

COMM 301L: Empirical Research in Communication

Summer 2005 TTh

Course syllabus

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Course description

This course aims to introduce students to the basic set of knowledge and skills needed to design and execute research. Lectures will focus on the conceptual aspects, such as developing research problems, building proper measurements, sampling, designing methods, and analyzing data. The laboratory sessions will focus on doing a research project that allows students to practice these knowledge and skills. When you complete this course, I hope that you will be equipped to move beyond being passive recipients of research, and become discriminating consumers and competent practitioners.

Course materials

- Textbook: *Principles of Research in Communication* (abbreviated as *PRC*; required)
- Lecture outlines and exercises (to be handed out in class)

Evaluation of performance

Examination 1	25%
Examination 2	25%
Final Examination	26%
Project	12%
Attendance and participation	10%
Instructors' judgment	02%

There are no extra credit activities.

Examinations (76% total)

There will be 3 examinations for this course, and they generally hold the following format:

- 8 to 15 multiple choice questions (about 20% of the examination's points);
- 5 to 8 fill in the blanks or short answer questions (about 15% of the examination's points);
- 5 to 8 analysis questions (about 65% of the examination's points).

The latter examinations may be cumulative in part. In general, I aim to have no more than 20% of the later examinations to test materials covered in prior examinations. The purpose is not to impose excessive burdens on you during examinations; the purpose instead is to highlight the inter-linked nature of many decisions we make in designing research methods: decisions made in the earlier phases of the study will shape the available options in the study's later phases.

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Project (12%)

The research project is meant to give you the experience of conducting research in an abbreviated and meaningful way. The end deliverable for this project is a paper (about 7 pages long). Your laboratory sessions will focus on getting this project done.

The main point you need to know about the project now is that you could work alone or work in teams of 2 people. I will give much more details about the project in time.

Attendance and participation (10%)

This part of the evaluation is designed to set incentives for punctual attendance and active participation in class sessions. I take attendance in both lectures and laboratory sessions. Arriving past five minutes into the class is considered poor form, and will represent a penalty. Participation can take many forms. One basic form is contribution to the class' learning experience when discussing materials. Generally, if you ask a meaningful question, or can help answer a question, or otherwise contribute to a discussion, that will count towards participation.

Generally, missing one lecture session is acceptable; missing two and more will adversely affect our evaluation of your performance. ***Certain lecture sessions are extremely important (such as the sessions devoted to data collection), and therefore carry a significant portion of the attendance-participation score.*** So, do not miss them if at all possible. Likewise, missing laboratory sessions can be problematic. So, do not miss laboratory sessions if you can help it at all.

However, if you fall ill, you should not neglect your health; take the time to rest. We will accept authentic medical excuses. However, medical conditions do not necessarily exempt your participation in the missed sessions. In such a situation, you must meet with the instructors to discuss how you can compensate for missing the sessions.

More generally, this principle applies to other authentic, justifiable crises that you may encounter in your life as the semester progresses. However, be very conservative in your interpretation of what constitutes a justifiable crisis. Sudden life-threatening illness, or death in the family is a crisis; deciding to recover from a weekend partying in Cancun is not.

Instructors' judgment (2%)

This small portion of the evaluation focuses on the less tangible aspects. Generally, it may be awarded to a student who has contributed to the class in ways that the other parts of the evaluation cannot capture. Qualities such as enthusiasm, initiative, and consideration for peers count. Also, I am inclined to **reward effort and improvement**. What I will not reward, among other things, is disrespectful behavior towards other students or me.

Note that this 2% is **entirely** at my discretion. I may or may not award it.

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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 of the Communication major or minor.

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 TA or professor 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.

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May 19, 2005 (Th)	<p>Course introduction</p> <p>Developing researchable questions (PRC, Ch. 2)</p> <p>Access to the community (PRC, Ch. 3)</p> <p><u>Lab</u>: Organize project work; define research topics and questions; search for prior research</p>
May 24, 2005 (T)	<p>Science and ways of knowing (PRC, Ch. 1)</p> <p>Building good measures: levels of measurement (PRC, Ch. 4)</p> <p>Introduction to statistical tests</p> <p><u>Lab</u>: Search and review existing research; look for designs and measurements you can use.</p>
May 26, 2005 (Th)	<p>Survey design (PRC, Ch. 9)</p> <p>Experimental designs (PRC, Ch. 8)</p> <p><u>Lab</u>: Search and review of prior research; building decent measurements</p> <p>Due: Choice of research topic; draft of research questions; initial results of search for prior research</p>
May 31, 2005 (T)	<p>Experimental designs (PRC, Ch. 8)</p> <p>Content analysis design (PRC, Ch. 10)</p>
June 2, 2005 (Th)	<p>Review for Examination 1</p> <p><u>Lab</u>: Work on project</p> <p>Due: Summaries of prior research; refined research questions and hypotheses</p>
June 7, 2005 (T)	<p>Examination 1</p> <p>Building good measures: measurement reliability and measurement validity (PRC, Ch. 4)</p>
June 9, 2005 (Th)	<p>Building good measures: measurement reliability and measurement validity (PRC, Ch. 4)</p> <p>Relationships and causation; rival hypotheses (PRC, Ch. 2, Ch. 8 p. 81-82; others)</p> <p>Validity in research (PRC, Ch. 7)</p> <p>Lab: Work on project</p> <p>Due: Draft of operationalization of methods, including manipulation of variables (if applicable), all measurements, researcher protocols, and so on.</p>
June 14, 2005 (T)	<p>Project activity: data collection</p>
June 16, 2005 (Th)	<p>Sampling (PRC, Ch. 5)</p> <p>Review for Examination 2</p>

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June 21, 2005 (T)	Examination 2 Setting up data in SPSS Basic data manipulations in SPSS Testing scale reliabilities
June 23, 2005 (Th)	Descriptive statistics: distributions, measures of central tendency and measures of variability <u>Lab</u> : Work on project; set up data set.
June 28, 2005 (T)	Hypothesis testing <u>Lab</u> : Work on project; set up data set.
June 30, 2005 (Th)	Statistics: t-tests, correlation, and chi-square
July 5, 2005 (T)	Statistics: t-tests, correlation, and chi-square Lab: Continue working on project; run statistical tests
July 7, 2005 (Th)	Review for Final Examination Due: paper reporting the research project
July 12, 2005 (T)	Final Examination