

University of Maryland, College Park
Department of Communication

COMM 400 - Research Methods in Communication

Spring 2004

Section: 0101
Place: JMZ 0220
Time: Tu/Th 2:00-3:15

Instructor: Dr. Michael F. Meffert
Office: Skinner 2118
Office Hours: Tuesday 3:30-4:30, Thursday 11:00-12:00, and by appointment
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WebCT: <http://www.courses.umd.edu>

Course Description

This course provides an introduction to both the theory and practice of social science research methods in communication. Students will become familiar with important concepts and research designs such as experiments, surveys, and content analyses. Research procedures for sampling and measurement will be introduced and subsequently used in student-designed group projects. In this class, students will develop the skills to evaluate research in the field of communication as well as the ability to design and conduct their own studies.

Required Readings

- Frey, L. R., Botan, C. H., & Kreps, G. L. (2000). *Investigating Communication: An Introduction to Research Methods*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon. **[IC]**
- Pyrczak, F., & Bruce, R. R. (2003). *Writing Empirical Research Reports: A Basic Guide for Students of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*. 4th ed. Los Angeles, CA: Pyrczak Publishing. **[RR]**
- Nisbett, R. E., & Cohen, D. (1996). *Culture of Honor: The Psychology of Violence in the South*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press. **[CH]**

Requirements

The final grade in the course will be based on the following (weighted) components:

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|---------------------------------------|-----|
| • Group research project (Experiment) | 30% |
| • Midterm exam | 20% |
| • Final exam | 20% |
| • Worksheets (WebCT) | 15% |
| • Assignments (In-Class, WebCT) | 15% |

Group Research Project (Experiment)

The group research project requires active student participation and involvement outside the scheduled class meetings. Students can form their own groups (with up to 4 members) by notifying the instructor in writing or by e-mail one day **before** the group assignment day (see *Course Schedule*) or else will be randomly assigned to groups before class that day. The group project will take the form of an experiment based on a communication theory. Any data collection involving human participants outside the classroom requires the prior completion and approval of the *Departmental Human Subjects Review Form*.

The group project continues throughout the semester and involves several steps: a **topic and literature list** with at least 5 academic articles, a **human subjects review proposal**, an **in-class human subjects review**, a **final report**, and a **presentation** of the group project (see *Course Schedule* for dates & deadlines).

Each group member should expect to receive the same group grade, adjusted (up to +/- 10 points) by peer evaluations that take place both during and at the end of the semester. Group members who fail to participate in a meaningful way might receive 0 credit ("F") for the group project. Detailed instructions, deadlines, and grade components will be announced in class during the group assignment in about two weeks and posted on WebCT.

The Toughest Exam Ever™ Exams

The midterm and final exam use a multiple-choice and true/false question format. The exams cover material from both the textbooks and the lecture. The final exam is not cumulative.

Worksheets and Assignments

Worksheets and assignments will be handed out throughout the semester, either unannounced or on short notice. All worksheets and some assignments require the use of the WebCT system (see below) for online submission of the answers. Other assignments will take place during class sessions. For the final worksheet grade, the worksheet with the lowest score will be dropped.

WebCT

Students are required to have Internet access—on campus or at home—in order to use the WebCT system. Answers to worksheets will be submitted online and important course material and information for the group project, topic summaries/review sheets, and grades will be posted on the WebCT system at <http://www.courses.umd.edu>. WebCT also provides a discussion area that will be used to post announcements and can be used for the group project.

To access the WebCT system, go to <http://www.courses.umd.edu> and use your LDAP ID and password to log in. If you use WebCT for the first time, it is highly recommended that you read the "**Getting Started**" section under *Student Resources*. If you have trouble logging in, follow the link to the "**New To WebCT? Need Login Help?**" section. It is very important that make sure that your browser is set up correctly to avoid a number of common problems. Note in particular that beta versions or very new versions of web browsers as well as less common browsers such as Opera **do not work reliably**, especially in the quiz module (which is required in particular for the worksheets). Any loss of points due to not following these rules is the student's responsibility.

Attendance/Late Policy

Except for university excused absences (e.g. illness, religious observance, participation in university activities at the request of university authorities, and/or circumstances beyond the student's control; see *Schedule of Classes* for further details), any student expecting to miss a quiz, an exam, or any other course deadline must have **advance** approval by the instructor. Students missing a quiz or exam due to illness or other emergencies should notify the instructor as soon as possible but not later than five days after the due date/exam date.

- Failure to take an exam without the explicit exemption by the instructor will result in a grade of 0.0 ("F") for the exam.
- Failure to submit written and online assignments as well as papers on the specified due date without the explicit exemption by the instructor will result in a grade of 0.0 ("F") for individual assignments or, if they are part of the group project, a deduction of 10% of the total points possible for the group project for **each day late**.

You can notify the instructor by phone, leave a message at the office, or by e-mail. Note that a voice mail or e-mail message does **NOT** guarantee approval by the instructor. You must receive **verbal or written permission** from the instructor to reschedule a paper due date or exam. In all cases, students have to document their excuse in appropriate written form (e.g. doctor's note) within one week of the absence.

Special WebCT Rules and "Emergency" Procedures

It is the students' responsibility to (1) read and follow all instructions carefully and (2) to complete WebCT assignments early enough to be able to accommodate any technical access problems that may occur. If you encounter problems with the WebCT system, you have to notify the instructor **immediately** by email (or phone) in order to resolve the problem before the final deadline. Always include a detailed description of the problem (e.g. your browser, the page that caused the problem, any error messages). If the problem occurs right before the deadline without sufficient time for the instructor to respond, you may submit your answers by email **before the final deadline**. The instructor will decide, case-by-case, whether to accept such an email submission based on the individual circumstances.

Policy on Incompletes

The grade of incomplete ("I") is given only to a student whose work in a course has been qualitatively satisfactory, when, because of illness or other circumstances beyond his/her control, he/she has been unable to complete some small portion of the course work. In no case will "I" be given to a student who has not completed major course assignments. If you miss the final exam and have a valid reason (see above), you must contact the instructor within 24 hours and sign an **incomplete contract**. Without it, your course grade will be calculated based on 0.0 credit ("F") for the missed assignment or exam. It is the student's responsibility to request arrangements for the completion of the course work.

Academic Integrity

The University's approved *Code of Academic Integrity* is available on the web at: http://www.inform.umd.edu/CampusInfo/Departments/JPO/code_acinteg.html. Refer to the Code for a definition of academic dishonesty (including cheating, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, and plagiarism). The *Code* prohibits students from cheating on exams,

plagiarizing papers, submitting the same paper for credit in two courses without authorization, buying papers, submitting fraudulent documents, and forging signatures. **Academic dishonesty of any sort constitutes grounds for failure on the relevant assignment and potential failure of the entire course.** If you have any questions about what practices are and are not acceptable, direct them to the instructor before the assignment is due. More specifically, use of scholarly material without proper acknowledgement in written work may be grounds for failure on the relevant assignment or in the course:

- Every direct quotation must be identified by quotation marks or by appropriate indentation and must be promptly cited as to author, source, and page.
- Prompt acknowledgement as to author and source is required when material from another source is paraphrased or summarized in whole or in part in your own words. Acknowledging only a directly quoted statement does not suffice to notify the reader of any preceding or succeeding paraphrased material.
- Information obtained in one's reading or research, which is not common knowledge among students in this course, must be acknowledged by citing author and source.

Honor Pledge

The University has a nationally recognized Honor Code, administered by the Student Honor Council. The Student Honor Council proposed and the University Senate approved an Honor Pledge. The University of Maryland Honor Pledge reads:

"I pledge on my honor that I have not given or received any unauthorized assistance on this assignment/examination."

Unless you are specifically advised to the contrary, the Pledge statement should be **handwritten and signed** on the front cover of all major papers, projects, or other academic assignments submitted for evaluation in this course. Students who fail to write and sign the Pledge will be asked to confer with the instructor.

Tape Recording of Lectures

Unauthorized reproduction of class lectures through tape recording or any other means is an infringement of common-law copyright. No person may reproduce the proceedings of this class without *prior written permission* from the instructor.

Format of Written Work

Please adhere to the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (either 4th or 5th ed.). Proofread your written work carefully. Errors in spelling, format, grammar, and clarity of thought will affect the grading of all written work. All written work has to be typed (double-spaced, 12pt font).

Extra Credit

On occasion, faculty or graduate students may provide the opportunity for students to participate in research. **In case** such opportunities are offered this semester, students are

encouraged to take advantage of any extra credit offered. Note, however, that students ***must be in class*** when these opportunities are provided. Extra credit cannot be made up.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

The University of Maryland is committed to making appropriate accommodations to individuals with disabilities that have been documented by the Disability Support Services (0126 Shoemaker Hall). If you wish to discuss academic accommodations for this class, please contact the instructor as soon as possible, and no later than the second week of the semester.

Learning Assistance Service

If you are experiencing difficulties in keeping up with the academic demands of this course, contact the Learning Assistance Service, 2201 Shoemaker Building, 301-314-7693. Their educational counselors can help with time management, reading, note-taking, and exam preparation skills.

Course Schedule

Please note: Every effort will be made to follow the schedule below. Minor adjustments might be made to dates, topics, and readings if such a need arises during the semester. Any change will be announced in class, and it is the students' responsibility to be aware of them.

Date	Topic	Chapters
1/27	Introduction: Course Goals & Requirements	
Part I Defining Research: Basic Concepts & Definitions		
1/29	Scientific Theory & Research and Research Questions	IC 1
2/3	Theoretical Concepts, Variables, and Relationships	IC 2; RR 6
2/5	Hypotheses, Causality, and Unit of Analysis	IC 2; RR 1-3
2/10	☐ Group Assignment & Discussion of Group Projects	
2/12	Academic Literature & Papers & Overview of Research Designs	IC 3; RR 4,5,7
2/17	Culture of Honor	CH 1,2
Part II Designing Research: Techniques & Procedures		
2/19	Measurement Techniques & Measurement Levels	IC 4
2/24	☐ Topic & Literature List due Measurement Scales	IC 4
2/26	Questionnaire Design	IC 8 (pp. 209-215)
3/2	Measurement Validity and Reliability	IC 5
3/4	Threats to Internal and External Validity	IC 5
3/9	☐ First Proposal for Group Projects due Example: Milgram Study	
3/11	Ethical Issues and Discussion of Proposals	IC 6
3/16	☐ The Toughest Exam Ever™ Midterm Exam	
3/18	☐ Final Proposal for Group Projects due ☐ HSR Task Force Members pick up Proposals Sampling	IC 5
3/23 & 25	Spring Break	
3/30	☐ In-Class Review by HSR Task Forces Replication	IC 5
Part III Conducting Research: Common Research Designs		
4/1	Controlling Confounds	IC 7
4/6	Experiments and Field Studies	IC 7; RR 8; CH 4,5
4/8	Surveys and Culture of Honor	IC 8, CH 3,6
4/13	Content Analysis	IC 9
Part IV Analyzing Research: Data Analysis		
4/15	Data Management and Descriptive Statistics	IC 11
4/20	Inferential Statistics: Distributions	IC 12
4/22	Inferential Statistics: Significance Testing	IC 12; RR 9, App. C
4/27	Statistical Tests for Group Differences	IC 13
4/29	Statistical Tests for Relationships	IC 14, 15; RR 10,11
Part V Presenting Research: Group Presentations		
5/4	☐ Group Project Report due ☐ Group Presentations (1)	
5/6	☐ Group Presentations (2)	
5/11	Summary and Review	
5/17	☐ The Toughest Exam Ever™ Final Exam (10:30-12:30)	