break)	
W, Mar. 13	*No Classes (Spring Break)	
F, Mar. 15	*No Classes (Spring Break)	
Week 10	Topic	Assignments Due
M, Mar. 18	*SPSS Lab Assignment (SES data) ** <i>Class meets in Fell 108 lab</i>	
W, Mar. 20	**“Effects of Instructor Speech Rate on Affective Learning and Student Perceptions of Instructor Immediacy, Credibility, & Clarity.” *Conducting and writing the Literature Review	*Read Simonds et al. (2006)
F, Mar. 22	*SPSS Lab Assignment (SES data) ** <i>Class meets in Fell 108 lab</i>	
Week 11	Topic	Assignments Due
M, Mar. 25	**“Missing Children in National News Coverage: Racial and Gender Representations of Missing Children Cases.”	*Read Min & Feaster (2010)
W, Mar. 27	**“Assessing Information Literacy Instruction in the Basic Communication Course.” ** <i>Class meets on Zoom</i>	*Read Meyer et al. (2008)
F, Mar. 29	**“Intentions and Beliefs About Getting Tested for STDs: Implications for Communication Interventions.” ** <i>Class meets on Zoom</i>	*Read Boudewyns & Paquin (2011)
Week 12	Topic	Assignments Due
M, Apr. 1	*SPSS Lab Assignment (SES data) ** <i>Class meets in Fell 108 lab</i>	
W, Apr. 3	**“Attitudes Toward Online Social Connection and Self-Disclosure as Predictors of Facebook Communication and Relational Closeness.” *SPSS Lab Assignment (SES data) ** <i>Class meets in Fell 108 lab</i>	*Read Ledbetter et al. (2011) ** <i>SES Data due</i>

F, Apr. 5	*“Meta-Analysis.” ** <i>Class meets on Zoom</i>	*Read Allen (2009) ** <i>Literature Review write-ups due</i>
Week 13	Topic	Assignments Due
M, Apr. 8	*Review for Third Exam *Discuss SPSS results write-up format and APA style *Locate SPSS output for results write-ups	
W, Apr. 10	*** <i>THIRD EXAMINATION</i>	
F, Apr. 12	*“Conversation Analysis: Explaining Talk’s Structure and Function.” ** <i>Class meets on Zoom</i>	*Read Chapter 10
Week 14	Topic	Assignments Due
M, Apr. 15	*“Making Arguments for Multiple Plausible Realities.” *Debrief exam results	*Read Chapter 11
W, Apr. 17	*“Interviews and Focus Groups: Interpreting Guided Responses.”	*Read Chapter 12
F, Apr. 19	*“Ethnography: Interpreting and Evaluating Cultural Communication.”	*Read Chapter 13
Week 15	Topic	Assignments Due
M, Apr. 22	*“Discourse Analysis: Interpreting and Evaluating Language-in-Use.”	*Read Chapter 14
W, Apr. 24	*“Rhetorical Criticism: Interpreting and Evaluating Messages.”	*Read Chapter 15 ** <i>SPSS Results write-ups due</i>
F, Apr. 26	*“Critical Studies: Evaluating and Reforming Ideologies.”	*Read Chapter 16 * <i>Research Board due</i>
Week 16	Topic	Assignments Due
M, Apr. 29	*SPSS review for Final Exam	* <i>Course Evaluations</i>
W, May 1	*“Glossary” and textbook review for Final Exam ** <i>Class meets on Zoom</i>	*Read Glossary
F, May 3	*Review for Final Exam	
Finals Week	Topic	Assignments Due
?, May ?	*** <i>FINAL EXAMINATION</i> (Exact Date & Time TBA by Registrar)	