SOLVING COMMUNICATION PROBLEMS: RESEARCH METHODS AND STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION

About the Instructor

Dr. Sujatha Sosale  
Campus address: W329 AJB  
Phone: 319-335-3428  
Office Hours: Wed. 11:30 – 2:30 and by appointment  
E-mail: sujatha-sosale@uiowa.edu

Academic Course Home

College of Liberal Arts and Sciences—School of Journalism and Mass Communication  
http://clas.uiowa.edu/sjmc/

DEO: Professor David Ryfe  
Campus address: E305B AJB  
Phone:  
E-mail: david-ryfe@uiowa.edu

Course Site

To access the course site, visit the Iowa Courses Online (ICON) homepage and log in using your Hawk ID and password. http://icon.uiowa.edu

Course Description and Objectives

This course covers the basics of research methods most frequently used in media and communication industries and among researchers to understand audience preferences and tastes, make messages more effective, and figure out what media are saying about people, cultures, trends, and the world. Learning the basics of research in the “real world” will, of necessity, involve to a certain extent reading, evaluating, and generally working with academic and scholarly approaches to research. It is here that research professionals in communication are trained. They bring this training to the industry and by extension, influence the bottom line. Therefore readings, discussion, assignments, and guest presentations will involve aspects of both scholarly as well as applied research.

The objectives of this course are to:

- understand and apply research concepts to tackle various problems related to media, content, production, and audiences;
- learn to “read” published research – that is, identify, explain, and evaluate the stated problems, key findings, and suggested solutions;
- develop the habit of questioning what we routinely read, hear, and see in the media such as poll data, surveys, business reporting, or consumer preferences;
- select appropriate methods for solving specific problems by learning the approach, features, purposes, advantages, and limitations of various research methodologies;
- work with practical aspects of research, like developing a basic understanding of numerical information used in media research, constructing research instruments, writing a literature review to show convincingly the existence and nature of the problem, and developing a cogent research design.

Required Textbook/Media

There is no prescribed textbook for this course. Readings will be made available on the course ICON, and where journal articles are used, you will obtain them through E-Journals from the UI Libraries portal. Guest presentations will be included for quizzes and the tests, and where possible and appropriate, video material may also be incorporated into class materials and included in quizzes and the tests.

Recommended, not required:
Media/System Requirements

Listed below are the media/system requirements applicable to this course:

- **System requirements.** Computer with Internet access and a sound card.

  - The latest version of Adobe Reader and Adobe Flash Player must be installed in your computer in order to access the course materials posted on ICON (i.e. Study Guide, video clips). For a free download of these applications, visit the Center for Credit Programs Internet Connection Test/Download Page.
    - Once on this page, scroll down to “Test Sample Files/Download Software,” and test the file related to the media player listed above.
    - Download media player if needed.
    - Audio: earphones and microphone
    - Video: Webcam

- **Need Technical Support?** Contact the Division of Continuing Education technical support staff at dce-techsupport@uiowa.edu.

ICON

We will use the course ICON for several things. The syllabus is now available on the course site. Announcements and updates on class procedures and activities, reminders, and class materials including the syllabus, reading guides, and assignment guidelines will be available on the class ICON. Once the course ICON is ready, you have to download reading guides from there. Lecture-discussion notes and classroom discussion material will not be available on ICON. You are responsible for checking ICON regularly to keep abreast of various updates. The material in the “Announcements” section will keep changing and it is easy to miss important information if you do not check regularly.

**Email:**

Email is the official method of communication for this course. Students can expect to receive weekly communications from the instructor (via email) introducing assigned course-work. Students are expected to check their university email account frequently.

The course structure described above assumes that students have basic computer skills and are knowledgeable about the various programs and hardware they will need to use during this session (e.g. Microsoft Word). For information and computer support geared toward distance education students, access:

- the Technical Support page - [http://www.continuetolearn.uiowa.edu/tech-support/index.html](http://www.continuetolearn.uiowa.edu/tech-support/index.html)
- the Student Guide to ICON - [http://icon.uiowa.edu/support/onlinehelp/students/guide/](http://icon.uiowa.edu/support/onlinehelp/students/guide/)

Grading Criteria

Final course grades will be assessed based on the student’s performance in the following items:

Grading and assessments

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**The point distribution is given below. The final letter grade for the course will be based upon the total number of points earned.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Date due</th>
<th>Total points</th>
<th>Weight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Test 1 (in-class)</td>
<td>Tues. Mar. 03</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Test 2 (in-class)</td>
<td>Tues. Apr. 21</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Dates in course calendar (ICON)</td>
<td>Points</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quizzes (9)</td>
<td></td>
<td>45</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading a research article</td>
<td>Tues. Feb. 03 (ICON)</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idea and topic</td>
<td>February 24 (ICON)</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing a literature review</td>
<td>March 10 (ICON)</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing questions (problems), research</td>
<td>April 28 (ICON)</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing questions, research design and</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>method</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research instrument</td>
<td>April 28 (ICON)</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project presentations (groups – undergraduate; individual – graduate)</td>
<td>May 5 (ICON)</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project presentations (groups – undergraduate; individual – graduate)</td>
<td>May 5 (ICON)</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final paper from the teamed project</td>
<td>May 12 (ICON)</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed self- and peer-evaluation (undergraduate research teams)</td>
<td>May 12 (ICON)</td>
<td>No points for the evaluation</td>
<td>Failure to upload will result in a deduction of 10 points from total score for the semester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>500</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total points and final letter grades:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Range in percentage</th>
<th>Range in points</th>
<th>Letter grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>97-100%</td>
<td>485-500</td>
<td>A+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>94-96.9%</td>
<td>470-484.5</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90-93.9%</td>
<td>450-469.5</td>
<td>A -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>87-89.9%</td>
<td>435-449.5</td>
<td>B+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>84-86.9%</td>
<td>420-434.5</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80-83.9%</td>
<td>400-419.5</td>
<td>B -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77-79.9%</td>
<td>385-399.5</td>
<td>C+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74 -76.9%</td>
<td>370-384.9</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70 -73.9%</td>
<td>350-369.5</td>
<td>C -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>67-69.9%</td>
<td>335-349.5</td>
<td>D +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64-66.9%</td>
<td>320-334.5</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-63.9%</td>
<td>300-319.5</td>
<td>D -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59.9% &lt;</td>
<td>299.5 &lt;</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Grade interpretations are as follows. Plus and minus signs indicate that the grade ranges within the set of criteria against the applicable letter grade.

“A” range: The work is thorough, thoughtful, and well-written. It shows an excellent understanding of the subject matter.

“B” range: The work shows good efforts to understand the material and attempts to write well. Ideas could
be better-developed, and in general, performance can be improved.

“C” range: Acceptable work, basic points are present. Considerably more thought and development of ideas needed.

“D” range: Barely passing material.

“F:” Failing grade.

Note: It is likely that grades may slip to lower brackets if penalties are applied – for example, late submissions, e-mail submissions, and so on. Further details on this follow.

**Grade of Incomplete:** As a policy, I do not give a grade of “Incomplete” except under extenuating circumstances, which I will first have to evaluate.

**Extra credit assignments:** There are no extra-credit assignments for the course.

Course policies and requirements

Assigned readings must be completed each week before coming to class.

**Attendance and participation**
Both are assumed for the course. If you miss a session I can answer questions during office hours within a reasonable time frame but I will be unable to replicate missed lecture discussions during office hours. All aspects to the course are important, so it is best to attend regularly.

**Course Structure**
This course is being offered over the World Wide Web as a Distance Education offering. Students will log in to the course site on ICON to access the course materials (syllabus, assignments, schedules), and the discussions forum. For details of the course assignments and activities, see the calendar section of this syllabus. Students will be expected to visit the course site regularly in order to:

- **Review the “Content” page** and get familiarized with all course materials. Among other things, this page contains links to media and web-activities to be completed as part of this course.
- **Review the course homepage regularly** for any updates related to the course “Events”.
- **Submit** assignments and final project to the course instructor via the ICON “Dropbox”.

In addition, students will visit the course site to:

- **Participate** in offline activities, planning, writing drafts and other work in the group discussion forum created on ICON for each group.

**Course Work**

**Class format**
Lecture-discussions, guest speakers, in-class work such as student presentations in workshop sessions, short take-home assignments if the opportunity arises (these are not graded), and a pilot research project that will be developed in stages. Submission for each stage denotes a graded assignment. Undergraduate students will work in small research teams; graduate students will work on individual pilot projects. After the class roster settles (around the second week of classes), detailed information on the project will be provided.

**Tests, quizzes, and assignments**
**Tests:** There are two in-class tests for this course – one will be held on week 7 of the semester and the other, on week 14. Grading details are given in a table below. Study notes will be given and explained the week before each test.

**Quizzes:** On the specified dates in the calendar, quizzes will be posted 24 hours prior to the start of class on ICON. Two to three items in multiple choice or fill the blank, True/False or match items will be given from the prescribed reading for that session. The grades will be available immediately upon completion of the quiz. Each quiz will be available for taking a day prior to the start of class (5 PM on Monday). However, once you begin the quiz, it will close within 10 minutes of the starting time. In other words, you will have flexibility to take it at any point from 5 PM on Monday onwards till 5 PM on Tuesday. Once you begin answering the questions, you will have 10 minutes to complete it.

**Reading a research article:** Part of learning to “do” research is the ability to read published research intelligently, evaluate its merits, and where a literature review is needed, to help make the research useful for your own purposes. Material and guidelines will be provided for this assignment.

**The pilot project:**

This is a semester-long project that will develop gradually into a study of choice. There are several steps involved and each step is a graded assignment. Work will commence after the second week of classes, when the class roster stabilizes. Because student “drops” continue into the semester, occasionally undergraduate team compositions may have to be changed later in the semester.

**Research paper topic:** Specifying a topic and having a plan to study it is like having a very helpful road map for a research project. Guidelines will be provided.

**Literature review:** You will be required to find sources for the research paper and develop a cohesive picture of the literature available in your chosen topic of research. Guidelines will be provided.

**Research questions, design, and method:** Your team will develop a design for your research project. Guidelines will be provided.

**Research instrument and preliminary findings:** You will work with the data you will have gathered and will show what they tell us about you’re the problems your project has raised. Guidelines will be provided.

**Presentation:** You will present your research at the end of the semester to the class. A schedule of presentation dates will be provided by the fourth week of classes.

**Research paper:** A research paper of about 8-10 pages is required. Page counts do not include the title page and references. Essentially, this is a coming together of all the previous pieces of the research project. Guidelines on how to integrate all the pieces will be given about this final paper to be produced by each team.

In-class group time will be given to accommodate the nature of a distance education course. Group spalce for off

**A Note on Collaboration**

Each student in the research team is expected to complete a similar amount of work and to contribute equally to the final project. Each student will complete a self- and peer evaluation, describing this equality or the lack of it during the group’s work. A peer evaluation form will be provided for this purpose. Students who misrepresent themselves as equal partners in this collaborative project but who are actually letting others do the bulk of the
work will be reported to the College for academic dishonesty. If you have questions, it is your responsibility to ask them.

**COURSE CALENDAR**

**Note:** This is a working calendar. Deviations may be necessary at times. It is the student’s responsibility to keep informed of the calendar at all times. Changes to the calendar, if any, will be announced in class and on the ICON opening page.

Some short readings may be added on certain days. Announcements will be made and the short readings will be uploaded to ICON in advance of the week during which the reading will be discussed.

“Read” in bold means read before the class session starts and come prepared to discuss.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 1: Introduction</th>
<th>Tues. Jan 20</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Due dates and reminders:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Completed bio-sheet due in ICON dropbox (Friday, January 30)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>This week:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| • People introductions
• Course introduction, syllabus
• **Read** Poindexter & McCombs – introductory chapter (ICON)
• **Read** Treadwell, chapter 1 (ICON) |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 2: Reading research: Identifying problem-solving in the literature</th>
<th>Tues. Jan. 27</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Due dates and reminders:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| □ Complete quiz for Locke et al reading before class starts
□ Article analysis assignment due in ICON dropbox (Tues. Feb. 03) |
| **This week:** |
| • Article analysis guidelines
• **Read** Locke et al reading (ICON)
• *Guest presentation:* Ericka Raber, Main Library
• **Read** for in-class practice analysis – 2 articles (on ICON) |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 3: Ethics in research, Overview of social science methods</th>
<th>Tues. Feb. 03</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Due dates and reminders:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| □ Complete quiz for Treadwell and Sumser chapters before class starts
□ *Article analysis assignment due today – ICON dropbox*
□ Project idea workshop (Tues. Feb. 17) |
| **This week:** |
| • Idea workshop process
• **Read** Treadwell, chapter 3 on ethics (ICON)
• **Read** Sumser, chapter 1 (ICON) |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 4: Social science research methods cont’d; Overview of interpretive methods</th>
<th>Tues. Feb. 10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Due dates and reminders:</strong> cont’d</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| □ Complete quiz for Sumser chapter before class starts
□ Project idea paper due in ICON dropbox (Tues. Feb. 24) |
| **This week:** |
| • *Insider Series Guest Presentation 1* (TBC)
• Idea paper guidelines
• **Read** Sumser, chapter 2 (ICON)
• **In-class group time:** Get acquainted with group members, develop two project ideas |

<p>| Week 5: Developing the research idea | Tues. Feb. 17 |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Due dates and reminders:</th>
<th>This week:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| □  *In-class Workshop session today*: Project idea | •  Read Rubin et al reading (ICON)  
•  **Present alternate project ideas at** in-class Workshop |

**This week:**

**Due dates and reminders:**

- Complete quiz for van den Berg reading before class starts
-  *Project idea paper due today in ICON dropbox*
- Test 1 (Tues. Mar. 04)
- Literature review due in ICON dropbox (Tues. Mar. 11)

**This week:**

- Discuss test 1 notes, format
- Discuss literature review guidelines
- **In-class group time** for literature review discussion
- AAPOR website
-  Read Watt and van den Berg reading (ICON)

**Week 6: Research procedures | Tues. Feb. 24**

**Due dates and reminders:**

- Test 1 today (in class)

**This week:**

- Wind up Watt and van den Berg reading
- Test 1

**Week 7: Wind up, test 1 | Tues. Mar. 03**

**Due dates and reminders:**

- Complete quiz for Sampling chapter before class starts
-  *Literature review due today*
- Workshop on research questions (Tues. March 31)

**This week:**

- Workshop process for research questions
-  Read Treadwell, chapter 7 on sampling (ICON)
-  Read Treadwell, chapter 5 on measurement (ICON)

**Week 8: Selecting objects for study; Measurement | Tues. Mar. 10**

**Due dates and reminders:**

- Complete quiz for Measurement chapter before class starts
- Reminder – prepare research questions for the workshop next week

**This week:**

- Insider Series Guest Presentation 2 (TBC)
- Workshop process for design and method
- Treadwell chapter 5 cont’d
- **In-class group time** for developing draft research questions for workshop

**Week 9: Spring break | Mar. 17**

-- No class --

**Week 10: Measurement, cont’d | Tues. Mar. 24**

**Due dates and reminders:**

- Complete quiz for social media articles before class
- Workshop on research questions today
- Workshop on research design and method (Apr. 14)
- Workshop on research instrument (April

**This week:**

- Workshop RQs
- Read Articles (will be posted to ICON)
- **In-class group time** for developing design, method, and instrument for the workshop

**Week 11: Social media research | Tues. Mar. 31**
### Week 12: Qualitative research | Tues. Apr. 7

**Due dates and reminders:**
- Complete quiz for Treadwell chapter 8 before class
- Reminder – workshop for design and method, research instrument (Tues. Apr. 14)
- RQ, design and method written assignment due in ICON dropbox (Tues. Apr. 28)

**This week:**
- *Insider Series Guest Presentation* 3 TBC
- Discuss RQ, design and method assignment guidelines
- **Read** Treadwell, chapter 8 Surveys (ICON)
- **Read** Treadwell chapter 10

### Week 13: Workshop | Tues. Apr. 14

**Due dates and reminders:**
- Test 2 (Tues. Apr. 21)
- Research instrument written assignment due in ICON dropbox (Apr. 28)

**This week:**
- Discuss test notes and format
- Research instrument guidelines
- Complete discussion of Morse & Richards reading
- **Workshop:** Design and method; research instrument

### Week 14: Test 2 | Tues. Apr. 21

**Due dates and reminders:**
- **Test 2 today (in class)**
- Presentation guidelines (Tues. May 5)
- Project report guidelines (Mon. May 11)

**This week:**
- **Test 2**
- Discuss guidelines for presentation
- Discuss guidelines for project report

### Week 15: Research week | Tues. Apr. 28

- Submit the assignment on research questions, design, and method to ICON dropbox today
- Submit assignment on research instrument to ICON dropbox today
- Research week; no class – collect data, prepare for the presentation; instructor consultations as needed

### Week 16: Presentations | Tues. May 5

Presentations

**Presentations:** panels will be announced

**Monday May 11 – Final project reports due; completed self- and peer-evaluation (on ICON) due**

Have a wonderful summer!
As one of more than 104 programs in journalism and mass communication accredited by the Accrediting Council for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (ACEJMC), we must assess student learning to assure that each of our graduates meets the following standards.

We learn to ...

1. Write correctly, clearly and well.
2. Conduct research and gather information responsibly.
3. Edit and evaluate carefully.

We value ...

6. Free speech and First Amendment principles for all individuals and groups.
7. A diverse global community.
8. Creativity and independence.

We explore ...

10. Theories and concepts.
11. The history, structure and economy of media institutions
12. The role of media in shaping cultures.
Administrative Policies and Notifications

Administrative Home
The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences is the administrative home of this course and governs matters such as the add/drop deadlines, the second-grade-only option, and other related issues. Different colleges may have different policies. Questions may be addressed to 120 Schaeffer Hall, or see the CLAS Academic Policies Handbook at http://clas.uiowa.edu/students/handbook.

Electronic Communication
University policy specifies that students are responsible for all official correspondences sent to their University of Iowa e-mail address (@uiowa.edu). Faculty and students should use this account for correspondences (Operations Manual, III.15.2, k.11).

Accommodations for Disabilities
A student seeking academic accommodations should first register with Student Disability Services and then meet with the course instructor privately in the instructor's office to make particular arrangements. See http://sds.studentlife.uiowa.edu/ for more information.

Academic Honesty
All CLAS students or students taking classes offered by CLAS have, in essence, agreed to the College's Code of Academic Honesty: "I pledge to do my own academic work and to excel to the best of my abilities, upholding the IOWA Challenge. I promise not to lie about my academic work, to cheat, or to steal the words or ideas of others; nor will I help fellow students to violate the Code of Academic Honesty." Any student committing academic misconduct is reported to the College and placed on disciplinary probation or may be suspended or expelled (CLAS Academic Policies Handbook).

CLAS Final Examination Policies
The final examination schedule for each class is announced by the Registrar generally by the fifth week of classes. Final exams are offered only during the official final examination period. No exams of any kind are allowed during the last week of classes. All students should plan on being at the UI through the final examination period. Once the Registrar has announced the date, time, and location of each final exam, the complete schedule will be published on the Registrar's web site and will be shared with instructors and students. It is the student's responsibility to know the date, time, and place of a final exam.

Making a Suggestion or a Complaint
Students with a suggestion or complaint should first visit with the instructor (and the course supervisor), and then with the departmental DEO. Complaints must be made within six months of the incident (CLAS Academic Policies Handbook).

Understanding Sexual Harassment
Sexual harassment subverts the mission of the University and threatens the well-being of students, faculty, and staff. All members of the UI community have a responsibility to uphold this mission and to contribute to a safe environment that enhances learning. Incidents of sexual harassment should be reported immediately. See the UI Comprehensive Guide on Sexual Harassment for assistance, definitions, and the full University policy.

Reacting Safely to Severe Weather
In severe weather, class members should seek appropriate shelter immediately, leaving the classroom if necessary. The class will continue if possible when the event is over. For more information on Hawk Alert and the siren warning system, visit the Department of Public Safety website.