

SPCM 3700: Empirical Research Methods in Communication (Summer 2009)

Location:	SLC 268
Time:	M/T/W/R/F: 11:00-1:45
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Course Description

This course is an introduction to social science research methods for those who have little or no prior experience or course work in this area or statistics. It is designed to accomplish three inter-related goals: (1) to introduce students to the process, basic concepts, logic, and techniques of social science research; (2) to provide students with a critical framework and a set of tools to examine communication problems and to evaluate various claims on communication processes and effects; and (3) to offer students opportunities to gain insights into research process by having hands-on experiences. By the end of the semester, you should have the tools need to accomplish these tasks.

Successful completion of this course will help you become a savvy consumer of research reports and respond appropriately based on your understanding of the research findings, as well as provide you with the foundation necessary to conduct your own research. Even if you do not pursue a career in social science research, the skills that you acquire in this course will be useful in your career, more advanced methods courses, and in everyday life.

This course is NOT a statistics or mathematics class; however, you should be prepared to learn some elementary ideas of statistics and the basics of quantitative reasoning in this course. The emphasis of this course will be on the logic of reasoning with statistics and research applications rather than on mathematical computation; however, it will be advantageous and in your best interest to review your course materials from your statistics course.

Resources

Required Text:

1. Babbie, E. (2005). *The basics of social research (4th Ed.)*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Recommended Text:

1. Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 5th Edition.

Other Resources:

Methods & statistics: <http://www.socialpsychology.org/methods.htm>

Research methods: <http://methods.fullerton.edu/>

Statistics: <http://davidmlane.com/hyperstat/>
<http://www.robertniles.com/stats/>

Requirements

The best way to learn how research is conducted is by doing research. Reflecting this pedagogical principle, this course is designed to contain three integrated components: (1) lectures and readings, (2) exercises, and (3) a research project. You are required to participate **fully** in all three parts. More specifically, you are required to attend lectures regularly, to finish the assigned readings **prior to** class everyday, to complete the assignments and exams as required, and to take primary responsibilities for the assigned tasks leading to the completion of a group research project.

The materials covered in this course are tightly integrated into a coherent system. It is imperative that you gain a clear and thorough understanding of each week's topic in order to proceed to the topics of the subsequent lectures. The only sure way for succeeding in this course is to keep the pace with the course throughout the semester.

Attendance:

SPCM3700 is a very important and difficult class. You are required to attend class every day. Attendance will be checked every day. your attendance is worth 10% of your grade. If you miss a quiz/exam due to absence, there is no chance for a make-up.

Quizzes, Exams, and Written Assignments

There will be four individual homework assignments (60 points in total: two are of 20 points, the other two of 10 points each). I only accept hard copies of homework assignments. Late homework assignments will suffer significant loss of points.

Students are also required to complete four quizzes during the semester (60 points in total). Each quiz consists of 10 questions covering both the readings and lectures of the corresponding period. There will be three kinds of questions: multiple choice, true/false, and short definition. The quizzes will take place in lectures. The students are responsible for being present in class and taking the quizzes. They are designed to motivate you to review the lecture and reading materials in time and get you familiarized with the format of questions in the mid-term and final exams—they will be in the same format as the exams.

Exams

There will be two exams (200 points in total). The mid-term is an in-class and close-book exam. It will take place in our regular classroom. The format of the exam will be exactly the same as the quizzes. The final exam is not explicitly cumulative, but materials covered in the first half of the class will be useful during the final.

Please note that this last statement is more “true” for this class than for some other classes. The reason is that the materials for this class are closely inter-related. Materials covered in later weeks are built upon those covered in earlier weeks. You must develop a firm grasp of the materials covered in the first half of the semester to do well in the final exam.

Team Assignments

Teams will complete four assignments (80 points in total) together that are relevant to course materials and/or to the class project.

Class Project

Students are required to work in groups to complete a research project to examine an important issue about communication, and write up a research paper that consists of the

following sections: literature review, specific hypotheses, method, results and discussion. You will be evaluated as a group, instead of individuals. There will be one research paper to turn in over the course of the semester. The paper is comprised of the first half the research project (literature review, hypotheses, and method).

Evaluation

Grading

The final grades will be determined by the sum of the points in the following areas:

Activities	Points
Attendance	60
Quizzes (15/each x 4)	60
Midterm	100
Final	100
Individual Homework	80
Team Assignments	100
Research Paper I	80
Group Presentation	20
TOTAL	600

There will be **NO** curve in this course. Final grade breakdowns will be as follows:

Points	Approximate Percentage	Grade
546-600	91-100%	A
540-545	90-91%	A-
510- 539	85-90%	B+
480-509	80-85%	B
468-479	78-80%	B-
450-467	75-78%	C+
420-449	70-75%	C

University and Course Policies

Class schedule. There is a tentative schedule in the reading pack. Please note that it is a general plan for the course; deviations announced to the class by the instructor may be necessary.

Laptop use: Internet use prohibited in class. Laptop might be used for taking notes. But there is empirical evidence that taking notes by hand leads to better learning and grades.

Attendance. Attendance does not contribute directly to your grade. However, if you are not present when a quiz takes place, you will get 0 for that particular quiz. And I strongly recommend that you attend each and everyone of the lecture. There is a substantial correlation between class attendance and good grades, *particularly* for research methods classes. We will cover a great deal of information this semester and class time is an effective means of managing that information. In addition, we will be working with our groups during class time so it's imperative that you be in class the day groups meet. Please note that

attendance is required for all Team Project Presentation days. You are required to show support to other teams in the class. ***If you fail to attend a presentation, you will receive a zero for your own presentation points.***

Academic honesty policy. Your enrollment at this university and your participation in this course presuppose that you follow principles of academic and personal integrity whereby you live honestly and respect the work of others as inviolably theirs. All academic work must meet the standards contained in “A Culture of Honesty.” Students are responsible for informing themselves about those standards before performing any academic work. You can get a copy of the brochure at the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs. Anyone caught cheating on exams, plagiarizing assignments, or failing to cite sources of research will receive a zero on the assignment and will face disciplinary action under the academic honesty policy. **Ignorance is not an acceptable defense.** For more information concerning what constitutes academic dishonesty, please visit the following website:
<http://www.uga.edu/ovpi/honesty/acadhon.htm>

Distraction policy. Please allow everyone to make the most of their learning experience by turning off any electronic devices (watches, cell phones, pagers, Sega games) that can be heard by others before class. **If any of your devices becomes activated during class, you forfeit the opportunity to attend class for the rest of the day.** Your presence in this classroom counts as consent to this condition.

Reasonable accommodation policy. Students with learning disabilities who may require accommodations should contact The Learning Disabilities Center at 706-542-7034. Reasonable accommodations will be determined on a case-by-case basis according to each student’s individual documentation. Please note: if you have arrangements with the Disability Center that require modified test or assignment conditions, you must make the instructor aware of this fact in the beginning of the semester.

Late assignment policy. All homework and team task assignments are due at the beginning of class on the day that they are due on by the time specified on the handout, or the announced due date. **Late assignments will cost you points: 10% deduction for each day the assignment is late for. No assignment will be accepted when they are more than three days late.**

Incomplete policy. In accordance with university policy, an incomplete will be given only when a student who is otherwise earning a passing grade is unable to complete the course because of conditions beyond his or her control. **You must submit your incomplete request in writing to the instructor before the 12th week of classes.** If you receive permission to take an incomplete, it is your responsibility to arrange for the timely completion of this course.

“I Hate My Group Member” policy. A careful perusal of the point system indicates that half of the points come from individual work (homework assignments and the tests). The other half of the points comes from group work. Working in a group can be rewarding and frustrating at the same time. If one particular member consistently demonstrates a lack of dedication to the team (by not attending meetings, not doing the required work, or turning in

unacceptable work on behalf of the group), the other members have the right to "fire" that member up until the **9th week of classes**. Firing involves a 2 step process: (1) The team (in consultation with the instructor) gives the errant member a warning and that teammate must negotiate with the group how he or she is going to be a better teammate, and (2) if the member continues to act dissatisfactory, that individual will be fired from the group by the instructor. If you are fired, you forfeit all team benefits associated with completing the Team Tasks and the Team Project as a group. You will have to turn in individual assignments (including the research project) from the point of firing on. Bad teammates usually show their tendencies early, so let a problematic group member know that her/his behavior is not acceptable early on, rather than waiting until Week 9.

You can no longer "fire" a team member beyond Week 9. However, for each group assignment, each team member is to be rated by the other members. The team as a whole will get a grade for each group assignment. Your individual grade from the assignment not only depends on the group grade, but also on your group evaluation. For example, if your team gets 90 points out of 100 for the second research paper (which is an A), and you get 100% evaluation from your team, you will get 90 points for that assignment. However, if you receive 80% evaluation from your team, your grade for that assignment will be 80% of the 90 points, which will be 72 points, which will be a C.

Make-exam policy. There will be no make-up exam allowed except: (1) in the case of extraordinary events that have prevented him/her from taking the exam at the scheduled time; or (2) there is a conflict of schedule with exams in other classes. However, you are responsible of informing the instructor to reschedule **in advance**.

Good Things to Know in Order to Do Well in SPCM 3700

APA style. All written work that communication scholars submit to their colleagues (in the form of journal articles, conference papers, etc.) must be written in accordance to the most recent guidelines of the American Psychological Association (APA). Given that you are communication scholars, this standard also holds for all written work submitted for this class. Most of your assignments must be completed in APA style complete with title pages, abstracts, and reference sections when appropriate. The directions for a given assignment will specify if your assignment needs to be in APA style. Papers that do not adhere to these criteria will lose considerable points. It is recommended that you read the primer carefully and keep it as reference when you write your papers. APA materials are available on Course WebCT.

Help. This class will introduce you to the language, techniques, and procedures for conducting research. The course content is often brand new to students; therefore, this class can be challenging. You are strongly encouraged to form study groups and to review course material frequently. Also, do not be afraid to meet with the course instructor about any course information or questions that you have. No question is too small—don't wait until you feel overwhelmed. I will be more than happy to read your drafts and give you some feedback before your papers are due. Or you can go to the UGA Writing Center at the Student Learning Center for help to improve your paper.

Your signature indicates that you have read this syllabus, and consent to the assignments, terms, policies, and other requirements of SPCM 3700 (Shen) at 11:00-1:45 in Maymester, 2009.

Name

Signature

Date