

USC Annenberg School of Communication
COM 301: Empirical Research in Communication (4 units)
Fall 2015
Schedule # 20458R

Professor: Dr. Carmen M. Lee

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Office Hours: Tues., 11:00-1:00 p.m.,
Wed. 2:30-3:30 p.m., & by appt.

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Meeting Time: **Tues. & Thurs., 9:30-10:50 a.m.**

Class Location: ASC 231

Course Description

This course examines the assumptions underlying quantitative research methods such as survey, experimental, and content analysis research designs. Moreover, we will explore the statistical tools of analysis necessary to understand and interpret findings from such methodologies. The course outlines how to design research to test issues of theoretical importance and measure constructs of interest. The course also exposes students to a variety of measurement issues (e.g., reliability and validity) and approaches (e.g., self-report measures and coding). Students will practice evaluating the design and measurement of research articles. Also, you will design, execute, and report your own research. In so doing, the knowledge and skills essential to the conduct of empirical research, data analysis, and interpretation will be developed. As a practical matter, this course should help you to become a better consumer of the knowledge claims presented to you in your daily life.

Course Objectives

The major objective of this course is to provide you with an understanding of quantitative research methods and statistical procedures often employed in communication research. More specific learning objectives include:

- To recognize the relationship between theory and research methods;
- To comprehend and implement a variety of research designs;
- To comprehend and implement a variety of measurement techniques;
- To practice critical evaluation of research articles;
- To facilitate the independent conduction and report of research.

Required Readings:

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

The textbook (T) is accompanied by an *Online Companion Website* that provides interactive resources such as answers to select textbook exercises, sample quizzes, and suggested readings or web resources. The link is: <http://college.holycross.edu/projects/approaches5>.

All additional required readings/course materials will be made available on Blackboard (Bb).

Recommended Supplemental Materials:

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

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

SPSS 22 or SPSS 23 Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (also known as IBM SPSS).

IBM SPSS provides a Graduate Standard Pack version that is a fraction of the regular price.

NOTE: SPSS 23 also can be rented for 6- or 12-months at a reduced rate: <http://www.onthehub.com/spss/>

Computer Access:

IBM SPSS 22 is available on computers in the following USC Computing Centers: Ahmanson Information Commons at Leavey Library, King Hall (KOH 206), Salvatori Computer Science Center (SAL 125), and Waite Phillips Hall (WPH B34). Moreover, SPSS offers an inexpensive graduate package for rental or purchase. It is your responsibility to ensure that you have access to a computer that can perform the necessary functions for completion of assignments.

Course Requirements**Responsible attendance is expected.**

Students who do miss a class meeting are expected to have read the material *and* actively find out what they missed. You should approach another classmate for missed lecture notes and, if clarification is needed, meet with your Instructor. Instructor lecture notes or PowerPoint slides are not provided to students in the course. If a student is missing a class on the day an assignment is due, the student should make arrangements for that assignment to be turned in on time.

1. Class Participation/Preparation

Students are expected to: (1) read the assigned readings *before* class, (2) come to each class prepared to discuss the reading assignments, and (3) actively participate in the class. Participation in class does not just mean talking! Good class participation involves coming to class on time with questions about the readings to share with the class, volunteering answers to questions that are insightful, actively listening to others' contribution to discussion, and moving the discussion along toward a shared understanding. On occasion, students will be required to complete in-class assignments as part of their class participation. Weekly attendance is expected and essential for participation credit. Class participation is worth 5% of your final grade.

2. Assignments

In order to facilitate your understanding of course material, you will be assigned a series of twelve (12) homework assignments. These assignments will take various forms. You will read research articles and critique the various research methods utilized; you will develop a short survey and coding scheme; you will complete statistical procedures by hand; and after concepts have been covered in class, you will conduct a statistical test on a specific dataset and write-up the results (per expected guidelines). Descriptions of all assignments will be made available on Blackboard. Assignments are worth 25% of your final grade.

To be accepted, all completed assignments must: (1) be neat and readable (i.e., written responses should be clear), (2) show each step to any statistical procedure (this aids the instructor, and also you in understanding how you thought through your answers), (3) provide clean copies and label all relevant documents for computer generated answers (i.e. provide the SPSS output with answers labeled on the printout), and (4) be turned in on time.

Assignments fall under a 'work alone' policy. That is, unless otherwise noted, all assignments should be completed individually without the assistance or advice of ANYONE (except the Instructor or TA). Collaboration with others on any of these assignments is counterproductive to individual learning objectives. Assignments that suggest violation of this edict (i.e., similar pattern of mistakes or writing) will receive a zero.

3. Exams

There will be three (3) exams given throughout the course. The exams are NOT cumulative; however concepts do build upon each other. Exams will consist of true/false, multiple-choice questions, fill-in-the-blank, short answer questions, and the interpretation of SPSS statistical output. There will be a review prior to each exam. The review will consist of students asking questions to verify lecture and reading content, but not re-lecturing of course material. All exams are to be taken in class on the designated exam dates. Your exams will not be returned to you, but you are welcome to come during office hours or make an appointment to peruse your exam if desired. Each exam is worth 15% of your final grade.

In the rare event that an *extreme* emergency arises (i.e., you were in the hospital, there was a death in the family, etc.), it is your responsibility to: (1) inform your Instructor prior to the scheduled exam time, and (2) provide the Instructor with written documentation of the emergency (e.g., medical note from a certified physician) that can be verified. If your excuse can be verified, you will be allowed to make up the missed exam at the discretion of the Instructor. Exam I will be held on **September 22, 2015**; Exam II will be held on **November 3, 2015**; Exam III will be held on **December 10, 2015 (11:00-1:00 p.m.)**.

4. Research Project

This research project will reflect the culmination of your training in quantitative research methods and statistics. In groups of no more than two (2), you will choose a topic of interest and an accompanying research methodology (e.g., content analysis, survey, or experiment). You will then develop testable hypotheses and/or research questions based on existing literature, gather data and write-up your research findings. In order to assist in your completion of your project, benchmarks will be imposed. The benchmark completions are worth 10% of your final grade.

Research partners who fail to contribute equally to the project may receive deductions up to a grade of zero. If you have a research partner who is not pulling his/her weight, contact me immediately. If you do not contact me well in advance, please do not complain about your partner's lack of work on the project. Given enough lead-time, I can assist in the situation.

5. Research Paper

The research paper will be similar in format to an empirical research article. Papers should be double-spaced, typed pages following APA format. The research paper should be submitted via Turnitin on Blackboard and email (with the required documents: codebook, SPSS output, and dataset). **A more detailed description can be found in the Research Project/Paper Description on Blackboard.** The final research paper is worth 15% of your final grade.

Assessment:

You will be assessed on the following requirements:

| <u>Requirements</u> | <u>% Of Final Grade</u> | <u>Point Equivalent</u> | <u>Date Due</u> |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Classroom Participation | 5% | 50 | <i>weekly</i> |
| Assignments (12) | 25% | 250 | <i>vary</i> |
| Exam I | | 150 | 09/22/15 |
| Exam II | 45% | 150 | 11/03/15 |
| Exam III | | 150 | 12/10/15 |
| Research Project Benchmarks (5) | 10% | 100 | 9/03, 9/24, 10/15, 11/05, 11/24 |
| <u>Research Paper</u> | 15% | <u>150</u> | 12/05/15 |
| <i>Total</i> | | <i>1000 pts. Possible</i> | |

Grading

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

| <u>Points</u> | <u>%</u> | <u>Grade</u> | <u>Points</u> | <u>%</u> | <u>Grade</u> |
|---------------|----------|--------------|---------------|----------|--------------|
| 940-1000 | 94-100 | A | 730-769 | 73-76 | C |
| 900-939 | 90-93 | A- | 700-729 | 70-72 | C- |
| 870-899 | 87-89 | B+ | 670-699 | 67-69 | D+ |
| 830-869 | 83-86 | B | 630-669 | 63-66 | D |
| 800-829 | 80-82 | B- | 600-629 | 60-62 | D- |
| 770-799 | 77-79 | C+ | 0-599 | ≤59 | F |

Course Policies

Academic Integrity Policy

The Annenberg School of Communication maintains a commitment to the highest standards of ethical conduct and academic excellence. Any student found responsible for plagiarism, fabrication, cheating on examinations, or purchasing papers or other assignments will be reported to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards and may be dismissed from the School of Communication. There are no exceptions to the school's policy (University of Southern California Catalogue, 2014-2015, p. 352).

USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include 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. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles as set forth in [*SCampus*](#).

Disability Service Accommodations

If you are a student with a disability and believe you will need accommodations for this class, it is your responsibility to contact Disability Services and Programs (DSP). You need to make a request with DSP for each academic term that accommodations are desired. To avoid any delay in the receipt of your accommodations, you are encouraged to do this no later than the first week of class. Students taking courses in the Annenberg School of Communication will need to share and discuss their letters with their Instructor and forward a letter to the Office of the Director (ATTN: DSP). Please note that accommodations are not retroactive, and that accommodations based upon disability cannot be provided until you have presented your Instructor with an accommodation letter from DSP. Your cooperation is appreciated. Disability Services & Program contact information: (213) 740-0776 or http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html

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.

Incomplete Work (IN)

A mark of incomplete is used to reflect work not completed because of documented illness or some other emergency occurring after the twelfth week of the semester; arrangements for the IN and its completion should be initiated by the student and agreed by the Instructor prior to the final exam. Incompletes will be given only when all University requirements pertaining to them are met. Marks of IN must be completed within one year from the date of the assignment of the IN (USC Catalogue, 2014-2015, p. 24).

Turnitin.com

Students agree that by taking this course all required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to Turnitin.com for the detection of plagiarism. All submitted papers will be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of such papers. You may submit your papers in such a way that no personal identifying information is included.

Recording Policy

Students may not record any portion of a classroom lecture, discussion, or review **without the prior and explicit written permission of the course instructor**. The unauthorized use of any form of device to audiotape, photograph, video-record or otherwise reproduce (in whole or in part) lectures, course notes, or teaching materials provided by the instructor is forbidden. Students registered with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) who are unable to take or read notes have the right to audio record class lectures for their personal study only. Lectures recorded for this purpose may not be shared with other people without the consent of the Instructor. Furthermore, permission granted for recording of a lecture, discussion, or review

also requires the observation of privacy guidelines and regulations for students in the class whose presence or statements might also be recorded.

Consultations

You are more than welcome to contact me in my office, email me, attend office hours, or set up a meeting time. Please do not wait until the night before an assignment is due to realize that you do not understand it. If you experience difficulty in this course for any reason, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Additional Resources

Student Counseling Services: (213) 740-7711 or <http://engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling/>

Student Counseling Services Counseling Center provides mental health treatment for students as well as assistance with developmental issues (e.g., intimate relationships, cultural adjustment, and identity development). Moreover, they provide assistance to students struggling with emotional urgent concerns. Student Counseling Services is located in Engemann Student Health Center, 1031 W. 34th Street.

ITS Customer Support Center (CSC): (213) 740-5555 or <http://itservices.usc.edu/students/>

The ITS Customer Support Center (CSC) provides support to the USC community for connecting to the USC Network and using supported applications. For help with network connectivity and software, contact CSC. Walk-in support is available in Leavey Library's Information Commons.