

Seminar in Mass Comm Research

COMM 7620-1 • Spring 2007 • M 6-9 p.m. • 2630 LNCO

“Use the tools you need to answer your question.”

–Andy Perrin, Assistant Professor of Sociology, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

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Office hours: TH noon-1 p.m. and by appointment.

Where’s my office? 2618 LNCO (at the end of the hall toward the TV studios).

Required:

- ▶ Guido H. Stempel III, David H. Weaver, and G. Cleveland Wilhoit, *Mass Communication Research and Theory* (Allyn & Bacon, 2003).
- ▶ A sense of scholarly inquiry.
- ▶ The commitment to complete a project that will contribute toward your degree.
- ▶ A readiness to contribute to the success of our seminar.
- ▶ A good will.

Overview:

This course was created one year ago in response to a perceived need. Although our department provides a solid base in theory, graduate students – especially those with interests in mass communication – have not always had sufficient opportunities to study research methods and design. Julia Corbett, who taught this course the first time it was offered, wrote: “In my experience, grad students need instruction in how to use theory to guide and choose appropriate research methods, in conceptualizing and operationalizing variables, and [in] asking good questions and getting good answers.”

If theory provides the blueprint for a house, methods are the tools you use to build it. This course will survey a broad array of tools, any of which might be appropriate for you. Even if they’re not appropriate, you’ll become familiar with them – which is essential if you plan to make academe your career. (Among other things, you must be able to read, understand, critique, and review scholarly literature; teach it as needed; and advise your own graduate students.)

The textbook offers “a wide and sympathetic introduction to all the ways that new knowledge may be uncovered” in mass-communication research. It introduces you to a variety of methods so you can avoid “methodological chauvinism” while developing the specialized skills you need to pursue your research (p. 6).

Objectives:

- ▶ To gain a broad understanding of major areas of mass-comm research.
- ▶ To critically evaluate mass-comm research for design and method.
- ▶ To conduct and write a substantive research review.
- ▶ To use what you do here in your graduate program, including comprehensive exams, thesis/dissertation proposals, foundations of research projects, etc.

Assignments:

- 10% Lead chapter discussion and critique
- 10% Lead article discussion and critique
- 35% State-of-the-research review for your topic
- 35% Theory-based argument and research design for your topic
- 10% Collegiality, participation, and preparedness

Assignment formats and styles:

- ▶ Double-space *everything* and use Times or Times New Roman 12 point.
- ▶ Use citation style appropriate to your method and target publication(s).

Academic honesty:

Read the Student Code at: <http://www.admin.utah.edu/ppmanual/8/8-10.html>

Accommodation:

- ▶ I will not make accommodations in course content, requirements, or expectations. The university policy is at: <http://www.admin.utah.edu/facdev/accommodations-policy.pdf>
- ▶ The University of Utah seeks to provide equal access to its programs, services and activities for people with disabilities. If you need accommodation in this class, please provide reasonable prior notice to the Center for Disability Services, 162 Olpin Union Building, 581-5020 (V/TDD), or at <http://www.sa.utah.edu/ds/>. CDS will work with you and me to make arrangements.
- ▶ Written information in this course can be made available in an alternate format with prior notification to the Center for Disability Services.

Calendar:

- ▶ The Office of the Registrar keeps the official semester calendar. It's at: http://www.sa.utah.edu/regist/pages/Spring2007_000.htm.

Expectations:

I expect you to take complete responsibility for your own learning and progress. I'm your coach, but you must run the race. I also urge you to collaborate as individuals and as a cohort.

My job is to help you learn, guide your work, and encourage (or warn) you as you go. If you have questions, ask anytime. To quote my UNC colleague Deb Aikat:

“You are not an interruption of my work – you are the purpose of it.”

Week by Week Guide

- ▶ Life’s unpredictable, so this will likely change.
- ▶ Read each assignment *by* the day listed. Chapters refer to the text. Other readings will be on WebCT. If you’re unclear on any readings, please ask.

1. **Monday, Jan. 8** Intro: Syllabus, schedule; introductions, survey cards.
Discussion: Informally share areas of interest.
Sign up: To lead chapter discussions.

- Monday, Jan. 15** NO CLASS – MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. DAY.

2. **Monday, Jan. 22** Basics of Research Design.
Read: Ch. 1 (The Systematic Study of Mass Communication), Ch. 6 (The Logic of Social and Behavioral Science), Ch. 7 (Constructing Theory); article, “Theory and Research in Mass Communication” by Bryant and Miron.
Due: 2-3 pp. describing your areas of interest, including 3-4 *preliminary* research questions (ungraded).
Sign up: To lead article discussions (I may approve a substitute article if you justify it and provide copies.)
Handout: Paradigm chart.

3. **Monday, Jan. 29** Applied Research.
Read: Ch. 2 (Broadcast Research), Ch. 3 (Newspaper Research); article, “A Gang of Pecksniffs Grows Up” by Plaisance.

4. **Monday, Feb. 5** Applied Research.
Read: Ch. 4 (Applied Public Relations Research), Ch. 5 (Advertising Research); article, “Public Relations: State of the Field” by Botan and Taylor; article, “Tonight’s Top Story” by Wood, Nelson, Cho, and Yaros.
Due: Revised preliminary research questions (ungraded).

5. **Monday, Feb. 12** Measurement.
Read: Ch. 8 (Measurement Decisions).
Due: 2-3 pp. outlining available sources and your approach to writing a state-of-the-research review for your topic. This will include a sense of scholarly traditions and methods (ungraded).

- Monday, Feb. 19** NO CLASS – PRESIDENTS DAY.

6. **Monday, Feb. 26** Quantitative Methods.
Read: Ch. 9 (Basic Statistical Tools), Ch. 10 (Data Analysis and SPSS Programs); article, “Frame-Mapping Analysis of Newspaper Coverage” by Seamon.
7. **Monday, March 5** Content Analysis.
Read: Ch. 11 (Content Analysis), Ch. 12 (Using Databases for Content Analysis); article, “Content Analysis in Mass Communication” by Lombard, Snyder-Duch, and Bracken.
Due: State-of-the-research review for your topic (ungraded draft).
8. **Monday, March 12** Surveys and Questionnaires.
Read: Ch. 13 (Survey Research), Ch. 14 (Secondary Analysis); article, “Representing the Total Community” by Wu and Izard.
- Monday, March 19** NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK.
9. **Monday, March 26** Experimental Design.
Read: Ch. 15 (The Controlled Experiment), Ch. 16 (Ethical Issues).
Due: State-of-the-research review for your topic (final graded version).
10. **Monday, April 2** Qualitative Methods.
Read: Ch. 18 (Separating Wheat from Chaff in Qualitative Studies); article, “The Qualitative Paradigm” by Joniak.
Due: 2-3 pp. outlining your approach to a theory-based argument and research design (ungraded).
11. **Monday, April 9** Historical and Legal Research.
Read: Ch. 19 (The Practice of Historical Research), Ch. 20 (Legal Research in Mass Communication); article, “The Variety of Journalism History” by Cloud; article, “The Music Industry and the Legislative Development of the Digital Millennium Copyright Act’s Online Service Provider Provision” by Imfeld and Ekstrand.

12. **Monday, April 16** Writing and Presenting Research.
Read: Ch. 17 (Presenting Quantitative Data), Ch. 21 (Presentation of Research Results).
Due: Theory-based argument and research design for your topic (ungraded draft).
13. **Monday, April 23** Presentations on your research.
- Exam week** **Due:** Theory-based argument and research design for your topic (final graded version).

Additional references/resources:

- John W. Cresswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Traditions* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 1998).
- Thomas R. Lindlof and Bryan C. Taylor, *Qualitative Communication Research Methods*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 2002).
- Dana K. Keller, *The Tao of Statistics: A Path to Understanding (With No Math)* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 2005).
- Paula M. Poindexter and Maxwell E. McCombs, *Research in Mass Communication: A Practical Guide* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2000).
- Neil J. Salkind, *Statistics for People Who (Think They) Hate Statistics* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 2000).
- David Silverman, *Doing Qualitative Research*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 2005).
- David Silverman, *Qualitative Research: Theory, Method and Practice*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 2004).