

Communication Research

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Office Hours (SJMC 324): Monday/Wednesday 12:30pm–2pm, and by appointment.

Spring 2026
SJMC 225
Monday/Wednesday, 3:55pm–5:10pm

“It is not enough for communication specialists to acquire skill in surveying, content analysis, or other technical operations. A genuine profession can be said to complement skill with enlightenment.”

— Harold Lasswell, 1972, *Public Opinion Quarterly* 36(3), p. 306

Course Description

This is a course in basic social science and communication research for those with little or no previous experience or course work in research methodology. The goal of the course is to provide students with a critical framework for evaluating communication research and first-hand experience in the research process. Specifically, we will examine how research questions, originating from client-specific or from more academic interests, are translated into a research project. You will learn how to select an appropriate research topic, develop measurements, draw a sample, conduct a specific form of data collection, analyze the data, and interpret the results. There are no assumptions about students' previous work in statistics or research methods. Fear of mathematics will not be a barrier to success in the course.

Course Objectives

Students who successfully complete this course will:

- Understand how to evaluate communication research.
- Have first-hand experience with the research process.
- Examine how research goals are translated into a research project.
- Have a basic understanding of how to select a research topic, develop measurements, draw a sample, collect and analyze data, and interpret results.
- Understand how principles of research apply in the communication setting.

Required Materials

Textbooks and readings

Keyton, J. (2023). *Communication research: Asking questions, finding answers* (6th ed.). McGraw Hill.

Technology requirements

Links to articles, assignments, quizzes, and rubrics are located on Blackboard. To participate in learning activities and complete assignments, you will need:

- Access to a working computer that has a current operating system with updates installed, plus speakers or headphones to hear lecture presentations.
- Reliable Internet access and a UofSC email account.
- A current Internet browser that is compatible with Blackboard (Google Chrome is the recommended browser for Blackboard).
- Microsoft Word as your word processing program.
- Reliable data storage for your work, such as a USB drive or Office365 OneDrive cloud storage.

If your computer does not have Microsoft Word, Office 365 ProPlus package is available to you free of charge and allows you to install Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Outlook, OneNote, Publisher, and Access on up to 5 PCs or Macs and Office apps on other mobile devices including tablets. Office 365 also includes unlimited cloud storage on OneDrive. To download Office 365 ProPlus, log into your student (University) email through a web browser, choose Settings (top right corner), and select software. If you have further questions or need help with the software, please contact the Service Desk

(https://www.sc.edu/about/offices_and_divisions/university_technology_services/support/servicedesk.php).

Minimal technical skills needed

Minimal technical skills are needed in this course. Most course work will be completed and submitted in Blackboard. Therefore, you must have consistent and reliable access to a computer and the Internet. The minimal technical skills you need to have include the ability to:

- Organize and save electronic files.
- Use UofSC email and attached files.
- Check email and Blackboard daily.
- Download and upload documents.
- Locate information with a browser.
- Use Blackboard.

Evaluation

This class will use the standard USC grading scheme:

Grade	Percent	Grade	Percent	Grade	Percent
A	90-100%	B+	85-89.99%	B	80-84.99%
C+	75-79.99%	C	70-74.99%	D+	65-69.99%
D	60-64.99%	F	0-59.99%		

The final grade in the class will tentatively consist of the following:

Assignment	% Total
Exams (x2)	40%
Assignments	12%
In-class assessments	8%
Research Project Data Collection	4%
Research Project Data Report	36%
Total	100%

Exams

There will be two in-class exams covering major aspects of course content. These will be administered during designated class periods using Respondus Lockdown Browser (without its webcam monitor) and students will have the duration of the class period to finish. Physical presence in class will be required. Makeups for excused absences will be allowed on a case-by-case basis. The format of the exam will consist of a mixture of multiple choice and short response questions. If students do not have a laptop available, do not wish to use Respondus Lockdown Browser, or encounter some other technical problem, they may take the exam with pen and paper instead.

Assignments

Students will complete a small number of assignments, mostly completed outside of class, to help build skills essential for the class that are difficult to assess otherwise. Among these will be two or more assignments requiring the use of Microsoft Excel. Others may be added as needed, with ample notice.

In-class assessments

Low-stakes quizzes on course content will occur during many class meetings. These assessments may not be taken outside of the classroom. The two lowest scores in this category will be dropped.

Research Project

In teams, you will collect, analyze, and report the results of a study created by you and a group of your classmates. This project will be scaffolded in several phases throughout the semester:

- **Data Collection (4%):** Begin data collection (e.g., by inviting people to take a survey). You will be required to reach a certain sample size, dependent upon the number of people on your team and the design you've chosen. This component includes an in-class feedback checkpoint and completion of data collection.
- **Data Analysis:** Analyze the results using analysis methods appropriate to your specific topic and design.
- **Data Report (36%):** Submit a final written data report that follows professional formatting practices.

Included in the grade received for this project is an assessment from group members about whether the workload was distributed fairly and each member contributed substantially.

Grade Disputes

Any dispute about a grade must be done within one week of the grade posting. You should compose an email, making clear that you are challenging the grade, with information about the assignment and details (using the

rubric and guidelines) of why you feel you should receive a different score. There is no guarantee of a grade change in response to such a challenge, but you can rest assured that you will not be penalized even if additional errors are discovered.

Course Policies

Reasonable Accommodation Policy

Reasonable accommodations are available for students with a documented disability. If you have a disability and may need accommodations to fully participate in this class, contact the Student Disability Resource Center: 777-6142, TDD 777-6744, email sasds@mailbox.sc.edu, or stop by LeConte College Room 112A. All accommodations must be approved through the Student Disability Resource Center.

Late policy

Late work may be accepted with full credit under most circumstances. Communication with the instructor is essential for receiving credit on late work. The goal is to be flexible, but not fall behind in the course. This policy may be changed at short notice if students are struggling to keep up without the motivation of late penalties.

Faculty feedback and response time

Allow 10-14 days for grades on major assignments, although sometimes you will receive feedback sooner. In general, expect a response to emails within 24 hours on business days. If you haven't gotten a response after a couple of days, feel free to reach out again.

Written assignments

All written work must be typed and should conform to APA formatting, citing, and referencing guidelines (see <http://www.apastyle.org/> and <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/>). Title pages and abstracts are never required, however. You will not be graded for adhering to all the details of APA formatting, but you must communicate clearly so as to avoid plagiarism and confusion.

Unless otherwise noted, assignments must be submitted no later than 11:59 p.m. on the assigned due date.

Academic misconduct

Honor Code

Every student has a role in maintaining the academic reputation of the university. It is imperative that you refrain from engaging in plagiarism, cheating, falsifying your work and/or assisting other students in violating the Honor Code. Two important components of the Honor Code:

- Faculty members are required to report potential violations of the Honor Code to the Office of Student Conduct and Academic Integrity.
- When a student is uncertain as to whether conduct would violate the Honor Code, it is their responsibility to seek clarification from the appropriate faculty member.

Your enrollment in this class signifies your willingness to accept these responsibilities and uphold the Honor Code of the University of South Carolina. Please review the Honor Code Policies. Any deviation from this expectation can result in a referral to the Office of Student Conduct and Academic Integrity.

Copyright

Lectures and course materials (which is inclusive of my presentations, tests, exams, outlines, and lecture notes) may be protected by copyright. You are encouraged to take notes and utilize course materials for your own educational purpose. However, you are not to reproduce or distribute this content without my expressed

written permission. This includes sharing course materials to online social study sites like Course Hero and other services.

Students who publicly reproduce, distribute or modify course content maybe in violation of the university's Honor Code's Complicity policy, which states: sharing academic work with another student (either in person or electronically) without the permission of the instructor. To best understand the parameters around copyright and intellectual property review <http://www.sc.edu/policies/acaf133.pdf>.

Collaboration

A student's grades are to represent to what extent that individual student has mastered the course content. You should assume that you are to complete course work individually (without the use of another person or un-cited outside source) unless otherwise indicated by the instructor. It is your responsibility to seek clarification if you are unclear about what constitutes proper or improper collaboration. For skills assignments, you will be given a more specific definition of what constitutes collaboration because seeking outside help is one of the skills you should develop.

Reusing course materials

The use of previous semester course materials is not allowed in this course. This applies to homework, projects, quizzes and tests. Because these aids are not available to all students within the course, their use by any individual student undermines the fundamental principles of fairness and disrupts your professor's ability to accurately evaluate your work. Any potential violations will be forwarded to the Office of Student Conduct and Academic Integrity for review.

Diversity and inclusion

The university is committed to a campus environment that is inclusive, safe, and respectful for all persons, and one that fully embraces the Carolinian Creed. To that end, all course activities will be conducted in an atmosphere of friendly participation and interaction among colleagues, recognizing and appreciating the unique experiences, background, and point of view each student brings. You are expected at all times to apply the highest academic standards to this course and to treat others with dignity and respect.

Changing nature of this syllabus

The assignments, policies, and readings in this syllabus are subject to change at any time. If this occurs, the changes will be announced and an updated version of the syllabus will be posted to Blackboard.

Unless otherwise specified, quizzes, discussion posts, and other assignments are due at 11:59 PM on the date they are due.

If the information on Blackboard contradicts this syllabus, assume the information on Blackboard is correct.

This schedule provides a broad overview of the materials you will read for the course. It does not include assignment due dates. More details will be available on Blackboard, where you will access any necessary materials.

Tentative Course Schedule

Week	Dates	Topic	Reading
1	Jan 12, 14	Course introduction; What is research?	Ch 1
No class Mon, Jan 19 (MLK)			

Week	Dates	Topic <i>Day)</i>	Reading
2	Jan 21	The research process	Ch 2
3	Jan 26, 28	Causality	Llaudet & Imai, Ch 2
4	Feb 2, 4	Measurement	Ch 5
5	Feb 9, 11	Quantitative research: Variables & hypotheses	Ch 4
6	Feb 16, 18	Sampling	Ch 6
7	Feb 23, 25	Quantitative research designs	Ch 7
8	Mar 2, 4	Surveys; Exam 1 (Mon, Mar 2)	Ch 8
9	Mar 9, 11	<i>Spring Break – no class</i>	–
10	Mar 16, 18	Descriptive statistics & hypothesis testing	Ch 9
11	Mar 23, 25	Inferential statistics	Ch 10, Ch 11
12	Mar 30, Apr 1	Content analysis	Ch 12
13	Apr 6, 8	Introduction to qualitative research	Ch 14
14	Apr 13, 15	Qualitative data collection; Exam 2 (Wed, Apr 15)	Ch 16 (selections)
15	Apr 20, 22	Project work	–
16	Apr 27	Wrap-up	–
Finals	TBD	Final project report due	–