

COMM 301: Empirical Research in Communication

“Statistical thinking will one day be as necessary a qualification for efficient citizenship as the ability to read and write.” – H. G. Wells

Instructor: L. Paul Strait

Email: strait@usc.edu

Office: ASC G4 (basement of west wing)

Office Hours: M 1:00pm-2:00pm; By Appt.

Course: COMM 301

Term: Summer 2012

Classroom: AHF 259

Class Hours: MWF 9:00am - 11:50am

Check your email linked to Blackboard regularly. I will send detailed information about course deliverables and events through Blackboard’s email system.

Course Description

This course introduces you to the basic set of knowledge and skills needed to design, execute, and criticize research. Lectures will focus on the conceptual aspects, such as developing research problems, building proper measurements, sampling, designing methods, and analyzing data. You will also develop basic competence with SPSS, a statistical analysis software application commonly used by social science researchers. When you complete this course, my hope is that you will become discriminating consumers and competent practitioners of research.

Course Materials

Required Text:

Wrench, J. S., Thomas-Maddox, C., Richmond, V. P., & McCroskey, J. C. (2008). *Quantitative research methods for communication: A hands-on approach*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Recommended Text:

Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 6th ed. (2010). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Additional readings will be made available in PDF format on the class Blackboard site.

Important Websites:

American Psychological Association's style website-- <http://www.apastyle.org>

National Communication Association – <http://www.natcom.org>

International Communication Association – <http://www.icahdq.org>

Interactive Statistical Calculation Page – <http://statpages.org/>

Research Methods Knowledge Base – <http://trochim.human.cornell.edu/kb/>

Evaluation of Performance

Exams (Midterm: 15%; Final: 15%) – Exams will be a mix of multiple choice, short answer, and essay questions. The final will not be cumulative, though it will address certain topics from the first part of the course that are interconnected to topics from the second part of the course.

Research Proposal (40%, see below)– At the end of the semester, you will turn in a full research proposal that introduces your topic, reviews relevant literature, presents a hypothesis, and fully describes the methods with which you could test this hypothesis. You will use Qualtrics to design your survey instrument. You will turn in drafts of many of the components of this proposal throughout the semester:

Topic – choose a topic that interests you. It must be related to the study of communication, but beyond that it can be most any aspect of human communication. Due: Monday, July 2

Initial Literature Review (5%) – Identify 5-6 articles on the topic (the two most helpful places to look are the Communication & Mass Media Complete database and google scholar). At this point begin to narrow your topic and develop your hypotheses/research questions. Due: Monday, July 9

Hypotheses/Research Questions (5%) – develop one hypothesis or research question that your study will address. In addition, limit the number of variables that you will study within each hypothesis/research question to two (one IV and one DV). This must be very carefully and precisely worded. Due: Friday, July 13

Complete Literature Review (10%) – Thoroughly read about your topic and the theories directly related to your study, refine your hypothesis/research question if appropriate. Due: Monday, July 23

Survey (5%) – Choose the scales and questions that you want your sample to complete. You may develop a scale specifically for your study and/or use scales that have already been developed. Due: Friday, July 27

Methods (5%) – Design your study. Determine what questions will be asked, in what order the questions will be asked, whom you will ask, how you will obtain your subjects, and how you will analyze your data. You need to focus on making your study as valid and as replicable as possible. Due: Wednesday, August 1

Final Paper (10%) – Consists of revisions of the above, in four sections: Introduction, Literature Review (with hypothesis), Methods, and an Appendix with the survey instrument. Due: Tuesday, August 7

Assignments and Participation (30%) – Short assignments will be given out throughout the semester, usually involving SPSS. These are technically homework assignments but some time in class will be designated to work on them. Attendance is

mandatory, particularly given our compressed time period. I expect you to do the readings in advance of class, and given how small this class is, it will be obvious if you do not.

This course uses the following grading scheme:

A	95% or higher
A-	90%-94%
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

There are significant penalties for late assignments (e.g., half of possible score for homework assignments, and -2% per day late for proposal components). If your assignment is received even one minute late, the penalties will apply. This is not because I am petty and vindictive, but rather because I want to encourage behaviors that contribute to success. Fundamental to success is punctual delivery of assignments.

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.

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.

Tentative Schedule:

Wed 6/27 – Course introduction
Fri 6/29 – Chapters 1-3
Mon 7/2 – Chapters 6-7, *Due: Topic*
Wed 7/4 – No Class, Independence Day
Fri 7/6 – Appendix A
Mon 7/9 – Chapter 8; *Due: Initial Literature Review (rev: chp 8-9)*
Wed 7/11 – Chapters 9-10 (**rev: chp 10**).
Fri 7/13 – Chapter 11; *Due: Hypothesis/Research Question*
Mon 7/16 – Chapters 12-13 (**rev: chp 12**).
Wed 7/18 – Chapter 14 (**rev: chp 13**).
Fri 7/20 – Midterm Exam
Mon 7/23 – Chapter 15; *Due: Complete Literature Review (rev: no reading)*.
Wed 7/25 – Chapter 16 (**rev: chp 14-15**)
Fri 7/27 – Chapters 17-18; *Due: Survey (rev: chp 16)*
Mon 7/30 – Chapter 19 (**rev: chp 17-18**)
Wed 8/1 – Chapter 20; *Due: Methods (rev: chp 19-20)*
Fri 8/3 – Chapter 21
Mon 8/6 – Final Exam
Tue 8/7 – No class; *Due: Final Paper*