

# COMM 305 — Understanding Social Science Research (Tentative Syllabus)

Professor Lian Jian

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**Class meets: TuTh 3:30-4:50p, ASC 204**

Teaching Assistants

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## Course Description

The value of science can only be realized if it is understood by people and put into practice. This course guides you to evaluate scholarly publications of social scientific research, and to apply the results of social science in daily practices.

In order to truly appreciate scientific research, we need to understand the principles of research methods. This learning process is best facilitated by a combination of lectures, problem sets, and exams. In addition, there will be assignments in which you are required to summarize and critically evaluate a series of research articles in the field of communication. Evaluation of these assignments will be based on whether you have summarized the main findings in the assigned articles, and more important, whether you have identified their main flaws.

**There is no prerequisite for this course.**

## Course materials

- **[Required]** Rowntree, Derek. (2003). Statistics Without Tears: A Primer for Non-Mathematicians. New York: Charles Scribner's sons.

- **[Required]** Huff, Darrell. (1993). How to lie with statistics. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.

## Requirements and Evaluation

Evaluation will be on the following basis:

Exam 1	15%
Exam 2	15%
Exam 3	15%
Assignments	30%
Final Report	15%
Participation	10%

There will be six assignments, and the one you scored lowest will be dropped, which means only five count toward your final score, each worth 6%.

This course uses the following grading scheme:

A	93% or higher
A-	90%-92%
B+	87%-89%
B	83%-86%
B-	80%-82%
C+	77%-79%
C	73%-76%
C-	70%-72%
D+	67%-69%
D	63%-66%
D-	60%-62%
F	59% or lower

## Examinations

There will be three examinations for this course, and they generally hold the following format: 8 to 15 multiple choice questions (20-30% of the examinations points); 5 to 8 fill in the blanks or short answer questions (10-30% of the points); 4 to 6 analysis questions (40-50% of the points).

**These three exams are non-cumulative.**

The examinations require significant effort and resources to design and conduct. Holding make-up examinations demands even more, which may not be possible or reasonable. So, make every effort to take the examinations on their scheduled dates. Check the course calendar below.

Requests to take examinations on other dates will be considered only for unexpected, justifiable and documentable reasons. For example, if you missed the scheduled examination to attend to a friend's sudden illness, the instructors will ask for formal documentation from the medical authorities.

## Assignments

Each assignment will contain multiple choices, conceptual questions, critiquing research articles, or problems sets on statistical techniques. You are required to complete the assignments **INDEPENDENTLY**. No group discussion or any study groups are allowed before the submission of assignments.

Assignments will be submitted in hardcopies at the start of the class on the day indicated in the syllabus. **Late assignments will not be graded.** All assignments must be the original work of the student and not used for any other course. Violation of this policy is an Academic Integrity Violation.

Questions about grades should be addressed in a timely manner. There is a 24-hour “wait period” after receiving a grade, but then you should address questions within the next 10 days. Requests for grade changes must be **written and include justification**. A re-grade could lead to either higher or lower points.

## Final Report

The instructor team will provide a list of scientific research papers after Exam 2. You are required to select one from the list (if you want to pick a paper outside of our list, you need to obtain instructors’ approval first), and write a report and a critique based on it. Your report should include the following:

- A one-page summary of the paper in your own words. Summarize the main findings of the paper, the method used, and the practical implications of the results.
- A 3-5 page (double spaced) critique of the research. Your critique should include comments on both the strength and weaknesses of the paper. For the weaknesses you point out, suggest improvements.

## Participation

There are assigned readings before each lecture. You are required to complete these readings and come to class prepared to discuss the material. 6% of the participation score is based on the instructors’ general impressions about your *constructive* inputs in the class discussion.

You are allowed two absences during the semester without penalty. Thereafter, each unexcused absence costs 1% of the total grade. Having four unexcused absences costs 4% of the final score (i.e., a 90% drops to 86%). Absences beyond the fourth open the possibility that you may fail the course. Arriving past five minutes late to class will incur a penalty (half that of absences).

Students who are instant messaging, web surfing, or involved in other similar activities during class will be marked as **absent**.

## **Extra Credits**

You can earn extra credits (2 points max per student) by being an effective scientific research/reporting police.

- To earn 2 extra points, find a misleading *report* of a scientific study in a newspaper (e.g., LA Times, USA Today) or a magazine (e.g., The Economist). Submit the report (the news article), a short summary of the study, and explain why you think the report is misleading. Again the instructors will evaluate your submission and decide if you get the extra credit. You will do a short 5-minute presentation in class at the end of the semester.

## **Academic Integrity**

The Annenberg School for Communication is committed to upholding the University's Academic Integrity code as detailed in the 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.

The School and the University is committed to the general principles of academic honesty that include and incorporate the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one's own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another's work as one's own. By taking this course, students are expected to understand and abide by these principles.

Any student found responsible for plagiarism, fabrication, cheating on examinations, or purchasing papers, or other assignments, will receive a failing grade in the course and may be dismissed as a major in communication. See section 11 of Scampus and the relevant sections of the Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards at <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/SJACS/students.html>.

## **Religious Holy Days**

You may arrange to take an exam on an alternative date if the exam falls on a religious holy day. Notify the instructor at least **two weeks in advance** of the holy day. Do not expect to be excused from taking the exam on the assigned date if you fail to notify your instructor two weeks in advance of the holy day. The same policy applies to assignments: you need to ask for an extension two weeks in advance otherwise it will be treated as a late assignment.

## Students with Disabilities and Academic Accommodations

Students requesting academic accommodations based on a disability are required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP when adequate documentation is filed. Please be sure the letter is delivered to Lian Jian as early in the semester as possible. DSP is open Monday-Friday, 8:30-5:00. The office is in Student Union 301, Tel: (213) 740-0776. For additional information, see the Disabilities Services Program online: [http://sait.usc.edu/academicssupport/centerprograms/dsp/home\\_index.html](http://sait.usc.edu/academicssupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html).

### Schedule

#### Week 1 Aug 26 ~ 30, 2013

##### Session A — Introduction; deduction versus induction; falsifiability

- [On Blackboard] Babbie (2008), p.23-24 .
- [On Blackboard] Alan Chalmers. *Chapter 4. Introducing Falsificationism*. Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis, Indiana, 1976.

##### Session B — Social science and hypotheses

- [On Blackboard] Hayes (2005), p.8-15.
- [On Blackboard] Williams and Monge (2001), p.62-66.

#### Week 2 Sept 2 ~ 6, 2013

##### Session A — What's in a research paper?

- [On Blackboard] Manuscript Structure and Content, *Publication Manual of the APA*, Sixth Edition, 2009, p.25-36.
- [On Blackboard] Angeline S Lillard and Jennifer Peterson. The Immediate Impact of Different Types of Television on Young Children's Executive Function. *Pediatrics*, 128(4):644–649, December 2011.

##### Session B — Descriptive statistics

- Ch 3 of Rowntree book.
- Ch 2 and 5 of Huff book

**Week 3 Sept 9 ~ 13, 2013**

**Session A — Measurement**

- [On Blackboard] Hayes (2005), Measurement, p.16-30.
- Ch 4 of Huff book
- [Assignment 1 due.]

**Session B — Discussing Measurement**

- Reading will be handed out in class.

**Week 4 Sept 16 ~ 20, 2013**

**Session A — Probability and distributions**

- [On Blackboard] Aczel (2004), p.1-16.
- Rowntree book, p38-64.

**Session B — Introducing Normal distribution**

- Rowntree book, p64-81.

**Week 5 Sept 23 ~ 27, 2013**

**Session A — Sampling**

- [On Blackboard] Hayes (2005), Ch 3, Sampling.
- Ch 1 of Huff book
- [Assignment 2 due.]

**Session B — Review for exam 1**

- No reading for this week.

**Week 6 Sept 30 ~ Oct 4, 2013**

**Session A — Exam 1**

**Session B — Inferences: from sample to population**

- Ch 5 of Rowntree book

- Ch 3 of Huff book

**Week 7 Oct 7 ~ 11, 2013**

**Session A — One-sample t tests**

- No reading for this week.

**Session B — Two-sample t tests**

- Rowntree book, p.102-120 and p.128-141.

**Week 8 Oct 14 ~ 18, 2013**

**Session A — Discussing one-sample and two-sample t tests**

- [On Blackboard] Dmitri Williams, Nick Yee, and Scott E Caplan. Who plays, how much, and why? Debunking the stereotypical gamer profile. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 13(4):993–1018, Jul 2008.
- [Assignment 3 due.]

**Session B — One-way ANOVA**

- Rowntree book, p. 141-150.
- [On Blackboard, skip the part marked in red] Yi-Fen Chen. Herd behavior in purchasing books online. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 24(5):1977–1992, September 2008.

**Week 9 Oct 21 ~ 25, 2013**

**Session A — Two-way ANOVA**

- [On Blackboard] Andrea B Hollingshead. Information Suppression and Status Persistence in Group Decision Making The Effects of Communication Media. *Human Communication Research*, 23(2): 193–219, December 1996.
- [Assignment 4 due.]

**Session B — Correlations and regressions**

- Rowntree book, p.155-184.

Week 10 **Oct 28 ~ Nov 1, 2013**

**Session A** — Correlation, causation, and third variables

- [On Blackboard] Hayes (2005), p.323-328.
- Ch 8 of Huff book
- [On Blackboard] Jeffrey T Hancock and Catalina L Toma. Putting Your Best Face Forward: The Accuracy of Online Dating Photographs. *Journal of Communication*, 59(2):367–386, June 2009.

**Session B** — Review for exam 2

Week 11 **Nov 4 ~ 8, 2013**

**Session A** — Exam 2

**Session B** — Empirical research based on observational data

- [On Blackboard] Babbie (2008), p.368-375.
- [On Blackboard] Lian Jian and Nikki Usher. Crowd-funded journalism. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, forthcoming.

Week 12 **Nov 11 ~ 15, 2013**

**Session A** — Survey research: biases and reliability

- [On Blackboard] Babbie (2008), p.268-291.
- [On Blackboard] Nicole B Ellison, Charles Steinfield, and Cliff Lampe. The benefits of Facebook “friends:” Social capital and college students’ use of online social network sites. *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication*, 12(4):1143–1168, 2007.
- [Assignment 5 due.]

**Session B** — Content analysis

- [On Blackboard] Lemi Baruh. Publicized Intimacies on Reality Television: An Analysis of Voyeuristic Content and Its Contribution to the Appeal of Reality Programming. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, 53(2):190–210, September 2009.

Week 13 **Nov 18 ~ 22, 2013**

**Session A** — Experiments: treatment and control



- [On Blackboard] Babbie (2008), Experiments, p.246-254.

- [Assignment 6 due.]

**Session B — Experiments continued**

- [On Blackboard] Babbie (2008), Validity issues in experimental research, p.255-265.

- [On Blackboard] Jonah Berger and Chip Heath. Who Drives Divergence? Identity Signaling, Outgroup Dissimilarity, and the Abandonment of Cultural Tastes. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 95(3):593–607, January 2008.

**Week 14 Nov 25 ~ 29, 2013**

**Session A — Ethics in research**

- Ch 10 of Huff book.

**Session B — Thanksgiving break.**

**Week 15 Dec 2 ~ 6, 2013**

**Session A — Review for Exam 3**

**Session B — Exam 3**

**Week 16 2pm-4pm Tuesday, Dec 17, 2013**

- **Final Report Due at 2pm for Submission on Blackboard**

Have a great winter break!