

Audience Research & Analysis
MCOM 4383-2 - 3 Credit Hours
Fall 2017
The Woodlands Center #109
MW, 12:30-1:50 p.m.

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Course Description

This course introduces students to the history and application of communication research methods, both quantitative and qualitative, that are employed in commercial media markets and academic environments to assess media audiences, media content, and media use. Topics addressed include survey methods, content analysis, experimental research, ethnographic and critical research, research ethics, and statistical analysis. Special attention will be devoted to research in print and electronic media.

Practical exposure and execution are key goals for this course. Research methods are often steeped in abstract academic theory. Such theory is important because it informs and empowers practical research goals, but practical research is the ultimate goal – theory for the sake of theory is ultimately useless if it cannot be applied and adapted to the so-called “real world.” As such, while this course covers a variety of abstract topics, the chief aim is for students to engineer and execute their own research.

In this course, you will survey and interview a variety of media consumers. You will watch them and experiment upon them. You will design your own media to subconsciously manipulate them, and analyze media to determine subtextual messages and themes.

Prerequisite: Junior standing. Levels: Undergraduate. Schedule Types: Lecture.

Course Objectives

This course is designed to provide you with:

- Expertise in quantitative research methods
- Expertise in qualitative and critical research methods
- An understanding of the role research plays in contemporary American society

Required Textbooks

Media and Communication Research Methods: An Introduction to Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches. Arthur Asa Berger, 2013. Third edition.

Additional media, including readings from scholarly journals or professional podcasts, will be uploaded to Blackboard periodically throughout the semester.

Course Requirements

There will be a total of **five group research projects**, one for each research methodology, comprising a total of **45 percent** of your grade. Individually, each will be worth **9 percent** of your overall grade. There will be **weekly quizzes, administered via scantron**, worth **10 percent** of your grade. There will be 10 quizzes but the lowest grade will automatically be dropped, making each worth **1.11 percent** each. There will be **three tests** worth **10 percent** each. Your **final exam** will be worth **15 percent**.

Grades will be uploaded to Blackboard in a timely manner. Current grades, as well as a running average for the course, will be maintained on the site.

Please note that there is no participation grade. In theory, participation grades offer incentive for vocal and engaged students. In practice, however, they are problematic. They are biased in favor of outgoing and extroverted students, imply one correlation between studiousness and loquaciousness and another correlation between shyness and stupidity; too, they require the professor to either interrupt lectures with tedious accounting or to have phenomenal memory recall, both of which impede the class discussions participation grades are intended to enhance. As such, while class participation is absolutely encouraged, it will not be a part of your course grade.

Group Research Projects – 45 percent total, 9 percent each

This course considers five distinct quantitative and qualitative research methodologies. Each will span two weeks. You will be required to design and execute a research study using the discussed methodology. Each methodology will have specific requirements and parameters, but you are generally free to consider your own subject matter and encouraged to be creative. There are **seven requirements and noteworthy points** for each project: **(1)** Each study must involve media behavior, media creation, or media consumption of one kind or another. The methodologies themselves can be applied to a wide variety of fields, but as a Mass Communication course, the focus needs to remain on the mass media. **(2)** Each project must be conducted in randomly assigned pairs. This is intended to encourage creativity and teamwork, but also to ensure complicated projects can be designed and executed on deadline. **(3)** The groups themselves will shuffle throughout the semester. You will never be paired with the same partner for two separate assignments. **(4)** The research reports and projects will be turned in only once per group. They will be graded only once – each group member will receive the same grade. This policy is intended to reflect cold, hard facts. In the working world, bosses rarely consider nuance or workload distribution – all that matters is the completed product. Having one overall grade also encourages teamwork and planning ahead, which are vastly preferable to procrastination and improvisation. **(5)** Exceptions (most likely extensions) will be granted for groups with a legitimate illness or crisis. They will be evaluated on a case by case basis. **(6)** Each report must be at least 2,500 words and submitted via email. **(7)** Group research projects will be graded based upon a quantitative rubric. Rubrics are included at the end of the syllabus.

Project I: Surveys

Your group is responsible for designing a detailed survey of 8-10 questions. You must ensure that both closed and open-ended questions are extant. You must target a particular audience (it may be students), a particular media behavior, and a method of distributing your survey (online or in-person), collecting at least 20 completed surveys, and analyzing the responses. You must write a report outlining your methodology, how you chose your subject, how you crafted the survey questions, how you collected the data, and what those data indicate. Include a copy of your survey with your report.

Project II: Interviews

Your group is responsible for designing a detailed interview of 8-10 questions. It may be fully structured, semi-structured, or fully unstructured. You must target a particular audience and particular media behavior, and devise a method of scheduling and conducting interviews. At least 10 interviews must be conducted, and both group members must conduct at least five interviews. You must write a report outlining your methodology, how you chose your subjects, how you crafted your interview questions, collected responses, and what those responses indicate. Additionally you must report how your interviews varied between group members, and how your personal demographics and characteristics may or may not have influenced

responses, and how they might differ between partners. You must also include a justification for choosing structured, semi-structured, or unstructured interviews.

Project III: Ethnography

Your group is responsible for designing and conducting an ethnography, or participant observation, of a group engaged in some form of media consumption. You must conduct at least a half hour of observation of at least five subjects, and both group members must participate in the observation. Write a report outlining how and why that demographic and media behavior were chosen, what steps you took to observe discreetly and objectively, and what you observed about the media behavior. Consider possible explanations and justifications for that behavior. Also report how your personal demographics and characteristics may or may not have influenced the participant's behavior, and how that influence might vary between participants.

Project IV: Experiments

Your group is responsible for designing and conducting an experiment on fellow humans. You must construct a scenario that measures behavior or responses to media stimuli. You must design both a control group and an experiment group, and you must utilize a quantitative measurement of that behavior. You must also provide an ethical introduction and de-briefing to your participants. Write a report outlining your methodology and decisions, as well as the results of your experiment.

Project V: Semiotics

Your group is responsible for creating a detailed advertisement, in print, audio or video, for a product of your choice. This advertisement must include at least ten semiotic associations designed to enforce your message and influence your target audience. Write a report outlining your choice of product and providing a detailed explanation of each semiotic association, including details on both signifier and signified, and how those cultural meanings will influence a particular audience to buy your product.

Quizzes – 10 percent total, 1.11 percent each

Most classes will begin with a multiple choice quiz administered via scantron. Bring your own scantrons; I will attempt to have a reserve supply, particularly in the early weeks of the semester, but please do not rely on it. Questions will focus on the readings for the lesson at hand. They may also cover the previous week's PowerPoint and lecture, assuming a consistent topic; for example, the quiz for Surveys I will focus entirely on the readings, but the quiz for Surveys II may cover the reading or previous lectures and discussion on surveys. The lowest quiz grade will be struck from the record, making each quiz worth 1.11 percentage point.

Exams – 30 percent total, 10 percent each

Each unit will conclude with a multiple choice exam administered via scantron. Review sheets will be distributed the week before each exam. They will cover two methodologies each and will include information from class discussions, PowerPoints, and the course readings.

Final Exam – 15 percent

A final exam will also be multiple choice and administered via scantron. It will cover the same material extant in each of the three unit exams, but collected in one final exam.

Extra Credit – Occasional opportunities for extra credit may arise as the semester progresses, and will contribute an additional one percentage point to your final grade.

Course Guidelines

Deadlines – Deadlines are absolute in newsrooms and media corporations, and are largely inflexible elsewhere in the so-called “real world.” Course deadlines are strict to reflect those priorities. Missing a deadline by up to 24 hours will result in a 10 point penalty on the assignment. After 24 hours, the student will receive a zero on the assignment. Exceptions can be granted for reasonable absences or uncontrollable events, including illness or family emergencies.

Attendance Policy – SHSU Student Handbook of University Policies states that regular and punctual class attendance is expected of each student at Sam Houston State University and that it is expected that each faculty member will keep a record of student attendance. A student will not be penalized for three absences or six tardies (defined as entering class after roll has been taken) when examinations or other assigned work has not been missed.

The Department of Mass Communication has adopted the policy that every absence or two tardies over the allotted three absences or six tardies will result in the loss of one letter grade. For example, if your class grade is a B and you have five absences your final course grade will be a D.

Additionally:

- Exceptions are for documented illnesses or family emergencies or for students attending SHSU activities in an official capacity. Documentation for illness or emergency should be presented upon the student’s return to the classroom. Documentation for activities should be presented prior to the absence and contain the signature of the SHSU employee sponsor.
- Each semester hour of credit entails at least two additional hours of work outside the classroom per week: so for this 3 credit course, you should expect to do at least an additional 6 hours of work a week beyond class time. This is on average; some weeks may require more, others less.

Grading scale

A	90% and above
B	80-89%
C	70-79%
D	60-69%
F	59% & below

E-mail – You must be able to receive e-mail via your “@shsu.edu” account. You will be responsible for any messages you miss if you do not use this university-assigned address. Class announcements may also be posted on Blackboard.

Academic Dishonesty – All students are expected to engage in all academic pursuits in a manner that is above reproach. Students are expected to maintain 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. For a complete listing of the university policy, see:

[Dean of Student's Office](#)

Student Absences on Religious Holy Days Policy – Section 51.911(b) of the Texas Education Code requires that an institution of higher education excuse a student from attending classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day, including travel for that purpose. Section 51.911 (a) (2) defines a religious holy day as: “a holy day observed by a religion whose places of worship are exempt from property taxation under Section 11.20....” A student whose absence is excused under this subsection may not be penalized for that absence and shall be allowed to take an examination or complete an assignment from which the student is excused within a reasonable time after the absence.

University policy 861001 provides the procedures to be followed by the student and instructor. A student desiring to absent himself/herself from a scheduled class in order to observe (a) religious holy day(s) shall present to each instructor involved a written statement concerning the religious holy day(s). The instructor will complete a form notifying the student of a reasonable timeframe in which the missed assignments and/or examinations are to be completed. For a complete listing of the university policy, see:

http://www.shsu.edu/~vaf_www/aps/documents/861001.pdf

Students with Disabilities Policy – 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 you have a disability that may affect adversely your work in this class, then I encourage you to register with the SHSU Counseling Center and to talk with me about how I can best help you. All disclosures of disabilities will be kept strictly confidential. NOTE: No accommodation can be made until you register with the Counseling Center. For a complete listing of the university policy, see:

http://www.shsu.edu/~vaf_www/aps/811006.pdf

Campus Carry Policy – Texas law allows the concealed carry of licensed handguns on certain parts of campus. Sam Houston State University policy allows the concealed carry of licensed handguns in university classrooms. Both state law and university policy require handguns be concealed at all times. If at any time a firearm becomes visible, the student will be asked to leave and given an absence for that class day. If the student becomes disruptive, University Police Department staff will be notified. If a firearm is discharged for any reason, deliberately or accidentally, UPD staff will be notified.

Mental & Physical Health Policy - If you find yourself struggling with your mental or physical health this semester, please feel free to approach me. I try to be reasonably flexible and accommodating, just as any competent boss or supervisor in the so-called “real world” would assist employees. Also, please feel empowered and encouraged to reach out to the Student Health Center at (936) 294-1805 and the Counseling Center at (936) 294-1720.

Unit I: Surveys & Interviews

Week 1:

August 23

Topic: Introduction + Surveys I

Quiz: No

Readings: Radiolab Podcast (Emailed)

Due: None

Week 2:

August 30

Topic: Surveys II

Quiz: Quiz 1

Readings: Berger 12

Due: None

Week 3:

September 6

Topic: Interviews I

Quiz: Quiz 2

Readings: Berger 7

Due: None

Week 4:

September 13

Topic: Interviews II

Quiz: Quiz 3

Readings: TBD

Due: Project I: Surveys

Week 5:

September 20

Topic: Test I

Quiz: None

Readings: Berger 12, 7; Quizzes 1-3, PowerPoints

Due: Study for Test

Unit II: Ethnography & Participant Observation

Week 6:

September 27:

Topic: Ethnography I

Quiz: Quiz 4

Readings: Berger 10

Due: Project 2: Interviews

Week 7:

October 4

Topic: Ethnography II

Quiz: Quiz 5

Readings: TBD

Due: None

Week 8:

October 11

Topic: Experiments I

Quiz: Quiz 6

Readings: Berger 13

Due: Project 3: Ethnography

Week 9:

October 18

Topic: Experiments II

Quiz: Quiz 7

Readings: TBD

Due: None

Week 10:

October 25

Topic: Test II

Quiz: None

Readings: Berger 10, 13; Quizzes 4 – 7; PowerPoints

Due: Study for test

Unit III: Semiotics

Week 11:

November 1

Topic: Semiotics I

Quiz: Quiz 8

Readings: Berger 3

Due: Project 4: Experiments

Week 12:

November 8

Topic: Semiotics II

Quiz: Quiz 9

Readings: TBD

Due: None

Week 13:

November 15

Topic: Semiotics III

Quiz: Quiz 10

Readings: TBD

Due: None

Week 14:

November 22

Thanksgiving – No Class

Week 15:

November 29

Topic: Test III: Semiotics

Quiz: None

Readings: Berger 3; Quizzes 8 – 10; PowerPoints

Due: Study for Test

Week 16

December 4 - 7

Topic: Final Exam, exact date TBD

Readings: Review PowerPoints, Berger 12, 7, 10, 13, 3, Quizzes 1 - 11

Due: None

Name:

Grading Rubric: Survey Project
Audience Research & Analysis Spring 2017

Deadlines

Was the project turned in on time and properly?	Yes / No
If no, was it less than 24 hours late?	Yes: - 50
If no, was it more than 24 hours late?	Yes: - 100

Major Details

Did the survey contain 8 – 10 questions?	Yes / No: - 50
Are both open and closed questions extant?	Yes / No: - 50
Were at least 20 surveys collected?	Yes / No: - 50
Did the survey focus on media production, consumption or behavior?	Yes / No: - 100
Was the report at least 2,500 words, not including the survey itself?	Yes / No: - 50
Was a copy of the survey included at the end of the report?	Yes / No: - 50

Audience Selection	/ 30
Does the survey target a specific audience?	/ 10
Does the report articulate how, and why, that specific audience was chosen?	/ 10
Does the report articulate the strengths and weaknesses of selecting that audience?	/ 10

Methodology	/ 30
Does the report articulate how the questions were chosen and crafted?	/ 10
Does the report articulate how survey participants were located and approached?	/ 10
Does the report articulate how survey responses were anonymously collected?	/ 10

Analysis	/ 30
Does the report process and report the quantitative data in a clear, detailed manner?	/ 10
Does the report analyze the qualitative responses in a clear, detailed manner?	/ 10
Does the report draw reasonable conclusions from the survey responses?	/ 10

Writing	/ 10
Does the report utilize proper grammar, and is free of misspellings and typos?	/ 5
Does the report provide a clear summary of the research method in the methodology?	/ 5

Total	/ 100
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Comments:

Name:

Grading Rubric: Interview Project
Audience Research & Analysis Spring 2017

Deadlines

Was the project turned in on time and properly?	Yes / No
If no, was it less than 24 hours late?	Yes: - 50
If no, was it more than 24 hours late?	Yes: - 100

Major Details

Did the interviews contain 8 – 10 questions?	Yes / No: - 50
Did the interviews focus on media production, consumption or behavior?	Yes / No: - 100
Were at least 10 interviews conducted?	Yes / No: - 100
Was the report at least 2,500 words, not including the interview itself?	Yes / No: - 50
Was a copy of the interview script included at the end of the report?	Yes / No: - 50

Audience Selection	/ 30
Do the interviews target a specific audience?	/ 10
Does the report articulate how, and why, that specific audience was chosen?	/ 10
Does the report articulate the strengths and weaknesses of selecting that audience?	/ 10

Methodology	/ 30
Does the report articulate how the questions were chosen and crafted?	/ 10
Does the report articulate how participants were located and approached?	/ 10
Does the report justify the selection of structured, semi-structured or unstructured interviews?	/ 10

Analysis	/ 30
Does the report draw reasonable conclusions from the interview responses?	/ 10
Does the report articulate how, and why, responses and interviews varied among interviewers?	/ 10
Does the report explore possible explanations for those similarities or differences?	/ 10

Writing	/ 10
Does the report utilize proper grammar, and is free of misspellings and typos?	/ 5
Does the report provide a clear summary of the research method in the methodology?	/ 5

Total	/ 100
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Comments:

Name:

Grading Rubric: Ethnography / Participant Observation
Audience Research & Analysis Spring 2017

Deadlines

Was the project turned in on time and properly?	Yes / No
If no, was it less than 24 hours late?	Yes: - 50
If no, was it more than 24 hours late?	Yes: - 100

Major Details

Did the ethnography focus on media production, consumption or behavior?	Yes / No: - 100
Were at least five individuals observed for at least 30 minutes (preferably more)?	Yes / No: - 100
Was the report at least 2,500 words?	Yes / No: - 50

Subject Selection	/ 30
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Does the ethnography observe a specific group and media behavior?	/ 10
Does the report articulate how, and why, that specific group was chosen?	/ 10
Does the report articulate the strengths and weaknesses of selecting that group?	/ 10

Methodology	/ 30
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Does the report articulate procedures to observe discreetly and objectively?	/ 10
Does the report justify the levels of participation and observation in the ethnography?	/ 10
Does the report explain particular challenges to ease for each ethnographer?	/ 10

Analysis	/ 30
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Does the report draw reasonable conclusions from the ethnography?	/ 10
Does the report articulate how observations were similar or different among ethnographers?	/ 10
Does the report reflect upon the decisions regarding participation and observation?	/ 10

Writing	/ 10
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Does the report utilize proper grammar, and is free of misspellings and typos?	/ 5
Does the report provide a clear summary of the research method in the methodology?	/ 5

Total	/ 100
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Comments:

Name:

Grading Rubric: Experiments
Audience Research & Analysis Spring 2017

Deadlines

Was the project turned in on time and properly?	Yes / No
If no, was it less than 24 hours late?	Yes: - 50
If no, was it more than 24 hours late?	Yes: - 100

Major Details

Does the experiment contain both a control and experiment group?	Yes / No: - 100
Does the experiment utilize a quantitative measurement?	Yes / No: - 100
Were at least 5 people in each group?	Yes / No: - 50
Was the report at least 2,500 words, not including the intro/exit script?	Yes / No: - 50
Was a copy of the introduction and de-briefing scripts included at the end of the report?	Yes / No: - 50

Participant Selection	/ 30
Does the experiment target a specific, well-defined group?	/ 10
Does the experiment quantitatively measure clear media behavior?	/ 10
Does the report articulate the strengths and weaknesses of selecting that group and media?	/ 10

Methodology	/ 30
Does the report articulate how the group members were selected?	/ 10
Does the report articulate how exposure to one media variable was isolated?	/ 10
Does the report justify the selection and structure of a quantitative measurement tool?	/ 10

Analysis	/ 30
Does the report clearly articulate the quantitative results?	/ 10
Does the report draw reasonable conclusions from the quantitative data?	/ 10
Does the report explore the strengths and weaknesses of the experiment?	/ 10

Writing	/ 10
Does the report utilize proper grammar, and is free of misspellings and typos?	/ 5
Does the report provide a clear summary of the research method in the methodology?	/ 5

Total	/ 100
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Comments:

Name:

Grading Rubric: Semiotics
Audience Research & Analysis Spring 2017

Deadlines

Was the project turned in on time and properly?	Yes / No
If no, was it less than 24 hours late?	Yes: - 50
If no, was it more than 24 hours late?	Yes: - 100

Major Details

Does the experiment contain both a report and produced advertisement?	Yes / No: - 100
Does the report number and identify 10 signs in the produced advertisement?	Yes / No: - 100
Was the report at least 2,500 words, not including the produced advertisement?	Yes / No: - 50
Was a copy of the produced advertisement included?	Yes / No: - 100

Audience Selection	/ 30
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Does the advertisement target a specific, well-defined audience?	/ 15
Does the report articulate why that audience was chosen for that product?	/ 15

Semiotic Associations	/ 40
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Does the report identify each of the 10 signs in detail?	/ 15
Does the report articulate how each sign corresponds with a particular meaning?	/ 15
Does the report justify the selection of each sign for the particular audience?	/ 10

Produced Media	/ 20
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Does the produced media reflect spent time and effort?	/ 10
Does the produced media appear to have been planned and coordinated?	/ 10

Writing	/ 10
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Does the report utilize proper grammar, and is free of misspellings and typos?	/ 5
Does the report provide a clear summary of the research method in the methodology?	/ 5

Total	/ 100
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Comments: