

Instructor: Dr. Steve Hunt  
Office: Fell 427  
Office Phone: 438-7279  
Office Hours: TR 1:00 p.m.-2:00 p.m., & by appointment when necessary  
E-mail: [skhunt2@ilstu.edu](mailto:skhunt2@ilstu.edu)  
Section: 01 (9:35 a.m.-10:50 a.m./TR/Fell 158  
03 (11:00 a.m.-12:15 p.m./TR/Fell 280)

**TEXT:**

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

Additional required PDF readings are available through Canvas via Milner Library or Internet hyperlinks; citations appear in this syllabus. It is helpful to have access to a copy of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (7th edition) though help sheets are available on Canvas. You also need to maintain a working email account that you can check before class each day.

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

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 is to cover “methods of scholarly research and critical evaluation of research.” We will focus primarily on quantitative research methods but will also devote some attention to qualitative and rhetorical methods. Thus, this course is designed to accomplish the following objectives:

1. To provide students with a comprehensive knowledge of communication research methods.
2. To provide students with the ability to apply research skills.
3. To develop students’ competence in formulating research questions and hypotheses, constructing research designs, conducting data analysis, reporting results, and analyzing implications of findings.
4. To develop students’ understanding of sampling, measurement, and scale development in communication research studies.
5. To develop students’ abilities to locate, critically read, and summarize research.
6. Understand and appropriately explain research ethics.

**MY APPROACH TO TEACHING:**

First of all, please keep in mind that I AM HERE TO HELP! My goal as an instructor is to do all I can to create an environment in which we all can learn from each other safely,

productively, and happily. Every person in this class contributes to that environment, and together we share the power to determine whether or not we live up to that goal.

Please do not hesitate to ask questions, or ask for help, in or out of class. (Unless there is a privacy issue at stake, in-class is often best, since your classmates may have the same questions or concerns that you do, and then you are helping them, too.)

If you have any special needs that it would help for me to be aware of, please do let me know. I am committed to helping every student attain the best quality of education she or he can.

### **COURSE POLICIES:**

**ATTENDANCE:** It should be no surprise that in a communication class, I expect attendance. I expect you to be able to apply the things we discuss in class to your graded assignments. In addition, there may be several written assignments in this class. Some of these assignments may be done in class; others may be assigned as homework. Some assignments may involve using your textbook, so you are requested to bring your textbook to class. Assignments done in class **CANNOT** be made up for credit. If you are absent the day an in-class assignment is performed, you lose the assigned points (the same policy applies to quizzes and other graded assignments). If you need advice on how to manage an extended absence or want notification of your absence sent to your instructors, contact the [Dean of Students Office](#).

**PROFESSIONALISM:** (1) This class begins on time. Habitual lateness counts cumulatively as absence(s). (2) Should you need to miss a class or an appointment, I would appreciate the same courtesy and sense of responsibility you would extend to an employer. (3) Professionalism includes respecting others' opinions, not interrupting in class, being respectful to those who are speaking, and working together in a spirit of cooperation.

**PROBLEMS:** All work is expected on the date it is due. Make sure to anticipate those predictable problems so that you can prevent them. For example, running out of paper or ink, or losing something on a computer or flash drive that you did not backup are problems that need not occur if you are looking ahead.

**TOUGHER PROBLEMS:** All work is still expected on the date it is due. In emergencies I will make other arrangements with individual students but such cases are relatively rare. Like most instructors, I am more understanding if you keep me informed. If you encounter problems, please let me know right away as I may be able to help.

**CHEATING/PLAGIARISM:** Students are expected to be honest in all academic work, consistent with the academic integrity policy as outlined in the *Code of Student Conduct*. All work is to be appropriately cited when it is borrowed, directly or indirectly, from another source. Unauthorized and unacknowledged collaboration on assignments

and/or the presentation of someone else's work warrants plagiarism.

Students found to inadvertently commit acts of dishonesty will receive appropriate penalties specific to the assignment in question. Students found to commit intentional acts of dishonesty will receive a failing grade in the course and will be referred for appropriate disciplinary action through the Office of Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution.

Content generated by an Artificial Intelligence third-party service or site (AI-generated content) without proper attribution or authorization is another form of plagiarism. If you are unsure about whether something may be plagiarism or another form of academic dishonesty, please reach out to me to discuss it as soon as possible.

STUDENT ACCOMMODATIONS: Any student needing to arrange a reasonable accommodation for a documented disability and/or medical/mental health condition should contact Student Access and Accommodation Services at 350 Fell Hall, (309) 438-5853, or visit the website at [StudentAccess.IllinoisState.edu](http://StudentAccess.IllinoisState.edu).

MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES: Life at college can get very complicated. Students sometimes feel overwhelmed, lost, experience anxiety or depression, struggle with relationship difficulties or diminished self-esteem. However, many of these issues can be effectively addressed with a little help. Student Counseling Services (SCS) helps students cope with difficult emotions and life stressors. Student Counseling Services is staffed by experienced, professional psychologists and counselors, who are attuned to the needs of college students. The services are FREE and completely confidential. Find out more at [counseling.illinoisstate.edu](http://counseling.illinoisstate.edu) or by calling (309) 438-3655.

STUDENT WELL-BEING: It's hard to learn if you're hungry or couch surfing. If you are having difficulty affording groceries, accessing sufficient food to eat every day, or securing a safe and stable place to live, help may be available. I urge you to contact the Dean of Students Office to learn more.

CAMPUS SAFETY: Illinois State University is committed to maintaining a safe environment for the University community. Please take a few moments to make sure you are signed up for ISU Emergency Alerts at [IllinoisState.edu/EmergencyAlert](http://IllinoisState.edu/EmergencyAlert). Also, note the information posted in each classroom about emergency shelters and evacuation assembly areas (both are indicated on stickers inside every classroom). Additional safety information is available on the Campus Safety and Security website, [Security.IllinoisState.edu](http://Security.IllinoisState.edu).

EXTRA CREDIT: There will be a few extra credit opportunities for research participation. The extra credit points will be added to your final grade and may not necessarily appear in the gradebook immediately upon your completion of the opportunity. There are no guarantees for extra credit, and it is each student's responsibility to be aware of and

take advantage of such opportunities. You may receive extra credit for participating in up to four of the studies posted to the School of Communication's Research Announcement Board. The Research Announcement Board is updated as research studies are opened/closed, and it is your responsibility to access the Board and be aware of available opportunities. The Research Announcement Board can be accessed via: <https://sites.google.com/site/ilstusocstudies>

Each study you participate in is worth five points of extra credit. I will receive evidence of participation and the time of participation from the researcher(s) who administer the research studies at the conclusion of the semester; however, it is your responsibility to make sure that the researchers have the necessary evidence of your participation at the time of the study. Before participating in a study, please be sure to have your name, ULID (i.e., the part of your email before @ilstu.edu), instructor name, and course and section number ready, as you will need to provide these to receive credit. Research Credit can only be applied to one course for each study, unless specified otherwise on the Research Announcement Board. A maximum of 20 points can be earned from extra credit opportunities via the Research Announcement Board.

NON-RESEARCH EXTRA CREDIT: There may be some studies for which you are not eligible (e.g., recruiting based on gender or family structure) or in which you do not wish to take part. Reasonable alternatives are available for those not able or wanting to take part in specific studies, to ensure equitable non-research based opportunities. Throughout the semester, I will announce non-research opportunities for extra credit, which may include attending a colloquium, reading a recent article or research paper, or attending an on-campus event and writing a summary of the connection of the event to course content. I will make these opportunities and specific details available as they arise.

#### **GRADING:**

Your grade for this course will depend on how many points you earn from the assignments listed below. **NOTE: Failure to turn in any of the course requirements may result in failure of the course.**

1. **Exams (200 points):** There will be one midterm and one final exam. The exams will assess your understanding course content as well as your application and integration abilities. The tests will consist of fill-in/short answer questions.
2. **Group Project Research Paper (175 points):** The goal of this paper is to produce a product acceptable for convention presentation. Most convention guidelines specify that papers should be no longer than 25 pages (excluding references, tables, etc.). *Your final paper should be between 15-20 pages in length.* Papers should be written using APA

(American Psychological Association) guidelines as this is the style required by most journals that publish communication research. If you do not have a copy of this manual, I recommend that you purchase it. Writing clearly and concisely is an ongoing learning process—none of us ever perfect it. However, I do want you to be concerned about your writing style and hope that as this course progresses your writing will also improve. Feel free to ask me to consult with you on your papers prior to grading. You may select one of two options for the format of your final paper.

a. *Research Summary.* A research summary is an essay, incorporating an original way of summarizing, analyzing, and interpreting a body of research literature. Rather than being a mere descriptive survey, it goes beyond to develop insights and provide acute evaluations which can be the basis for subsequent research. Research summaries for purposes of this class should contain a) a review of literature, b) evaluation of literature, c) issues for further inquiry, and d) practical and/or theoretical implications.

b. *Research Proposal.* A research proposal is the first step in the research process in which you (a) describe of the purpose of the study, (b) provide a rationale for the study question(s), (c) define all key concepts/terms in the research question(s), (d) review previous research directly relevant to your research question(s), and (e) describe proposed methods and procedures, including participants, data bases or measurement instruments, time frame, and a rationale for your choices.

c. The timetable for the paper assignment is as follows:

1. a 1-2 page purpose statement (you will provide an overview of the topic—25 points). **DUE: February 19, 2026.**

2. a 6-10 page summary of your paper's purpose, relevant prior literature, research questions, or hypotheses and methods (50 points). **DUE: April 14, 2026.**

3. a 15-20 page final paper (100 points). **DUE: TBD** (finals week).

3. **Quizzes and Activities (points TBA):** I will give several unannounced quizzes throughout the semester. The answers to these quizzes will be quite obvious to one who has read the material! You may NOT make-up a quiz. Also note, any/all materials are handed out only once. If you are not in class to receive them, you should obtain the information from a fellow student.

4. Summary of Grading:

Exams	200 points
Group Research Project	175 points
Quizzes/Activities	TBA

The grading scale is a standard ten percentage point scale:

90-100% = A ; 80%-89% = B; 70%-79% = C; 60-69% = D; below 60% = F

### TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

#### Week 1

Jan. 13 (T) Course Orientation/Introductions

15 (R) What Should Students Enrolled in Research Methods Learn?

**Reading:**

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>

#### Week 2

20 (T) Science and Statistics

**Readings:**

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>

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/>

22 (R) Research as Argument (**Read MH Preface & Forward**)

#### Week 3

27 (T) Research in a Post-Truth Era

**Reading:**

Waisbord, S. (2018). The elective affinity between post-truth communication and populist politics. *Communication Research and Practice*, 4, 17-34. doi: 10.1080/22041451.2018.1428928

29 (R) Introduction to Communication Research (**Read MH CH 1**)  
**\*Assign Groups**

Week 4

Feb. 3 (T) Three Paradigms of Knowing (**Read MH CH 2**)

5 (R) Ethics and Research (**Read MH CH 3**)

Week 5

10 (T) Making Arguments for Association and Causality (**Read MH CH 4**)

12 (R) Measuring and Designing Quantitative Social Science Research (**Read MH CH 5**)

Week 6

17 (T) Experimental Research (**Read MH CH 6**)

19 (R) Survey Research (**Read MH CH 7**)  
**\*Purpose Statement Due**

Week 7

24 (T) Content Analysis (**Read MH CH 8**)

26 (R) Overview of Group Project

Week 8

March 3 (T) Review for Midterm

5 (R) **MIDTERM EXAM**

Week 9

**NO CLASS—SPRING BREAK!!!**

Week 10

17 (T) Work in Groups

19 (R) Work in Groups

Week 11

24 (T) Analyzing and Interpreting Quantitative Data (**Read MH CH 9**)

26 (R) Writing Research Questions and Hypotheses

Week 12

31 (T) Work in Groups (Complete Literature Review)

April 2 (R) Conversation Analysis (**Read MH CH 10**)

Week 13

7 (T) Making Arguments for Multiple Plausible Realities (**Read MH CH 11**)

9 (R) Interviews and Focus Groups/Ethnography (**Read MH CHs 12 & 13**)

Week 14

14 (T) Discourse Analysis (**Read MH CH 14**)  
**\*6-10 Page Summary Due**

16 (R) **NO CLASS—CSCA!!!**

Week 15

21 (T) Rhetorical Criticism (**Read MH CH 15**)

23 (R) Critical Studies (**Read MH CH 16**)

Week 16

28 (T) Work in Groups

30 (R)      Course Evaluations  
Reflection and Synthesis of Course  
Review for Final Exam

TBD            **FINAL EXAM & Research Paper**