

COM 520: Applied Mass Communication Research
Shippensburg University, Spring 2018
Wednesdays, 6:30 – 9:15 p.m., Rowland Hall 202

<p>Professor: Kyle Heim, Ph.D. Office: Rowland Hall 123 Office hours: Tue. & Thurs., 12:30 – 2:30 p.m. Wed., 4 – 5 p.m. or by appointment</p>	<p>Professor's email: krheim@ship.edu Office phone: (717) 477-1152 Course website: http://d21.ship.edu</p>
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Course description

In this course, students will learn a variety of quantitative and qualitative communication research techniques. In addition to these practical matters, broader issues such as research philosophies and ethics will also be addressed through readings and class discussion. It is expected that this course will provide strong preparation for professional projects and a position as a researcher for a communications firm.

The first portion of the course is devoted mostly to learning and demonstrating various techniques to solve practical communication research problems. This includes (but is not limited to) examining research fundamentals, methods, and procedures; understanding measurement, sampling, and issues such as reliability and validity; and data analysis and interpretation of descriptive and inferential statistics. An emphasis will be placed on the practical application of course material in several areas of mass communication such as research in advertising, public relations, print media, and electronic media.

The second portion of the course will be devoted mostly to a semester project. The aim of the semester project will be to produce a professional research proposal/prospectus that could be submitted to an outside agency for funding and/or further developed for a full-scale research study for submission to an academic conference and/or journal. The ideal project will be grounded in theory, will pose an interesting communication-related question and show the pathway to answering this question in such a way as to contribute to our knowledge about mass communication phenomena. In addition to a literature review, the semester project will include a strong introduction and justification for the study, a detailed methods section, and a results section that includes the appropriate statistical analyses of pilot data that will be collected during the semester. The proposal also should explain the practical relevance of the research to the field of mass communication. Additional project guidelines will be distributed and discussed in class.

This class may require fieldwork and/or outside expenditures. For example, you may need to survey community members or photocopy a printed survey form. You may need to purchase materials for your research project and presentation. Due to the technical nature of the course, students familiar with statistics and/or SPSS will find this knowledge advantageous in this course.

Consistent with standard research practice in this field, submissions should be prepared following the writing standards and practices of APA style. Spelling, grammar, and punctuation always count.

Special note about COM 520

This is a rigorous and demanding course that will require several hours of work outside of class each week. Students are encouraged to keep up with the readings and assignments and to visit the instructor's

office hours when necessary. Please expect to have several assignments each week (announced in class). Students are also encouraged to meet with the instructor individually throughout the semester during the various phases of the research project.

Required textbook

Wimmer, R. D. & Dominick, J. R. (2014). *Mass media research: An introduction* (10th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Other required materials

- Access to a computer lab with SPSS software.
- A copy of the APA Stylebook (6th edition) is strongly recommended.
- Additional readings (provided on D2L) may be assigned during the semester.

Course goals

- To introduce the scientific method of inquiry used in the social sciences, particularly as they inform communication research.
- To survey basic concepts of theoretical and empirical research in the field of communication.
- To enable students to critically analyze mass communication research and identify threats to validity of inferences.
- To help students design and conduct a communication research project proposal by training them to formulate questions, develop appropriate methods for generating the data needed for answering those questions, conduct data analysis and produce original work.

Course objectives

Upon successful completion of the course, students will be able to:

- Develop an understanding of the research process.
- Concisely define problems.
- Find and analyze existing research.
- Develop research questions and hypotheses.
- Understanding issues of validity and reliability.
- Construct questionnaires.
- Develop focus group agendas.
- Develop basic code for content analyses.
- Understand sampling issues.
- Conduct data analysis using SPSS (descriptive and inferential statistics).

Professional values and competencies

The Communication/Journalism Department faculty sets the goal of developing within each student core professional values and competencies as defined by the Accrediting Council for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (ACEJMC). The following competencies are addressed in this course:

- Understand concepts and apply theories in the use and presentation of images and information
- Demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity
- Think critically, creatively and independently

- Conduct research and gather information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they work
- Write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve
- Critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness
- Apply basic numerical and statistical concepts
- Apply tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work

Email and D2L

Please check your Shippensburg email account and D2L regularly, including before class. I frequently use email and D2L to communicate important class information to students, including any class cancellations due to illness, inclement weather or other unforeseen circumstances. When corresponding with me by email, **please include a subject line and mention that the email is regarding COM 520.** I respond to emails as quickly as I can, but **please allow 24 hours for a response or up to 48 hours on a weekend.**

Attendance and classroom etiquette

- **Attendance for this course is mandatory.** Students are expected to arrive for class on time and be prepared, engaged and ready to participate. Excused absences will be granted only in extreme cases and with appropriate documentation. If you miss a class, you are responsible for all missed work during your absence. Please do not expect a deadline extension for assignments, and do not expect the instructor to make alternate arrangements for you to make up work that was completed during a missed class.
- Please observe basic courtesy during class. **Cell phones are to be turned off or silenced and put away. Computer monitors are to be turned off during lecture sessions. No food or drink is permitted in the computer labs.**

Grading and evaluation

Grades will be recorded on the course D2L site. It is your responsibility to monitor your grades. Questions about grades should be raised when an assignment is returned, not at the end of the semester.

A total of **400 points** are available during the semester, broken down as follows:

Research Project	180 points (45% of overall grade)
Topic Proposal (Abstract)	10 points
Topic Summary	10 points
Draft of IRB Application	10 points
Draft of Survey Instrument	10 points
Poster and Minds@Work Conference	40 points
Research Paper	100 points
Exam	120 points (30% of overall grade)
Assignments (In and Out of Class)	60 points (15% of overall grade)
Sampling Assignment	15 points
Qualitative Data Analysis Assignment	15 points
Statistics Assignment	15 points
APA Style Assignment	15 points
Class Participation and Attendance	40 points (10% of overall grade)
TOTAL	400 points

Point totals at the end of the semester will be converted to letter grades using the following scale:

Point Total	Grade	Point Total	Grade	Point Total	Grade
372 – 400 (93%)	A	332 – 347.5 (83%)	B	280 – 299.5 (70%)	C
360 – 371.5 (90%)	A-	320 – 331.5 (80%)	B-	240 – 279.5 (60%)	D
348 – 359.5 (87%)	B+	300 – 319.5 (75%)	C+	0 – 239.5	F

Academic dishonesty policy

Plagiarism and cheating will not be tolerated in this course and will be handled according to the University's Academic Dishonesty Policy found in the 2016-2018 Shippensburg University Graduate Catalog (<http://ship.smartcatalogiq.com/2016-2018/Graduate-Catalog/Copy-of-Academic-Policies-and-Procedures/Academic-Dishonesty>). *All instances of academic dishonesty will be reported to the department, Dean's Office and Office of Student Affairs.* Penalties for violation of the Academic Dishonesty Policy include grade reduction, assignment of a failing grade for the course, suspension and expulsion from the university.

Learning Center resources

If you feel you need extra help to improve your academic performance in this course or any of your other courses, please consider making an appointment with a tutor or learning specialist in the Learning Center (LC). The LC is located on the lower level of Lehman Library and can also be reached at 717-477-1420.

Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) statement

Students with disabilities are not required by law to identify themselves to SU and the Office of Disability Services; however, if a student desires accommodations, he or she is obligated to complete the necessary forms and provide disability documentation at the time other requests are made. It is the policy of Shippensburg University to accommodate students with disabilities, pursuant to federal law, state law, and the University's commitment to equal education opportunities. Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact the Office of Disability Services at the *beginning* of the term (120 Horton Hall; 717-477-1329).

Commitment to a safe learning environment

Shippensburg University faculty support a safe campus environment for all. No one on this campus has the right to threaten you or make you feel intimidated in any way. More specifically, unwanted advances, harassment, aggressive or violent behavior, and sexual assault will not be tolerated. A comprehensive list of reporting options and support services, including confidential resources, can be found at http://www.ship.edu/no_more/.

Shippensburg University and its faculty are committed to assuring a safe and productive educational environment for all students. In order to meet this commitment and to comply with Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 and guidance from the Office for Civil Rights, the University requires faculty members to report incidents of sexual violence shared by students to the University's Title IX Coordinator. The only exceptions to the faculty member's reporting obligation are when incidents of sexual violence are communicated by a student during a classroom discussion, in a writing assignment for a class, or as part of a University-approved research project. Faculty members are obligated to report allegations of sexual violence or any other abuse of a student who was, or is, a child (a person under 18 years of age) when the abuse allegedly occurred. Such reporting must be made to the Shippensburg University Police at 477-1444, the Department of Human Services (DHS) at 800-932-0313, and the University's Office of the Vice President of Student Affairs at 477-1308. Information regarding the reporting of sexual violence and the resources that are available to victims of sexual violence can be found at: www.ship.edu/No_More/Sexual_Misconduct/Sexual_Misconduct_Information/

Tentative Course Schedule

This schedule is subject to change. Changes will be announced in class and via email or D2L. The timeline for the course may need to be adjusted for severe weather or other unforeseen circumstances. **All reading must be completed by the date on which it is listed.**

NOTE: Additional readings and assignments may be announced in class and/or posted on D2L. W&D refers to the Wimmer and Dominick *Mass Media Research* textbook. Students are responsible for completing all assigned readings and exercises each week.

WEEK 1 (Jan. 24)

- Course introduction
- Research basics

WEEK 2 (Jan. 31)

- Conceptualization, operationalization and measurement
- **READ:** W&D, Chapters 1 (Science and Research) and 2 (Elements of Research)
- **Come to class with some tentative ideas for the topic of your research project**

WEEK 3 (Feb. 7)

- Research questions and hypotheses; sampling
- **READ:** W&D, Chapters 4 (Sampling) and 11 (Hypothesis Testing)
- **DUE: Sampling assignment (due at start of class)**

WEEK 4 (Feb. 14)

- Survey research and questionnaire design
- **READ:** W&D, Chapter 7 (Survey Research)
- **DUE: Topic proposal**

WEEK 5 (Feb. 21)

- Experimental research; research ethics
- **READ:** W&D, Chapters 3 (Research Ethics) and 9 (Experimental Research)
- **DUE: Topic summary and registration for Minds@Work conference**

WEEK 6 (Feb. 28)

- Content analysis
- **READ:** W&D, Chapter 6 (Content Analysis)
- **DUE: Draft of IRB application and consent form**

WEEK 7 (March 7)

- Qualitative research methods
- **READ:** W&D, Chapter 5 (Qualitative Research Methods)
- **DUE: Draft of survey instrument**

March 14

- **NO CLASS (Spring break)**

WEEK 8 (March 21)

- Qualitative research methods (cont.); exam review; **Qualitative data analysis assignment in class**
- **DUE: Final IRB applications and survey instruments**

WEEK 9 (March 28)

- EXAM

WEEK 10 (April 4)

- Data analysis and statistics; introduction to SPSS
- **READ:** W&D, Chapters 10 (Introduction to Statistics) and 12 (Basic Statistical Procedures)

WEEK 11 (April 11)

- Data analysis and statistics (cont.)
- **DUE: Data collection must be completed by the start of class**

WEEK 12 (April 18)

- Writing the research report/proposal; APA style; **APA style assignment in class**
- **DUE: Email me a draft of your poster no later than TUESDAY, April 17, at noon.**
- **DUE: Statistics assignment (due at start of class)**

WEEK 13 (TUESDAY, April 24, 3:30 – 9 p.m.)

- **Project Presentations: Minds@Work Conference on TUESDAY, April 24** (details and schedule to be announced). This will serve as our class meeting for the week. No class on Wednesday evening.

WEEK 14 (May 2)

- Conference follow-up; discuss projects with classmates; course wrap-up
- **DUE: Research paper due Friday, May 4, by 5 p.m.** (submit on D2L)