

USC Annenberg School of Communication

COMM 301: Empirical Research in Communication

Summer 2017 (4 units)

Lecture/Lab: 10:00am – 12:05pm, Tuesday/Thursday, ANN 309

Instructor: Nathan Walter

Email: nathanw@usc.edu

Office: ASC G6 (located at the G level of the west wing)

Office hours: 9:00-10:00 Tuesday/Thursday and by appointment

Course description

The goal of this course is to provide students with the ability to understand and apply empirical reasoning to communication-related phenomena. Lectures will focus on the conceptual aspects of empirical research, such as generating hypotheses, designing measurements, sampling, gathering data, analyzing it, and explaining the results. During the labs, we will explore the essential tools of statistical analysis that will help us organize, visualize, and interpret the findings. Finally, students will also be putting the knowledge into practice, by completing an original research project in small groups.

Course objectives

When you complete this course, you will be able to:

- Have competence in reading, understanding, and critiquing communication research
- Know how to design empirical research projects
- Know how to analyze quantitative data
- Know how to produce a full research paper

Course material

- All the relevant readings (book chapters, journal articles, and lecture outlines) will be made available on Blackboard (Bb).
- IBM SPSS Statistics 18+ - required (this software is available for 6-month rental).

Recommended supplemental material

American Psychological Association (2009). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (6th ed.). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Singleton, R. A., Jr., & Straits, B. C. (2010). *Approaches to social research* (5th ed.). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Williams, F., & Monge, P. (2001). *Reasoning with statistics: How to read quantitative research* (5th ed.). Orlando, FL: Harcourt.

Course Requirements

1. Class Participation/Preparation

Students are expected to read the assigned material *before* class, maintain a responsible attendance record, and actively participate in class discussion.

2. Assignments

In order to facilitate students' understanding of course material, they will be assigned a series of five homework assignments. Because empirical research is often more fun when you do it with others, **assignments may be done in teams of 2-3** (just indicate that when you turn in your assignment). These assignments will take various forms and their description will be made available on Bb. All assignments must be turned in on time. **Students may redo assignments to optimize their learning and receive full credit within 1 week after they are returned with feedback to you.**

3. Exams

There will be two (2) exams given throughout the course. The exams are NOT cumulative and they consist of true/false, multiple-choice questions, short answer questions, analysis questions, and interpretation of SPSS output. There will be a review prior to each exam and the instructor will provide the students with learning guides. All exams are to be taken in class on the designated exam dates. In the rare event of emergency, it is the student's responsibility to inform the instructor and to schedule a make-up exam.

4. Term Paper

This research project will reflect the culmination of the training in quantitative research methods and statistics. In small groups (usually 2-3 students), students will choose a FEASIBLE topic of interest and an accompanying research method (e.g., experiment, survey, content analysis, network analysis, etc.). Students will generate several research hypotheses, gather data, analyze it, and write-up the research findings. The final paper will be in a format of an empirical research manuscript. To help students get the most out of this course, they will work with real data, real codebooks, real questionnaires, and other relevant documents. The research paper should be submitted via Turnitin on Bb and email (for a detailed description of the submission guidelines see the **Research Project folder on Bb**).

5. Presentation

All students will be asked to present their research projects and accompany their presentation with 8-14 slides. Each group will receive approximately 20 minutes (12 min presentation + 8 min Q&As).

Requirements	% of Final Grade	Points	Date Due
Participation	10%	10	<i>Weekly</i>
Assignments (5)	20%	10x5=50	<i>Vary</i>
Exam I	15%	100	<i>6/20</i>
Exam II	15%	100	<i>8/1</i>
Research Paper	30%	100	<i>8/3</i>
Class Presentation	10%	10	<i>8/8</i>
<i>Total</i>	100%		

Grading

The following scale will be used to assign final course grades:

Grade	%	Grade	%
A	94-100	C	73-76
A-	90-93	C-	70-72
B+	87-89	D+	67-69
B	83-86	D	63-66
B-	80-82	D-	60-62
C+	77-79	F	≤59

Course Policies

Academic conduct

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” <https://policy.usc.edu/student/scampus/part-b>. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct>.

Discrimination, sexual assault, intimate partner violence, stalking, and harassment are prohibited by the university. You are encouraged to report all incidents to the *Office of Equity and Diversity/Title IX Office* <http://equity.usc.edu> and/or to the *Department of Public Safety* <http://dps.usc.edu>. This is important for the health and safety of the whole USC community. Faculty and staff must report any information regarding an incident to the Title IX Coordinator who will provide outreach and information to the affected party. The sexual assault resource center webpage <http://sarc.usc.edu> fully describes reporting options. Relationship and Sexual Violence Services <https://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp> provides 24/7 confidential support.

Support systems

A number of USC’s schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing. Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more. Students whose primary language is not English should check with the *American Language Institute* <http://ali.usc.edu>, which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students. The *Office of Disability Services and Programs* <http://dsp.usc.edu> provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations. If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, *USC Emergency Information* <http://emergency.usc.edu> will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of Blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.

Late assignments

Turning in any assignment late will result in 30% deduction for each day after the deadline. The instructor may refuse to accept late work. For all types of excuses, students will receive point deductions and should provide the instructor with formal, written documents/evidences. The instructor has the right to decide on the exact amount of total points deducted, depending on the evaluation of the legitimacy of the excuse.

	Date	Topic	Assignment Due
Week 1	5/18	Understanding positivism 1.Singletary, M. W. (1993). <i>Mass communication research: Contemporary methods and applications</i> (Ch. 3). New-York, NY: Longman Publishing Group	
Week 2	5/23	Conceptualization 1.Rimal, R. N., & Lapinski, M. K. (2015). A re-explication of social norms, ten years later. <i>Communication Theory</i> , 25(4), 393-409. 2.Hayes, A. F., Glynn, C. J., & Shanahan, J. (2005). Validating the willingness to self-censor scale: Individual differences in the effect of the climate of opinion on opinion expression. <i>International Journal of Public Opinion Research</i> , 17(4), 443-455.	
	5/25	Levels of measurement	
Week 3	5/30 6/1	Variables, types of relationships, and hypotheses Lab: Introduction to SPSS	HW#1
Week 4	6/6 6/8	Reliability & validity 1.Fink, A. 2003. <i>The survey handbook</i> (ch.3). Los Angeles, CA: The Langley Research Institute Lab: Measures of central tendency/dispersion	HW#2
Week 5	6/13 6/15	Sampling 1.Thompson, S. K. 2012. <i>Sampling</i> (ch. 2). New Jersey, NY: Wiley Review for Exam 1	HW#3
Week 6	6/20 6/22	Exam 1 Lab: Frequencies	
Week 7	6/27 6/29	Experiments 1.Hulbert, L. 2008. Experimental research designs (ch. 2). In G. M. Breakwell (Ed.). <i>Doing social psychology research</i> . New Jersey, NY: Wiley SPSS: t-tests & ANOVA	HW#4
Week 8	7/4 7/6	<u>No class – Independence day!</u> Surveys 1.Saris, W. E., & Gallhofer, I. N. 2014. <i>Design, evaluation, and analysis of questionnaires for survey research</i> (ch. 5). New Jersey, NY: Wiley	
Week 9	7/11 7/13	Content analysis 1.Neuendorf, K. A. 2002. <i>The content analysis guidebook</i> (ch. 2). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. Lab: Correlation & Goodness of fit	HW#5
Week 10	7/18 7/20	Network analysis/ time series analysis 1.Rubin, A. M. The challenge of writing the quantitative study. In A. Alexander, W. J. Potter, & J. A. Anderson (Eds.) <i>How to publish your communication research: An insider's guide</i> . Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. Group meetings	
Week 11	7/25	Ethics (IRB, common sense, politics)	

	7/27	Review for Exam 2
Week 12	8/1	Exam 2
	8/3	Group presentations
Week 13	8/8	Submission of final papers (summative experience)