Solving Communication Problems: Research Methods and Strategic Communication
Spring 2014
JMC:3840:0EXV/ 19:151:EXV

Instructor: Sujatha Sosale
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E−mail: sujatha-sosale@uiowa.edu

Class: Virtual Classroom
Time: T 5:30 - 8:00
Office hours: W 11:30 – 2:30 and by appointment

Prerequisites
None

Academic course home
College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

Course site
To access the course site, log into Iowa Courses Online (ICON) using your Hawk ID and password.
http://icon.uiowa.edu/index.shtml

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 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 profession and by extension, influence the bottom line. Therefore readings, discussion, assignments, and guest presentations will involve aspects of both basic and 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, consumer preferences, representations of people and cultures, and a host of other issues;
• 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.

Class materials

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.
- **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 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 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/)

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:** Each class session (see dates in course calendar below) will begin with a quiz of two items designed constructed from the prescribed readings for that session. The format may be multiple choice, or filling blanks, or matching items. The grades will be available immediately upon completion of the quiz. This is a timed quiz and it will close within the first 10 minutes of the start of the class. It times out after the first 10 minutes.

**Discussion postings:** For each class session (see dates in course calendar below), you will be required to post five (5) keywords/key terms from the readings assigned for that day. These keywords and terms will form the basis of discussion for part of each of those sessions.
**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. This should not affect graduate students, who are required to carry out individual research projects.

**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 produced by each team.

**A Note on Collaboration**

For undergraduate students in the class, the final research project is collaborative. 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.

**The Iowa Dozen Standards Reminder:** Standards applicable for this course are presented in **bold** font:

We learn to (1) write correctly, clearly, and well; (2) conduct research and gather information responsibly; (3) edit and evaluate carefully; (4) use media technologies thoughtfully; (5) apply statistical concepts accurately.

We value (6) free speech and First Amendment principles for all individuals and groups; (7) a diverse global community; (8) creativity and independence; (9) truth, accuracy, and fairness.

We explore (10) theories and concepts; (11) the history, structure and economy of media institutions; and (12) the role of media in shaping cultures.
Grading and assessments

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, open book, short essays)</td>
<td>Tues. Mar. 04</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Test 2 (in-class, open book, short essays)</td>
<td>Tues. Apr. 22</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opening quizzes (9)</td>
<td>Dates in course calendar (ICON)</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posting keywords to ICON Discussion</td>
<td>Dates in course calendar (ICON)</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading a research article</td>
<td>Tues. Feb. 04 (ICON)</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idea and topic</td>
<td>February 25 (ICON)</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing a literature review</td>
<td>March 11 (ICON)</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing questions (problems), research design and method</td>
<td>April 29 (ICON)</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research instrument</td>
<td>April 29 (ICON)</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project presentations (groups – undergraduate; individual – graduate)</td>
<td>May 6 (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 25 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>
</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” range: 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.

**Late submission and other policies on assignments:**

- Almost all assignments will be submitted on ICON. Late submissions are recorded and course policies on late submissions will be applied – one half of a letter grade for that assignment per day (regardless of weekday or weekend).

- Late submissions, if not for emergency reasons, carry a penalty – see explanation below. If there is an emergency, you should see me about it – I will determine if it is indeed one (some reasons are obvious, others not so obvious, hence it is my responsibility to sort that out). Assignments will then have to be completed in a timely fashion – I will set the new due date.

Late submissions carry a penalty of one half letter grade for the assignment per working day, except in cases when there is an emergency (death in the family, severe illness, unforeseen circumstances such as automobile accidents), which has to be documented. You should check with me as soon as possible after the emergency situation to discuss documentation.

**Classroom conduct:**

It is assumed that you will adopt a courteous and tolerant attitude toward your classmates and the instructor and be respectful of the diverse viewpoints necessary for a course of this nature. In addition to active and constructive participation, serve as an attentive and engaged audience for your classmates and instructor.
Ensure that you come prepared (readings completed before class, assignments ready at beginning of class on due dates).

**Attendance and absences:**
Attendance in all sessions is required, as is participation in class. For absences, you should notify me well in advance except in emergencies like death in the family, in which case you should notify me at the earliest after the absence. Appropriate documents have to be provided for all absences within a time limit determined by the instructor. If you are ill you can get a self-documentation form for the illness from the Registrar’s website. You can meet me during office hours, call me over the phone during office hours, or make an appointment to see me to discuss an absence.

**Readings and preparation for the class:**
Complete assigned readings prior to attending class. As a rule of thumb, double the course credit hours for weekly study and preparation time. For a three-credit course, plan on a weekly study time of six hours.

**Special needs**
I would like to hear from anyone who has a disability which may require seating modifications or testing accommodations or accommodations of other class requirements, so that appropriate arrangements may be made. Please contact me during my office hours.

**Meetings and consultations with the instructor**
I check e-mail frequently, and especially during office hours. E-mail is the best way to reach me; my phone during office hours is the next best.

Do not hesitate to contact me if you have questions regarding any aspect of the course—syllabus, term assignments, ideas for assignments, exams, what constitutes academic dishonesty, or any other issue related to the course. Depending upon the nature of the question or problem, I may do one or more of three things—ask you to check back with the syllabus (so consult it first before approaching me), discuss over e-mail, or indicate that a meeting during office hours or by appointment may be best.

**Complaints and grievances**
If you have problems with any aspect of the course, please bring them to my attention at the earliest. Talk to me during office hours. I can then take appropriate measures to address the situation. If the problem is not resolved to your satisfaction, you can contact Professor Julie Andsager, Director, School of Journalism and Mass Communication, at 319/ 335-3486 or julie-andsager@uiowa.edu and pursue the matter further.

**Teaching Policies & Resources — CLAS Syllabus Insert** (instructor additions in this font)

**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 privately with the course instructor to make particular arrangements. See www.uiowa.edu/~sds/ for more information.

Academic Honesty
All CLAS students 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). It is important to attribute to source, either by quoting (if using exact words) or citing (if paraphrasing from original work). Failure to do so is considered academic dishonesty and carries severe penalties. Please use the APA style guide for this course to help you with attributing to source appropriately, and in the style preferred by social scientists in the discipline.

CLAS Final Examination Policies
The final examination schedule for each class is announced around the fifth week of the semester by the Registrar. 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 dates and times of each final exam, the complete schedule will be published on the Registrar's web site.

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). Please talk to me, the instructor, first if you have complaints. If the issue is not resolved to satisfaction, the DEO, Professor Julie Andsager may be contacted at julie-andsager@uiowa.edu.

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.
**COURSE CALENDAR**

**Note:** The calendar provides a general plan of materials for the course; deviations may necessary. It is the student’s full responsibility to keep informed of the correct schedule. Guest presentation dates are to be confirmed.

If there is a reading change, it will be posted on ICON.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Readings, guest presentations, other</th>
<th>Important dates – tests, assignments, other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Week 1: Jan. 21**  
Introduction | Course introduction  
Poindexter and McCombs, introductory chapter  
Treadwell chapter 1 |  |
| **Week 2, Jan 28**  
**Reading research: Identifying problem-solving in the literature** | Locke et al – How to select and read research reports – ICON  
Guest presentation: On library resources | Jan. 31 – submit bio-sheets in ICON dropbox – biosheets posted under Content |
| **Week 3, Feb. 04**  
**Ethics; Approaches to studying problems through research: Social science methods** | Sumser – chapter 1-- ICON  
Treadwell chapter 3 -- ICON | Sept. 04 – Individual assignment on reading a research article due – each student submits in ICON dropbox |
| **Week 4, Feb. 11**  
**Social science methods cont’d; Overview of interpretive methods** | IS Guest presentation 1  
Sumser – Chapter 2 ICON  
Treadwell, chapter 10 ICON  
Get acquainted with group members |  |
| **Week 5, Feb. 18**  
**Developing the research idea** | Workshop session -- the group research idea  
Rubin et al – all chapters in the reading packet (bibliography, access, tools, sources) -- ICON | Feb. 18 – Workshop – project idea |
| **Week 6, Feb. 25**  
**Research procedures** | Watt and van den Berg reading - ICON | Feb. 25 – Research idea written assignment due – ICON dropbox |
| **Week 7, Mar. 04**  
**Wind up, first test** | Complete Watt and van Den Berg reading  
Test 1 | Mar. 04 – Test 1 |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 8, Tues. Mar. 11</th>
<th>Treadwell, chapter 7, Sampling Treadwell, chapter 5 Measurement</th>
<th>Mar. 11 – Literature review due today</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Selecting objects for study; Measurement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 9, Mar. 18</td>
<td>Spring break, no class</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 10, Mar. 25</td>
<td>IS Guest presentation 2 Treadwell, chapter 5 Measurement, cont’d One more reading or excerpt possible</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measurement, Cont’d</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 11, Apr. 1</td>
<td>Readings TBA</td>
<td>Apr. 01 – Workshop on Research Questions and Hypotheses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media research</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 12, Apr. 8</td>
<td>IS Guest presentation 3 Treadwell chapter 8, Surveys ICON Morse and Richards reading ICON</td>
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<tr>
<td>Qualitative research</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 13, Apr. 15</td>
<td>Workshop session</td>
<td>Apr. 15 - Workshop: design and method; crafting the research instrument</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-class workshops</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 14, Apr. 22</td>
<td>Test 2</td>
<td>Apr. 22 - Test 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Test 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 15, Apr. 29</td>
<td>Research week</td>
<td>Apr. 29 – research question, design and method assignment due Research instrument assignment due</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wind up data collection; prepare for presentation; instructor consultations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 16, May 06</td>
<td>Project presentations</td>
<td>May 06 – upload presentation to ICON</td>
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<tr>
<td>Presentations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Exam week: May 12

Project reports due

All final project reports due today

Have a wonderful summer!

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Bibliography of course readings


Social media research – readings TBA

