

716 Syllabus**MEJO 716 RESEARCH METHODS AND APPLICATIONS SYLLABUS**

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Knowledge of the logic, conduct and ethics of research is essential and empowering. Communication professionals have more research tools at their disposal than ever before, and they are under more pressure than ever to measure and evaluate the impact of communication products and services. This introduction to research methods and applications will help communication professionals make better and more informed decisions about why, how, when, and where to use research and what methods of research are appropriate given the compelling research challenge and resource opportunities and constraints (time and money). Through readings, discussions, activities, and papers, we will explore the premises, values, and limitations of research and the scientific method, critique qualitative and quantitative methods, and introduce ways to understand and critically interpret research results. This course provides both a broad overview of relevant research methods and practical experience in conducting research.

By the end of the course, you should be able to:

- identify the strengths and weaknesses of various approaches to research
- evaluate research studies in your areas of interest
- articulate a research problem and questions
- explain why particular research methods would answer the questions posed
- write a basic research proposal
- carry out a pilot study

The School of Media and Journalism's accrediting body outlines a number of values you should be aware of and competencies you should be able to demonstrate by the time you graduate from our program. Learn more about them here:

<http://www2.ku.edu/~acejmc/PROGRAM/PRINCIPLES.SHTML#vals&comps>. No single course could possibly give you all of these values and competencies; but collectively, our classes are designed to build your abilities in each of these areas. In this class, we will address a number of the values and competencies, including:

- *Think critically, creatively and independently;*
- *Conduct research and evaluate information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they work;*
- *Write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve;*
- *Critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness;*
- *Contribute to knowledge appropriate to the communications professions in which they work.*

Contacting me and turning in assignments

If you have questions or need help with the course assignments, please email me at the address listed above. If I don't respond to you within 48 hours during, please assume that I didn't receive your email, and email me again. I would also be happy to set up an appointment to speak with you by phone, in person, or

via online chat.

You will use the Assignments tool/area on the Sakai site to turn in the major papers and most of the assignments for the class. (I might sometimes ask you to email me class exercise materials.....but I'll let you know if I want you to do this.) Anything you turn in should be in .doc or .docx format so that I can use the review/comment functions. If you email something to me, please put J716, your last name and what you're sending to me in the subject line. So something like this:

J716Johnston _research topic

Important UNC policies and procedures:

The Honor Code: Students must adhere to the letter and spirit of the university honor system. Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated – this includes plagiarism, cheating or any false means of obtaining a grade – and may result in failure of the course, and suspension or expulsion from the university.

Title IX : Title IX makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender is a Civil Rights offense subject to the same kinds of accountability and the same kinds of support applied to offenses against other protected categories such as race, national origin, etc. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, you can find the appropriate resources here <http://campusconversation.web.unc.edu/resources/>

Special Accommodations: If you require special accommodations to attend or participate in this course, please let the instructor know as soon as possible. If you need information about disabilities visit the Accessibility Services website at <https://accessibility.unc.edu/>

Diversity: The University's policy on Prohibiting Harassment and Discrimination is outlined in the 2011-2012 Undergraduate Bulletin <http://www.unc.edu/ugradbulletin/>. UNC is committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming environment for all members of our community and does not discriminate in offering access to its educational programs and activities on the basis of age, gender, race, color, national origin, religion, creed, disability, veteran's status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.

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More information about copyright law and the University's Copyright Policy may be found on the home page of the University's Copyright Committee: <http://www.lib.unc.edu/copyright/>

Required Textbooks

- Wimmer, R. D, & Dominick, J. R. (2014). *Mass media research: An introduction* (10th ed.). Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth. (Referred to as W & D in schedule)
- Brennen, B. S. (2013). *Qualitative research methods for media studies*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Other Required Readings

- Additional readings listed on your syllabus can be found by searching online, or they are on the Sakai

site for the class. Please let Rachel Lillis or me know if you have problems accessing this content.

- You will need access to an APA (American Psychological Association) style guide for your papers. Abbreviated guides are available online. Here is one <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/>

Grades

Final graduate course grades are H, P, L, F. I will be using two types of grading in this course depending upon the type of assignment or requirement. Sometimes your work will be graded Pass/Fail. Failure to turn in any of this work will result in a L in the course. Other assignments or work will be graded H, P, L, F. Late papers and late assignments are not accepted. If you do not turn in either one of the major papers for the course (Paper 1 or 2) you will receive a F in the course. If you are trying to understand what graduate grades mean, here's a general description.

- H means a truly outstanding performance in the class and on assignments. You can't translate the H as the undergraduate grade of an A. H is reserved for the exceptional work being done by the student or students in the class on that particular assignment.
- P is a good, solid performance overall in the class and on assignments. It is the most typical grade received by good work at the graduate level.
- L is a performance in the class and on assignments that is below the acceptable level for graduate students. It means the student does not understand the course material very well, does not have a grasp of what is required in this area at the graduate level, is not participating in the class at the level expected of graduate students, or has not handed in all papers or participated in all assignments.
- F is failing. It is given rarely in the circumstance that a student has not handed in H, P, L graded assignments.

In the next section, I've indicated how the different course requirements will be graded and weighted in this course. Your grade, overall, is determined by: active participation in class, grades on assignments, and your work in relation to others.

Course Requirements - Overview

Assessment	Graded	Weight %
1. IRB certification.	Pass/Fail	5
2. Critique of either quantitative or qualitative digital communication/media research article in an academic journal	Pass/Fail	10
3. Discussion Forum	H, P, L, F	20
4. Paper 1: Introduction, Literature Review and Research Questions/Hypotheses	H, P, L, F	25
5. Paper 2: Final Research Proposal	H, P, L, F	30
6. Voicethread Report of Pilot Study	H, P, L, F	10

Course Requirements – Assessment Specifications

Before I give you specific requirements for these assignments, let me first give you my overall requirement for your participation in the course. Active participation is a given...an expectation...in any graduate level

course. Participation to me means that you turn in all of the assignments, you keep up with the readings, you ask questions if you don't understand something, you stay in communication with me throughout the semester, you lead the online discussions when I've assigned you to do so, and you respond to your classmates' comments. Please feel free to go beyond what readings you have assigned here for information about a topic. That's what graduate students do. Of course you'll be doing that for your individual papers, but get into the habit of looking at other sources when you have questions about or want to make connections with the material you've been assigned to read. And if you find a good source, please share it with us all. One caution here: there's lots of material online about many of these topics, but they aren't always accurate or credible. Read with a critical eye...and please feel free to ask me (or post in the Discussion Forum) about your sources.

Below I've provided some details about specific course requirements.

1. IRB certification.

You will need to complete the Institutional Review Board's certification process. This means you will do the CITI Online Course (CITI = Collaborative IRB Training Initiative) on the web [here](#). You will need to first Register/Create an Account, then indicate the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill as your affiliation. The registration will take you through several screens. When you choose which one you want to complete, be sure to select the Social and Behavioral Research: Basic Course. Send me an email when you've completed the training. One caution here: This certification may take some time, so I recommend you try to do this in stages.

2. Critique of either quantitative or qualitative digital communication/media research article published in academic, scholarly journal

You will find a published quantitative or a published qualitative digital communication/media research article in an academic journal (*such as Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*). You are welcome to use an article that you plan to use in your literature review and final paper. Please do not critique any of this course's required reading articles for this assignment. In one 4-page paper, you will critique the article using the information and guidelines provided in the document "Critiquing Research Academic Journals" in the Assignments and Paper Guidelines folder under the Resources tool on the Sakai site.

I view this assignment as an indication of my success (or failure!) in explaining what should be included in any methods or procedures section in a quantitative or qualitative scholarly article...and how to critique those methods. You can't really fail this assignment; I may ask that you redo or rewrite parts of the assignment if they aren't on target.

3. Discussion Forum

Below, I've detailed how the Discussion Forum will work and my expectations of your contributions. One caution here: Sakai will sometimes eat your posts. I recommend that you write your post (particularly if it's lengthy) in some word document and then copy/paste from word into Sakai. I have had it happen to me...and to several of my students. It's very frustrating, so I wanted to warn you about this.

You'll notice on the Course Schedule that I schedule the weeks to go from Saturday to Friday. That is, the week begins on a Saturday and the Discussion Forum will end for that week 7 days later at 9 p.m. on Friday. Because you will have lots of reading to do in this course, you should use Saturday and Sunday to read, think, highlight and formulate your responses or thoughts about the discussion prompts or questions. The Discussion Forum itself will be available for your posts on Monday morning at 6 a.m. EST, and all posts and other smaller assignments will be due that Friday at 9 p.m. EST. A few of the assignments are due on Mondays. All of this is detailed in the Course Schedule and in the course content in the Sakai site. And although you can't post in the Discussion Forum until it opens, I have provided a .pdf of the Discussion Forum questions/tasks for the entire semester (in the Resources/Week by Week section of the Sakai site).

You are always welcome to read ahead and think about your comments ahead of time.

I expect your participation to be **insightful, comprehensive, and regular**. Lack of participation in a graduate level class is simply not acceptable. Remember, the online discussion is analogous to class time. So a 3-credit course will require about 2.5 hours of online discussion time each week (reading the comments, posting comments, responding to comments). You are always welcome to add your personal experiences and use them to provide an understanding of the material we are reading in class. Let's try to avoid "binge posting" and have discussions take place over the course of the Monday to Friday time frame. During the semester, you will also participate in class exercises designed to introduce and practice basic research design skills. You may, for example, be assigned to design, participate, or otherwise take a role in conducting rudimentary online focus groups, experiments and surveys. I expect you to participate in these exercises and hand in any materials associated with the exercises.

My goal is to facilitate your discussions of the material and your understanding of course content. Because I want to respect the asynchronous design of the course, I may not be in the Discussion Forum when you are...and you may have your own schedule for responding and posting that is different from my schedule. And all of that is fine. If you ever have a specific question about something you don't understand about the readings or assignment and you would like it specifically answered by me...and I don't do that in the Discussion Forum, please email me.

Please remember to read my Instructor Comments (available by Saturday morning) as well as all of the required readings (or view required links) before you post in the Discussion Forum.

During the course of the semester, you'll each be assigned to lead the online discussions during a couple of the weeks. (See Student Assignments to leading Discussion Forum topics in Resources/Week by Week.) I've provided more details below about how this will be set up during the semester and about my expectations for your participation. If I do not say that certain students will lead the discussion (see the Course Schedule) for a particular week, then there are no set discussion leaders for that week. All students should follow the guidelines given in that week's Discussion Forum in responding to the discussion prompt.

When you are assigned to lead the online discussion for that week, your first post is due by the Tuesday of that week at 11 p.m. (Check the Course Schedule for specifics.) Follow directions on the individual Discussion Forums, but your posts should be substantive posts. A substantive post is one that answers the questions posed and does what the prompt asks of the discussion leaders. When you respond to the discussion prompts, be sure to **substantiate your answers** by making explicit connections to expert sources (i.e. the texts, readings, other credible sources you find in the course of your study). It is important for you to read and react to the course materials. You are welcome to also respond to any comments made by your classmates, but I am looking for original substantive posts during the week from you if you are in the group that's been assigned to lead the discussion.

When you are not assigned to lead the online discussion for that week: Follow directions on the individual Discussion Forum assignments, but generally you are still expected to read the readings, make sure you understand the material and provide detailed responses to comments made by the discussion leaders. A detailed response is more than, "I agree." I expect you to add your insight to what the readings say or to what the group leaders have said; to add information from your personal experience; and/or to post information about a supplementary reading or link. By the way, you are always welcome to respond to any of your classmates' posts.

4. Paper 1: Introduction, Literature Review and Research Questions/Hypotheses

You will submit an 10-12 page introduction to, literature review of and research questions/hypotheses for the area you would like to study (and plan to present in your research proposal). You should review at least 10 pieces of scholarly literature. At the end of the paper, be sure to include a reference list in APA style. You will include a revised version of this work in your final paper for the class: a research proposal. See information and guidelines provided in the document, Intro_Lit_Review_guidelines in the Assignment and

Paper Guidelines folder under the Resources tool of the Sakai site.

5. Paper 2: Final Research Proposal

The proposal will include a title page, a revision of Paper 1 and a discussion of the research methods you plan to use. The methods section will explain, in detail, how you plan to study the problem you've proposed and how you will answer your research questions/test your hypotheses. The methods section should include what you think the limitations are to this method or study, how you plan to operationalize variables and definitions of terms or concepts. Include citations in the methods section that will help you use your methods. Include a reference list in APA style. The Research Proposal should be about 15-18 pages. See information and guidelines provided in the document, Final Proposal and Pilot Study guidelines in the Assignment and Paper Guidelines folder under the Resources tool of the Sakai site.

6. Report of Pilot Study

Since research is easier said (and proposed) than done, each of you will try out your proposed study in some small, pilot version. We will talk more specifically about what this will mean for your individual project. I just want you to try to carry out some part of the study you've proposed. And since this is for class purposes only, you do not need to get IRB approval if you want to talk to human subjects. Provide a description of your pilot study, any findings, any coding or survey forms, and anything you learned that might change the way you would do your proposed study. You will provide a Voicethread presentation where you will report on the findings from your pilot study. See information and guidelines provided in the document, Final Proposal and Pilot Study guidelines in the Assignment and Paper Guidelines folder under the Resources tool of the Sakai site.

NOTE: Ideally you will write your proposal, and then carry out your pilot study. You do not need to rewrite your proposal because of what you found in the pilot study.