

SPCM 3700: Empirical Research Methods in Communication

Summer 2009

MTWRF 1:00-3:15 Terrell Hall 214

Staff:	Minsun Shim
Email:	mshim@uga.edu
Phone:	706-542-3259
Office:	142 Terrell Hall
Office Hours:	TW 11:00-12:30 & by appointment

Overview

This course introduces the process of conducting communication research from a social scientific perspective. It addresses the processes of advancing research questions, variable definition and measurement, sampling, survey research, experimental research, writing research reports, and hypothesis testing.

Students can expect to come away from this course with: (1) knowledge about the process, basic concepts, logic, and techniques of social science research; (2) competence in the evaluation of research reports and claims; and (3) skills in designing and implementing empirical research. Successful completion of this course will help you become a savvy consumer of research, 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 class but a *methods* class. The emphasis of this course is on the logic of reasoning and hypothesis testing, rather than on statistical or mathematic computation. However, you should be prepared to learn some elementary ideas of statistics and the basics of quantitative reasoning in this course and it will be advantageous to review your course materials from your statistics course.

Readings

1. Babbie, E. (2005). *The basics of social research (4th Ed.)*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
2. Other required readings will be posted on the WebCT (<https://webct.uga.edu>) throughout the semester.

Requirements

Attendance and participation

SPCM3700 is a very important and difficult class. Students are expected to attend class every day and to participate fully in class discussions and activities. (40 points total)

1. Class attendance will be taken on a random basis. Each class missed over 2, without a University-sanctioned excuse, will result in 5 points subtracted from your total points. If you miss 7 or more classes without a legitimate excuse, you will get an *automatic F* for the class.
2. Students will complete several in-class activities. If you miss class for any reason on a day that an activity is completed, you will have 5 points subtracted from your total points. Activities will not be announced ahead of time.

Exams

The class will have two exams in a form of multiple choice and short answer questions. The exams are designed to test knowledge; therefore, questions require recall and application of course material. Make-up exams are scheduled only in cases of unavoidable conflicts. No make-up exams will be given for personal reasons (e.g., work, family events, vacation plans, etc.). **You must notify Dr. Shim at least one week prior to the scheduled exam and provide documentation if you hope to reschedule an exam.** (200 points total)

1. Exam 1 (100 points) will cover the first half of the course.
2. Exam 2 (100 points) is *not* explicitly cumulative, but materials covered in the first half of the class will be useful for Exam 2. Please note that this statement is more “true” for this class than for some other classes because 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 Exam 2.

Individual assignments

There will be four individual homework assignments. Each assignment is worth 20 points. It is expected that you will complete all homework assignments individually without the consultation of your classmates. Homework is due at the **beginning** of class. **No e-mail** assignments will be accepted. (80 points total)

Team project and assignments

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 literature review, specific hypotheses, method, results and discussion. You will be evaluated as a team, but each individual's contribution to the project (evaluated by other members) will be considered as well. (180 points) Teams will complete six tasks over the course of the semester (140 points), and these tasks will ultimately lead to a final research paper (25 points) and class presentation (15 points). If you fail to attend a team presentation, you will receive a zero for your own presentation points.

Grading

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

Activities		Points
Attendance and participation		40
Exams	2 exams	200
Individual assignments	4 assignments	80
Team project and assignments	6 tasks (140) Final paper (25) Presentation (15)	180
TOTAL		500

There will be **NO** curve in this course. Your final letter grade will reflect this distribution:

Final grade	Points (%)	Final grade	Points (%)
A	465 (93%) - 500	C+	385 (77%) - 399
A-	450 (90%) - 464	C	365 (73%) - 384
B+	435 (87%) - 449	C-	350 (70%) - 364
B	415 (83%) - 434	D	300 (60%) - 349
B-	400 (80%) - 414	F	000 (0%) - 299

University and Course Policies

Syllabus: The syllabus is a general plan for the course; deviations may be necessary.

Academic honesty: 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.**

Distraction: 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. Also, please enjoy newspapers or magazines to outside of class.

Reasonable accommodations: 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.

Late assignments: All homework and team task assignments are due at the beginning of class on the day specified on the syllabus. **Late assignments will cost you points: 10% deduction for each day the assignment is late for. No assignments will be accepted if they are more than three days late.**

Incompletes: 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 3rd week of classes.** If you receive permission to take an incomplete, it is your responsibility to arrange for the timely completion of this course.

“Firing Teammates” (aka the “Donald Trump” clause): Forty percent of the points come 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 **June 16**. 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 June 16.

Make-up exam: 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**.

Final grade: Your final grade is final. Applying subjective standards after the fact in order to bolster your grade is unfair to your classmates, and therefore will not occur. Grades will only be changed in the event of a clerical error. **Also note:** You must earn a **C** or above for this course to count as part of a major in Speech Communication.

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.

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. Or you can go to the UGA Writing Center at the Student Learning Center for help to improve your paper.

Tentative Course Schedule

(Subject to revision if necessary)

Days	Topics	Readings	Assignments due
6/5	Introduction to the course The nature of social science & theory	Ch. 1	
6/8	Research design <i>Team project</i>	Ch. 4, pp. 99-125	
6/9	Conceptualization <i>Team project (literature review)</i>	Ch. 5, pp. 131-146	
6/10	Research questions & hypotheses <i>Team project (RQs & Hs)</i>	Reinard (1998). Ch. 2	Team task 1 (Research article)
6/11	<i>Homework review</i> <i>Team project (ID)</i>		Ind assignment 1 (Hypotheses)
6/12	Research ethics & participant rights <i>Team project (IRB)</i>	Ch. 3 IRB Guidelines	Team task 2 (Project ID)
6/15	Operationalization & Measurement <i>Team project (measurement)</i>	Ch. 5, pp. 146-164	Ind assignment 2 (Ethics)
6/16	Scaling & index construction <i>Team project (index)</i>	Ch. 6	Team task 3 (Protocol & IRB)
6/17	Sampling	Ch. 7	
6/18	Survey research	Ch. 9	Ind assignment 3 (Sampling)
6/19	<i>Team project (survey)</i> Review for the exam		Team task 4 (Front end)
6/22	Exam 1		
6/23	Experimental research	Ch. 8	Team task 5 (Methods)
6/24	Content analysis	Ch. 11, pp. 349-362	Ind assignment 4 (Experiments)
6/25	Basic quantitative analysis Data collection, entry, and analysis	Ch. 14, pp. 442-454	
6/26	Quantitative data analysis	Ch. 14, pp. 455-466	Team data
6/29	Result report <i>Team project (data analysis and report)</i>		
6/30	Result interpretation <i>Team project (discussion and presentation)</i>		Team task 6 (Results)
7/1	Team presentation Review for the exam		
7/2	Exam 2		Team final paper (7/3, 1 pm)