CMGT 540: Uses of Communication Research

Professor: Mathew Curtis
Email: mcurtis@usc.edu

Course description

This course introduces you to knowledge and skills needed to design and implement research projects. You will learn to form appropriate research questions and answer such questions by collecting and interpreting data. After completion of this course, you will be equipped to move beyond being passive observers of research and be discriminating consumers and competent practitioners.

As professionals you need to able to solve problems. Although solving problems successfully requires many resources (e.g., interpersonal and political skills), a fundamental ability is being able (1) to understand problems conceptually – to break problems down into their important parts and have a sense of how the parts relate to one another and to the whole; and (2) to obtain and analyze relevant data. Conceptualizing problems, and obtaining and analyzing data are two core skills you learn in research methods. The skills you learn in this course will allow you to stand out in your profession as a creative thinker, with the additional ability to design and implement good assessment practices.

A secondary aim of the course is to impart somewhat vicariously a set of skills that will be useful in your professional careers. In your careers you will undoubtedly have to make decisions and act under uncertain or confusing conditions. Under such conditions, the important skills are about dealing with information: knowing where to look for information, how to judge the quality of information, how to make sense out of information. Dealing with information is a core part of doing research, and so you will have many opportunities to practice those skills.

Module 1: Writing
- Writing Well
- Using the Library
- How to Avoid Plagiarism
- Ethics

Module 2: Statistics
- Theory and Concepts
- Application

Module 3: Focus Groups
- Theory
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- Case Examples

Module 4: Survey
- Theory
- Case Examples

Module 5: Content Analysis
- Theory
- Case Examples

Module 6: Experiment
- Theory
- Case Examples

Learning objectives

- Apply Content Analysis methodology to a provided situation.
- Apply Focus Group methodology to a provided situation.
- Construct a problem then design Experiment research to address it.
- Construct a problem then design Survey research to address it.
- Execute a research project and final paper using scientific communication skills:
  - by using as few words as possible
  - being as accurate as possible
  - always backing up adjectives with concrete definition of the term
  - removing 1st person
- Analyze real reports representing the four research types to isolate flaws and design a better strategy.
- Identify common errors in existing research and design a mitigating strategy, inclusive of:
  - not using a representative sample
  - asking biased or leading questions
- Recognize through the creation of four mini papers that one method of research is not going to provide a comprehensive analysis to any given situation.
  - Then create a written modified holistic approach analyzing where the strengths and weaknesses of each approach can be mitigated by employing another approach.
- Identify strategies to successfully mitigate when unplanned situations arise within research, recognizing that by engaging in research you are a representative of yourself and your institution.
- Use SPSS program with example data sets.
- Use Qualtrix with example data sets and to complete peer generated surveys.
- Retrieve citations that support research claims. Evaluate a faulty submission, isolate the errors, and modify until correct.
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- Understand and avoid plagiarism by:
  - Using APA citations.
  - Quoting appropriately.
  - Paraphrasing correctly.
- Design and implement a comprehensive research analysis of a specific topic.

Textbooks and materials

- **Books:**
    
    **NOTE:** This reference guide is used throughout the program, so is not assigned as specific reading within this course.

- **Articles:**
  - (Please see weekly reading list at the end of this syllabus)

Sessions and days of the week

The course is divided into six two week modules. Due dates for assignments and discussions are stated in day numbers. Day 1 is Monday, the first day of the beginning of each weekly session.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MODULE</th>
<th>Week One</th>
<th>Day 1</th>
<th>Monday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Day 2</td>
<td>Tuesday</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Day 3</td>
<td>Wednesday</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Day 4</td>
<td>Thursday</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Day 5</td>
<td>Friday</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Assignments are due no later than **11:55 p.m. in the Pacific time zone** on the day that is stated in the assignments section.

**Grading policy**

*Course Components*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage of Final Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Mini Research Papers (one for each of the four topic modules, Survey, Focus Groups, Content Analysis, and Experiment)</td>
<td>40% (4 times 10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Introductory Paper</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. SPSS Application Assignment</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Final Paper</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Participation</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Quizzes (Avoiding Plagiarism, APA Style, Writing)</td>
<td>6% (3 times 2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Other Assignments</td>
<td>16% (8 times 2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Percentage</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Mini-Research Projects (40%)

The research projects are your chance to investigate something of interest to you. What would be useful for you to know more about? Each module will supply you with the skills needed to define your problem and design a plan to research your question. You are the person who decides what it is your research. You will complete four mini-research projects utilizing the four main methods of the course (survey, focus group, content analysis, experiment).

Introductory Paper (10%)

To make people listen to your ideas and findings you have to make them care. The introduction to any work is where you frame an issue to appeal to your target audience. You cannot assume the reader knows or cares about your work. You have to make them know and care about your work. This will use the Paper Grading Criteria shown in the chart below.

Computing Lab (SPSS) Assignment (10%)

Research generates data. Lots of data. Statistical skills are needed to interpret the data you gather. You will receive instruction on statistical concepts but perhaps the most effective way to learn statistics is via ‘hands-on’ use of statistical programs.

Final Paper (10%)

You will take your Introductory Paper and expand this into a Final Paper. This Final Paper extends and builds upon your Introductory Paper. Your Final Paper will also address the feedback provided on your Introductory Paper. This will also use the Paper Grading Criteria shown in the chart below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paper Grading Criteria</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Scoring</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>95 points or more Exemplary</td>
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</table>
## CMGT 540 Syllabus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score Range</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>87 – 94 points</td>
<td>Accomplished</td>
<td>The paper complies with the prescribed style format in most places, containing 2 to 4 style or format errors. The paper follows normal conventions of writing mechanics throughout. Minor errors exist, but do not interfere significantly with comprehensibility. The paper contains 1 to 4 expression, vocabulary, grammar, punctuation, spelling, or typography errors. The paper uses organizational structures such as sections and headings to distinguish major ideas from one another. However, the transitions are not uniformly smooth, being disjointed in a few places.</td>
<td>The paper complies with the prescribed style format in most places, containing 2 to 4 style or format errors. The paper follows normal conventions of writing mechanics throughout. Minor errors exist, but do not interfere significantly with comprehensibility. The paper contains 1 to 4 expression, vocabulary, grammar, punctuation, spelling, or typography errors. The paper uses organizational structures such as sections and headings to distinguish major ideas from one another. However, the transitions are not uniformly smooth, being disjointed in a few places.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80 - 86 points</td>
<td>Developing</td>
<td>The paper complies with the style format but lapses in several places. The paper contains 5 to 7 style or format errors. More frequent errors in writing mechanics interfere with reading comprehensibility. For example, sentences have non-parallel forms, subject-verb or tenses do not agree, use of apostrophes is inappropriate. Expressions and vocabulary are unrefined. The paper contains 5 to 7 expression, vocabulary, grammar, punctuation, spelling, or typography errors. The organization needs significant revision in places to present the arguments well. The sectioning of the argument remains incomplete; writing does not flow smoothly from point to point; appropriate transitions</td>
<td>The paper complies with the style format but lapses in several places. The paper contains 5 to 7 style or format errors. More frequent errors in writing mechanics interfere with reading comprehensibility. For example, sentences have non-parallel forms, subject-verb or tenses do not agree, use of apostrophes is inappropriate. Expressions and vocabulary are unrefined. The paper contains 5 to 7 expression, vocabulary, grammar, punctuation, spelling, or typography errors. The organization needs significant revision in places to present the arguments well. The sectioning of the argument remains incomplete; writing does not flow smoothly from point to point; appropriate transitions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### CMGT 540 Syllabus

| 79 points or less | Problematic | The paper struggles to comply with the prescribed style format, containing more than 7 style or format errors. | The paper contains extensive errors in sentence structure and other grammatical forms that make reading and understanding difficult. Reading is also marred by grammar, punctuation, spelling or typography errors. Expression and use of vocabulary are awkward. The paper contains more than 7 errors. Rather than providing for smooth arguments, the paper presents a series of separate and disjointed ideas. For example, similar concepts appear for the first time in disparate places, with no attempt to link them. The organization needs significant and thorough revision to bring the paper up to par. **Note:** More than 7 errors put the paper at risk for scoring a “0” for writing quality. Poor writing quality also hinder comprehension. | Analysis of existing scholarly or professional literature on the topic is inadequate. The topic lacks focus; the key concepts remain undefined. The argument being made is ill-justified or incomprehensible; the supporting findings and arguments hold serious flaws and confounds. |

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**Participation (8%)**

Contribute professionally to class discussions, group work, and peer review. Asking a question or contributing to the discussion counts as participation. If you participate frequently, enthusiastically, and thoughtfully this counts a complete. You will not earn a complete by merely posting quick responses or being disengaged or disrespectful.

**Quizzes (2%)**

Plagiarism is a serious infraction in this course. We will devote significant energy to understand what constitutes plagiarism and how to not commit it. After the lesson on plagiarism, to anchor the learning, you will be tested. There is also a quiz on writing and quiz on APA style.

**Research Ethics Module (2%)**
The research ethics module is a set of lessons focusing on the awareness and care you should take when you collect and present data about subjects. Refer to the document and instructions in Week 2 Assignment 1. It has explicit instructions on how to enroll. Complete the module by Week 2. Submit a pdf or html of the web page indicating completion.

**Other grading policies**

**Writing Quality**

The course project demands much in terms of writing. The quality of your writing will significantly influence how your work is evaluated.

The instructors learned through many encounters that many students judge themselves to be good writers. This judgment is often over-optimistic. The writing demands in this course are very high, complex, and constant. Even competent writers will be challenged. Hence, be prepared to expend much effort in improving your writing. The instructors encourage you to be open and receptive to feedback for improving.

The effort to improve must come from you. The instructors will highlight where your writing needs to improve, and point you to resources. Then, it is your responsibility to use these resources to improve.

How will writing quality be evaluated? One basic component is writing mechanics. Good mechanics refer to careful attention to spelling, punctuation, and grammar; good grammar includes subject-verb agreement, appropriate use of parallel structures, absence of sentence fragments, and so on. Another aspect of mechanics is the use of proper vocabulary and expressions. For a refresher, refer to [http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/grammar](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/grammar). More resources are listed at: [http://college.usc.edu/writingcenter/information_for_students/online_resources.html](http://college.usc.edu/writingcenter/information_for_students/online_resources.html).

Another component of writing quality is organization. In a well-organized paper, the arguments flow smoothly; the transitions from one idea to another are well written, i.e., the reader knows when different arguments are being presented and can grasp the important and subtle distinctions. A well-organized paper respects the reader’s cognitive burden and shepherds the reader’s attention carefully. How to learn about organizing a paper well? Two good resources exist:

- The first is the article “The Science of Scientific Writing,” available on Moodle.
- The second is the required text *They Say / I Say*, especially Chapter 8. Consult these resources, become familiar with their guidance, and implement in your writing.

The basic criterion is to communicate well to your readers (your instructors and your peers). If your readers cannot understand your writing due to flaws in
grammar, vocabulary or organization, then the quality of your thinking cannot be appreciated. The instructors cannot spend minutes to decipher a sentence you wrote. You cannot ask instructors to ignore poor writing in order to focus on content.

A paper with good ideas but bad writing will earn a poor grade, as specified in the evaluation rubric ("Evaluation of Papers"). The demands are especially stringent. If your writing performs poorly in the quality requirement (i.e., scoring on the lowest category), it represents unsatisfactory performance. The instructors will require you to attend to those areas and revise before proceeding. For example, upon detecting the 8th error in vocabulary, expression, spelling, punctuation, typography or other mechanics in your draft, the instructors will impose a score of "0" in that category, and may stop reading and return your paper. You then have to revise and resubmit within 7 days.

When evaluating your writing, the instructors may correct the first few language errors. Thereafter, the instructor may only indicate that flaws are present. In such instances, you must take the initiative to identify and correct those flaws, rather than expect instructors to perform that task.

Grading Practice and Philosophy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Range</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>93.0% or higher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90.0%-92.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87.0%-89.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>83.0%-86.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>80.0%-82.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>77.0%-79.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>73.0%-76.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>70.0%-72.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>60.0%-69.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>59.9% or lower</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Paper guidelines

- All documents should be in Microsoft Word format.
- Papers must be type-written or word-processed, double-spaced, with 12 point font.
- Make sure you keep a copy of all submitted paper.
- Please ensure that each paper is written in APA style. Refer to the APA manual. (6th Edition)
- Finally, typos and spelling errors are unforgivable at this level and reflect poorly on you.
- All page length requirements are for double-spaced pages, with 1-inch margins, in 12-point Times New Roman font.
Lateness

I realize that working professionals occasionally must submit an assignment late. To encourage everyone to hand in assignments, I will accept late work. However, in fairness to those who do turn things in on time there will be a price to pay for late work. I will grade all late assignments and then deduct percentage points. Work less than 24 hours late will be deducted 10%, work more than 24 hours late but under a week late will be deducted 25%. Each additional week will result in a further 25% deduction per week late up to a maximum of a 50% deduction.

Academic integrity policy

The Annenberg School for Communication is committed to upholding the University's Academic Integrity code as detailed in the SCampus Guide. It is the policy of the School of Communication to report all violations of the code. Any serious violation or pattern of violations of the Academic Integrity Code will result in the student's expulsion from the Communication major or minor.

It is particularly important that you are aware of and avoid plagiarism, cheating on exams, fabricating data for a project, submitting a paper to more than one professor, or submitting a paper authored by anyone other than yourself. If you have doubts about any of these practices, confer with a faculty member.

Resources on academic honesty can be found on the Student Judicial Affairs Web site (http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/SJACS):

1. "Guide to Avoiding Plagiarism" addresses issues of paraphrasing, quotations and citations in written assignments, drawing heavily upon materials used in the university's Writing Program;

2. "Understanding and Avoiding Academic Dishonesty" addresses more general issues of academic integrity, including guidelines for adhering to standards concerning examinations and unauthorized collaboration.

The “SCampus” (http://www.usc.edu/scampus) contains the university's Student Conduct Code and other student-related policies.

Disabilities policy

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to your instructor as early in the semester as possible. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.
Library access

As a USC student, you have access to all the library resources and the Annenberg Librarian, Chimene Tucker (cetucker@usc.edu), is available to assist you with any inquiry you may have.

http://www.usc.edu/libraries/services/remote_user_services/

Lead Instructor information

Mathew Curtis received his Ph.D. in social psychology from USC. He teaches a wide range of courses at the graduate level from research methods to persuasion and influence and has been the recipient of both teaching and mentoring awards at USC.

Mathew’s primary research examines emotion and the role of comparison; how individuals and groups compare themselves to others in order to understand their role in work and social settings as well the behavioral and emotional responses to these comparisons. Mathew has also completed extensive research in relation to linguistics; most recently examining the effects of language contained in jury instructions on the jury’s deliberation and outcomes.

Before teaching at USC, Mathew worked as a business consultant in England, examining the consumer decision process and how to successfully market products. Mathew also has background in teaching statistics and has served as a statistical consultant for researchers and business entrepreneurs.

Hardware and software requirements

Minimum hardware requirements for PC users

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Operating System:</th>
<th>Windows XP or higher required.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RAM:</td>
<td>1 GB of RAM required (higher is recommended).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free Disk Space:</td>
<td>4 GB available hard-drive space.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Connection</th>
<th>Internet service provider (ISP); broadband connection recommended</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Audio & Video | Sound card and speakers or headphones for listening to audio components.  
Webcam (if you have a laptop, a built-in camera will suffice unless otherwise specified for the course). |
| Monitor | Monitor resolution of 1024 x 768 or higher. |
| Browser: | Internet Explorer 8.0 and/or Firefox 3.5 or higher browser(s). The browser should be set to accept cookies, allow javascript and java, and to show the newest version of a page. Pop-up blockers should be disabled for Moodle. |
| Also Recommended: | CD/DVD-ROM drive. |

### Minimum hardware requirements for Mac Users

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Operating System</th>
<th>Mac OS X Version 10.4 or higher.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RAM:</td>
<td>1 GB of RAM required (higher is recommended).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free Disk Space:</td>
<td>4 GB available hard-drive space.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection:</td>
<td>Internet service provider (ISP); broadband connection recommended</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Audio & Video    | Sound card and speakers or headphones for listening to audio components.  
Webcam (if you have a laptop, a built-in camera will suffice unless otherwise specified for the course). |
| Monitor          | Monitor resolution of 1024 x 768 or higher. |
| Browser:         | Firefox 3.5 or higher browser. The browser should be set to accept cookies, allow javascript and java, and to show the newest version of a page. Pop-up blockers should be disabled for Moodle. |
| Also Recommended: | CD/DVD-ROM drive. |

### Software
Recommended: Microsoft Office 2003 (or Mac 2004) or higher (to include Word, Excel, and PowerPoint), Virus protection software, Adobe Reader.

**Plug-ins**

General note: Please ensure you have the latest Java plug-ins.

- PC: Windows Media Player, QuickTime, Flash, Shockwave, Adobe Reader, and Java.
- Mac: Flip4Mac (to access Windows Media files), QuickTime, Flash, Shockwave, Adobe Reader, and Java.

**Check your System Compatibility**

To verify that you have the appropriate hardware and software, please log in to the course to launch the Browser Test Page.

**Technical support**

Assistance to resolve technical problems is available 24 hours a day, every day of the year. This service is provided by Embanet-Compass Knowledge Group, and it is restricted primarily to problems associated with the functionality of the course delivery platform.

Contact Embanet-Compass Knowledge Group's Help Desk staff for assistance to resolve problems you believe are not associated with the computer hardware and software you have purchased from a vendor.

Examples of problems that fall within this category are:

- Unable to view multimedia files.
- Unable to view responses to comments you have posted in the Discussion area.

If you are not sure whether the problem is due to your computer system, contact Embanet-Compass Knowledge Group's Help Desk for guidance; otherwise, contact the vendor.

To talk to a live technical support agent, please call the following number:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Toll-free</th>
<th>877-646-1885</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Support Center</td>
<td><a href="http://supportcenter.embanet.com/usc">http://supportcenter.embanet.com/usc</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Weekly Readings

|---|---|
| Week 3 | Percentages: [http://www.stats.org/faq_percentages.htm](http://www.stats.org/faq_percentages.htm)  
Significance: [http://www.stats.org/faq_significance.htm](http://www.stats.org/faq_significance.htm)  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 4</th>
<th>(None)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 8</td>
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<td>---</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 11</td>
<td>(None)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 12</td>
<td>(None)</td>
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</table>