

Research Design

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Office Hours (SJMC 324): *Monday/Wednesday 2:30–3:30, and by appointment.*

Fall 2025

SJMC 316

Wednesday, 5:50pm–8:35pm

“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

Note on Course Name

This syllabus corresponds to both JOUR 801, “Communication Research Design,” and ISCI 802, “Research Methods & Design in Information Science,” which are cross-listed and being taught together.

Course Description

This course provides an overview of the concepts and tools by which social scientific communication research is designed, conducted, interpreted, and critically evaluated. The primary goal of this course is to help you become a knowledgeable consumer and producer of empirical communication research.

Course Objectives

Students who successfully complete this course will:

- Understand and be able to use the concepts and vocabulary of communication research
- Be intelligent consumers of research, able to read, understand, explain and critically evaluate research reported in scholarly journals
- Develop the skills necessary for conducting communication research using quantitative methods

Required Materials

Textbooks and readings

All readings will be provided through Blackboard.

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:

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%		

Assignments

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

Assignment	% Total
CITI Training	5%
Entry Tickets	10%
Assignments	15%
Research Design Proposal	15%
Method Critique and Presentation	25%
Collaborative Research Participation	30%
Total	100%

Collaborative Research

The graduate program funds a survey of a nationally diverse sample of US adults, which we as a class will use. The class will collectively decide on a research idea, do a literature review on that idea, develop one or more hypotheses about it, and then field the survey based on a questionnaire we design. Upon completion of the survey, we will then analyze the data and collaboratively write up a paper describing the results with the goal of presentation at the AEJMC conference in New Orleans, LA in August 2026. The ultimate goal will be journal publication, if appropriate. Further details regarding authorship and collaboration are discussed in a later section. Students who wish to do an independent research study may be allowed to do so on a case-by-case basis and may be given space on the survey to do so.

Entry Tickets

These low-stakes assignments will be completed with pen and paper, usually at the very beginning of class. They will require a brief response to a prompt related to the assigned readings/materials for that class day. These “entry tickets” are meant to stimulate discussion, get you thinking about the topic for class that day, and incentivize engagement in both the assigned materials and the class session. They will largely be graded as “successful” or “not successful.” Students will be “not successful” if absent from class that day. The lowest two scores will be dropped from the scoring of final grades.

Other Assignments

Students will read and critique the methods of research in a series of assignments throughout the semester. Details for each assignment will be provided as they come due.

CITI Training

To do research on human subjects, researchers must pass a standardized training to demonstrate their knowledge of ethical responsibilities.

Method Critique and Presentation

Each student will pick a method (or category of methods) and find a peer-reviewed journal article published in the past 10 years that uses the method. The student will carefully analyze the article with a focus on the appropriateness of its research design and how it relates to the article’s scientific goals. The assignment proceeds in two parts: 1. The student will write a 500-1000 word essay that lays out the goals, procedures, and claims of the article along with an evaluation of the quality of the article’s methods. 2. The student will give a 10-15 minute in-class presentation about the article, based on their essay.

Research Design Proposal

In addition to the collaborative research project, students will be asked to propose a research design of their own that is justified by a (somewhat condensed) literature review. The goal of this assignment is to encourage independent thinking about research and design without requiring the full, independent execution of a study in the space of a semester.

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.

Authorship and Data-Sharing

For those participating in the course's collaborative research project, the following guidelines determine authorship credit for the specific projects detailed above:

- Default order of authorship credit: The course instructor will be listed as first author followed by each student (in alphabetical order unless another method is agreed upon) who participated materially in the collection of data, the analysis of data, or manuscript preparation for the particular project.
- Modifications to this default order of authorship credit can be made with the consent of the majority of persons claiming authorship in the project's publication. Reasons for modifying the order of authorship include, but are not limited to: recognizing additional effort above and beyond those of other co-authors, recognizing the contribution of special skills or additional time above and beyond those contributed by other co-authors, and recognizing additional effort given to preparing or revising the manuscript for publication after the conclusion of the course. Demotion in the author order may occur if less effort is given than expected for the course requirements. Nobody is obligated to continue participation in the project beyond the conclusion of the course and failure to do so will not result in demotion in the author order (although others may be promoted for *substantial* additional efforts). Note that even the course instructor may be moved down the author order depending on the level of their contributions and the contributions of others.
- In the case of journal publication, all efforts will be made within the constraints of the journal to explain the relative contributions of each other to avoid the appearance of greater efforts having been made by earlier-listed authors.

In addition, students taking this course and participating in the survey project also agree that once the research project (as defined above) yields its intended publication(s), all data collected for the project can be used freely by any of the project co-authors, who agree to cite the authors of the original publication as the source of the data. This means that every project participant is guaranteed authorship credit on the first publication, but not on any subsequent publications that might result from this data collection effort. The goal of this additional policy is to encourage student collaborators to produce further research as appropriate without requiring explicit permission from each individual collaborator to do so — it is advised, however, that some notice be given when working in areas of mutual interest so any interested collaborators may participate.

Students may wish to consult the following resource for information on norms and guidelines regarding coauthorship credit in general: <https://www.apa.org/science/leadership/students/authorship-paper>

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.

Artificial Intelligence Use Policy

In this course, all work you submit for a grade must be your own. It is a violation of university policy to misrepresent your intellectual contributions. Submitting work that has been substantially generated or authored by an AI tool constitutes a misrepresentation of your own effort and is a violation of academic integrity. While you may use AI tools to brainstorm, outline, or get feedback on work you have done, the core ideas, analysis, and final expression must be yours. If you are unsure whether a specific use is appropriate, please ask me before you submit the assignment.

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.

Classroom Environment

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.

Below is a summary of all changes:

- August 20: First public version
- September 10: Some changes to readings and topics

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.

August 20: Validity

Trochim, W. M. K., & Donnelly, J. P. (2008a). Chapter 2. In *Research methods knowledge base*. Atomic Dog/Cengage Learning.

Trochim, W. M. K., & Donnelly, J. P. (2008b). Chapter 3. In *Research methods knowledge base*. Atomic Dog/Cengage Learning.

August 27 + September 3: Causality

Imbens, G., & Rubin, D. B. (2015). Causality: The basic framework. In *Causal inference for statistics, social, and biomedical sciences: An introduction* (pp. 3–22). Cambridge University Press.

Sen, M., & Wasow, O. (2016). Race as a bundle of sticks: Designs that estimate effects of seemingly immutable characteristics. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 19(1), 499–522. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-032015-010015>

September 10: Sampling and Surveys

Cheon, B. K., Melani, I., & Hong, Y. (2020). How USA-centric is psychology? An archival study of implicit assumptions of generalizability of findings to human nature based on origins of study samples. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 1948550620927269. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550620927269>

Henrich, J., Heine, S. J., & Norenzayan, A. (2010). The weirdest people in the world? *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 33(2–3), 61–83. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0140525X0999152X>

Lavrakas, P. J., & Kosicki, G. M. (2018). Surveys. In P. M. Napoli (Ed.), *Mediated Communication* (Vol. 7, pp. 225–260). De Gruyter Mouton.

Simons, D. J., Shoda, Y., & Lindsay, D. S. (2017). Constraints on generality (COG): A proposed addition to all empirical papers. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 12(6), 1123–1128.

September 17: Measurement and Questionnaire Design

Hayes, A. F. (2005). Fundamentals of measurement. In *Statistical methods for communication science* (pp. 16–30). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Lilienfeld, S. O. (2010). Myths about memory. In *50 great myths of popular psychology: Shattering widespread misconceptions about human behavior* (pp. 65–82). Wiley-Blackwell.

Schwarz, N. (1999). Self-reports: How the questions shape the answers. *American Psychologist*, 54(2), 93–105. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.54.2.93>

Slater, M. D. (2004). Operationalizing and analyzing exposure: The foundation of media effects research. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 81(1), 168–183. <https://doi.org/10.1177/107769900408100112>

September 24: Experimental Designs

Questionnaire mini-presentations

Crano, W. D., Brewer, M. B., & Lac, A. (2023). Designing experiments. In *Principles and methods of social research* (4th ed., pp. 79–96). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003271734>

Dietvorst, B. J., Simmons, J. P., & Massey, C. (2015). Algorithm aversion: People erroneously avoid algorithms after seeing them err. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 144(1), 114–126. <https://doi.org/10.1037/xge0000033>

Shadish, W. R., Cook, T. D., & Campbell, D. T. (2001). Experiments and the generalization of causal connections. In *Experimental and quasi-experimental designs for generalized causal inference* (pp. 1–32). Houghton Mifflin.

October 1: Getting Started with Qualitative Methods

Tracy, S. J. (2020b). Entering the conversation of qualitative research. In *Qualitative research methods: Collecting evidence, crafting analysis, communicating impact* (Second edition, pp. 25–47). Wiley-Blackwell.

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2016). Five qualitative approaches to inquiry. In *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed., pp. 65–110). SAGE Publications.

Fisher, K. E., & Naumer, C. M. (2006). Information grounds: Theoretical basis and empirical findings on information flow in social settings. In A. Spink & C. Cole (Eds.), *New Directions in Human Information Behavior* (pp. 93–111). Springer Netherlands. https://doi.org/10.1007/1-4020-3670-1_6

October 8: Handling Qualitative Data

McKenzie, P. J. (2003). A model of information practices in accounts of everyday-life information seeking. *Journal of Documentation*, 59(1), 19–40. <https://doi.org/10.1108/00220410310457993>

Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. S. (2005). The responsive interview as an extended conversation. In *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data* (2nd ed., pp. 108–128). SAGE Publications, Inc. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452226651>

Saldaña, J. (2016). An introduction to codes and coding. In *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (pp. 1–42). SAGE Publications Ltd.

October 15: Content Analysis

Boler, M., Gharib, H., Kweon, Y.-J., Trigiani, A., & Perry, B. (2025). Promoting mis/disinformation literacy among adults: A scoping review of interventions and recommendations. *Communication Research*, OnlineFirst. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00936502251318630>

Lynch, T., Tompkins, J. E., van Driel, I. I., & Fritz, N. (2016). Sexy, strong, and secondary: A content analysis of female characters in video games across 31 years. *Journal of Communication*, 66(4), 564–584. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcom.12237>

Riffe, D., Lacy, S., & Fico, F. (2014). Defining content analysis as a social science tool. In *Analyzing media messages: Using quantitative content analysis in research* (Third edition, pp. 18–31). Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group.

Törnberg, P. (2024). Large language models outperform expert coders and supervised classifiers at annotating political social media messages. *Social Science Computer Review*, OnlineFirst. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08944393241286471>

October 22: Mixing Methods

Creswell, J. W. (2022). *A concise introduction to mixed methods research* (Second Edition). SAGE.

Gil De Zúñiga, H., Goyanes, M., & Skurka, C. (2023). Understanding fake news corrective action: A mixed-method approach. *International Journal of Communication*, 17, 3428–3450. <https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/19885>

Litt, E., & Hargittai, E. (2016). The imagined audience on social network sites. *Social Media + Society*, 2(1), 205630511663348. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305116633482>

October 29: p-values and Other Basic Statistical Issues

Daniel Lakens. (2019, September 16). *What is a p-value?* [Video recording]. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RVxHlslw_Do

Lakens, D. (2022). Using p-values to test a hypothesis. In *Improving Your Statistical Inferences*. <https://doi.org/10.5281/ZENODO.6409077>

Wasserstein, R. L., & Lazar, N. A. (2016). The ASA's statement on p-values: Context, process, and purpose. *The American Statistician*, 70(2), 129–133. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00031305.2016.1154108>

November 5: Replication and Best Practices

Dienlin, T., Johannes, N., Bowman, N. D., Masur, P. K., Engesser, S., Kümpel, A. S., Lukito, J., Bier, L. M., Zhang, R., Johnson, B. K., Huskey, R., Schneider, F. M., Breuer, J., Parry, D. A., Vermeulen, I., Fisher, J. T., Banks, J., Weber, R., Ellis, D. A., ... de Vreese, C. (2021). An agenda for open science in communication. *Journal of Communication*, 71(1), 1–26. <https://doi.org/10.1093/joc/jqz052>

Lewis, N. A., Jr. (2020). Open communication science: A primer on why and some recommendations for how. *Communication Methods and Measures*, 14(2), 71–82. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19312458.2019.1685660>

November 12: Moderation and Mediation

Hayes, A. F. (2022a). Fundamentals of moderation analysis. In *Introduction to mediation, moderation, and conditional process analysis: A regression-based approach* (Third edition, pp. 233–281). The Guilford Press.

Hayes, A. F. (2022b). The simple mediation model. In *Introduction to mediation, moderation, and conditional process analysis: A regression-based approach* (Third edition, pp. 79–117). The Guilford Press.

November 19: Longitudinal designs, catch-up, project work

Mediation assignment due

Andreß, H.-J., Golsch, K., & Schmidt, A. W. (2013). Benefits and challenges of the panel design. In *Applied panel data analysis for economic and social surveys* (pp. 2–11). Springer Berlin Heidelberg.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-32914-2>

Gross, K., Porter, E., & Wood, T. J. (2019). Identifying media effects through low-cost, multiwave field experiments. *Political Communication*, 36(2), 272–287. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2018.1514447>

Long, J. A., Jeong, M. S., & Lavis, S. M. (2021). Political comedy as a gateway to news use, internal efficacy, and participation: A longitudinal mediation analysis. *Human Communication Research*, 47(2), 166–191.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/hcr/hqaa011>

November 26: No class, Thanksgiving holiday

December 3: Theoretical Contributions, Wrap-up