

**COMM 305: Understanding Social Science Research
2016 Summer
Tuesdays and Thursdays, 10:00-2:10pm, ANN 211**

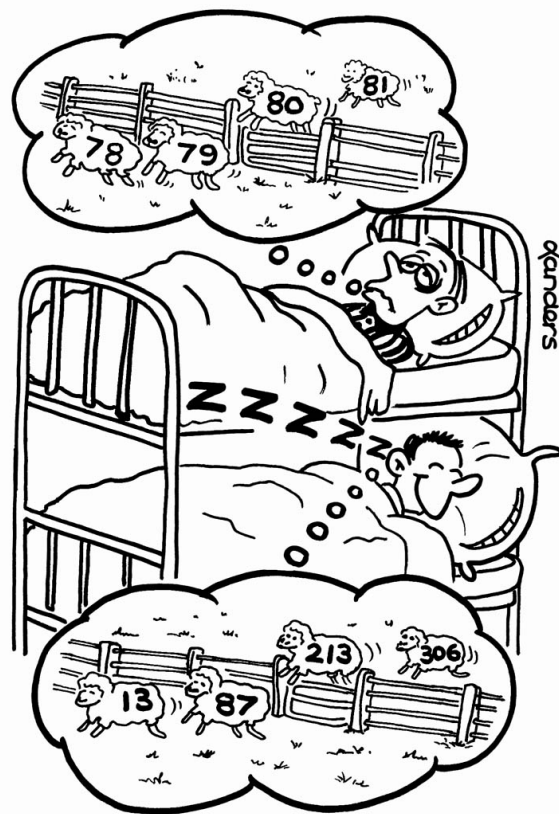
Instructor: Dr. Rong Wang

Email: rongw@usc.edu

Office hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 3:30-5pm and by appointment

Office: ASC G6 (west wing of the ASC building)

Course Website URL: <https://blackboard.usc.edu/webapps/login/>



*Statisticians fall asleep faster by
taking a random sample of sheep.*

Course description

COMM305, Understanding Social Science Research, is designed to introduce students to the basics of quantitative communication research. It provides you with the knowledge, skills, and resources needed to design, conduct, analyze, write up, and present original empirical research in communication. Lectures will focus on the conceptual aspects of research, such as developing research questions, building measurements, sampling, designing methods, and analyzing data. You will be putting the knowledge gained from the course material and lectures into practice, by working on an original research project development.

Course objectives

When you complete the 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 conduct a full research paper.

Course material

- Lecture outlines, journal articles, and project materials – available on Blackboard
- SPSS is available in USC computer labs. *If you would like to have it on your laptops, IBM® SPSS® Statistics Base GradPack is available for 6 month rental, see onthehub.com/spss.*
- *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (6th ed.). (2009). Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association. (ISBN 1-4338-0561-8, ppk)

Note: Come to class having done all of your readings. All the readings and assignments are subject to change, depending on the class progress.

Evaluation of performance

Your grade will be calculated based on the following formula:

- Exam 1 20%
- Exam 2 20%
- Research project 30% (Final paper and presentation)
- Homework assignments 15%
- Attendance and participation 15%

Note: Extra credit opportunities (up to 2% maximum) may be available though not guaranteed.

This course uses the following grading scheme:

Letter Grade	Grade Range
A	93-100%
A-	90-92.99%
B+	87-89.99%
B	83-86.99%
B-	80-82.99%
C+	77-79.99%
C	73-76.99%
C-	70-72.99%
D	60-69.99%
F	59.99% or less

Examinations

There will be two examinations for this course, and they generally hold the following format:

- Multiple choice questions
- Short answer questions
- Analysis questions

Latter examinations may be cumulative in part due to the nature of this course, as information learned later in the course builds upon previous knowledge. The purpose is not to impose a burden on you, but is due to the fact that in research, decisions made in early phases shape the available options in the study's later phases.

Requests to take examinations on other dates will be considered only for unexpected, justifiable and documentable reasons.

Research project

The research project is meant to enable you to apply your knowledge of research (that you are learning from your text book, readings, and lecture) to the process of actually doing meaningful research. The end deliverable for this project is a final paper (about 10-15 pages long), which could take the form of a research design or research paper with data analysis.

To help you make progress and get the feedback that you'll need to succeed, the project is broken into multiple segments with specific deliverables. Parts of the course sessions will focus on getting this project done. And we will do it together!

A note about statistics

The thought of statistics may scare some of you. While we do cover statistics in this course, this is not a statistics course. We focus on the CONCEPTUAL elements of statistics and emphasize the PRACTICAL implications of statistics in areas such as management and marketing.

Assignments

There will be 3 assignments – see document reading and assignment schedule. All the homework assignments must be completed in order to pass this course. Some will be done individually, and some with your teammate. Most will serve as milestones toward completion of your final paper. Late assignments will receive half credit at most. However, the homework must still be completed to pass this course.

All assignments will be uploaded to Blackboard.

Attendance and participation in class

Attendance will be taken. The goal is punctual attendance and active participation in class sessions.

One absence from lecture will be excused without penalty. For this absence, you need not tell me why. Thereafter, the second absence costs 1% of the total grade, the third 2%, the fourth 3%. Absence beyond the fourth open the possibility that you may fail the course. We cover a lot of material in class sessions, and being absent will significantly hurt your ability to succeed in this course. However, if you have a legitimate reason for absence—such as illnesses or family emergencies—these will be accepted. Please communicate with me ahead of time and we can discuss the work that needs to be done to compensate for such absences.

For participation, come to class prepared, having done your readings, and be ready to discuss the material. Asking questions or contributing to the discussion counts as participation. I will not reward and may penalize disrespectful behavior toward other students or ourselves, or indifferent engagement. An example is surfing social media during class to the point of being distracted from class content.

Academic Integrity

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.

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.

This course places high demands in bringing together existing knowledge on a topic and acknowledging these sources in your writing. Hence, opportunities to commit plagiarism are numerous. You must understand what constitutes plagiarism and not commit it. In particular, see SCampus Section 11: <http://web-app.usc.edu/scampus/1100-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions/>. You cannot plead ignorance. All submitted work for this course may be subject to an originality review as performed by Turnitin technologies (<http://www.turnitin.com>) to find textual similarities with other Internet content or previously submitted student work. Students of this course retain the copyright of their own original work, and Turnitin is not permitted to use student-submitted work for any other purpose than (a) performing an originality review of the work, and (b) including that work in the database against which it checks other student-submitted work.

USC Policy for students with disabilities

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 this letter is delivered to your instructor as early in the semester as possible. DSP is open Monday-Friday, 8:30-5:00. The office is in the Student Union 301 and their phone number is (213) 740-0776.

Course Outline (tentative)

Class 1 May 19 Thursday: Introduction and Orientation

Introduction to the class
Review of the syllabus
Introduction to Communication research
Defining research questions and testable question and hypotheses
Ethics and making claims

Class 2 May 24 Tuesday: Survey

Sampling
Unit of analysis
Level of measurement
Reliability and validity

Causality

Assignment 1 Due Friday 27

Class 3 May 26 Thursday: Survey - continued

Qualtrics (USC portal) demo and questionnaire construction
Strengths and weaknesses of surveys
Understanding quantitative research findings
Individual research project and data collection plans

Class 4 May 31 Tuesday: Getting familiar with SPSS

Set up sample dataset and input data
Basic data manipulation in SPSS
Descriptive statistics with SPSS
Inferential statistics and hypothesis testing: correlation, Chi-square and T-test
Writing up analysis findings

Assignment 1 Due Friday 27

Class 5 June 2 Thursday: Social Network Analysis (SNA)

Understanding communication studies from a network perspective
Basic concepts with SNA
Social network revolution
How to collect network data
Introduction to SNA tools: NodeXL, UCINET, NetDraw, and Gephi
Individual project update and feedback

Class 6 June 7 Tuesday: Social Network Analysis (SNA) - continued

Descriptive network analysis
Network Visualization
Discussion on social media for communication research
Mid-term review

Exam 1 – Take-home test, due Monday June 13th 10am

Class 7 June 9 Thursday: How to conduct good literature review

Introduction to APA
How to conduct literature search
Review existing relevant literature
Writing an integrated literature review
Individual project update and feedback

Class 8 June 14 Tuesday: Experiment

When to use experiment as a research method
Basic principles of experiment design

Review strengths and weakness of experiments and how to design an effective experiment

Assignment 2 Due June 17th 10am

Class 9 June 16 Thursday: Experiment – continued

Recruiting participants

How to analyze and interpret experiment data

Work on individual research projects: start data collection

Class 10 June 21 Tuesday: Content analysis

Data sources

Developing coding schemes

Practice coding

Work on individual research projects

Assignment 3 Due June 24th 10am

Class 11 June 23 Thursday: Practical implications of communication research

Case studies of applying research techniques in marketing, audience analysis and public relations, etc.

Exam 2 review

Class 12 June 28 Tuesday: Project presentation

Exam 2 – Take-home test, due July 1th 10am