

COMS 5331: Communication Research Methods (ONLINE)
Fall 2017

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REQUIRED READINGS

Baxter, L. A., & Babbie, E. (2004). *The basics of communication research*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

All other required readings will be posted on Blackboards.

OPTIONAL

Publication manual of the American Psychological Association, 6th edition.

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

This online course provides an introduction to the concepts, methods, and tools by which communication research is designed, conducted, interpreted, and evaluated. The primary goals of this class are to help you acquire the necessary knowledge to understand and conduct communication research. The following objectives will help you reach these goals: (1) master the concepts and vocabulary of communication research – and be able to use this language appropriately; (2) become an intelligent consumer of research – able to read, understand, explain and critically evaluate research reported in scholarly journals, and (3) develop the skills necessary for conducting reliable and valid communication research – with an emphasis on surveys, experiments, and content analysis. We make no assumptions about previous work in statistics. Fear of mathematics is not a barrier to success in this class.

As this is an ONLINE class, learning will be achieved mainly the following ways: 1) thoroughly reading each of the first 14 chapters, focusing on understanding rather than memorizing; 2) completing weekly assignments; 3) reading (watching) additional readings (videos). It is COMMON that you might get lost when you read the textbook. Do not worry and do not panic. I do not expect you to understand everything from the book. **If you have trouble understanding a certain concept or finishing an assignment, you can email me to set time for phone meetings.**

www.shsu.edu/syllabus

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

Exams (2 x 15% = 30% of Grade)

There will be two equally weighted exams: a midterm and a final. The exams are not cumulative. Each exam lasts 2 hours. Both are open-book tests. You can use whatever resources (textbook, or the Internet, for example) you have to complete a test within the time limit. But you cannot ask another person to take the test for you. Review questions will be posted on Blackboards two weeks before the test. The format of the tests will be mainly multiple-choice questions and research design questions.

Weekly Assignments (50% of Grade)

Each week (except the very first week), there is a weekly assignment due ranging from **3 to 10 points** each. The format of the assignment varies. Some will be essay questions, which you can find answers from the textbook. Some will be analysis or summary questions, which ask you to use what you learn from the book to analyze a research article (for example, is it qualitative or quantitative, survey research or experiment, etc.). **All the assignments are due by Friday midnight.**

Final Paper (20% of Grade)

The final paper asks you to develop and write a Method section that will allow you to test the research questions and/or hypotheses you developed in your Communication Theory paper. You are also required to provide a thorough critique of the study you design. The main body of this paper (i.e., the hypotheses and/or research questions, Method section, and Strength and Limitations section) should be no more than nine pages long.

GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR PAPER

- | | |
|--|----------------|
| • Title page | 1 page |
| • Abstract | 1 page |
| • Research questions and hypotheses | 1 page or less |
| • Method | 3-4 pages |
| • Strengths & limitations (Discussion) | 1-2 pages |
| • References | 1+ pages |
| • Tables (optional) | 1 page each |

SPECIFIC GUIDELINES FOR PAPER:

- *Title page.* At a minimum, make sure your title in some way identifies each of the variables under investigation (you may also consider identifying your theory and target population if particularly important/relevant).
- *Abstract.* Provide a 120 word (maximum) summary of the entire paper.
- *Research questions and/or hypotheses.* Your theory paper should culminate in one or more research questions or hypotheses. The quality of your hypotheses and/or research questions will be evaluated in both classes.

- *Method*. Clearly and completely identify and discuss the methodological design of the study, including, at a minimum, potential (1) research participants; (2) procedures; and (3) instrumentation. Be sure to identify and provide the conceptual and operational definitions for each variable, including previous reliability and validity information when applicable.
- *Strengths and limitations (Discussion)*. Provide a thorough and insightful discussion of your study's strengths and limitations, with an emphasis on measurement reliability and validity, internal and external validity, and theoretical and/or practical application.
- *References*. Provide an APA citation for all materials and information cited in your manuscript.
- *Table(s)*. Tables are optional. Tables are typically used to present a lot of information in a small(er) amount of space. You might consider using a table to illustrate your research design, but this is not necessary.

Grade Scale

[Final Grades Based on Percentages]

90-100	A
80-89	B
70-79	C
60-69	D
59 or lower	E

CLASS POLICIES

Late or Missed Assignments & Missed Exams

You have one week to finish each weekly assignment and each exam. If you miss them, there will be NO opportunity to make them up. **The only exceptions to these rules are tragic, extraordinary, and totally unforeseen personal circumstances that are convincingly documented no later than 24 hours after the due date.**

Written Work

Students are expected to use correct spelling and grammar for all assignments and the final paper. All submitted work must be typed. Proofread your work at least twice before you turn it in.

Academic Dishonesty:

All students are expected to engage in all academic pursuits in a manner that is above reproach. Students are expected to maintain complete honesty and integrity in the academic experiences both in and out of the classroom. **Any student found guilty of dishonesty in any phase of academic work will be subject to disciplinary action.** The University and its official representatives may initiate disciplinary proceedings against a student accused of any form of academic dishonesty including, but not limited to, cheating on an examination or other academic work which is to be submitted, plagiarism, collusion and the abuse of resource materials.

Americans with Disability Act:

It is the policy of Sam Houston State University that individuals otherwise qualified shall not be excluded, solely by reason of their disability, from participation in any academic program of the university. Further, they shall not be denied the benefits of these programs nor shall they be

subjected to discrimination. Students with disabilities that might affect their academic performance are expected to visit with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities located in the Counseling Center. They should then make arrangements with their individual instructors so that appropriate strategies can be considered and helpful procedures can be developed to ensure that participation and achievement opportunities are not impaired.

SHSU adheres to all applicable federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and guidelines with respect to providing reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. If a student has a disability that may affect adversely his/her work in this class, then the student is encouraged to register with the SHSU Counseling Center and to talk with the instructor about how best to deal with the situation. All disclosures of disabilities will be kept strictly confidential. NOTE: no accommodation can be made until the student registers with the Counseling Center.

Instructor Evaluation

Students will be asked to complete a course/instructor evaluation form toward the end of the semester.

Weekly Schedules

Week	Topics	Readings	What's Due (By Midnight Saturday)
1. Aug 23-25	Course Introduction	Chapter 1	None
2. Aug 28-Sept 1	Building Blocks	Chapters 2	Weekly Assignment
3. Sept 4-8	Research Paradigms	Chapter 3	Weekly Assignment
4. Sept 11-15	Theoretical Models: Conceptualizing Relationships among Variables/ Ethics	Chapters 4 & 5	Weekly Assignment
5. Sept 18-22	Conceptualization and Operationalization	Chapter 6	Weekly Assignment
6. Sept 25-29	Sampling and Generalization	Chapter 7	Weekly Assignment
7. Oct 2-6	Basics of Survey Methodology	Chapter 8	Weekly Assignment
8. Oct 9-13	Exam 1		Exam 1
9. Oct 16-20	Experiments (1)	Chapter 9	Weekly Assignment
10. Oct 23-27	Experiments (2)	Chapter 9	Weekly Assignment
11. Oct 30-Nov 3	Content Analysis	Chapter 10	Weekly

			Assignment
12. Nov 6-10	Basics of Quantitative Analysis	Chapter 11	Weekly Assignment
13. Nov 13-17	Inferential Statistics	Chapter 12	Weekly Assignment
14. Nov 20-24	Participant Observation	Chapters 13	Weekly Assignment
15. Nov 27--Dec 1	Qualitative Interviewing	Chapters 14	Weekly Assignment
16. Dec 4-7	Exam Two		Exam 2 & Final Paper