

COM 297:002/003 – Communication Research Methods
Tuesday & Thursday, 12:35-1:50/3:35-4:50
Fell Hall 148/162

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Professor: Lindsey J. Thomas, PhD• Office Hours: T/Th 2:00-3:15; by appointment• Email: ljthom3@ilstu.edu (best way to reach me) | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Department: School of Communication, FEL 434• Office: FEL 459• Phone: 309-438-3671 (seriously though, email) |
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WELCOME to communication research methods! I hope this new beginning finds you well. I love learning and helping others to learn (i.e., teaching), so I am thrilled to teach this course, during which I get to assist you in honing your research skills as well as learning more about communication. Truth be told, I'm a theory and methods nerd, and even though methods might not sound like the most exciting class (yeah, we've all heard y'all talk), *I* for one really enjoy knowledge acquisition and production, am excited to learn from your research, and hope you find joy in it as well (a professor can dream, right?!). Below, please find some guidelines for how we can make the most of our time together.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course covers methods of scholarly research and critical evaluation of research. Prerequisites: COM 111 and 60 hours completed. In particular, this course explores a variety of approaches to social scientific and humanistic inquiry, examines the role of primary and secondary sources in scholarly argument development, and provides a survey of numerous qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection and analysis. The purpose of this course is to provide students with the opportunity to obtain and, to a fundamental degree, master the primary tools of scholarly investigation. These include familiarity with information databases and database searching techniques, quantitative empirical investigative techniques and experimentation formats, qualitative methods of exploration and examination, manuscript/journal article formats, and the further development of critical thinking skills as evidenced through writing and speech. This course is, at many levels, preparatory for upper division coursework within each student's concentration/major and beyond.

Goals

1. Critical thinking: Demonstrate literacy and think “outside the box” regarding (communication) research
2. Cognitive complexity: Explore and practice varied approaches to garnering and producing knowledge
3. Writing & speech skills: Develop and defend written and oral arguments/positions
4. Data collection: Understand and appropriately implement a variety of qualitative and quantitative methods
5. Data analysis: Understand and appropriately implement a variety of qualitative and quantitative methods
6. Knowledge production: Engage the research process from start (Hs/RQs) to finish (discussion of results)
7. Style: Gain familiarity with APA writing styles/guidelines
8. Ethics: Gain insight into and appreciation for the numerous ethical considerations in research
9. Discussion: Practice being an integral part of your and others' learning in respectful classroom interactions

If you would like assistance outside of class with achieving these goals, I welcome you to attend my office hours or make an appointment to meet with me.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Wait for it... there is no textbook for this class. However:

ER = Check ReggieNet regularly (before each class period) for course readings throughout the semester.

You are responsible for completing the required readings before class. I reserve the right to administer pop quizzes, and it will be difficult to make insightful comments and queries in class, and thus earn full participation points, in absence of completing the relevant reading each day. Moreover, the readings can (and should) be used as guides of the data collection and analysis assignments, as well as the final synthesis paper. You will find it much more difficult

to excel when completing assignments in this course if you do not read and regularly reference the readings as well as our class conversations.

OPTIONAL TEXTS:

American Psychological Association. (2010). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (6th ed.). Washington, D.C.: APA.

Baxter, L. A. & Babbie, E. (2003). *The basics of communication research*. Boston, MA: Wadsworth. (This is one of my favorite comprehensive textbooks; it's an excellent reference for methods of data collection and analysis).

COURSE WEB PAGE: <https://reggienet.illinoisstate.edu/>

Remember to check for readings and announcements.

COURSE PERFORMANCE & REQUIREMENTS:

Please keep in mind that you are not “given” a grade. Rather, you earn a grade that is based on performance in four general areas: participation in class and group work, written assignments, oral presentations, and a cumulative course examination, all of which highlight your advancement toward achieving course goals. All assignments will be graded using a points-based system (detailed below). Please keep track of your own grade and standing in this course.

Academic Load and Homework Expectation

This is a three (3) credit hour course. As such, in addition to scheduled class time, students should expect to spend approximately six to nine hours per week outside of class preparing for class sessions and working on assignments.

COURSE EVALUATION:

Participation, etc.	50 points
CITI Training (individual)	20 points
Project Proposal & Plan (group)	30 points
Methods Assignments	
Data Collection Assignments (group)	
Scale/Survey	25 points
Interviews/Focus Groups	25 points
Archival Research	25 points
Data Analysis Assignments (group)	
Statistics & Content Analysis	25 points
Thematic Analysis	25 points
Course Content Examination	100 points
Final Project	
Synthesis Paper (group)	100 points
Project Presentation (group)	25 points
Project Reflection (individual)	50 points
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500 TOTAL POSSIBLE POINTS	

Grading Scale

Generally in the course, *excellent* work earns “A” grades, *good* work earns “B” grades, *average* work earns “C” grades, *below average* work earns “D” grades, and *unacceptable* work earns an “F” or “O” grade. There may be opportunities for extra credit, but you should not rely on it. The grading scale is as follows:

> 90-100% = A; 80%-89.99% = B; 70-79.99% = C; 60-69.99% = D; below 60% = F

* I reserve the right to adjust this scale, but I will only change it to the students’ advantage.

Attendance, Participation, and Smaller Assignments (50 points; 10% of total grade)

Because this course is a skills-based, applied course, participation is essential. Attendance, demonstration of having read the material, asking questions to extend the thinking of the class and instructor, contributing relevant examples, and demonstrating respect for the contributions of classmates comprise participation. You are expected to participate

in discussion, participate in oral/written critiques of readings, listen to fellow classmates, actively contribute to the collaborative learning environment, and complete additional activities and exercises both inside and outside of class. Help me to help you by coming to class prepared to talk about the assigned readings for the week and engage in class activities and discussions. Simply attending discussion section without actively contributing is not “participation.” Please read assigned texts before attending class so that we are able to discuss them (that makes sense, right?). It is also beneficial to bring the readings with you for ongoing reference. I will note participation, and you may be responsible for conducting/submitted activities. If you are bashful, you may also read ahead and submit clips/activities/etc. relevant to the class period at least 24 hours before we meet to discuss the material.

If you are seeking an approved/excused absence, please e-mail me *before* the absence or, in the event of an emergency, as soon as possible. I accept the following approved and/or “excused” absences only with proper documentation: 1. Certain religious holidays and observances; 2. Service in the military or jury duty; 3. Major illness (requiring a physician’s note with physician’s signature to be excused) 4. Authorized university activities, including athletics, marching band, and other university groups (requiring note from coach, leader, etc.). You are responsible for all material discussed and distributed in class as well as in your absence. As such, it is your responsibility to sign the attendance sheet each class period. I will not give points retroactively for failure to sign in. Also, any/all materials are handed out only once. If you are not in class to receive them, you should obtain the information from a fellow student (unless excused and you obtain them from me). Lecture material will be posted on Moodle.

CITI Training (20 points; 4% of total grade)

You can find instructions for registering for Human Subjects Research training here:

<http://research.illinoisstate.edu/ethics/training/irb/index.php> (while registering, use your best judgement, and choose: “No” for CE credits; “Student Researcher – Undergraduate” for Role In Research; “Basic Human Subjects – Social and Behavioral Focus” for Which Course Do You Plan To Take?) (for the enrollment questionnaire, choose: Q1 – Educational, Social, and Behavioral research with human subjects; Q2 - None; Q3 – None; Q4 – Not at this time; Q5 – None; Q6 – None; Q7 - <check nothing>). Complete all 16 modules (yes, 16 – this will likely take longer than you anticipate). After passing the quizzes for all 16 modules, print your certificate and passing scores – *this is what you will turn in for credit*.

Project Proposal & Plan (30 points; 6% of total grade)

As a group, you will propose to study a communication-related topic of interest that you can study on the ISU campus. This proposal will include collaboration notes, an overview of the topic, an annotated bibliography, a basic plan for how each data collection and data analysis assignment might be completed, and *all group members’ names*.

Data Collection and Analysis Assignments (25 points each X 5 assignments = 125 points; 25% of total grade).

I hope that learning in participatory and practice-based in this course. Thus, as a group and related to your topic, you will practice scale/survey development and collection, planning and executing a (social) experiment(s) and conducting in-depth participant/field observation, interviewing individuals or focus groups, practicing archival research, engaging in appropriate statistical analyses, organizing and completing a content analysis, and examining data using thematic analysis. The work for each of these assignments can be organized as your group sees fit, and each will include an assessment component describing how the work was completed, all group members’ notes pertaining to the assignment and their role in completing the collection or analysis procedures (these can be individual, handwritten, etc. – however you want to include them, as long as they’re included), ethical implications, what worked well, what did not work as anticipated, and how the design – research method, if you will – could be improved in future research endeavors. Note: Not everything you try will work well – that’s research (and life), Man! It’s also why critical thinking and reflection are important components of these assignments and the course more broadly. Practice makes perfect (or at least better), and I want you to take risks with your practice of methods without having to worry about your grade if a design is not perfectly executed. Also note: These activities will become clearer as we work through the class, and more in-depth descriptions will be provided for each assignment.

Course Content Examination (100 points; 20% of total grade)

50 multiple choice items, worth two points each, covering course content throughout the semester.

Synthesis Paper (100 points; 20% of total grade)

At the end of the semester, your group will produce a social scientific manuscript in APA style that is centered around the project proposal and data collection and analysis assignments. It will include a title page, abstract, brief review of literature (including any theory that you incorporated, although this is not a requirement), in-depth description of methods (<<it is, after all, a methods course), some interesting results/findings related to the highlighted methods, and a brief discussion and conclusion.

Project Presentation (25 points; 5% of total grade)

Via a semi-formal presentation, groups will introduce their classmates to their project (this will be based on the synthesis paper). Presentations should be approximately 14 minutes with an additional approximately 5 minutes of discussion. This is an excellent opportunity to garner feedback on your paper, so feel free to set your classmates up to not only learn but help you to improve your paper.

Project Reflection (50 points; 10% of total grade)

Individual students will produce individual reflections pertaining to the group projects, including what was learned throughout the course – and completion of each assignment – when taken together, what was learned working in the group, how skills developed in this class might be useful in the future, their perceived role in/contribution to the group, and a 25-point peer evaluation of each group member (i.e., provide an evaluation/explanation of each member's contribution to the group and grade them out of 25 points; this will be averaged and account for half of the assignment grade). The project reflection is due via ReggieNet by the end of the class's TBD scheduled final examination timeslot.

Note: Assignments in this course are flexible to allow for tailoring to each student's/group's interests and to enhance students' abilities to make decisions throughout the research process; assignments are intentionally less specific than those which you might have in other courses. Please consider the APA Manual and materials posted on ReggieNet to be extensions of the assignment criteria above. I also encourage students to refer to journal articles assigned throughout the course as examples of what completed research papers might look like. If you would like more guidance regarding assignments, it is your responsibility to work with the instructor. If you do not appreciate the intellectual freedom granted to you in this course, remember that you have the option of seeking another section of research methods to fulfill the course requirement.

I DO NOT ACCEPT LATE WORK. Please reference the tentative schedule for all due dates. All assignments are due in class, hard copy format, APA style (12 pt. TNR, double spaced, black font; 1" margins), stapled, and error-free (PROOFREAD) unless otherwise noted. If you cannot turn something in when it is due, you must arrange (i.e., request and garner approval from the instructor) to submit it *before* the due date. You are always welcome to turn papers in before the deadline. If you are unable to attend a class, it is your responsibility to a) attain notes and information you missed from a fellow student and b) contact me about questions (not content of whole classes) that you have regarding the material.

ADDITIONAL COURSE POLICIES:

Each of the following are intended to enhance students' educational experiences, both inside and outside of the classroom.

Classroom Decorum

Debates and disagreements during class discussions foster the free exchange of ideas. It is expected that students treat each other with respect when engaging in discussions and all other classroom interactions.

Technology

If you are accessing your newfangled technological devices while in class, use them for ventures related to the course. Do not distract your classmates or your instructor.

Academic Dishonesty (Cheating/Plagiarism)

Plagiarism (using the words or ideas of others and failing to acknowledge their contribution) will not be tolerated and may result in a failing grade. Examples of plagiarism include: using the work of other students, arranging for someone else to write your assignments, rephrasing a published review or essay and presenting it as your own work/ideas, copying a review word-for-word and presenting it as your own work, using unacknowledged sources on the Internet and World Wide Web, failing to use quotation marks where needed, failing to cite sources where needed, and “recycling” essays written by other students. If you have any doubts about how to acknowledge the work of others, please pose questions in class or during an office visit with us. Refer to the University Handbook for the plagiarism policy followed in this class. That said, I credit Dr. Keli Steuber, Dr. Andy High, Dr. Bianca Wolf, Dr. Justin Eckstein, Dr. Aimee Miller-Ott, and Dr. Daniel Cochece Davis and thank them for their contributions to developing this syllabus.

Never turn in a paper that you did not write yourself. Never turn in a paper for this class that you wrote for another class. Never collaborate on an exam or facilitate someone else’s efforts to do so. If I detect cheating or plagiarism I will reduce the student's grade on the assignment or the course or assign an F for the course. Plagiarism or cheating will be reported to Community Rights and Responsibilities, and the instructor will meet with the student in person.

Grades

All evaluations will be graded using points; please keep track of these points so that you are aware of your standing in this course. In accordance with FERPA (Family Education Rights and Privacy Act) regulations, I will not post grades outside of the ISU System. Come to my office hours or make an appointment to discuss your grade(s).

I have a “24-7” policy for disputing assignment grades. This means that you must wait 24 hours before contacting me (aside from basic mathematical errors) to discuss/dispute an assignment, and you must contact me *in writing* within 7 days of the assignment being returned to dispute a grade. This policy ensures that you have time to process my feedback and that disputes take place in a timely manner. To dispute a grade, you must submit no more than a one-page argument that details your specific dispute(s) about the (in)appropriateness of the grade. I will review your request and re-grade the assignment, and we will have a face-to-face meeting to discuss our stances. Note: your grade can increase, stay the same, or decrease upon re-grading.

(Optional) Up to 2 Points Extra Credit for Research Participation

You have two options for earning extra credit. First, you may receive extra credit for participating in any of the studies posted to the School of Communication’s Research Announcement Board. The Research Announcement Board is updated as research studies are opened/closed, and it is your responsibility to access the Board and be aware of available opportunities. The Research Announcement Board can be accessed via:

<https://sites.google.com/site/ilstusocstudies>

In general, each 30 minutes of participation in an extra credit study will earn you .5 Research Credits, but please see the call for participants for the Research Credits associated with each study. Each project listed on the Research Announcement Board will indicate the specific number of Research Credits associated with the project. For this class, you can complete up to the equivalent of 1.0. Research Credit for participating in studies on the School of Communication Research Announcement Board website. For studies worth .5 credits, you can earn 1 point (1 percent) extra credit. For studies worth 1.0 credit, you can earn 2 points extra credit.

The extra credit points will be added to your final grade and might not necessarily appear in the gradebook immediately upon your completion of the opportunity. There are no guarantees for extra credit, and it is each student’s responsibility to be aware and take advantage of such opportunities.

The researcher(s) who administer the research studies will provide evidence of your participation at the conclusion of the semester; however, it is your responsibility to make sure that the researchers have the necessary evidence of your participation at the time of the study. Before participating in a study, please be sure to have your name, ULID (i.e., the part of your email before @ilstu.edu), instructor name, and course and section number ready, as you will

need to provide these to receive credit. Research Credit can only be applied to one course for each study, unless specified otherwise on the Research Announcement Board.

Second, there may be some studies for which you are not eligible (e.g., recruiting based on gender or family structure) or in which you do not wish to take part. Therefore, options for alternative extra credit during the semester, each worth .5 research credits (1 point extra credit), will also be available. As with the research participation, you can earn up to 1 research credit (2 points extra credit). These assignments are alternatives to research participation, not in addition to participating in research. Thus, YOU CANNOT EARN MORE THAN 2 EXTRA CREDIT POINTS IN THIS COURSE.

Permission to Record

Students must obtain written permission from the instructor if they wish either to photograph classroom lectures or discussions or to record them using audio or video devices. This restriction includes visual materials that accompany the lecture/discussion, such as lecture slides, whiteboard notes/equations, etc. Such recordings are to be used solely for the purposes of individual or group study with other students enrolled in the class. They may not be reproduced, shared in any way (including electronically or posting in any web environment) with those not in the class. Students with disabilities who need to record classroom lectures or discussions must contact Student Access and Accommodation Services to register, request and be approved for an accommodation. Students who violate this policy may be subject to both legal sanctions for violations of copyright law and disciplinary action under the University's Code of Student Conduct.

Student Access and 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 at 350 Fell Hall, [\(309\) 438-5853](tel:3094385853), or visit the website at StudentAccess.IllinoisState.edu.

Classroom Emergency Response

Please review university emergency preparedness and response procedures posted in classrooms.

Instructor Responsibilities

My job is to expand on ideas presented throughout the course and offer opportunities for discussions to take place about the material covered in readings and field experiences. Above all else, I am here to help you!

Please feel free to e-mail me at any time if you have questions about course materials, assignments, or other concerns related to the course. However, please note: I will respond only during "regular business hours" (i.e., not 4:00 AM the Sunday before an assignment is due), so plan accordingly. Do not wait until the day before an assignment is due to seek assistance. You do not need to make appointments with me to attend my office hours, so stop on by! I get lonely in there, and again, my job is literally to help you learn. If you are unable to attend office hours due to a conflict in your schedule, please set up a time to meet with me. I want you to succeed as much as you want you to succeed.

Final Thoughts

You are an adult. That's awesome (although, I must admit, the novelty starts to wear off after a while). However, with great power comes great responsibility. I have faith that you know what is expected of you as a college student: come to class; don't cheat; meet deadlines; be a team player; and so on. All of this is important, and I assume that you already know it (if you didn't before, you do now; you're welcome). Equally importantly, though: Just don't be a jerk. Be good to yourself, to your peers, to your instructors... to everyone. It will serve you well in the long-run. We all have stuff going on (believe me, I know that life gets really rough sometimes), and the only way to get through it is to be kind to one another. When you need help, talk with someone. Talk with me. When someone talks with you, be kind. We're all in this together.

When the going gets weird, the weird turn pro.
Hunter S. Thompson

TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE

(Tentative schedule subject to change without notice as instructor deems necessary)

Week	Date	Topic	Reading (BEFORE class) [Optional Baxter & Babbie]	Assignment (DUE DATE)
1	8/20	Welcome! Course Introduction Paradigms of Knowing	skim ER-1 for paradigms [B&B Chs. 1-3]	
	8/22	APA Style & Ways of Knowing	APA style on ReggieNet [B&B Ch. 4]	
2	8/27	Collaboration & Group Organization		
	8/29	Workday – Project Proposal & Plan	[B&B Ch. 5]	CITI Training (ReggieNet)
3	9/03	Quantitative Collection – Sampling & Experiments	[B&B Chs. 7 & 9]	
	9/05	Quantitative Collection - Surveys	Check ER [B&B Chs. 6 & 8]	Project Proposal & Plan
4	9/10	more ^^		
	9/12	more ^^ (workday)		
5	9/17	Qualitative Collections – Interviews & Focus Groups	Check ER [B&B Ch. 14]	
	9/19	more ^^		Surveys/Scales Data
6	9/24	Observation & Archival Research	Check ER [B&B Ch. 13]	
	9/26	more ^^		
7	10/01	Quantitative Analysis - Content	Check ER [B&B Ch. 10]	Protocol & Interview Data
	10/03	Quantitative Analysis - Statistics	Check ER [B&B Ch. 11 & 12]	
8	10/08	more ^^ (CA in class)		Archival Research
	10/10	more ^^ (group CA & Stats)		
9	10/15	more ^^ (group CA & Stats)		
	10/17	Qualitative Analysis - Thematic	Check ER [B&B Ch. 15 & 16]	
10	10/22	more ^^ (TA in class)		Stats & Content Analysis
	10/24	more ^^ (group TA)		
11	10/29	Synthesis: APA research papers		
	10/31	Synthesis Paper Organization Day		Thematic Analysis
12	11/05	Review Day (optional)		
	11/07	Course Content Examination		Exam
13	11/12	Workday – NCA Annual Convention		
	11/14	Workday – NCA Annual Convention		
14	11/19	Presentations (3 groups)		
	11/21	Presentations (2 groups)		
XXXX	11/26	No Class – Thanksgiving		
XXXX	11/28	No Class – Thanksgiving		
15	12/03	TBD Based on Class Needs		
	12/05	Closure		Synthesis Paper (11:59 PM)
16	12/09	FINALS WEEK: Project Reflection due via ReggieNet by end of TBD class exam period		

