

COM382: Social Scientific Approaches to Communication Research

**Mondays and Wednesdays, Winter Quarter 2016
1:30-3:20 in CMU 120**

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Course Content

There are many ways to learn about social science research methods in the discipline of communication. One way is to talk broadly about the different approaches to research. Another is to discuss the tools that usually go into the methodological toolkit for social science research, and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of each. Still another is to actually do a research project, going from the conceptualization of research questions to the execution of a research plan and the dissemination of results. We will do these three things in this course. The learning goals of this class are to:

- have students understand the major epistemological differences between research methods;
- develop team research skills by providing opportunities for leadership, collaboration, and peer review in research;
- involve students in original research, conceptualized as a concrete project with distinct timelines, deliverables, and public impact.

By the end of the class, students will be able to:

- design a small research project;
- collect data, assess its quality, and manage it;
- manage real working relationships under tight deadlines.

Our dedicated Communication Librarian, Jessica Albano, will visit the class early in the quarter to discuss the library resources available to us. There will be no class meeting on January 18th, January 20th, or February 15th.

Methods of Evaluation

There are no mid-term or final exams in this course. Student work in this class will be evaluated through the following components.

Participation (20 points). Participation will be evaluated by the degree to which you advance conversation in the classes and labs. I'll look for other kinds of evidence of your engagement

with the material, including any knowledge checks we develop for the class. I will also look for other evidence that you've contributed: in the past students have run twitter conversations, participated in class debates, or blogged their lecture notes. There is no "shyness" component to the grade, and contributing in innovative ways generates the evidence of your participation. At UW class attendance cannot be used as the basis for a participation grade, so if there is no evidence of your participation you will not get points for participation.

Assignments (130 points).

Critique Your Selfies (20 points).

UW Responsible Conduct for Research (10 points).

Fast Food Fieldwork (20 points).

Comparative Content Analysis of Gender Stereotypes (20 points).

Experiment on Your Friends and Family (20 points).

Personal Network Analysis (20 points).

Computational Profile Essay (20 points).

Quizzes (50 points).

Quiz: Terms of Quantitative Methods (25 points).

Quiz: Read and Critique a Piece of Public Scholarship (25 points).

Late assignments will be accepted with a lateness penalty of 2 points per day. If there is a medical explanation for the missed deadlines, providing me with a note from your doctor will mean the penalty can be waived.

Howard Becker's Writing for Social Sciences also has advice on developing good writing habits. If you use citations in your work please use the [Chicago Manual of Style](#). Please refer to the University of Washington's "Principles Regarding Academic Integrity" for the definitions and consequences of plagiarism.

Textbook

Remler, D. K., & Van Ryzin, G. G., (2014). Research Methods in Practice: Strategies for Description and Causation. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

An important goal for this class is to let you get familiar with the library research databases, so please use them to find the articles that have been assigned.

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: [Hollaback and Why Everyone Needs Better Research Methods](#).

Prezi: [Crafting Research Questions](#).

Handout: [How to Get from a Social Problem to a Research Question and Research Plan](#).

Lab Meeting: Introductions. How to read a research article.

Assignment: None.

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: Frosh, Paul. 2015. "Selfies and The Gestural Image: The Selfie, Photography Theory, and Kinesthetic Sociability." *International Journal of Communication* 9 (0): 22.

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

Handout: [Types of Causality](#).

Handout: [Argumentative Fallacies](#).

Lab Meeting: How To Read a Research Article. Discuss First Assignment.

Assignment: Critique Your Selfies, due midnight Sunday 17th.

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

What are the best ways to do research and protect human subjects? Are there ways to prepare for the unintended consequences of our research?

Reading: Remler and Van Ryzin, Chapter 16, "The Politics, Production, and Ethics of Research".

Prezi: [Ethics in Research](#).

Lab Meeting: Prepare for, or discuss, Fast Food Fieldwork.

Assignment: Do the online [UW Responsible Conduct for Research training course](#) for social and behavioral sciences. Make a pdf of the final screen confirming completion and upload it to Canvas. Due midnight Sunday January 24th.

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: Remler and Van Ryzin, Chapter 3, "Qualitative Research".

Prezi: [Qualitative Research I](#).

Prezi: [Qualitative Research II](#).

Prezi: [Ethnography](#).

Handout: [Organizing an Interview](#).

Handout: [Types of Evidence](#).

Lab Meeting: None.

Assignment: Fast Food Fieldwork due midnight Sunday January 31st.

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: Remler and Van Ryzin, Chapter 11, “Causation”.

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

Prezi: [Comparative Research](#).

Prezi: [Content Analysis](#).

Lab: None.

Assignment: Comparative Content Analysis of Gender Stereotypes due midnight February 7th.

Week 6: Experimental

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

Reading: Remler and Van Ryzin, Chapter 11, “Randomized Experiments” and Chapter 15 “Natural and Quasi Experiments”.

Prezi: [Focus Groups](#).

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

Lab: Discuss Terms of Quantitative Methods.

Assignment: Experiment on Your Friends and Family.

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: Remler and Van Ryzin, Chapter 7, “Surveys and Other Primary Data”

Prezi: [Quantitative Methods](#).

Prezi: [Survey Design](#).

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

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

Lab: None.

Quiz: Terms of Quantitative Methods. Due February 19th.

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: Emirbayer, Mustafa, and Jeff Goodwin. 1994. “Network Analysis, Culture, and the Problem of Agency.” *American Journal of Sociology* 99 (6): 1411–54.

Prezi: [Social Sciences](#).

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

Lab: Discuss Reading. Discuss Personal Network Assignment.

Week 9: Computational

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

Reading: Carey, Benedict. 2006. "In Music, Others' Tastes May Help Shape Your Own." *The New York Times*. February 14. Salganik, Matthew J., Peter Sheridan Dodds, and Duncan J. Watts. 2006. "Experimental Study of Inequality and Unpredictability in an Artificial Cultural Market." *Science* 311 (5762): 854–56. doi:10.1126/science.1121066.

Lab: None.

Assignment: Computational Profile Essay.

Week 10: Public Scholarship

Audit studies. Meta-Analysis.

Reading:

Lab: None.

Quiz: Read and Critique a Piece of Public Scholarship. Due March 11th.