

MASS COMMUNICATION RESEARCH METHODS

Fall Semester 2017

Syllabus

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Course: MEJO 701.2 | **Schedule:** M/W 12:30-1:45 p.m. | **Location:** Carroll 253

Final Exam: December 15, 12-3 p.m.

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Office Hours: M/W 10:30 a.m. - 12 p.m.
Or by appointment

DESCRIPTION

The key to effective communication is research. This course will teach you how to understand, evaluate, and conduct communication research. It will provide you with an understanding of the relationship between theory, data collection, analysis, and the communication of these results. The course will also teach you how to design and execute various methodologies used for program assessment and evaluation in mass communication.

Much of the semester will focus on the fundamentals (e.g., key terms and concepts) of quantitative and qualitative social science research, as well as on the application of these methods. You will learn to formulate research questions, specify independent and dependent variables, assess the reliability and validity of studies, and design research projects. You will be exposed to the broad range of designs used in communication research, including laboratory and field experiments, surveys, content analysis, interviewing, and ethnography. These are the same fundamentals taught to social scientists, but their objectives are sometimes—but not always—different from yours. Given that many of you will be called upon to interpret and use the results of social science in your professional work, we will read research articles to evaluate the methodological choices of social scientists, understand the limitations of studies, and differentiate between reliable and unreliable work.

GOAL

The goal of this course is to enable students to understand the role of research in mass communication and apply qualitative and quantitative methods. This course will provide you with a broad introduction to the foundations and tools of communication research. These tools will serve you as you complete the master's program and later, when you begin or resume your professional career and may be called upon to conduct research, to evaluate research, to communicate about research, or to use research to shape your organization's direction.

OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this course, students should be able to:

- Describe quantitative and qualitative research options in the area of mass communication
- Differentiate the strengths and weaknesses of different research methods
- Apply qualitative and quantitative research methods and appropriate data collection, numerical concepts, and statistical procedures
- Determine research methods that are the most appropriate to answer specific research questions
- Design research, develop research instruments, and collect data using these methods
- Analyze and synthesize data obtained by these research methods
- Apply research findings to address real-world issues and research problems
- Examine research problems through primary and secondary research

COURSE VALUES

- **Integrity and honesty:** All work should be your own, including research reports, tests, etc.
- **Completeness and thoroughness:** The best projects will meet all the objectives and requirements of the assignment.
- **Preparedness:** Complete reading assignments before class and be prepared to participate in class discussions. Turn assignments in on time.
- **Accuracy:** Data must be accurate and not falsified.
- **Professional courtesy:** Demonstrate courtesy toward your fellow classmates. Respect diverse backgrounds and opinions so that we may all gain insights from one another. Avoid disruptive classroom behaviors. Turn off all communication devices during class.

ACEJMC CORE COMPETENCIES:

The Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC) requires that, irrespective of their particular specialization, all graduates should be aware of certain core values and competencies. This course is particularly relevant to the following competencies:

- Understand concepts and apply theories in the use and presentation of images and information;
- Demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness, and diversity;
- 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; and,
- Apply basic numerical and statistical concepts.

The full list of competencies is available here: <http://www.acejmc.org/policies-process/nine-standards>.

HONOR CODE

All students are expected to be familiar with and abide by the Honor Code. The student-led Honor System is responsible for adjudicating any suspected violations of the Honor Code and all suspected instances of academic dishonesty will be reported to the honor system. Information, including your responsibilities as a student is outlined in the Instrument of Student Judicial Governance (<http://instrument.unc.edu>). Your full participation and observance of the Honor Code is expected.

All work submitted for this course must be your own work. All sources used for information must be properly cited. The ideas and content within your materials must be original and not copied from others. In our industry, we are expected to be original and creative all of the time. If you have any questions about whether your use of reference material is appropriate, please see me. If any part of your work is judged by me and an independent faculty member or plagiarism software to reflect inappropriate use of reference material, I reserve the right to adjust assignment and course grades downwards, in addition to reporting suspected violations as described in the preceding paragraph.

TEXTBOOK AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

Brennen, B. S. (2017). *Qualitative research methods for media studies*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Wimmer, R. D., & Dominick, J. R. (2014). *Mass media research: An introduction* (10th ed.). Boston, MA: Wadsworth.

Supplemental readings will be assigned during the semester. Readings will be made available through Sakai. It is your responsibility to check Sakai to access the readings prior to class.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

IRB Ethics Training: All students will complete the *IRB certification* process. This means that you will do the CITI Program Ethics IRB Training course on linked from UNC IRB's website and upload a copy of the certification to the course's Sakai site. This certification may take some time, so it may be helpful to do it in stages. **The certification must be completed by Sept. 18.** The course is available online here:

<http://research.unc.edu/human-research-ethics/getting-started/training>

Peer Groups: Peer groups will be formed based on the type of research you are interested in conducting (ethnography, experiments, surveys, applied case studies, etc.) *or* your substantive area of interest (i.e.: health communication). These peer groups are intended to be forums for you to share literature, propose ideas and questions, and vet research plans. You will write your assignments with your peer groups, and share your research questions and literature review with members of your peer group, as well as the entire draft of your proposal or research for formal peer review. In order to find areas of common interest, students will complete an **online survey by September 1.**

Research Project—Proposal or Completed Original Study: Each class member will select a topic and present a full working research proposal for the final project, or a completed original study. Working towards this goal, students will complete a series of homework assignments and corresponding in-class discussions with their peer groups related to the study that each student is proposing or conducting. These assignments will help convey course concepts as well as keep class members moving forward on their research. Dates for individual assignments are indicated in the syllabus below and the assignment descriptions will be posted on Sakai and discussed in class, prior to the assignment due date. The completed draft research project is due for peer review on **November, 20.** Peer groups will have one week to review and students will then have one week to revise. More details about the peer review process will be provided in class and on Sakai. The final revised paper is **due on the last day of class.** Class members will prepare an oral presentation of their projects during the designated exam period for the class on **December 15, 12-3 p.m.** Both research project options are described in detail below.

Option 1: Research Proposal

The **research proposal** lays out your thinking and plan of action for the study you intend. The full proposal will include a title page, summary, introduction, section explaining the purpose and significance of your study, research questions and literature review, your hypotheses or anticipated findings, full discussion of the methods you will use, your plan for carrying out the study, conclusion, and references. Your research questions should be grounded in the social scientific or professional literature. The methods and research plan sections will explain, in detail, how you plan to answer the questions you have asked and defend the methodological choices you make. You should also include a discussion of how you plan to operationalize variables, your key terms or concepts, and the limitations to the study you have identified. The full proposal should be 4,000-5,000 words or 14-20 double-spaced pages, excluding endnotes, graphics, dummy tables, and appendices. Any draft questionnaire, instrument, interview protocol, or coding protocol for the project should be included as an appendix to the proposal.

Option 2: Original Completed Research

As an alternative to the research proposal, some students may wish to conduct **original research** as part of this class. This works particularly well for professional track master's students with a defined area of interest they are planning on exploring further as either a standalone project or as part of their master's thesis. This option could allow interested students to gain some hands-on research experience prior to the thesis and also gain some valuable pilot data. If you are pursuing this option, you must speak to me by **Oct. 9.** Depending on your study design, you will most likely need to go through IRB approval. You will still complete the homework

assignments that guide the research process. Original completed research projects should include the same elements as the research proposal, with the addition of findings/results, discussion, and limitations/suggestions for future research.

Observation and Field Notes: As a peer group, you are responsible for conducting an exploratory field observation and individually writing up your field notes for a research site of your choosing. This means that you will decide as a group on one research site, but do your own work of independent observation. This assignment is designed to introduce you to the disciplined practice of ethnographic observation, the challenge of creating a ‘thick description’ of a field site, and through review of each other’s work to see commonalities and discrepancies in observation. The assignment is due in class on October, 2.

Participation: Consistent and enthusiastic class participation is assumed because scholarship is a shared endeavor among those who seek a better understanding of their discipline and who want to communicate that understanding to others. You will profit from the insights and concerns of others. Your own comments and suggestions will help others to do their best research. In addition, class members and the instructor will help each other in various steps of the research process. In addition to active participation in class, you are responsible for posting at least one question for the class about the readings *each week* on the Sakai forum, or writing one response to a peer’s question. I will often use these posts as the starting points for classroom discussion.

Book or Article Critique: Part of this course focuses on critiquing research, and, to do so, each student will read an article or book on research and critique the book or article in an oral presentation and discussion session. Available on Sakai will be a list of several books based on qualitative and quantitative research studies in various disciplines. Each student should choose one to read during the semester. Two students cannot choose the same book or article. Therefore, selection is first-come-first-served—students must indicate their choice for book or article online through Sakai. If you would like to choose a book not on the list, you will need to get approval from the instructor before you begin reading the book. Towards the end of the semester, students will present a critique of their book and elicit discussion about it in class. More details about the required presentation and handout will be available on Sakai.

Grading Procedure

IRB Certification	5%
Class Participation	10%
Article/Book Critique	10%
Peer Group Work and Evaluation	15%
In-Class Assignments and Homework	20%
• Observation and Field Notes	
• Qualtrics Survey and Experiment Design	
• SPSS Data Analysis	
Research Project and Final Presentation	40%
Total	100%

Grading Scale

Graduate grades are H, P, L, F. Your grade is determined by active participation in class, the quality of your assignments, and your work in relation to others.

Grade	Description
H	Mastery of course content at highest level; Outstanding attainment and truly outstanding performance in the class and on assignments
P	Strong performance overall in the class and on assignments; Solid attainment
L	Marginal attainment; Performance in the class and on assignments below the acceptable level for graduate students. Able to apply the material and extrapolate ideas in only some instances. May not be participating or handing in assignments on time.
F	Failed performance; Unacceptable attainment. May be missing class, failing to read or engage with the material, or unwilling to apply the material.

COURSE POLICIES

All students are expected to be in class on time. Please read all assignments before class so you may join our class conversations. This is a group-learning environment. Please come to class with ideas, comments, etc.

All course information is posted on Sakai and most assignments will be uploaded using Sakai: You will find the course syllabus, course schedule, assignments, supplemental readings and other important information about the course on Sakai (<http://sakai.unc.edu>). Additional information will be posted throughout the semester for upcoming course dates and assignments. You also can obtain the e-mail addresses of your classmates on Sakai. In an effort to make this class as “paperless” as possible, most assignments, other than exams, will be posted on Sakai and assignments should be uploaded via Sakai. It is your responsibility to keep up with Sakai and the content there. Your grades are posted in Sakai only so that you can stay updated on your progress; overall grades on Sakai are rough approximations of your overall grade in the course.

Attendance policy: Each student is expected to adhere to the attendance policy guidelines set forth in the syllabus. Just as professionals go to work each day, students in a professional school are expected to come to class on time and be prepared to work. Attendance will be taken during each and every class at the beginning of class. You are allowed three absences this semester for any reason with no penalty (including religious holidays, which the university allows two excused absences for). Missing four classes will result in your final grade being lowered one full letter grade (10 points) and another letter grade for each absence after that. After being late three times, a student’s final grade will be lowered one-half of a letter grade (5 points). If you are late to class, there is no guarantee that you will be marked as present.

Exceptions may exist for a student who misses more than a week of classes for a sanctioned university activity, such as presenting research at a national forum, class travel or university athletic travel. Students participating in such events must submit a written request in advance to the professor.

Deadlines are firm. If you miss a deadline, you will receive a 10% reduction in your assignment grade for each 24-hour period the assignment is late. After 72 hours, the assignment will not be accepted and will be given a grade of zero. Late assignments must be e-mailed or handed to me personally. Since most assignments are submitted via Sakai, you can submit an assignment online in advance if you are unable to be in class the day an assignment is due.

In-class assignments. Unless you have a legitimate, documented excuse, there will be no make-ups for in-class assignments and no extra time given if arriving to class late. A make-up assignment must be done within the week following the original date and it is your responsibility to set up an appointment with me.

Religious Holiday Observance: Per university policy, students are authorized up to two excused absences each academic year for religious observances required by their faith. Students who wish to request more than two excused absences in an academic year for religious observances required by their faith will need to contact the professor to request the additional absence, which will only be granted with the course instructor's permission. Students are responsible for providing a written notice for an excused absence for a religious observance two weeks in advance of the date requested or as soon as possible if the date occurs within the first two weeks of the semester and making up the course content missed. This policy does not apply during the final examination period.

Student Accommodations: The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill facilitates the implementation of reasonable accommodations, including resources and services, for students with disabilities, chronic medical conditions, a temporary disability or pregnancy complications resulting in difficulties with accessing learning opportunities. All accommodations are coordinated through the Accessibility Resources and Service Office (919-962-8300 or accessibility@unc.edu). Detailed information about the registration process is available at <https://accessibility.unc.edu/about-ars/policies/student-and-applicant-a...> Please understand that I'm not qualified or permitted under University policies to provide any disability-related accommodations without authorization from ARS.

Diversity: The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill is committed to equality of educational opportunity. The University 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. The Dean of Students (Suite 1106, Student Academic Services Building, CB# 5100, 450 Ridge Road, Chapel Hill, NC 27599-5100 or [919] 966-4042) has been designated to handle inquiries regarding the university's nondiscrimination policies.

Harassment: We all have the right to our opinions. In the classroom, everyone should feel comfortable expressing his or her opinions. We do not need to agree but we do need to respect others' thoughts. The University does not tolerate harassment. Please support your classmates' and others' right to worship, act, look, and think, in their own way. Harassment is a violation of the Honor Code, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act (1964), and Title IX. If you are harassed or feel threatened, please bring it to my attention at an appropriate time or contact the Dean of Students (dos@unc.edu, 919-966-4042).

Technology Policy: Turn off cell phones and other communication devices/applications during class. Use of these devices can distract you, others around you, and the professor. Use of cell phones in class, except in the event of emergency situations in which you have notified me prior, may affect your final grade. Computers are acceptable for note-taking, searching the web for class-related information, and participating in class activities. Your use of the technology in the classroom is a privilege, please use it accordingly. If I find that, as a class, laptops are becoming too distracting for holding meaningful dialogue, this privilege may be revoked. Using your computer for non-class-related activities may affect your final grade.

Email and Communication: You are encouraged to e-mail me with any questions or comments you have throughout the semester. If you don't understand an assignment or have questions, please ask. It's sometimes hard to anticipate what students don't know or understand, and, at times, this class will be time consuming and difficult. I will do my best to respond within 24 to 48 hours, Monday through Friday 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. You should treat emails to me as professional correspondence. All communication should include your name, your class, and a professionally worded message. If your e-mail relates to your group project, please copy your group members on the e-mail. It is your responsibility to check your e-mail and Sakai regularly for messages and updates.

CLASS SCHEDULE

***Schedule is subject to change—always use the updated version on Sakai.** Any revisions to the following outline will be discussed in class and posted on Sakai. Additional readings may be added. Note: readings should be read by the date listed. For example, W&D Chapters 1-2 should be read by the time you come to class on Monday, August 28.

W&D is Wimmer and Dominick *Mass Media Research: An Introduction*, 10th edition.

BB is Brennen, *Qualitative Research Methods for Media Studies*.

Date	Content	Due
8/23	Overview Introduction Syllabus	
8/28	The Nature and Process of Research; Research Procedures; Theory in Research; Elements of Research	Read W&D Ch. 1, 2 (pp. 43-49; 57-63) Read BB Ch. 1
8/30	Secondary Research; Reading and Critiquing Research	Read Edwards (on Sakai) Readings on Sakai <i>Peer Group Surveys Due by 9/1</i>
9/4	NO CLASS- Labor Day	
9/6	Library Resources Lecture w/ Librarian Stephanie Willen-Brown Peer Groups Assigned—First Peer Group Meeting	Review Library Guide (See Sakai) Readings on Sakai
9/11	Identifying Research Problems: Gaps and Opportunities in Research	Read W&D Ch. 13-16 Read BB Ch. 2
9/13	Peer Group Discussion of Research Ideas	<i>Research Ideas Due</i>
9/18	Research Ethics and IRB Ethics in-class activity	Read W&D Ch. 3 <i>IRB Certification Completion Due</i>
9/20	Introduction to Qualitative Research	Read W&D Ch. 5 Review BB Ch. 2 <i>Brief Literature Review Due</i>
9/25	Peer Group Discussion of Lit Review Begin Introduction of Qualitative Methods Field/Participant Observation In-class project work: Prep for observation	Read BB Ch. 7 Readings on Sakai
9/27	Work Day – Participant Observation	Conduct Observations Across Campus
10/2	Peer Group and Class Discussions— Participant Observation	<i>Observation Field Notes Due</i>
10/4	Interviewing and Focus Groups In-class project work: Planning for focus groups, Drafting discussion guide	Read BB Ch. 3-4 Readings on Sakai
10/9	In-class Interview Project Peer Group Discussion of Key Concepts	<i>Key Concepts Due</i>
10/11	Qualitative Analysis In-class project work: Qualitative Analysis	Readings on Sakai
10/16	Work Day – Focus Groups	Conduct Focus Group in Class
10/18	Sampling, Sampling Error	Read W&D, Ch. 4

10/23	Content Analysis Content Analysis Activity	Read W&D, Ch. 6 Readings on Sakai
10/25	Survey Research Project work: Drafting hypotheses and research questions	Read W&D, Ch. 7
10/30	Peer Group Discussion of Proposed Methods	<i>Proposed Methods and Sampling Due</i>
11/1	Questionnaire development and design Scaling Techniques In-class project work: Draft survey questions	Readings on Sakai
11/6	In-class Activity: Pretesting Questionnaires Project work: Survey design in Qualtrics Peer Group Discussion of Study Instruments	<i>Proposed Study Instruments Due</i>
11/8	Analysis of Quantitative Data Preparing Research Reports, Creating Tables and Charts	Read W&D Ch. 10 Readings on Sakai
11/13	Introduction to SPSS for quantitative data analysis In-class SPSS Activity	Readings on Sakai Pre-test SPSS Access on Laptop via Virtual Lab <i>SPSS Assignment Due by End of Class</i>
11/15	Peer Group Work Day	
11/20	Experimental Research In-class project work: Designing experiment in Qualtrics	<i>Draft Research Projects Due to Peer Group</i>
11/22	THANKSGIVING BREAK- NO CLASS	
11/27	Oral Presentation of Book/Article Critiques	<i>Article/Book Critique Due (if presenting)</i>
11/29	Oral Presentation of Book/Article Critiques	<i>Article/Book Critique Due (if presenting) Peer Reviews Due Back to Peer Group</i>
12/4	Peer Group Work Day	
12/6	Last Day of Class In-class project work: Plan for Presentations Meet with Peer Groups to Discuss	<i>Final Revised Research Project Due</i>
Dec. 15, 12-3 p.m.	PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH PROJECT	<i>Final Presentation of Research Project Peer Evaluations Due</i>