



COM 297-003

Communication Research Methods

Fall 2026

Classroom: Fell Hall 158 (most days) & Fell 108 computer lab (7 days)

Dates & Times: Mondays, Wednesdays, & Fridays, from 11:00 – 11:50 a.m.

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Office Hours: By appointment, MW 12–1 p.m. & M 2–3 p.m. Any time via cell phone.

Course Description and Objectives:

The purpose of this class is to teach you methods of scholarly communication research, research design, data analysis, and reporting of research results. According to the undergraduate catalog, this course covers “methods of scholarly research and critical evaluation of research.” We focus primarily on quantitative research methods but will also devote attention to qualitative methods and rhetorical criticism. This course is designed to accomplish the following objectives:

1. Provide students with a comprehensive knowledge of communication research methods.
2. Provide students with the ability to apply research skills.
3. Develop students’ competence in formulating research questions and hypotheses, constructing research designs, conducting data analysis, reporting results, and analyzing implications of findings.
4. Provide students with experience in data entry and data analysis using SPSS.
5. Develop students’ understanding of sampling, measurement, and scale development in communication research studies.
6. Develop students’ abilities to critically read and summarize research.
7. Develop students’ understanding of research ethics.

Online Engagement:

We use various locations for class meetings: our Fell 158 classroom (most days) & the Fell 108 computer lab (7 days). Check the schedule each day to ensure you show up to the right location. We may have unplanned Zoom days, so also check Canvas announcements and your ISU email. Consult the Modules feature in Canvas for tasks to complete. Written assignments must be submitted as Word (*not* PDF) documents, with metadata and properties visible, on Canvas using the Assignments feature. Contact me through my ISU email (for quick questions) or my cell phone (for back-and-forth dialogue). I do *not* check or respond to Canvas inbox messages.

Professionalism:

Learning is maximized by reading class materials, handwritten note-taking, critical listening, cognitive engagement, and focusing one’s attention by not yielding to distractions. Actively listen to those who are speaking during lectures and discussion. We are a team working collectively to improve and learn research methods. Each student must be a productive, contributing member of our team. Be on time for class, ignore cell phones, text messages, social

media, or urges to surf the Internet. Respect is demonstrated by listening, ignoring distractions, and being fully present—both physically and mentally. *Laptops, tablets, and phones should not be used during class without my explicit permission.* Audio or video recording/translation and photography are not permitted without approved accommodations from SAAS.

Attendance Policy:

Regular attendance and active engagement are required. Come prepared to discuss and engage with the daily readings and material. Perfect attendance is expected; by enrolling in this course, you have made a commitment to be present during all class meetings. Being absent deprives you of valuable class lectures, discussions, and announcements. When you are absent in this class you will miss a ton of material. Historically, there has been a strong correlation between absences and grades; the more students miss, the lower grades they tend to earn.

Late Work Policy:

If you do not take an exam during the scheduled time, you will likely receive a zero. Assignments are expected at the beginning of class on the due date, unless otherwise noted. An automatic 10% of the points possible will be deducted from late assignments, with an additional 10% deducted for each 24 hours it is late. As a general rule, incomplete grades will not be given.

Academic Misconduct Policy:

Students must be honest in all academic work, consistent with the *Code of Student Conduct*. All ideas are to be appropriately cited when borrowed, directly or indirectly, from a source. Inadequate citation, unauthorized and unacknowledged collaboration, and/or the presentation of someone else's work constitute plagiarism. Students found to commit intentional acts of dishonesty (including cheating on an exam, recycling work submitted for another course, or plagiarizing an assignment) will likely receive a failing assignment and course grade as well as be referred for disciplinary action to the Student Conduct and Community Responsibilities office. Reporting academic dishonesty is my professional responsibility so I do not hesitate to enforce consequences. In this course, the use of generative AI tools is *not* permitted to support the completion of any assignment in whole or in part and constitutes academic dishonesty. This includes, but is not limited to, using generative AI tools to ideate, pre-plan, edit, wordsmith, translate, or otherwise create original material you claim to be solely your creation.

Special Needs Accommodation:

I am happy to accommodate any special needs you may have—so please let me know, although I require written documentation from Student Access and Accommodation Services (SAAS) for ongoing accommodations. Any student needing to arrange a reasonable accommodation for a documented disability and/or medical/mental health condition should contact SAAS at 308 Fell Hall, office phone (309) 438-5853, video phone (309) 319-7682 or visit the website at StudentAccess.IllinoisState.edu.

Research Study Announcement Board:

The board is at: <https://sites.google.com/site/ilstusocstudies/>. Studies go up as the semester progresses, but don't wait to get started. Participate in a study to earn points or complete a 3-page journal article review instead (a sample is provided on Canvas).

Examinations:

Exams are closed book/closed notes; however, you may use a handwritten study guide—the length and content of which will be specified prior to each exam. The format will consist of objective style questions, such as multiple choice, true/false, matching, and fill-in-the blank. Each examination is comprehensive, addressing all prior readings and material covered.

Proposed Research Project:

Students will compose a series of directional and non-directional research questions and hypotheses as well as a null hypothesis for a hypothetical research study using APA Style. Students will construct an original survey instrument, with items and scales for each variable, for their hypothetical research study and pilot test the survey.

Literature Review Write-ups:

Students will complete a series of brief literature review write-ups addressing assigned journal article studies. Literature reviews must follow APA Style.

SPSS Lab Assignments and Results Write-ups:

We will complete a series of SPSS lab assignments using mock data from the Messy Data and SES data sets. Results must be written-up in APA Style, in accordance with examples provided. Missing lab days will impact the grade you are able to earn on each lab assignment.

Course Assignments and Grades:

The grading scale is as follows: A= 100-90%; B= 89-80%; C= 79-70%; D= 69-60%; F= 59% and below. Percentages will be calculated based on points earned from:

	<u>Points Possible/Your Points</u>	
<u>Research Assignments</u>		
Research Questions and Hypotheses	15	/ _____
Messy Data in SPSS	30	/ _____
Survey Items and Scales	40	/ _____
SES Data in SPSS	20	/ _____
Literature Review Write-up	50	/ _____
SES Results SPSS Write-up	75	/ _____
Research Study Announcement Board	10	/ _____
<u>Examinations</u>		
First Examination	100	/ _____
Second Examination	100	/ _____
Third Examination	100	/ _____
Final Examination	100	/ _____
Total	640	/ _____

Required Textbook:

The textbook is required and necessary for successful completion of the course. You can purchase the textbook from the campus bookstore or online book sellers.

Merrigan, G., & Huston, C. L. (2020). *Communication research methods* (4th ed.). Oxford University Press.

Additional required PDF readings are available through Canvas via Milner Library or Internet hyperlinks. It is helpful to have access to a copy of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (7th edition) and help sheets are available on Canvas.

Required PDF Articles (citations listed in the order we read them):

Parks, M. R., Faw, M., & Goldsmith, D. (2011). Undergraduate instruction in empirical research methods in communication: Assessment and recommendations. *Communication Education*, 60(4), 406-421. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03634523.2011.562909>

Klein, L. W. (2011, September 9). Statistical terms used in research studies: A primer for journalists. *Journalist's Resource*.
<http://journalistsresource.org/reference/research/statistics-for-journalists>

Rosenau, J. (2011, May 31). The importance of being median [Web log post].
http://scienceblogs.com/tfk/2011/05/the_importance_of_being_median.php

Siegfried, T. (2010, March 27). Odds are, it's wrong: Science fails to face shortcomings of statistics. *Science News*, 177(7). <http://www.sciencenews.org/>

Simonds, B. K., Meyer, K. R., Quinlan, M. M., & Hunt, S. K. (2006). Effects of instructor speech rate on affective learning and student perceptions of instructor immediacy, credibility, and clarity. *Communication Research Reports*, 23(3), 187-197.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/08824090600796401>

Min, S.-J., & Feaster, J. C. (2010). Missing children in national news coverage: Racial and gender representations of missing children cases. *Communication Research Reports*, 27(3), 207-216. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08824091003776289>

Meyer, K. R., Hunt, S. K., Hopper, K. M., Thakkar, K. V., Tsubakopoulos, V., & Van Hoose, K. J. (2008). Assessing information literacy instruction in the basic communication course. *Communication Teacher*, 22(1), 22-34.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/17404620801926925>

Boudewyns, V., & Paquin, R. S. (2011). Intentions and beliefs about getting tested for STDs: Implications for communication interventions. *Health Communication*, 26(8), 701-711.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10410236.2011.563353>

Ledbetter, A. M., Mazer, J. P., DeGroot, J. M., Meyer, K. R., Mao, Y., & Swafford, B. (2011). Attitudes toward online social connection and self-disclosure as predictors of Facebook communication and relational closeness. *Communication Research*, 38(1), 27-53.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650210365537>

Allen, M. (2009). Meta-analysis. *Communication Monographs*, 76(4), 398-407.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03637750903310386>

Tentative Schedule

Week 1	Topic	Assignments Due
M, Aug. 17	*Introduction to and philosophy of the course *Syllabus assignments and policies	*Read Syllabus *Purchase Textbook
W, Aug. 19	*Overview of research methods and course content	*Explore Canvas & locate PDF readings
F, Aug. 21	*“Undergraduate Instruction in Empirical Research Methods in Communication: Assessment & Recommendations.”	*Read Parks et al. (2011)
Week 2	Topic	Assignments Due
M, Aug. 24	*“Statistical Terms used in Research Studies: A Primer for Journalists.” *“The Importance of Being Median.” *“Odds are, it’s Wrong: Science Fails to Face Shortcomings of Statistics.”	*Read Klein (2011) *Read Rosenau (2011) *Read Siegfried (2010)
W, Aug. 26	*“Preface” by Merrigan & Huston *“Foreword: Islands of Inquiry” by Brian Spitzberg *Descriptive Statistics	*Read Preface & Foreword, Merrigan & Huston (2009)
F, Aug. 28	*“Introduction to Communication Research.”	*Read Chapter 1
Week 3	Topic	Assignments Due
M, Aug. 31	*“Three Paradigms of Knowing.”	*Read Chapter 2
W, Sep. 2	*“Ethics and Research.”	*Read Chapter 3
F, Sep. 4	*“Making Arguments for Association and Causality.”	*Read Chapter 4
Week 4	Topic	Assignments Due
M, Sep. 7	*No Classes (Labor Day)	
W, Sep. 9	*“Measuring and Designing Quantitative Social Science Research.”	*Read Chapter 5
F, Sep. 11	*Writing Research Questions/Hypotheses & Data Visualization	
Week 5	Topic	Assignments Due
M, Sep. 14	*Review for First Exam	
W, Sep. 16	***FIRST EXAMINATION	
F, Sep. 18	*Debrief exam results *Inferential Statistics	**RQs & Hs due
Week 6	Topic	Assignments Due
M, Sep. 21	*“Experimental Research: Predicting Causes and Effects.”	*Read Chapter 6
W, Sep. 23	*“Survey Research: Explaining and Predicting Attitudes and Behaviors.”	*Read Chapter 7
F, Sep. 25	*“Analyzing and Interpreting Quantitative Data.”	*Read Chapter 9
Week 7	Topic	Assignments Due
M, Sep. 28	*SPSS Lab Assignment (messy data) **Class meets in Fell 108 lab	

W, Sep. 30	*“Content Analysis: Explaining and Interpreting Message Categories.”	*Read Chapter 8
F, Oct. 2	*SPSS Lab Assignment (messy data) **Class meets in Fell 108 lab	
Week 8	Topic	Assignments Due
M, Oct. 5	*Review for Second Exam *How to Read Journal Articles	
W, Oct. 7	***SECOND EXAMINATION	
F, Oct. 9	*Debrief exam results *SPSS Lab Assignment (messy data) **Class meets in Fell 108 lab	**Messy Data due
Week 9	Topic	Assignments Due
M, Oct. 12	*“Effects of Instructor Speech Rate on Affective Learning & Student Perceptions of Instructor Immediacy, Credibility, & Clarity.”	*Read Simonds et al. (2006)
W, Oct. 14	*SPSS Lab Assignment (SES data) **Class meets in Fell 108 lab	*Read SES codebook
F, Oct. 16	*SPSS Lab Assignment (SES data) **Class meets in Fell 108 lab	**Survey Items and Scales due
Week 10	Topic	Assignments Due
M, Oct. 19	*“Missing Children in National News Coverage: Racial and Gender Representations of Missing Children Cases.” *Content Analysis	*Read Min & Feaster (2010)
W, Oct. 21	*“Assessing Information Literacy Instruction in the Basic Communication Course.”	*Read Meyer et al. (2008)
F, Oct. 23	*“Intentions and Beliefs About Getting Tested for STDs: Implications for Communication Interventions.”	*Read Boudewyns & Paquin (2011)
Week 11	Topic	Assignments Due
M, Oct. 26	*“Attitudes Toward Online Social Connection & Self-Disclosure as Predictors of Facebook Communication & Relational Closeness.” *SPSS Lab Assignment (SES data) **Class meets in Fell 108 lab	*Read Ledbetter et al. (2011)
W, Oct. 28	*SPSS Lab Assignment (SES data) **Class meets in Fell 108 lab	**SES Data due
F, Oct. 30	*“Meta-Analysis.”	*Read Allen (2009)
Week 12		
M, Nov. 2	*Review for Third Exam *Locate SPSS output for results write-ups	**Literature Review write-up due
W, Nov. 4	***THIRD EXAMINATION	
F, Nov. 6	*Debrief exam results *Discuss SPSS results write-up format and APA style	
Week 13	Topic	Assignments Due
M, Nov. 9	*“Making Arguments for Multiple Plausible Realities.”	*Read Chapter 11

W, Nov. 11	*“Conversation Analysis: Explaining Talk’s Structure and Function.”	*Read Chapter 10
F, Nov. 13	*“Discourse Analysis: Interpreting and Evaluating Language-in-Use.”	*Read Chapter 14
Week 14	Topic	Assignments Due
M, Nov. 16	*“Interviews and Focus Groups: Interpreting Guided Responses.”	*Read Chapter 12
W, Nov. 18	*“Ethnography: Interpreting and Evaluating Cultural Communication.”	*Read Chapter 13
F, Nov. 20	*“Rhetorical Criticism: Interpreting and Evaluating Messages.”	*Read Chapter 15 **SPSS Results write-up due *Research Board due
Week 15	Topic	Assignments Due
M, Nov. 23	*No Classes (Fall Break)	
W, Nov. 25	*No Classes (Fall Break)	
F, Nov. 27	*No Classes (Fall Break)	
Week 16	Topic	Assignments Due
M, Nov. 30	*“Critical Studies: Evaluating and Reforming Ideologies.”	*Read Chapter 16
W, Dec. 2	*“Glossary”	*Read Glossary
F, Dec. 4	*Review for Final Exam	*Course Evaluations
Finals Week	Topic	Assignments Due
?, Dec. ?	***FINAL EXAMINATION (Exact Date & Time TBA by Registrar)	