

**MEJO 703 Research Methods**  
Fall 2023

**Instructor:** Allison Lazard, PhD  
384 Carroll Hall  
Hussman School of Journalism and Media  
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill  
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**Meeting Time:** Tuesdays and Thursdays 12:30-1:45pm  
In-person meetings will be in 303 Curtis Media Center

**Office Hours:** Mondays 1:20-2:00pm and Thursdays 2:00-2:40pm

Sign up for 20-minute time slots here:

<https://outlook.office365.com/owa/calendar/Officehours9@admin.live.unc.edu/bookings/>

You will get a calendar invite with office info and a Zoom link (<https://unc.zoom.us/j/93895262341>). You are welcome to join in person or virtually. If there is an open spot, you are also welcome to simply come that day (although if online, email to let me know or I will miss you).

**Course Overview:** The purpose of this course is to provide you with a broad introduction to the foundations and tools of communication and social science research. These tools will serve you in your program and career when you are conducting, evaluating, and communicating about research.

Much of the semester will focus on introducing 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 and discuss two books and 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 variables and measure them reliably, identify units of analysis and context, understand sampling, design research projects, and plan their analysis and presentation. You will be exposed to a range of communication science research designs, including experiments, surveys, content analysis, and other qualitative approaches. You'll do so by reading and critiquing others' work, hearing from top scholars, and planning your own work.

**Required Reading:** See the reading list in the weekly outline. Please read the week's reading before coming to class. We will use one book (below) and peer-reviewed articles.

Scharrer, E., & Ramasubramanian, S. (2021). *Quantitative research methods in communication: The power of numbers for social justice*. Routledge.

Rubin, A. T. (2021). *Rocking qualitative social science: An irreverent guide to rigorous research*. Stanford University Press.

Full citations are given at the end of the syllabus for the articles.

## Course Work & Grading:

Assignment	Weight
Weekly assignments (8)	45%
Class participation (+ reading questions/comments)	15%
Final paper and presentation	40%

### Weekly assignments:

There are 8 weekly assignments: research areas, IRB certification, concept review, sampling review and plan, quantitative methods review and plan, research questions or hypotheses, qualitative methods review and plan, and manuscript peer review. These are opportunities to think critically, build, and get feedback on your communication research methods before presenting and submitting the final paper.

### Class Participation Reading Questions or Comments:

To ensure we have lively and inclusive conversations, reading questions should be submitted by **9am the morning of Tuesday class, unless specified**, each week with assigned readings (11 of the 16 weeks). These are not graded. All questions – even if more of a comment or prompt – are welcome. Submit at least 2 for our class discussion for the assigned reading that day (see schedule below). If there are no readings, no questions needed. I will combine and share with the class. Your questions and comments will not have your name with them when shared.

### Final paper & presentation:

The final research proposal and presentation should demonstrate the culmination of the entire semester's work. This is a portion of a standard research paper suitable for a peer-reviewed submission. The paper should be no longer than 4000 words (or less if norm in your subfield) and include both an Introduction and all relevant sections of the Methods: overview, sampling, stimuli (if applicable), procedure, how data will be collected (e.g., measures, coding), and a data analyses plan. Please also including a short implications section (for me, not publication) stating what you think you will find and why this matters; this is for you to demonstrate to me that you are well positioned to defend your findings. This paper is expected to be of higher quality than the weekly assignments. It needs to be clearly and concisely written and suitable as a component of a full paper for a peer-review submission process (conference, journal, grant, etc.).

### Grade scale: High pass (H), Pass (P), Low pass (L), Fail (F)

- H - The work is intellectually rigorous, shows an exceptional understanding of the material and is error free.
- P - The work illustrates a good effort at understanding the material and has few errors.
- L - The work indicates some progress toward gaining an understanding of the material and has substantial errors.
- F - The work shows little to no understanding of the assignment or was not completed in a timely manner.

**Schedule:** The schedule includes the main topics for each week and the reading required for the meeting. Students are expected to have completed the assigned readings before coming to class.

**Note:** Based on your input and our progress, I reserve the right to amend and change the syllabus, reading schedules, and assignments during the semester. I will do so graciously and with as much advance notice as possible.

Week	Dates	Topic, Reading, & Assignments
1		<b>INTRODUCTION</b>
	8/22	Syllabus day!
	8/24	<p><b>Read:</b> Lingard, 2015 (Note: no discussion questions due)</p> <p><b>Assignment due next Thursday (week 2, 8/31):</b> Research ideas Identify three discrete research ideas you find interesting, important, or un-addressed in “the literature.” Briefly describe (150 words each, max.). You are welcome to approach the same topic from three angles, submit three different topics, or a combination.</p> <p>You do not, at this point, have to describe an explicit method or approach to answering them. Use your imagination and assume there will be resources available (an amount likely for someone at your career stage). These may be based on your professional experience and your observations of problems in the workplace or organizational success; your personal experience and observations of things around you; writings in professional trade publications, on blogs or websites, in the scholarly literature, or elsewhere.</p> <p>Estimated time for assignment: 2.5 hours (includes reading and writing time)</p> <p>I also recommend you begin your IRB training (due in two weeks) – this takes a few hours.</p>
2		<b>FOUNDATIONS &amp; ETHICS</b>
	8/29	<b>Read:</b> Scharrer & Ramasubramanian Ch. 1-2; Rubin Ch. 2-3 (Ch. 1 optional)
	8/31	<p><b>Guest:</b> Dr. Joe Bob Hester – IRB and the student pool</p> <p><b>Assignment due this week:</b> Research ideas</p> <p><b>Assignment due next Thursday (week 3, 9/7):</b> IRB certification Prior to initiating a human subjects research project, which requires approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), new researchers are expected to complete an introductory online course in human research ethics. Here is the link to do so: <a href="https://research.unc.edu/human-research-ethics/getting-started/training/">https://research.unc.edu/human-research-ethics/getting-started/training/</a> Submit your certificate for this assignment; no writing required.</p> <p>Estimated time for assignment: 5 hours</p>
3		<b>CONCEPTS &amp; VARIABLES</b>

9/5	<b>NO CLASS</b> – Well-being day
9/7	<p><b>Read:</b> Scharrer &amp; Ramasubramanian Ch. 3; Chakravarty, Kuo, Grubbs, &amp; McIlwain, 2018; Goings, Belgrave, Mosavel, &amp; Evans, 2023</p> <p><b>Assignment due this week:</b> IRB certification.  <b>Assignment due in next Thursday (week 4, 9/14):</b> Concept review  Find 3+ articles that meaningfully use one or two concept(s) you are interested in studying.</p> <p>Compare whether they do (or do not) use the same conceptual definitions. Compare how they operationalized the concepts – or if they operationalized the concept. Identify how these definitions align (or not) with your research. Describe in 200 words (or less, or more; this is just to give you a target if you want one).</p> <p>Estimated time for assignment: 3 hours</p>
<b>4</b>	<b>SAMPLING</b>
9/12	<b>Read:</b> Scharrer & Ramasubramanian Ch. 4; Rubn Ch. 5-7; McEwan, 2020
9/14	<p><b>Assignment due this week:</b> Concept review  <b>Assignment due next Thursday (week 5, 9/21):</b> Sampling review and plan  Part 1 (review): Find 3+ articles in your field (or field adjacent) conducted with samples that are potentially relevant to your work. Recap what they did well (strengths) and what they could do better (weakness) in the a) research and b) writing. Try to frame these S&amp;Ws in terms of bias, validity, generalizability, etc. Describe in brief summary paragraph(s) or bulleted lists (~200 words overall).</p> <p>Part 2 (plan): Develop a potential sampling plan for one research idea (~300 words). Describe who you will include, what inclusion or exclusion criteria you will have, how you will recruit. Provide rationale for all your choices. At this point, there is no need to think about sample size and imagine you have the resources that would be common among early career researchers (~\$1000-10,000). Do include limitations, biases, and potential threats to validity (but don't be too hard on yourself).</p> <p>Estimated time for assignment: 3.5 hours</p>
<b>5</b>	<b>SURVEYS</b>
9/19	<b>Read:</b> Scharrer & Ramasubramanian Ch. 5; Moy & Murphy, 2016; Flake & Fried, 2020
9/21	<p><b>Assignment due this week:</b> Sampling review and plan  <b>Assignment due in three Thursdays (week 8, 10/12):</b> Quantitative methods review and plan.  Part 1 (review): Select one quantitative method (e.g., survey) and identify 3-5+ articles using this method in your field (or field adjacent). Recap what they did well (strengths) and what they could do better (weakness) in the a) research and b) writing. Try to frame these S&amp;Ws in terms of bias, validity,</p>

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generalizability, etc. Describe in a summary paragraph or bulleted lists (~200 words overall).

Part 2 (plan): Develop a research plan for one of your ideas using the quantitative methods you selected in part 1 (~750-1250 words). Draft a full methods section; however, remember this is a first/early draft. Include the standard sections: overview, participants, procedure, stimuli (if applicable), measures/coding, and data analysis plan. Provide rationale for all your choices. Continue to imagine you have ample, albeit realistic resources for an early career researcher (\$1000-\$10,000).

Estimated time for assignment: 12 hours

6	<b>EXPERIMENTS</b>
9/26	<b>Read:</b> Scharrer & Ramasubramanian Ch. 6; Thorson, Wicks, & Leshner, 2012; Lazard, 2021 ( <i>optional</i> : behind the scenes, i.e., my reviews)
9/28	<b>Assignment due this week:</b> None
7	<b>CONTENT ANALYSES</b>
10/3	<b>Read:</b> Scharrer & Ramasubramanian Ch. 7; Lacy et al. 2015
10/5	<b>Assignment due this week:</b> None
8	<b>COMPUTATIONAL METHODS &amp; INTERPRETING DATA</b>
10/10	<b>Read:</b> Scharrer & Ramasubramanian Ch. 8, Motulsky, 2015, van Atteveldt & Peng, 2018
10/12	<b>Assignment due this week:</b> Quantitative review and plan <b>Assignment due in two Thursdays (week 10, 10/26):</b> Research questions or hypotheses (+ Introduction) Draft your research questions (RQs) or hypotheses (Hs) to guide your research. These can be for your quantitative approach (previous assignment) or qualitative approach (next assignment). Remember to identify variables (e.g., predictors, outcomes) and relationships in both RQs and Hs, if appropriate.  Submit these RQs and Hs following an Introduction (4+/- paragraphs) that provide rationale for your study (what's the issue/solution) and relevant theories or concepts. End the Introduction with why your specific study is needed.  Estimated time for assignment: 4 hours
9	<b>CONSULTATIONS</b>
10/17	See schedule for individual consultation times on Canvas
10/19	<b>NO CLASS</b> – Fall Break

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10	<b>QUALITATIVE METHODS – Part 1</b>
10/24	<b>Read:</b> Rubin Ch. 8; McGuigan, 2023 Ch. 3
10/26	<b>Guest:</b> Dr. Lee McGuigan – behind the scenes qualitative research Before class read Chapter 3 “Optimization takes Command I: Management technique, from the military to Madison avenue” from his new book: <i>Selling the American people: Advertising, optimization, and the origins of adtech</i> (on Canvas and full cite below with link to open access PDFs).
	<b>Assignment due this week:</b> Research question(s) or hypotheses (+Introduction)
	<b>Assignment due in three Thursdays (week 13, 11/16):</b> Qualitative methods review and plan
	Part 1 (review): Select one qualitative method (e.g., interviews) and identify 3-5+ articles using this method in your field (or field adjacent). Recap what they did well (strengths) and what they could do better (weakness) in the a) research and b) writing. Try to frame these S&Ws in terms of bias, validity, generalizability, etc. Describe in a summary paragraph or bulleted lists (~200 words overall).
	Part 2 (plan): Develop a research plan for one of your ideas using the qualitative methods you selected in part 1 (~750-1250 words). Draft a full methods section; however, remember this is a first/early draft. Include the standard sections: overview, participants or sample, procedure, stimuli (if applicable), guide (if applicable), and data analysis/coding plan. Provide rationale for all your choices. Continue to imagine you have ample, albeit realistic resources for an early career researcher (\$1000-\$10,000).
	Estimated time for assignment: 12 hours
11	<b>QUALITATIVE METHODS – Part 2</b>
10/31	<b>Read:</b> Rubin Ch. 9-11; Tong et al., 2007
11/2	<b>Assignment due this week:</b> None
12	<b>MIXED METHODS</b>
11/7	<b>Read:</b> TBD
11/9	<b>Assignment due this week:</b> None
13	<b>PUBLISHING, POLICY, &amp; PRACTICE</b>
11/14	<b>Read:</b> Warren et al., 2021; Potter, 2001
11/16	<b>Assignment due this week:</b> Qualitative methods review and plan <b>Assignment due next Tuesday (week 14, 11/21):</b> Manuscript peer review Submit a review of the provided manuscript. Include comments to the author(s) and comments to the editor. Your review should include the following:

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Summary: explain what the research is about; restate research question(s) with independent/dependent variables clearly identified, method, and key findings. (no more than one short paragraph)

Overall Comments: Concisely state what you consider to be the major strengths and weaknesses of this research. (one paragraph)

Specific Comments: Address specific problems regarding research questions, variables, measurement issues, sampling, study design and execution, analysis and results, and theoretical and/or practical implications; make sure that you point out the problems, explain why they are problematic, and make clear suggestions for improvements. Remember, these should be merely preferences.

Estimated time for assignment: 2 hours

14	<b>CONSULTATIONS</b>
11/21	See schedule for individual consultation times on Canvas  <b>Assignment due this week:</b> Manuscript peer review <b>Assignment due in three Tuesdays (week 16, 12/5):</b> Final presentation, followed by the final paper due on 12/8 (final exam time).
11/23	<b>NO CLASS</b> - Thanksgiving
15	<b>PEER REVIEW</b>
11/28	Peer review Day 1
11/30	Peer review Day 2
16	<b>FINAL PRESENTATIONS &amp; PAPERS</b>
12/5	Prepare a presentation with visuals a la the conference of your choice. No longer than 7-9 minutes. You will be timed. Questions from the audience immediately after each presentation
Final Exam	12/8 FINAL PAPERS Due – <b>Friday, December 8 @ 12pm</b> (subject to change if final exam schedule changes)

**Honor Code:** I expect that 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 in this class. 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 Associate Dean Julie Dixon-Green, or you may speak with a representative of the Student Attorney Office or the Office of the Dean of Students.

**Seeking Help:** If you need individual assistance, please meet with the instructor. 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. I want to help, but may not be aware of the issue at early stages when there is the most flexibility to resolve.

**Diversity and Inclusion:** I strive to make this classroom an inclusive space for all students. Please let me know if there is anything I can do to improve; I appreciate any suggestions. More broadly, our school has adopted diversity and inclusion [mission and vision statements](#) with accompanying goals. These complement 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.

**Policy on Non-discrimination:** The University is committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming environment for all members of our community and to ensuring that educational and employment decisions are based on individuals' abilities and qualifications. Consistent with this principle and applicable laws, the University's [Policy Statement on Non-Discrimination](#) offers access to its educational programs and activities as well as employment terms and conditions without respect to race, color, gender, national origin, age, religion, creed, genetic information, disability, veteran's status, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. Such a policy ensures that only relevant factors are considered and that equitable and consistent standards of conduct and performance are applied.

If you are experiencing harassment or discrimination, you can seek assistance and file a report through the Report and Response Coordinators (see contact info at [safe.unc.edu](http://safe.unc.edu)) or the [Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office](#), or online to the EOC at <https://eoc.unc.edu/report-an-incident/>.

**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/>

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 barriers to fully accessing University courses, programs and activities.

Accommodations are determined through the Office of Accessibility Resources and Service (ARS) for individuals with documented qualifying disabilities in accordance with applicable state and federal laws. See the ARS Website for contact information: <https://ars.unc.edu> or email [ars@unc.edu](mailto:ars@unc.edu). (source: <https://ars.unc.edu/faculty-staff/syllabus-statement>)



**Counseling and Psychological Services:** CAPS is strongly committed to addressing the mental health needs of a diverse student body through timely access to consultation and connection to clinically appropriate services, whether for short or long-term needs. Go to their website: <https://caps.unc.edu/> or visit their facilities on the third floor of the Campus Health Services building for a walk-in evaluation to learn more.

**University Attendance Policy:** No right or privilege exists that permits a student to be absent from any class meetings, except for these University Approved Absences:

1. Authorized University activities
2. Disability/religious observance/pregnancy, as required by law and approved by [Accessibility Resources and Service](#) and/or the [Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office](#) (EOC)
3. Significant health condition and/or personal/family emergency as approved by the [Office of the Dean of Students](#), [Gender Violence Service Coordinators](#), and/or the [Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office](#) (EOC).

**Class Attendance Policy:** You may be absent from this course for any reason. It would be nice to know ahead of time – because I care, and you will be missed – by this is not a requirement. When it is appropriate (e.g., when you are feeling better), I will work with students individually to adjust timelines and supply materials needed to complete the learning objectives for the course.

Please be aware that you are bound by the [Honor Code](#) when making a request for a University approved absence. (source: <http://catalog.unc.edu/policies-procedures/attendance-grading-examination/>)

**Title IX:** Any student who is impacted by discrimination, harassment, interpersonal (relationship) violence, sexual violence, sexual exploitation, or stalking is encouraged to seek resources on campus or in the community. Reports can be made online to the EOC at <https://eoc.unc.edu/report-an-incident/>. Please contact the University's Title IX Coordinator (Elizabeth Hall, interim – [titleixcoordinator@unc.edu](mailto:titleixcoordinator@unc.edu)), Report and Response Coordinators in the Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office ([reportandresponse@unc.edu](mailto:reportandresponse@unc.edu)), Counseling and Psychological Services (confidential), or the Gender Violence Services Coordinators ([gvsc@unc.edu](mailto:gvsc@unc.edu); confidential) to discuss your specific needs. Additional resources are available at [safe.unc.edu](http://safe.unc.edu).

**Accreditation:** Our school'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, with special emphasis on these six bullet dots under "Professional values and competencies" in the link above.

- Demonstrate an understanding of the history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications;
- Understand concepts and apply theories in the use and presentation of images and information;
- 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;
- Apply tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work.

## Citations for the Readings

- Chakravartty, P., Kuo, R., Grubbs, V., & McIlwain, C. (2018). #CommunicationSoWhite. *Journal of Communication*, 68(2), 254-266.
- Flake, J. K., & Fried, E. I. (2020). Measurement schmeasurement: Questionable measurement practices and how to avoid them. *Advances in Methods and Practices in Psychological Science*, 3(4), 456-465.
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- Lacy, S., Watson, B., Riffe, D., & Lovejoy, J. (2015) Issues and Best Practices in Content Analysis. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*. 92(4), 791-811.
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- McEwan, B. (2020) Sampling and validity. *Annals of the International Communication Association*. 44(3), 235-247.
- McGuigan, L. (2023). *Selling the American People: Advertising, Optimization, and the Origins of Adtech*. MIT Press. Cambridge, MA. <https://direct.mit.edu/books/oa-monograph/5610/Selling-the-American-PeopleAdvertising>.
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- Moy, P. & Murphy, J. (2016) Problems and prospects in survey research. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*. 93(1), 16-37.
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- van Atteveldt, W., & Peng, T. Q. (2018). When communication meets computation: Opportunities, challenges, and pitfalls in computational communication science. *Communication Methods and Measures*, 12(2-3), 81-92.
- Warren, N. L., Farmer, M., Gu, T., & Warren, C. (2021). Marketing ideas: How to write research articles that readers understand and cite. *Journal of Marketing*, 85(5), 42-57.