

MEJO 701.01: Research Methods (RT)
Fall 2018
W 12:30-3:15 CA 338

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Purpose

Systematic research is used by political scientists and political campaign managers, by students of health communication and by public health practitioners, by professional communicators and by mass communication scholars, to name only a few applications. As these examples suggest, systematic research, like all scientific and evidence-centered approaches, can be used just as easily to generate data for testing theory in a seminar room, for testing the effectiveness of communication campaigns or technologies, for making informed decisions about how to allocate resources strategically, or for making effective management decisions in the board room. **Evidence trumps intuition every time, whether one's goal is applied or basic.**

The purpose of this course is to provide you with a broad introduction to the foundations and tools of communication research. These tools will serve you as you complete your program and begin to conduct research for presentation and publication, and when you begin or resume your professional career and are required to conduct research, to evaluate research, and to communicate about research.

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. 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. You will learn to formulate research questions, specify independent and dependent variables and measure them reliably, design research projects, and plan their analysis and presentation. You will be exposed to a range of designs used in communication research, including laboratory and field experiments, surveys, quantitative and qualitative content analysis, ethnography, and other qualitative approaches. You'll do so by reading and critiquing others' work, hearing from top scholars, and planning your own work.

Strategy

This class provides an overview of research methods through reading, lecture and discussion on the methods' technical points, critique of published studies, and "hands-on" participation in different phases of the methods' application. The strategy is for students to learn by **step-by-step development of a personal research project.**

The content of the class addresses both the theory and practice of research, including training in research on human subjects (including dealing with institutional review board [IRB] procedures), problem conceptualization, study planning and design, choice of method, sampling

decisions, steps in developing valid and reliable measures, questionnaire or instrument construction, pre- and pilot-testing of data collection procedures, post-collection analysis options, and statistical analysis of data.

Each class member will select a topic and present a full working research proposal for the final project, or a completed original study.

Text and Readings

Because each student is charged with developing a full working research proposal for the final project, reading assignments are necessarily concentrated in the first half of the semester (see Class Schedule). Rather than requiring multiple texts focusing on different approaches, a single text is used, and students will read 38 published journal articles to complement the textbook chapters. These articles are available on the course Sakai site. Pace yourself.

The required text for this course is:

Leslie A. Baxter and Earl Babbie, *The Basics of Communication Research* (Belmont CA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, 2004).

Doctoral students should also purchase:

Delbert C. Miller and Neil J. Salkind, *Handbook of Research Design and Social Measurement* 6th edition (Thousand Oaks CA: Sage, 2002);

Bonnie S. Brennen, *Qualitative Research Methods for Media Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2013); and

W. Paul Vogt, *The Dictionary of Statistics and Methodology: A Nontechnical Guide for the Social Sciences* 3rd edition (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2005).

Finally, students interested in a stellar example of how quantitative and qualitative methods of inquiry can be used in a complementary way to examine important social, health, economic, political and communication problems should purchase:

Michael Clay Carey, *The News Untold: Community Journalism and The Failure to Confront Poverty in Appalachia* (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia University Press, 2017).

Requirements

Requirements for this class are based on the assumption that research methods are best learned through hands-on work that complements reading good research. Consequently, course requirements involve class participation, reading, discussion, completion of a series of homework assignments, and a ***completed personal research project proposal*** (including human subjects training, conceptualization, operationalization of measures, instrumentation, IRB approval, pilot testing of data collection, and plan for data analysis), or ***completed original research project***. ***Consult instructor for approval of the latter option.***

IRB Human Subjects Training: All students will complete the *IRB certification* process. This means that you will do the Collaborative IRB Training Initiative course on the internet and print out the certification. This certification may take some time, so it may be helpful to do it in stages. **The certification must be completed and documentation provided by**

beginning of class Wednesday, Sept. 19, 2018. The course is available online here: <https://research.unc.edu/offices/human-research-ethics/researchers/training/index.htm>

Research Proposal Progress: Class members will prepare a series of homework assignments during the semester that relate to the study each student is designing or executing. These assignments will help convey course concepts as well as keep class members moving forward on their research. Dates are indicated in the syllabus below and on the detailed handout for each assignment. Although the assignments “build upon” one another and have different due dates, **students are strongly advised to read *all* the assignments *now*.**

The **project proposal** lays out your thinking and plan of action for the study you intend. The proposal should include a comprehensive literature review (developed through several homework iterations) and be 4,000-5,000 words or 14-20 double-spaced pages, excluding endnotes, graphics, dummy tables, and appendices. Any draft questionnaire, instrument, interview schedule, or coding protocol for the project should be included as an appendix to the proposal. **A hard (printed), clean (perfectly edited) copy of the completed manuscript is due at noon, Friday, December 14, 2018, at 338 Carroll Hall, but may be submitted earlier.**

Original Research option: As an alternative to the research “proposal,” some students choose to begin conducting original research as part of this class. If you are pursuing this option, you must speak to about it by **Oct. 10**. You will still complete the homework assignments that guide the research process.

Additional (eleventh) homework assignment: Article Critique. You are responsible for writing a critique of a published research article—ideally one that is important for your research project. Your critique should demonstrate your grasp of the semester’s work. You should specify the study’s independent and dependent variable(s), method and design, units of analysis, sampling employed, measures of reliability, etc. You should also provide a summary of the article’s key claims and point to the strengths and possible limitations of the study. Identify the article and discuss with the professor by **Oct. 31; Assignment 11 is due in class on Dec. 5**. The written assignment should not be more than five double-spaced pages.

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. Your participation will indicate your completion of weekly reading assignments. In addition, class members and the instructor will help each other in various steps of the research process.

Grades

Components of student performance are measured as follows:

IRB Certification	5 percent
Class Participation	10 percent
Homework Assignments	25 percent
Article Critique	10 percent
Research Proposal or Completed Study	50 percent

Those components will be used to determine a final assessment:

H Student reads and critically engages with all of the assigned material. Participation in discussion and written assignments exhibit the ability not only to apply the material, but also to extrapolate ideas, expand into new areas, and contribute to the body of scholarship in the area. Reserved for truly extraordinary work.

P Student usually reads and engages critically with the assigned material. Able to apply material and extrapolate ideas. Consistently good work done on time.

L Student reads and engages critically with only some of the assigned material. Able to apply the material and extrapolate ideas in only some instances.

F Student occasionally misses class, does not always read the material, fails to critically engage with it, and is unable or unwilling to apply the material.

The *participation* grade will be assessed based on attendance at class sessions and demonstrated willingness to comment appropriately and helpfully during class meetings. Willingness and dedication to helping class members accomplish their studies is also part of class participation.

“Regular” *homework* assignment grades are based on their completeness in addressing the specified assignment tasks. Homework Assignments must be submitted to the instructor per the deadlines specified in the syllabus and in the homework packet. A 0 is given for a late assignment. Assignments may be revised and resubmitted no later than one week after they are returned. Grades for revised assignments will be substituted for the original grades.

Major review criteria for evaluation of the project proposal or original research include study purpose and conceptualization, study relevance to theory and past research, appropriateness of the research design, and effectiveness of proposed data collection and analysis. Clarity and competence in organization, writing, and style will also be considered. Homework assignment grades are based on their completeness in addressing the specified assignment tasks, as well as presentation. Your reputation for the quality of your scholarship will extend far beyond your time in Carroll Hall. No graduate student in MEJO at UNC-Chapel Hill should ever turn in an assignment that is not perfect. Submitting less-than-perfectly edited work is a sign of poor scholarship, planning, and upbringing. Journal editors regard this as a “fatal flaw” that results in desk rejection.

Manuscripts should be prepared according to *The Chicago Manual of Style* (16th edition) for citations and other matters of style, or APA style. Abbreviated guides are also available online at:

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/>

<http://www.lib.unc.edu/instruct/citations/introduction/index.html>

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/>

Honor Code

Each student will conduct himself or herself within the guidelines of the University honor system (<http://honor.unc.edu>). All academic work should be done with the high levels of honesty and integrity that this University demands. You are expected to produce your own work. If you have any questions about your responsibility or your instructor’s responsibility as a faculty member

under the Honor Code, please see the course instructor or Senior Associate Dean, or speak with a representative of the Student Attorney Office or the Office of the Dean of Students.

Seeking Help

If you need individual assistance, it's your responsibility to meet with the instructor. If you are serious about wanting to improve your performance in the course, the time to seek help is as soon as you are aware of the problem – whether the problem is difficulty with course material, a disability, or an illness.

Diversity

The University's policy on Prohibiting Harassment and Discrimination is outlined in the 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.

MEJO 701.01 Research Methods (Research Track) Class Schedule

You are responsible for having read all the assigned materials by the date indicated. Plan ahead!

B&B is Baxter and Babbie, *The Basics of Communication Research*.

Aug. 22: Read B&B chapters 1-5, Appendices A-E. Course Introduction: Purposes of research. Research and theory. Doing social science. Doing research, evaluating research, and communicating about research. Evidence trumps intuition, authority, and tenacity. The Scientific Method. The three pillars of research. The anatomy of a research manuscript.

Assignment 1: Identify ten (10) research problems. Due in class Aug. 29.

Aug. 29: Research resources at UNC and MEJO. The Park Library: materials, databases, and experts eager to help. See: <http://guides.lib.unc.edu/mejo701> . The Institutional Review Board: protection for you and research participants, and a source of guidance. The Human Subjects Pool. The MEJO Research Center. **Guests: Park Library Director Stephanie Willen Brown at 12:30 and Dr. Joe Bob Hester at 1:45.** Tour Research Center at 2:45.

Assignment 2: Identify and justify one (1) research problem you will use as the focus for your term project/proposal. Due in class Sept. 5.

Read B&B 6, 7, and 11 for class Sept. 5.

Sept. 5: Fundamental concepts and decision points: Goals, methods, designs, unitization, representativeness, measurement. The three pillars revisited, and validity and reliability.

Assignment 3: Guerilla Lit. Review. Due in class Sept. 12.

Sept. 12: Fundamental concepts and decision points (continued): variables and measurement, types of relationships.

Assignment 4: Identify the fundamental concepts involved in your research problem; identify the “relationships” among those concepts in terms of a research design; identify your units of analysis and the feasibility of accessing those units in order to address your research problem. Due in class Sept. 19.

Read for class on Sept. 19:

B&B 7.

Aimee Yang and Maureen Taylor, “A Global Perspective on Public Relations Professionalism: Mapping the Structure of Public Relations Associations’ International Networks,” *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 91(3), 2014, pp. 508-529.

David Manning White, “The Gatekeeper: A Case Study in the Selection of News,” *Journalism Quarterly* 27(4) 1950, pp. 383-390.

Warren Breed, “Social Control in the News Room: A Functional Analysis,” *Social Forces* 33 (4) 1955, pp. 326-335.

Gaye Tuchman, “Making News by Doing Work: Routinizing the Unexpected,” *American Journal of Sociology* 79 (11) 1973, pp. 110-131.

Sept. 19: Revisiting one of the three pillars: Generalizability (task, *subject*, setting); representativeness and $n=1$, and the need for sampling. Types of samples. Turning the research question on its head: units of analysis versus relationships among units. **Guest: Dr. Adam Saffer, 2-3:15.**

Assignment 5: Updated Guerilla lit review. Due in class Sept. 26.

Read for class on Sept. 26:

B&B 13 and 14.

Donnalyn Pompper and Jessica Koenig, "Cross-cultural-generational Perceptions of Ideal Body Image: Hispanic Women and Magazine Standards," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 81 (1) 2004, pp. 89-107.

J. Robyn Goodman, "Flabless is Fabulous: How Latina and Anglo Women Read and Incorporate the Excessively Thin Body Ideal into Everyday Experience," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 79 (3) 2002, pp. 712-728.

Cathleen Carter and Kris Kodrich, "Challenges and Dangers of Reporting in a Tumultuous Border Region: How Journalists at the *El Paso Times* Deal with the Violence in Neighboring Ciudad Juarez," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 90(2) 2013, pp. 331-346,

Tracy Everbach, "The Culture of a Woman-led Newspaper: An Ethnographic Study of the *Sarasota Herald-Tribune*," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 83(3) 2006, pp. 477-493.

**J. Singer, "Commentary: Ethnography," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 86 (1), 2009, pp. 191-198.

**L. Rakow, "Commentary: Interviews and Focus Groups as Critical and Cultural Methods," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 88(2) 2011, pp. 416-428.

Sept. 26: Introduction to qualitative approaches. Guest: Dr. Lucinda Austin 12:30-1:30.

Read for class on Oct. 3:

B&B 15, 10, (optional: 16).

Barbara Freidman, "Unlikely Warriors: How Four U.S. News Sources Explained Female Suicide Bombers," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 85 (4, 2008): 841-859.

Elizabeth Blanks Hindman, "Jayson Blair, The New York Times, and Paradigm Repair," *Journal of Communication* 55 (June 2005): 225-241.

Dan Berkowitz, "Doing Double Duty: Paradigm Repair and the Princess Diana What-a-story," *Journalism* 1 (August 2000): 125-144.

Elizabeth Blanks Hindman and Ryan J. Thomas, "Journalism's 'Crazy Old Aunt': Helen Thomas and Paradigm Repair," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 90 (summer 2013): 267-286.

Carolyn Bronstein, "Representing the Third Wave: Mainstream Print Media Framing of a New Feminist Movement," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 82 (winter 2005): 783-803.

Melissa Suran, Avery Holton, and Renita Coleman, "Topical Punch: Health Topics as Drivers of Idiosyncratic Reader Responses to Online News," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 91 (winter 2014): 725-739.

Daniel Riffe, Seoyeon Kim, and Meghan Sobel, "'Borrowed News Revisited: A 50-year Perspective.'" D. Riffe, S. Kim, and M. Sobel. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* (in press, accepted 12/29/2017).

Nicole Martins and Barbara Wilson, "Mean on the Screen: Social Aggression in Programs Popular with Children," *Journal of Communication* 62 (6, 2012): 991-1009.

Hans C. Schmidt, "Women's Sports Coverage Remains Largely Marginalized," *Newspaper Research Journal* 37 (3, 2016): 275-298.

Sun Young Lee and Daniel Riffe, "Who Sets the Corporate Social Responsibility Agenda in the News Media? Unveiling the Agenda-Building Process of Corporations and a Monitoring Group." *Public Relations Review* (in press, accepted 2/2/2017).

**S. Lacy, B. Watson, D. Riffe, and J. Lovejoy, "Issues and Best Practices in Content Analysis,"

Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly 92, 4, winter 2015, 791-811.

Oct. 3: Text, symbol, and message analysis. Quantitative content analysis.

Read for class on Oct. 10:

B&B 8.

Amy Schmitz Weiss, "Exploring News Apps and Location-Based Services on the Smartphone," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 90(3) 2013, pp. 435-456.

Jennette Lovejoy, Daniel Riffe, and Hong Cheng, "Voters' Attention, Perceived Effects, and Voting Preferences: Negative Political Advertising in the 2006 Ohio Governor's Election," *Mass Communication and Society* 13 2010, pp. 487-511.

Brendan R. Watson and Daniel Riffe, "Perceived Threat, Immigration Policy Support, and Media Coverage: Hostile Media and Presumed Influence," *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 25(4) 2013, pp. 459-479.

Jennette Lovejoy, Daniel Riffe, and Travis Lovejoy, "An Examination of Direct and Indirect Effects of Media Use on Intentions to Avoid Unprotected Sun Exposure," *Health Communication*, 2014 (online publication March 5, 2014).

Lisa Barnard Farman, Daniel Riffe, Martin Kifer, and Sadie Elder, "Finding the Truth in Politics: An Empirical Validation of the Epistemic Political Efficacy Concept," *Atlantic Journal of Communication* (January 2018), 26:1-15.

Daniel Riffe and Jesse Abdenour, "'Erosion' of Television City Hall Reporting? Perceptions of Reporters on the Beat in 2014 and 2001," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, Winter 2017, 94:4:1096-1114.

Jennifer Harker, Daniel Riffe, and Martin Kifer, "Anger, Cynicism, *but* Trust in Democracy in Swing-state Presidential Primaries: What Role for News and Information in Populist Anger?" Paper presented at Annual Convention, Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC), Chicago, 2017.

Brendan R. Watson, Daniel Riffe, Lynsy Smithson-Stanley, and Emily Ogilvie, "Mass Media and Perceived and Objective Environmental Risk: Race and Place of Residence," *Howard Journal of Communications* 24, 2013, 134-153.

**P. Moy and J. Murphy, "Problems and Prospects in Survey Research," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 93, 1, spring 2016, 16-37.

Oct. 10: Quantitative content analysis: Issues and innovations. Introduction to survey research. Declaration Day for original research option. **Guest: Dr. Suman Lee, 1-2 p.m.**

Assignment 6: Updated Guerilla lit review with RQs and/or hypotheses. Due in class Oct. 17.

Read for class on Oct. 17:

B&B 9.

Rahul Biswas, Daniel Riffe, and Dolf Zillmann, "'Mood Influence on the Appeal of Bad News.'" *Journalism Quarterly*, 1994, 71:689-696.

Laura C. Wilson, Alesha D. Ballman, and Theresa J. Buczek, "News Content About Mass Shootings and Attitudes Toward Mental Illness" *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 93(3), 2016, pp. 644-658.

Mi Rosie Jahng and Jeremy Littau, "Interacting is Believing: Interactivity, Social Cue, and Perceptions of Journalistic Credibility on Twitter," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 93(1), 2016, pp. 38-58.

Scott Parrott, "When everyone is laughing: The presence, characteristics, and enjoyment of disparagement humor in online TV," *Mass Communication and Society*, 19(1), 2016, pp. 49-73.

**E. Thorson, R. Wicks, and G. Leshner, "Experimental Methodology in Journalism and Mass Communication Research," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 89, 1, spring 2012, 112-124.

Oct. 17: Survey research issues and innovations. Introduction to experimental research. Field experiments and virtual experiments.

Read for class on Oct. 24:

**Robert Frost's poem, "The Road Not Taken."

(Oct. 18-21: Fall break: Young Brave Sails High)

Oct. 24: Revisiting (Survey) questionnaires and (experimental) instruments. The mirror ball and thinking about reliable, valid, multidimensional measurement. In-class discussion of measures or operational definitions of your key concepts. **Guest: Dr. Allison Lazard, 12:30-1:30**

Assignment 7: Defense of your choice of method; defense of your sampling decisions. Due in class, Oct. 31.

Oct. 31: The importance of peer review and critique, pre-testing, and pilot testing. Reliability revisited. Declaration Day 2: Identify and discuss with professor your article for review (Assignment 11).

Assignment 8: Paper and digital copies of your survey measures, instrument, interview schedule, or coding protocol due beginning of class, Nov. 7.

Read for class on Nov. 7:

Sei-Hill Kim, Dietram Scheufele, and James Shanahan, "Think about It This Way: Attribute Agenda-setting Function of the Press and the Public's Evaluation of a Local Issue," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 79 (Spring 2002), 7-25.

Nov. 7: Complementary data sources. Interdisciplinary work. Mixed methods. Reconceptualizing measurement. **Guests: Dr. Tori Ekstrand, 12:30-1:30, and Dr. Nori Comello, 2:15-3:15.**

Assignment 9 (please note due date): Report on pilot test results due noon Monday, Nov. 19.

Read for class Nov. 14:

B&B 11, 12, 16

Nov. 14: Thinking about data analysis. Revisit levels of measurement and study goals: Description, sampling error, differences, associations and relationships. ***Dummy tables***. Tools.

Assignment 10: Dummy tables and plan for analysis due in class Nov. 28.

Read for class Nov. 28:

**Daniel Riffe, "Data Analysis and SPSS Programs for Basic Statistics," in G. Stempel, D.H. Weaver, and G.C. Wilhoit (eds.) *Mass Communication Research and Theory* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2003), pp. 182-208.

Nov. 21: No Class

Assignment 11: Written article critique due beginning of class, Dec. 6.

(Nov. 21-25: University closed for Thanksgiving holiday

Nov. 28: Tools for data analysis. SPSS?

Dec. 5: Brief oral presentation on project.

Friday, Dec. 14, noon. The completed manuscript (hard copy, edited perfectly) is due.