CMGT 540 Uses of Communication Research
Course Syllabus, Summer 2012
(Rev. 20120502)

Instructor: Heath Row
Office Hours: By appointment; call or email for assistance and appointments
Telephone: 718-755-9840 (mobile)
Email: erow@usc.edu

Course: CMGT 540 Uses of Communication Research
Term: Summer 2012
Time: Monday, 6-10 p.m.
Room: Center for the Digital Future, 11444 W. Olympic Blvd., Los Angeles

Course Objectives
This course provides a broad overview of the role of research in online and offline media and marketing (including social media), and the analytical techniques and tools used in research. You will learn how to define research questions, develop hypotheses, choose appropriate theoretical and methodological frameworks, and design studies of your own. The lectures will introduce you to a wide variety of methods, and you will explore some of them in depth for your class project.

In-class demonstrations and exercises will familiarize you with the research strategies and tools you will need in your work. We will discuss the way business and media professionals, and scholars have employed those techniques in their research. You will be asked to critically evaluate academic studies and media coverage of research, and identify the strengths and weaknesses of their research design.

Many of the methods you will learn in class can be applied in your professional career. Data collection and interpretation are essential in industry decision-making. Survey design and focus group studies are widely used in business settings. Additionally, the class will emphasize the use of traditional research methods in an online environment. We will cover areas like online ethnography, Web analytics, and the application of network analysis to the study of online social media.

Attendance and Participation
Attendance and participation will be noted. Participation will be graded based on quality, as well as quantity. If you are unable to attend a class, please try to let me know in advance. Missing one class during the semester might be permissible. Missing more could affect your grade and might prevent you from successfully completing the course. Each week, you are expected to review all of the required materials and be prepared to discuss them in class.

Course Requirements and Evaluation
Assignments
Over the course of the semester, you will be assigned a handful of assignments, including an online survey, based on the theoretical approaches and methods discussed in class. All assignments should be emailed to erow@usc.edu before 4 p.m. Sunday before the Monday that they are due.

Late assignments will be accepted within two weeks of the original deadline. Late assignments will receive an immediate penalty of 5%, and then they will continue to accrue late penalties not to exceed 10% per day (with a maximum penalty of 50%). Assignments will not be accepted after two weeks.

Class Paper
The project for this course involves writing a research proposal on a topic of your choosing. The paper will give you a chance to use the analytical approaches learned in class to explore a research question relevant to your interests. The paper should include a brief literature review, a detailed outline of your proposed methodology, and commentary on the outcome of your online survey. It should be 10-12 pages long and written according to the APA guidelines. The topic of your proposal should be submitted no later than June 18.

Ideally, this paper will help you to prepare for your APOC Final Project and will help you to explore some of the research questions that you might be facing in your final semester. Specific requirements will be discussed after the semester begins. When the paper is due Aug. 6, be sure to give me a hard copy in addition to emailing me a soft copy of your paper.

Participation
You are expected to take part in the class discussion. Grading will be based on quality, as well as quantity. Any online discussions related to the course, such as those in Blackboard, will be considered as part of your discussion, but primarily as a deciding factor or extra credit.

Starting the second week of the semester, we will have weekly student presentations. Every week, one or two of you will be asked to find an interesting research paper that uses the approaches we’ve talked about that day (or the previous week). During a 15-minute informal presentation and discussion, you will explain the study's focus, what methods and theories were employed, and what improvements (if any) could be made to its research design.

Grade Breakdown
• Assignments: 55%
• Class paper: 25%
• Paper presentation: 10%
• Participation: 10%
• Total: 100%

Course Materials
All information will be available on Blackboard
Required Readings

*How to Lie with Statistics* (1993) by Darrell Huff [Huff]

*Web Analytics 2.0* (2009) by Avinash Kaushik [Kaushik]

*The Handbook of Online and Social Media Research* (2010) by Ray Poynter [Poynter]

Recommended Readings


*Conducting Research Literature Reviews, 2nd Edition* (2005) by Arlene Fink [Fink]


Academic Integrity
The Annenberg School of Communication and Journalism is committed to upholding the USC Academic Integrity Code as detailed in the Campus Guide. It is the policy of the School to report all violations of the code. Any violation will at a minimum result in no credit earned for the assignment in question. Any serious violation or pattern of violations of the Academic Integrity Code may result in the student’s expulsion from the program. It is incumbent upon each student to understand and avoid plagiarism. If you have any questions, please contact me.

Accommodation
This class will accommodate any student requesting assistance. Students requesting academic accommodations based on a disability need to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP). A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please make sure that the letter is delivered to me as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located at STU 301, 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday-Friday, and can be reached at 213-740-0776.

Course Outline
The following schedule is tentative and subject to change depending on the progress of the class.
Week 1: May 21, 2012
Agenda: Introduction, overview of the class syllabus, recommended outside reading, qualitative versus quantitative approaches to research, research ethics, research literacy
Readings for 6/4: Huff, Aaker pp. 650-652, Poynter pp. xii-xvii and Part IV, Fink ch. 1
Assignment for 6/4: Bring in a sample of media coverage of or reportage on a piece of research for discussion; write a 1,000-word analysis of the reportage. General questions to consider: Who did the research, what was the methodology, are there any potential biases or other concerns?

Bye Week: May 28, 2012
Agenda: Happy Memorial Day!

Week 2: June 4, 2012
Agenda: Discuss HTL, discuss student research samples, the purpose and process of research, writing a literature review, finding data and academic resources online, basics of APA style
Assignment Due: Research reportage analysis

Week 3: June 11, 2012
Agenda: Applications of research, what constitutes a good hypothesis, measurement reliability and validity, population inference and sampling methods
Readings for 6/18: Aaker chapters 1-4, Callingham ch. 1-4, Fink ch. 4-5
Assignment for 6/18: Write a literature review on a topic of your choice. Combine primary and secondary sources, including research. Select a topic for an online survey of your own design and fielding

Week 4: June 18, 2012
Agenda: The research process, team structure, methods and theory
Assignment Due: Literature review and topic for online survey
Readings for 6/25: Aaker ch. 5-8, Callingham ch. 5 and 8-9, Sue ch 1-4
Assignment for 6/25: Draft the survey and list of distribution channels (sample frame)

Week 5: June 25, 2012
Agenda: Sources of data, survey design and online surveys, pretesting, scales and measurement
Assignment Due: Survey draft and sample frame
Readings for 7/2: Aaker ch. 9-12, Sue ch. 5-7
Assignment for 6/25: Final draft of online survey and list of distribution channels, class paper topic

Week 6: July 2, 2012
Agenda: Data analysis and hypothesis testing, basic descriptive statistics, focus groups and issues specific to online focus groups
Assignment Due: Final survey draft and sample frame
Readings for 7/9: Aaker chapters 13-15, Poynter Part I, Sue ch. 8-9
Assignment for 7/9: Programmed survey

Week 7: July 9, 2012
Agenda: Experimentation and sampling, introduction to online audience measurement and web analytics
Assignment Due: Survey program
Readings for 7/16: Kaushik ch. 1-4, Poynter Part III, Aaker ch. 16-18
Assignment for 7/16: Field survey, write audience measurement analysis of a Web site of your choosing

Week 8: July 16, 2012
Agenda: Web analytics, defining online project goals and measuring success, search engine optimization techniques
Assignment Due: Field survey, audience measurement analysis
Readings for 7/23: Kaushik ch. 5-8, Poynter Part II
Assignment for 7/23: Survey results, proposal for small group web analytics project

Week 9: July 23, 2012
Agenda: Beginning consulting or research engagements with new clients or products
Assignment Due: Survey results, web analytics proposal
Readings for 7/30: Kaushik ch. 10-12, Callingham ch. 10
Assignment for 7/30: Web analytics performance analysis

Week 10: July 30, 2012
Agenda: Competitive intelligence and business research, due diligence; New directions in online research, virtual worlds and online ethnography, TBD by students, Q&A on class projects
Assignment Due: Web analytics performance analysis
Readings for 8/6: Kaushik ch. 13-14, Poynter Part V, Callingham ch. 11

Week 11: Aug. 6, 2012
Agenda: Student presentations
Assignment Due: Turn in final project