

Methods of Inquiry, Communication 501

Mondays and Wednesdays, Winter Quarter 2016, 11:30-1:20 in CMU 242

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Office Hours MW 9:30-11:30 and by appointment

I. Description

Inquiry is the process of asking and answering questions. This course is designed to look closely at the diverse methods of inquiry into the nature, processes, and impact of communication. The breadth of coverage in this course reflects a commitment to pluralism in methodologies within the discipline. In this course, students explore the inquiry process in general as well as the utility of different methods for investigating different research topics, defining and measuring concepts, interpreting artefacts, and investigating theories. This course has four objectives:

- develop students' understanding about commonalities and differences across approaches to research;
- foster students' literacy of interdisciplinary and multi-method, and contemporary inquiry;
- involve students in the latest discussions and debates in communication inquiry;
- equip students with an advanced literacy in multiple approaches to inquiry, including ones they may not chose to use themselves.

The sequence of the course flows from approaches involving criticism and theory generation to generalization and theory testing. By the end of this class, students should be able to assess the impact of methodological choices on research findings. Students will be able to do a basic rhetorical reading, take ethnographic field notes, plan a cross-case comparison, design and field a survey, and calculate simple table descriptives from data samples.

Within every research tradition the distinction between theory and method seems quite problematic. So instead of reinforcing old epistemological categories of method, this course celebrates the diversity of and interdependence of approaches. This class will teach students about the unity and diversity of communication inquiry, and give them an introductory—but graduate level—literacy with several modes of inquiry. It seeks to impress upon students our faculty values on interdisciplinary, comparative, and multi-modal inquiry, and offer a balanced emphasis on disciplinary origins with an emphasis on the latest debates and directions in research by featuring very contemporary research, real-time inquiry, and our disciplinary trajectory. It also seeks to give students a sophisticated literacy with traditional modes of communication inquiry and substantive introduction to the latest innovations in digital humanities and computational social science on questions of interest to communication scholars.

As much as this is a class in methods, it is also an opportunity for students to choose the questions and themes they find most interesting in the study of communication. This class will be a workshop in which the students can present ideas on how and when to use evaluate methods of inquiry. Although students are required to try different methods, they have wide freedom to select their line of inquiry, and much of the content of this class will depend on the topics that

interest students. Students will finish the course with a good reference packet of notes, reviews, and other handouts.

II. Readings

You will read *Seeing Like a Rover* and then another book of your choosing this quarter (Vertesi 2015). The articles and book chapters below have been collected into a zip file and they will be shared with you.

III. Course Outline

Week 1: Design

This first week will be about how epistemology shapes conceptualizations of theory, and how those conceptualizations shape approaches to inquiry. The rationale behind the structure of the class will be presented via readings and discussion. What is research, what are research ethics, and how do we craft research questions? Research Outreach and Dissemination. Data Visualization.

Reading: (Christians, C.G. 2000; Carrigan 2015; @writingforresearch 2015).

Prezi: [Crafting Research Questions](#).

Handout: [Designing Communication Research](#).

Handout: [Sokal Hoax](#).

Week 2: Critical/Humanistic

Critical Paradigms, Critical Theory, and Theorizing via Critique. Critical-Cultural Studies. Critical Discourse Analysis. Theory in Humanistic Communication Scholarship. Rhetorical Criticism. Visual Communication. Research Ethics as Relevant.

Reading: (Dahlgren, Peter 1997; Haraway 1984; Schudson, Michael 1997) OR Rhetoric (Benson, T.W. 1994; Fisher, W.D. and O'Leary, S.D. 1996) OR Visual Communication (Frosh 2015; Gates 2015).

Prezi: [Grounded Theory and Cultural Studies](#).

Handout: [Types of Causality](#).

Handout: [Argumentative Fallacies](#).

Week 3: Ethics (No Meeting January 18th or 20th)

Do the online [IRB training course](#) for social and behavioral sciences, and hand in a printout of the final screen showing that you have completed the modules.

Reading: A book you have chosen.

Prezi: [Ethics in Research](#).

Week 4: Qualitative

Interpretive Paradigms and Approaches to Theory and Research. Validity. Practice-Based Theorizing. Participant Observation. Interviews. Ethnography. Feminist, Team, and Network Ethnography. Narrative Analysis. Qualitative Content Analysis. Qualitative Focus Groups. Research Ethics as Relevant.

Reading: (Vertesi 2015).

Prezi: [Qualitative Research I.](#)

Prezi: [Ethnography.](#)

Prezi: [Qualitative Research II.](#)

Handout: [Organizing an Interview.](#)

Handout: [Types of Evidence.](#)

Week 5: Comparative

Perspectives on Variables (Input / Output, Independent / Dependent, Cause / Effect, Beginning / Outcome). Case based methods. Historical and Archival Approaches. Concept Explication and Theory Development. Generalization. Typology Building. Research Ethics as Relevant.

Reading: (Downey and Stanyer 2010; Livingstone 2003).

Handout: [Major Forms of Cross-Case Research.](#)

Prezi: [Theories You Can Use.](#)

Prezi: [Comparative Research.](#)

Due: Book Review

Week 6: Experimental

Experimental and Quasi-Experimental Research. Focus Groups. Controls and Variables. Experimental Settings. Natural Experiments. Research Ethics as Relevant.

Reading: (Grabe, M. E. and Westley, B. 2002; Sekhon and Titiunik 2012; Shadish, W., Cook, T., and Campbell, D. 2001b; Shadish, W., Cook, T., and Campbell, D. 2001a)

Prezi: [Focus Groups.](#)

Handout: [Frequency and Sampling Distributions.](#)

Week 7: Quantitative (No Meeting February 15)

Positivist and Post-Positivist Paradigms. Error, Sampling, Effects. Surveys. Quantitative Content Analysis. Quantitative Focus Groups. Reading Statistical Tables. Research Ethics as Relevant.

Reading: On Surveys (Cohn 2015; González-Bailón and Paltoglou 2015; Kohut, A. 2015; Shoemaker, P. J. and McCombs, M. E. 1601) OR Meta-Analysis (D'Alessio and Allen 2000; Paik and Comstock 1994; Quandt et al. 2015)

Prezi: [Quantitative Methods](#).

Prezi: [Survey Design](#).

Prezi: [Content Analysis](#).

Handout: [In-Class Survey Design Scenario](#).

Handout: [20 Ways to Critique a Political Poll](#).

Week 8: Network

Social Network Analysis. Hyperlink Network Analysis. Actor-Network Theory. Activity Theory. Nodes and Ties as Units of Analysis. Network, Modular, and Cascading Effects. Path Dependency. Process Tracing. Material Agency. Research Ethics as Relevant.

Reading: On Social Network Analysis (Emirbayer and Goodwin 1994; Welles and Contractor 2015) OR Actor-Network Theory (Anderson and Kreiss 2013; Sayes 2014).

Prezi: [Social Sciences](#).

Handout: [Social Network Analysis Exercise](#).

Week 9: Computational

Contemporary research and debates. Digital Humanities. Computational communication research. Digital Humanities. Methodological innovation. Research Ethics as Relevant.

Reading: Computational Social Science (Carey 2006; Cowls and Schroeder 2015; Salganik, Dodds, and Watts 2006) Or Digital Humanities (Burdick, A. et al. 2014; Manovich, L. 2016)
**note the Burdick is more of a long report than a book.

Week 10: Student Presentations

Be ready to discuss your research plan.

IV. Additional Modes and Methods of Inquiry

There are many additional modes and methods of inquiry that can't fit into a 10 week class. So here are additional topics we can delve into as a group if there is sufficient interest.

Activity Theory / Cultural-Historical Activity Theory. (K. A. Foot 2001; K. Foot and Groleau 2011; Nardi 1996; Vásquez and Cooren 2013)

Applied Research. (Buddenbaum, J. 2001; H. L. Goodall 2004).

Audit Studies. (Sandvig et al. 2014).

Auto-Ethnography. (Clough 1997; Ellis 1995; Fine 1999; Reed-Danahay 1997; Tillmann 2009).

Field Theory. (Bourdieu 1993; Fligstein and McAdam 2012).

Focus Groups. (Fern, E. 2001; Krueger, R. and Casey, M. A. 2014; Lunt and Livingstone 1996).

Fuzzy Set Logic. (Downey and Stanyer 2010; Hussain and Howard 2013; Ragin 2000).

History of Communication. (Mukerji 2015; Turner 2013; Medina 2014).
Internet Research Methods. (Hargittai and Sandvig 2015; Hine, C. 2005; Rogers 2013).
Institutional Review Boards & Ethics. (Irvine, J. 2012)
Interviews and Interviewing. (Livingstone 2010).
Online Ethnography. (Coleman 2013; Hine, Christine 2000; Howard 2002).
Political Economy. (Arsenault and Castells 2008; McChesney 2014; Saxenian 1996; Castells 2009).
Phenomenology. (Starks and Trinidad 2007).
Scholarly Debate and Replication. (Braumoeller 2015; Duneier 2006; Fischer 2009; Hussain and Howard 2013; Klinenberg, Eric 2003; McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Brashears 2006).
Unobtrusive Methods. (Webb, E. and Campbell, D. 1999).

V. Some Research Tools

Concept Mapping Tools: [IHMC](#)
Computing Inter Coder Reliability: [Calculator](#)
Live Poll Generator: <https://www.polleverywhere.com/>
Political Economy and Networks of Power: [Theyrule.net](#)

VI. Evaluation

There are several important assignments in this course that will comprise the grades students receive for the course. Students may use either APA or Chicago style, but must choose one and stick to it. I watch for grammar, spelling, and gender-neutral language. If your writing style impedes my ability to understand your arguments your grade will suffer, so it is a good idea to have at least one other person proofread your writing. A good style guide is William Strunk, Jr., and E. B. White, *The Elements of Style* (New York: Macmillan, 1979). Do not exceed the set page limits.

Participation (10 points)

Students are expected to participate actively in class discussions. Completion of the IRB online training program, good faith effort to get your book review published, regular attendance, and contributions to the discussion of assigned readings and each other's work will result in a high grade. Each student will assume responsibility for leading a discussion on two topics. This means leading an extended discussion the readings for one meeting, reviewing authors' core conclusions, asking questions of the group, and taking questions from the group. This does not mean preparing a formal position paper, but does mean preparing a few notes to give a 10 minute introduction to the readings of the day.

Book Review (10 points)

We will be reading some of the latest books in the discipline of communication, and students will prepare a 1,000 word book review. The review is due in week 5. The final draft of the book review is due into the journal editor on February 29th. Since I hope this component of the evaluation will add some lines to the publications on your academic CV, I would be happy to review drafts again before they go into the journal editor.

The book review could focus on the validity of the authors' choice of method, given the argument, rationale, and research questions. The review could critique how an author characterized or operationalized a method.

In the first weeks of class we will decide who will read which books, and which journals the reviews will be submitted to. In the second week of class, students will write to editors to ask if the journal would consider publishing an unsolicited review. The first five hundred words should briefly summarize the importance of the topic and rationale for the method of inquiry used, and identify any research questions or hypothesis that appeared. The last five hundred words should be the student's own succinct critique of the readings. Develop three distinct points of friendly critique and three compliments of the manuscript. Use no more than three references to other works, though you do not have to use any references. Be sure to use the reference style for the journal you are submitting to. I watch for grammar, spelling, and gender-neutral language. If your writing style impedes my ability to understand your arguments your grade will suffer, so it is a good idea to have at least one other person proofread your writing.

If a journal editor agrees to review your essay, find other copies of reviews published in that journal to get sense of the style and form of the journal's review section.

You may review any one of several recent books published by communication scholars (Albaek, E. et al. 2015; Borgman, Christina 2015; Braun 2015; Chan 2014; Dunbar-Hester, Christina 2014; Hargittai and Sandvig 2015; Reagle, J. 2015; Margetts et al. 2015; Phillips 2015; Schudson, Michael 2015; Stockman, Daniela 2015; Pasquale, Frank 2015). I'm open to suggestions about other titles, but they have to be examples of the methods discussed in this class, be authored not edited, be written by communication scholars, and be appealing to others in the class, and be a book that a journal editor would want reviewed.

Research Proposal (20)

Ideally, this will become the proposal for a larger Master's or Doctoral project. Students should treat this as an opportunity to sketch out their own research questions, to stretch and learn a method that might challenge their methodological assumptions and help them triangulate on answers, and to write something that will help them move along in their graduate career. Your questions and topics will almost certainly evolve over the quarter, and you can change topics as you like as long as you meet the writing deadlines.

The final paper for COM 501 will be a research proposal outlining a project you would like to carry out. This proposal should accomplish several things:

1. It will help advance your own research work, providing you with an opportunity to think in some depth about a project you want to carry out.
2. It will give you the opportunity to apply many of the ideas and issues raised in the COM 500 and 501 sequence; as such, the course will have direct impact on your own research agenda.
3. It will give you the opportunity to think about which methods are most appropriate for the work you want to do.

4. It will also give you the opportunity to begin a literature review which will provide the foundation for your work.

Students will get a significant amount of written and oral feedback from the instructor and other students. Some feedback will be in the form of literature recommendations, but this proposal is much more about smartly framing research questions and justifying methods choices, so do not worry about completing an extensive literature review. The draft should have the following sections:

1. **Introduction:** This is a statement of the research area and its significance. The first part of the paper orients the reader to the general topic of the study and identifies the general scope of the area. Why is your research topic worth pursuing? It is not enough here merely to say that you like the topic; we need a defense of the topic and specifically, some sense of how your project will enhance our (academic) understanding of communication. Hook the reader with a problem, puzzle or mystery.
2. **Literature Review:** The literature review performs several key functions. First, it details the key work in the field that pertains to the topic you are exploring. Second, it shows how your project builds on--and extends--what has already been written in the field. Third, it provides the conceptual foundation for your work: the key ideas that you are exploring and how have these been discussed to date. Fourth, it presents specific research questions and/or hypotheses that will be addressed in your study.
3. **Method A:** How will you actually go about doing this project? Which method(s) will you use? Provide some detail on the method you will be employing. Do more than say you will run a survey, experiment, or rhetorical criticism—expand by reflecting on how your research questions lend themselves to your particular method of inquiry. For instance, if you are doing an experiment, give us some sense of what you would be testing in the experiment; explain the different experimental conditions that are relevant to your work, and explain how you hope these conditions will further your work. If you are doing historical work, what specific materials will you be examining? How will you examine them? What are the indicators of the phenomena or trends you hope to study? How will you know good evidence when you see it?
4. **Method B:** There should be synergies between your methods A and B, but they should not be from the same over-arching approach to inquiry.
5. **Logistics:** This short section should identify the scope, timeline and budget for the project. Identify the number of subjects, the rough dates of entry and exit from the field, or any logistical challenges there might be in accessing manuscripts or artifacts. Identify any ethical challenges or institutional barriers to your work, anticipate concerns that the IRB may have, and how you will respond.
6. **Conclusion:** Confidently state the broad impact and intellectual merit of your proposal. Discuss the synergy between methods A and B, and how the process of triangulation will help you answer the questions you posed in your introduction.
7. **References:** Organize your references by a consistent style. This reference list does not have to be exhaustive, but it should signal that you have identified a few of the big authors and arguments in your line of inquiry. It should show that you know what other methods are being used to answer similar questions, and that you are making methods choices in line with contemporary expectations. This will be the most tentative section of

your proposal: you should collect references that seem relevant, read items that might have a direct influence on your method choice, but do not need to have a massive reference list.

VII. References

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