
COM 520: Strategic Communication Research

Shippensburg University, Spring 2022 (Jan. 10-March 4)

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Weekly class meetings on Zoom, Mondays at 6:30 p.m.
All course materials will be posted to the course D2L site (<http://d2l.ship.edu>)

Office hours

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 11 a.m. – noon

Wednesdays, noon – 3 p.m.

Schedule an appointment at <https://calendly.com/krheim/officehours>.

You are always welcome to meet with me during office hours. Sign up for an appointment at the link listed above. You may choose to meet with me in my office (Rowland Hall 123) or via Zoom. If none of the available times works for you, please email me, and we can arrange a different date and time.

Course description

This course introduces students to several common research methods and their application to the strategic communication field. Students will learn how to conduct surveys, focus group interviews, and content analysis to examine communication messages and audiences. Students will learn strategies for analyzing and interpreting data to find solutions to practical communication problems.

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

Required textbook

Boyle, M. P., & Schmierbach, M. (2020). *Applied communication research methods: Getting started as a researcher*. **2nd edition**. ISBN: 978-0367178727.

Please have the textbook accessible during our Zoom meetings.



Course goals

- To introduce the scientific method of inquiry used in the social sciences, particularly as it informs strategic communication research.
- To survey basic concepts of theoretical and empirical research in the field of strategic communication.
- To enable students to critically analyze mass communication research and identify threats to validity of inferences.

- To help students design and conduct communication research by training them to formulate research 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.
- Find and analyze existing research.
- Develop research questions and hypotheses.
- Understand issues of validity and reliability.
- Construct surveys.
- Develop basic code for content analyses.
- Formulate focus group questions and a moderator’s guide.
- Understand sampling issues.

Professional competencies

In its guidelines for Certification in Education for Public Relations (CEPR), the Commission on Public Relations Education recommends that graduate curricula in public relations address several content areas. The content areas addressed in this course are indicated in bold:

- Strategic public relations management, best practices in a digital environment, crisis communication, risk communication, and written and oral communication skills
- Basic business principles and processes
- **Communications/public relations theory and research methods**
- **Ethics (ethical and legal issues)**
- Global influences on the practice of public relations (understanding of cross-cultural and intercultural communications, and public relations practices worldwide)

Course format and structure

COM 520 is **100% online**, using the university’s course management system, Desire2Learn (D2L) Brightspace (<http://d2l.ship.edu>), and Zoom online meeting software (<http://ship.zoom.us>). More information about using D2L and Zoom, including “how-to” videos, is available at <http://www.ship.edu/technology/student/resources/>.

D2L site: All course materials will be posted to the course D2L site. **It is your responsibility to check the site regularly and make sure you are completing all work and meeting deadlines.**

Weekly content modules: Clicking “Content” in the menu bar at the top of the D2L site will bring up a vertical listing of “modules,” organized by week. (NOTE: You will not see the modules for the full term. As the term progresses, I will make each week’s module available.) Clicking on a weekly module will bring up a listing of all materials for the week.

Zoom meetings: Each module will include a link and the password for the week’s Zoom meeting. (NOTE: It will be the same link and password each week.) **We will meet live (“synchronously”) as a class Mondays at 6:30 p.m.** We may not meet every week, but you should always assume that we are meeting unless I notify you otherwise (via D2L and/or email). The Zoom meetings will be used for announcements, discussions, assignment explanations, and some research exercises and practice. **Make sure that you have access to a laptop or desktop computer during the Zoom meetings, and have the textbook within reach.** The Zoom meetings will NOT be lectures. You are strongly encouraged to share your video during the meetings, which will make the meetings more personal and more productive. Be

sure to mute your audio when you are not speaking to the class. **NOTE:** If you need to miss a Zoom meeting because of illness, emergency, etc., please let me know via email.

Assigned reading: Most weeks will include assigned textbook reading. The reading load is intense. Pay close attention to the key concepts and terminology. You are encouraged to take notes.

Lecture videos: Watch any lecture videos posted to the week's module. I have uploaded the videos to YouTube and embedded them within D2L. (Let me know if a video is not playing properly.) These videos will expand on concepts introduced in the reading and provide additional examples and insights. You are encouraged to take notes. YouTube provides captions for the videos (although the captions may have errors), and you may pause the videos and change the playback speed.

Research assignments: These assignments will ask you to apply the research methods, procedures, and concepts discussed in the readings and videos. You also will be required to successfully complete CITI (Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative) training in research ethics. You will submit assignments to the appropriate assignment submission folder in D2L. **All assignments must be submitted by the due dates. Late assignments will receive a 10% deduction in points (approximately a full letter grade) for each day past the deadline**, unless appropriate arrangements were made in advance. Extensions are granted at my discretion and may require documentation of extreme circumstances, such as illness or an emergency. Extensions must be requested at least 24 hours before the assignment is due.

Final exam: You will complete a final exam at the end of the term. The exam will be comprehensive, covering all course material, and will feature a variety of question formats (multiple-choice, true-or-false, short-answer, short essay, etc.). You will take the exam on D2L, and it will be open-book and open-notes.

Email communication

In addition to checking the D2L site, please check your Ship email account regularly. I frequently use email to communicate important class information to students. I will contact you at your Ship email address (not your Gmail, Yahoo or other account).

When corresponding with me by email, please **use your Ship account and include a subject line.** **Always mention that the email is regarding COM 520.** Please allow 24 hours for a response or up to 48 hours on a weekend. I am always happy to answer a question, but check the syllabus and the D2L site to see if it can be answered there first.

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 **500 points** are available during the semester, broken down as follows:

Research Assignments	380 points (76% of overall grade)
Research Topic Assignment	20 points
Annotated Bibliography	40 points
Survey Assignment	100 points
Content Analysis Assignment	100 points
Focus Group Assignment	100 points
CITI Ethics Training	20 points
Final Exam (on D2L week of Feb. 28-March 4)	120 points (24% of overall grade)
TOTAL	500 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
465 – 500 (93%)	A	415 – 434.5 (83%)	B	350 – 374.5 (70%)	C
450 – 464.5 (90%)	A-	400 – 414.5 (80%)	B-	300 – 349.5 (60%)	D
435 – 449.5 (87%)	B+	375 – 399.5 (75%)	C+	0 – 299.5	F

NO incompletes will be issued for this course, except in emergency situations as defined by the University catalog.

Keeping copies of assignments and emails

Keep an electronic copy of all assignments and course-related email messages. Do not delete any course-related files or emails until you receive your final grade at the end of the semester. If there are questions about assignments, you may be asked to produce the original emails and files.

Technology help

I am happy to answer any questions regarding course content and assignments, but technical questions should be addressed to people who are much more knowledgeable about the technology:

D2L assistance: If you need technical assistance with the D2L system, contact the SU Student Helpdesk at (717) 477-HELP (x4357) or helpdesk@ship.edu. After hours, you may contact D2L Technical Support at helpdesk@d2l.com or (866) 832-2319. An [instructional video](#) provides details on using D2L as a student.

Zoom assistance: Information is available on [how to download and set up the Zoom application](#) and [how to join a Zoom meeting](#). An [instructional video](#) provides details on using Zoom as a student.

General information: More information about technology resources at Ship is available [at this site](#).

Plagiarism and academic dishonesty

Students are expected to complete individual and original work for this class. Plagiarism, cheating and other forms of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated and will be handled according to the university's [Academic Dishonesty Policy](#). 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 in any of your other courses, please consider making an appointment with a tutor or learning specialist in the Learning Center. The Learning Center is located in Mowrey Hall and can be reached at (717) 477-1420. Tutoring and most other services will be offered via Zoom. More information is available at the [Learning Center's website](#).

Accessibility resources

Shippensburg University is committed to providing equal opportunity for participation in all programs, services and activities. The University welcomes all students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs and strives to make all learning experiences as accessible as possible. Any student who feels they may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the Office of Accessibility Resources (OAR) to discuss specific needs. OAR is located in Mowery Hall 252 and can

be reached by phone at (717) 477-1364 or via email at oar@ship.edu.

Title IX - Commitment to a safe learning environment

Shippensburg University and its faculty are committed to ensuring a safe and productive educational environment for all students. In order to comply with the requirements of Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 and the University's commitment to offering supportive measures in accordance with the 2020 regulations issued under Title IX, the University requires faculty members to report incidents of sexual violence shared by students to the University's Title IX Coordinator at title9@ship.edu or by calling (717) 477-1161. The **only exceptions** to the faculty member's reporting obligation are when incidents of sexual violence are communicated by a student **during**: 1. A classroom discussion; 2. in a writing assignment for a class; 3. or as part of a University-approved research project. Faculty members are **obligated** to report 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 to the person designated in the University protection of minors policy found here: <https://www.ship.edu/globalassets/no-more/su-protection-and-supervision-of-minors-on-campus.pdf>. Information regarding the resources that are available to victims of sexual violence are set forth here: <https://www.ship.edu/life/resources/womens-center/resources/> and reporting processes and resolution can be found here: <https://www.ship.edu/globalassets/administration-finance/policies/701-002-sexual-misconduct-policy.pdf>

Tentative Course Schedule

This schedule is subject to change. The timeline for this course may need to be adjusted due to unforeseen circumstances. Changes will be announced via Zoom, email or D2L. **NOTE: This is an abbreviated schedule.** Please see each week's module (on the D2L course site under "Content") for due dates and the full list of assignments, videos and other materials for the week.

WEEK 1 (Jan. 10-16)

- First Zoom meeting (Monday at 6:30 p.m.)
 - Reading:
 - Chapter 1, Basic Principles of Research and a Guide to Using This Book (posted as a PDF on the D2L site if you have not yet purchased the textbook)
 - *Terminology*: research, empirical, intersubjective, systematic, self-correcting
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WEEK 2 (Jan. 17-23)

Research basics; Conceptualization, operationalization and measurement

– **NO ZOOM MEETING (Martin Luther King Jr. holiday)**

- Reading:
 - Chapter 2, Basic Concepts of Research, pp. 13-20 (stop at "Mediation") AND pp. 33-35 (the sections on "Research Questions" and "Hypotheses")
 - Chapter 3, Scholarly Research and the Creation of Knowledge, pp. 41-68 (stop at "Other Types of Articles")
 - Chapter 5, Concept Explication and Measurement (full chapter)
 - *Terminology*: variable, unit of analysis, independent variable, dependent variable, third variable, positive vs. negative relationships, research questions, hypotheses, replication, triangulation, qualitative vs. quantitative research, parts of a research article (abstract, literature review, method section, results section, discussion section, future directions), concept, conceptual definition, operational definition, levels of measurement (nominal, ordinal, interval, ratio).
 - Lecture videos on D2L
 - Research Topic Assignment due by **noon Monday, Jan. 24**
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WEEK 3 (Jan. 24-30)

Reliability and validity; Sampling

– **NO ZOOM MEETING**

- Reading:
 - Chapter 6, Reliability and Validity, pp. 123-142 (stop at "Cronbach's Alpha")
 - Chapter 8, Sampling, pp. 187-197 (stop at "Estimation") AND pp. 203-215 (starting with "Nonprobability Sampling")
 - *Terminology*: reliability, validity, internal vs. external validity, generalizability, index, sample vs. population, representative sample, response rate, sample size, sampling frame, census, nonprobability vs. probability sampling, convenience sampling, deliberate sampling, quota sampling, snowball sampling, volunteer sampling, simple random sampling, cluster sampling, stratified sampling, systematic sampling
 - Lecture videos
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WEEK 4 (Jan. 31-Feb. 6)

Survey research

- Zoom meeting (Monday at 6:30 p.m.)
 - Reading:
 - Chapter 7, Effective Measurement (full chapter)
 - Chapter 10, Survey Research (full chapter)
 - *Terminology*: filter questions, contingency questions, response set, closed-ended vs. open-ended questions, exhaustive, mutually exclusive, leading questions, social desirability, double-barreled questions, Likert scale, semantic differential scale, cross-sectional vs. longitudinal surveys, rapport
 - Lecture videos
 - Annotated bibliography assignment due by noon Monday, Feb. 7
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WEEK 5 (Feb. 7-13)

Content analysis

- Zoom meeting (Monday at 6:30 p.m.)
 - Reading:
 - Chapter 11, Content Analysis (full chapter)
 - *Terminology*: content analysis, texts/social artifacts, unitizing, coding, coding guide, coding sheet, intercoder reliability, latent vs. manifest content
 - Lecture videos
 - Survey assignment due by noon Monday, Feb. 14
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WEEK 6 (Feb. 14-20)

Focus groups and other qualitative research

- Zoom meeting (Monday at 6:30 p.m.)
 - Reading:
 - Chapter 12, Qualitative Research (full chapter)
 - Chapter 13, Approaches to Qualitative Analysis, pp. 350-353 only (sections on “Themes” and “Transcript”)
 - *Terminology*: reflexivity, case study, ethnography, field notes, saturation, focus group, participant observation, funnel interview format, fully structured vs. semistructured vs. unstructured interviews, themes, transcript
 - Lecture videos
 - Content analysis assignment due by noon Monday, Feb. 21
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WEEK 7 (Feb. 21-27)

Research ethics; Data analysis and statistics

- Zoom meeting (Monday at 6:30 p.m.)
 - Reading:
 - Chapter 4, Ethical Research (full chapter)
 - Chapter 14, Descriptive Statistics, pp. 359-371 (stop at “Histogram”)
 - Chapter 15, Principles of Inferential Statistics, pp. 387-396 (stop at “Type I Error”)
 - *Terminology*: informed consent, voluntary participation, anonymity vs. confidentiality, confederates, deception, debriefing, Institutional Review Board (IRB), descriptive vs. inferential statistics, central tendency vs. dispersion, mean, median, mode, range, standard deviation, p -value, statistical significance
 - Lecture videos
 - Focus group assignment due by noon **Monday, Feb. 28**
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WEEK 8 (Feb. 28-March 4)

Course wrap-up

- Zoom meeting (Monday at 6:30 p.m.)
 - Successful completion of CITI training (certificate) due by **5 p.m. Friday, March 4**
 - FINAL EXAM (on D2L) due by **5 p.m. Friday, March 4**
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