

SYLLABUS FOR MEJO 716: RESEARCH METHODS AND APPLICATIONS*

Fall 2019

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Office hours for Fall 2019: Thursdays 3:30 – 5pm (in office). Also available to meet at other times by appointment and by Zoom, Skype, or phone.

Course Description

Knowledge of the process 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 online class will introduce communication professionals to research methods and applications to enable them to make more informed decisions about why, how, when, and where to use research. 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 interpret research results. This course provides both a broad overview of relevant research methods and practical experience in developing research plans.

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 an abbreviated research proposal

Our field's accrediting body (Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications; ACEJMC) outlines 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 competencies, but collectively, our classes are designed to build your abilities in each of these areas. In this class, we will focus on the following competencies:

- 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.

*Syllabus and course content adapted with permission from materials developed by Dr. Anne Johnston

Contacting Me and Submitting Assignments

At any time, if you have questions or need help with course assignments, please email me at the address listed above or by sending me a direct message on our Sakai website (which automatically goes to my email). I will do my best to respond promptly. I would also be happy to set up an appointment to speak with you by phone or by online chat. For anyone in the Chapel Hill area, we can also meet in-person during office hours noted at the beginning of this document and by appointment.

At mid-semester and end of semester, there will also be scheduled opportunities to meet with me one-on-one via Zoom. These opportunities will occur before the deadlines for major assignments, so it is a good time to check in and get feedback prior to submission.

Please use the Assignments tool on the Sakai site to submit assignments, unless otherwise noted. Detailed instructions will be provided on the submission site for each assignment. Anything you turn in should be in **Word format** so that I can use the review/comment functions in Word.

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 me know as soon as possible. If you need information about disabilities visit the [Accessibility Resources & Service Office website](#), call 919/962-8300, or use NC Relay 711.

Diversity: The School of Media and Journalism adopted [diversity and inclusion mission and vision statements](#) in Spring 2016 with accompanying goals. It complements the University policy on [Prohibiting Harassment and Discrimination](#). In summary, 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. 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.

Copyright: Copyright in course materials created by faculty for the MADC program belong to the faculty member or University. For more specifics, please see the University's Copyright Policy here: <https://unc.policystat.com/policy/6197184/latest/> MADC students should be aware of these copyright restrictions. Students may not engage in the unauthorized copying, distributing, altering or translating of such copyrighted materials, software, music, or other media without the express permission of the University or faculty member, as applicable.

Required Readings

We will be relying heavily on the following textbook:

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. Available through Amazon.)

Additional readings listed on the course schedule are available either through a link or as a PDF on the Sakai site under Resources. In addition, 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/>

The Park Library page for our class is: <https://guides.lib.unc.edu/madc716>

Grades

Grades for overall course performance and most individual assignments will be based on the graduate scale (H, P, L, F). *As applied to final course grades*, interpretations are as follows:

- H = Your very best work. These students read and critically engage with all materials. They are able to apply concepts to practical and/or research-based contexts, suggest new directions, and significantly contribute to the body of scholarship in the area. Assignments are submitted on time and are well written and engaging. *Reserved for truly extraordinary work – I will actually say “wow!”*
- P = Your very best work. These students read and critically engage with all materials. They are able to apply concepts and suggest new directions in many instances. Assignments are submitted on time and are well written and engaging.
- L = Students read most of the material but do not often critically engage with it. They are able to apply concepts and suggest new directions in some instances.
- F = Students miss one or more classes without prior arrangement. They do not always read the material, and they fail to critically engage it.

Most individual assignments are also evaluated according to the H/P/L/F scale. *As applied to individual assignments*, a P signifies work that meets rubric requirements, is well written, and is submitted on time. An H signifies work that meets the above and is also exceptional in terms of depth of analysis or significance of

contribution. In addition to this grade, I also provide (sometimes extensive) comments on your papers, typically using the reviewing function on Word.

Although no formal points corresponding to the grades are issued, the WEIGHTS of each assignment in determining the final course grade are as follows:

Assignment	Weight
IRB certification (completed or not)	5
Worksheet: Literature-search progress	2
Worksheet: Proposed method	3
Discussion forums	20
Paper 1: Introduction, literature review, and RQs/hypotheses	25
Paper 2: Final research proposal (improvements to Paper 1, plus proposed methods)	35
Presentation of research proposal	10
Total	100

For all assignments except for discussion forum posts, you will find detailed instructions for completing the assignments on the submission site under Assignments in Sakai. These instructions will serve as the rubric against which I will evaluate your work. For grading of discussion posts, see the general guidelines in the next section on Course Requirements – Assessment Specifications.

Late assignments: Assignments and discussion forum posts submitted after the deadline will not be eligible to earn a P or H. Extensions may be granted under extenuating circumstances, but please contact me prior to the deadline to discuss.

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 in any graduate level course. Participation 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 participate in the discussion forum, and you respond to your classmates' comments (you may do this any time, but be sure to do this when required).

Please feel free to go beyond assigned readings – 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 assigned material or wish to explore topics in other contexts. 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 our awesome Park Library director Stephanie Brown about your sources.

Below I’ve provided some details about specific course requirements. Further details will be provided on Sakai.

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**. When you have completed the CITI course, submit proof of your certification under Assignments on Sakai. One caution here: This certification may take some time, so I recommend you try to do this in stages. The grading for this assignment is pass/fail.
2. Worksheets on lit search progress & proposed method: These are brief assignments that will serve as check-in opportunities before you turn in larger assignments. For the lit search worksheet, I’ll ask you to report on your meeting with Stephanie Brown and identify the most useful articles you’ve found so far; this summary and my feedback will give you a foundation for writing Paper 1. For the proposed method summary, I’ll ask you to describe the research method you would use for your proposed study; this will help you prepare for Paper 2. Grading is pass/fail.
3. Discussion forum participation: Below, I’ve detailed how the discussion forum will work and my expectations of your contributions. We’ll be using Sakai as our platform for these discussions, with forums created for each week’s topic. 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 forum will end for that week 7 days later at midnight on Friday**. My notes about the readings and the discussion prompt will be available on Sakai by 6am on Saturday to open the week. Because you will have lots of reading to do in this course, you should use Saturday and Sunday to read and think about material and to formulate your responses to the forum prompts.

I expect your participation to be insightful, comprehensive, and regular. Lack of participation in a graduate level class is not acceptable. Remember, the online discussion is analogous to class time. Therefore, a 3-credit course will require about 2.5 hours of online discussion time each week (posting responses, reading classmates’ responses, responding to comments, and other activities that would happen in a classroom).

My goal is to facilitate your discussions of the material and your understanding of course content. However, because of the asynchronous design of the course, please understand that it is not designed for immediate response to your questions. I may not be in the forum when you are: you may have your own schedule for responding and posting that is different from my schedule, and that's fine. If you ever have a specific question about something you don't understand, and you would like it specifically answered by me, please email me directly.

Before you post in the forum for the week, please read the assigned readings as well as the Instructor Comments I've prepared to provide context for the readings. These Instructor Comments should be available by Saturday morning of the week we're covering. You can find the Instructor Comments on Sakai under Resources. The discussion prompt for each week will be in the description of the topic. Your forum contributions should reflect your independent thinking and analysis of the week's readings; therefore, most forums will require you to post before you can read or respond to other posts.

Please also pay attention to the schedule I've listed for posting. As you will see from the Week-by-Week Course Schedule, sometimes you will have one post due by midnight Friday of that week, but **during most weeks of the semester, your post will be due by midnight on Tuesday of the week we're covering, with your reply to other posts due by midnight on Friday.**

As a general guideline, keep your main post (your direct answer to the prompt) **between 200 and 300 words**. Within this range, though, your post should **be substantive and address all parts of the prompt**. Your posts should **demonstrate your understanding of the readings**, so be sure to make explicit connections to expert sources (i.e., the text, readings, other credible sources you find). I also encourage you to **think beyond the week's readings** by linking to content covered in previous weeks, making connections to your own experiences, posing questions that are raised, etc. You are welcome to respond to any comments made by your classmates, even when that's not part of the discussion assignment for that week.

I may divide up the class into small groups for some posts, which may allow more in-depth discussions and interactions. I will let you know when these small group discussions will take place and which group you will join.

Grading of forum contributions is weekly using the H/P/L/F scale.

4. Paper 1 – Front end of research proposal: You will submit a paper that consists of an introduction, review of relevant scholarly literature, and research questions/hypotheses for the area you would like to study (and plan to present in your research proposal). Your paper should be 3-4 (single-spaced) pages, *not* counting title page and references. Your paper should cite 7 pieces of scholarly literature, with citations appearing in text as well as in a reference list in APA style at the end. 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. Submit this assignment on Sakai under Assignments. Grading is H/P/L/F.

5. Presentation of research proposal: You will prepare a narrated PowerPoint presentation of your project idea that will be posted for us to view on the last week of class. The comments you receive should help improve your final research proposal, which will be due the following week. This will also be a chance to reflect on your research journey thus far. I will provide detailed instructions for using Zoom to create a narrated presentation, as well as guidelines for content. Grading is H/P/L/F.

6. Paper 2 – Final research proposal: Using feedback you'll get on your first paper and presentation, you will flesh out your ideas further into a research proposal. Your final proposal will be a paper that consists of a revision of Paper 1 content based on my feedback, plus a methods section in which you describe how you will examine your research questions or hypotheses. The paper should be approximately 5-6 (single-spaced) pages, not counting title page and references. The methods section should include subsections on who or what you will study (e.g., if you're proposing a survey, describe the participants you'd like to get and how you would recruit them); how you will operationalize your variables (e.g., if you're proposing a survey to measure attitudes toward and intentions to purchase a product, describe the questions you will use to measure attitudes and intentions); and any limitations of your proposed method. Include citations in the methods section where appropriate (e.g., previously tested scales to measure attitudes). Include a reference list in APA style. Submit on Sakai.

This proposal is a shorter version of the type of proposal you'll have to submit for your thesis/professional project. Even if you decide to switch to another topic, you'll have experience in developing an idea and selecting appropriate research methods. Grading is H/P/L/F.

Week-By-Week Course Schedule (Fall 2019)

- This schedule represents a good faith effort to outline our work over the course of the semester. I will alert you of any changes in readings, assignments, due dates, etc., as needed.
- Times mentioned for this course are in the Eastern U.S. time zone.
- Most weeks begin on 6am Saturday and end at midnight the following Friday.
- W&D = Wimmer & Dominick text. Find other readings under Resources on Sakai.
- Forum discussions will take place on Sakai.

Week/Topic	Readings and activities	To submit
Week 1: Introduction and Overview Begins Tues. 8/20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instructor Comments • W&D, Chapters 1 & 5 (Stop at heading: "Field Observation") • Feldman & Wihbey (2015). Eight Questions to Ask When Interpreting Academic Studies: A Primer for Media. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forum post by Friday at midnight
Week 2: Applications of Research Begins Sat. 8/24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instructor Comments • W&D, Chapters 13-16 • Poynter, R. (2014, April 24). Why Has Social Media Analytics Met with Limited Success in Market Research? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forum post by Friday at midnight
Week 3: Ethics, IRB, & Critiquing Research Begins Sat. 8/31	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instructor Comments • W&D, Chapter 3 • Felten, E. W. (2014, June 30). Facebook's emotional manipulation study: When ethical worlds collide. • Begin work on IRB certification. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forum post by Tuesday at midnight • Comment on posts and propose paper topic by Friday at midnight
Week 4: Fundamental Elements in Quantitative & Qualitative Research Begins Sat. 9/7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instructor Comments • W&D, Chapter 2, 4, 5 (pp.151-157) • Refresh your memory of the following material from Week 1: W&D, Chapter 5, pp.116-127 (stop at "Field Observation"). • Sign up for small-group meetings with Stephanie Brown to take place next week. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forum post by Tuesday at midnight • Comment on posts by Friday at midnight

<p>Week 5: Defining your study & lit searching</p> <p>Begins Sat. 9/14</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instructor Comments • Reread: W&D, Chapter 1 (focus on material about picking a topic and conducting lit reviews) • YouTube video: Literature Reviews: An Overview for Graduate Students (9-min. video; link under Resources) • 716 Guidelines for Intro and Lit Review • Attend real-time online session for whole class on Sunday 9/15 with Stephanie Brown on conducting effective lit searches. • Meet with Stephanie in small groups online during the week; she'll offer time slots. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No forum this week but submit summary of lit search progress by Friday at midnight (assignment prompt under "Assignments" on Sakai).
<p>Week 6: Content analysis</p> <p>Begins Sat. 9/21</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instructor Comments • W&D, Chapter 6 • Find an academic article on your topic or a related topic that uses content analysis as a method. Article can come from your literature search. Review it thoroughly, paying special attention to the methods section. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submit IRB certification by Friday at midnight on Sakai. • Forum post by Tuesday at midnight • Comment on posts by Friday at midnight
<p>Week 7: Surveys</p> <p>Begins Sat. 9/28</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instructor Comments • W&D, Chapter 7 • Vannette (2015). 10 Tips • Find an academic article on your topic or a related topic that uses a survey as a method. Review it thoroughly, paying special attention to the methods section. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forum post by Tuesday at midnight • Comment on posts by Friday at midnight
<p>Week 8: Experiments</p> <p>Begins Sat. 10/5</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instructor Comments • W&D, Chapter 9 • Gallo (2017). A Refresher on A/B Testing. • Find an academic article on your topic or a related topic that uses an experiment as a method. Review it thoroughly, paying special attention to the methods section. • Work on Paper 1 due soon. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forum post by Tuesday at midnight • Comment on posts by Friday at midnight
<p>Week 9</p> <p>Begins Sat. 10/12</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fall Break week – no readings assigned! • Opportunity to meet with me via Zoom to check in regarding paper and class so far; I will offer time slots. • Take in-class survey by Friday at midnight. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submit Paper 1 by Wednesday Oct 16 at midnight on Sakai under "Assignments."
<p>Week 10: Quant Data Analysis</p> <p>Begins Sat. 10/19</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instructor Comments • W&D, Chapters 10-12 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forum post by Friday at midnight

<p>Week 11: Focus groups</p> <p>Begins Sat. 10/26</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instructor Comments • W&D, Chapter 5: p. 136 (begin at Focus Groups) to 142 (end at Intensive Interviews) • Krueger focus group guide posted under Resources • Find an academic article on your topic or a related topic that uses a focus group as a method. Review it thoroughly, paying special attention to the methods. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forum post by Tuesday at midnight • Comment on posts by Friday at midnight
<p>Week 12: Ethnography and Interviews</p> <p>Begins Sat. 11/2</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instructor Comments • W&D, Chapter 5, pgs. 127-136 and pgs. 142-143 • Wang (2016). Why Big Data Needs Thick Data. • Find an academic article on your topic or a related topic that uses ethnography or in-depth interviews as a method. Review it thoroughly, paying special attention to the methods section. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forum post by Tuesday at midnight • Comment on posts by Friday at midnight
<p>Week 13: Qualitative data analysis</p> <p>Begins Sat. 11/9</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instructor Comments • W&D, Chapter 5 (Data Analysis in Qualitative Research, pp. 122-127) • Dick, Bob (2005). Grounded theory: a thumbnail sketch. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forum post by Tuesday at midnight • Comment on posts by Friday at midnight
<p>Week 14</p> <p>Begins Sat. 11/16</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read research proposals by MADC students (see examples posted under Resources). • Continue to work on final proposal; begin putting together narrated presentation (due soon). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No forum this week but submit summary of proposed method for your study by Tuesday (assignment prompt under “Assignments” on Sakai).
<p>Week 15: Finalizing proposals</p> <p>Begins Sat. 11/23</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thanksgiving break week – no readings assigned! • Opportunity to meet with me via Zoom to check in regarding paper and class; I will offer time slots. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post narrated presentations of final proposal by Friday at midnight
<p>Week 16: Presentations and wrap up</p> <p>Begins Sat. 11/30</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Last week of class (partial week)! • Instructor comments • View classmates’ presentations • Work on final paper due soon. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forum post with feedback on presentations by Wednesday at midnight (last day)
<p>Final papers due Tuesday, Dec 10, at midnight on Sakai. Thank you for all your hard work and have a great holiday break!</p>		