

MMC 6421 Research Methods

Summer A 2018 | Section 01FC | Periods 2-3 Wednesdays; 2-4 Fridays, Weimer 3324 | 3 credits



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About me: See my [website](#) or follow me (@bikeprof) on [Twitter](#)

Office hours are first-come, first-served. If those hours don't work for your schedule, make an appointment or drop in whenever the office door is open.

ABOUT THE COURSE

Course Description

This is an overview of the primary qualitative and quantitative methods in mass communication research. It is designed to help graduate students conduct research for a peer-reviewed journal, thesis, or dissertation.

Course Objectives

By the end of the course, you will be able to:

- Distinguish between mediocre and good research.
- Evaluate strengths and weaknesses of commonly used methods.
- Collect and evaluate qualitative data.
- Collect and evaluate quantitative data.
- Submit an IRB request to conduct research involving human subjects.
- Choose statistical or analytical evaluations appropriate for each method.
- Compose the shell (intro through methods) of a study you plan to conduct.

Required Textbooks

1. Wimmer, R.D., & Dominick, J.R. (2014). *Mass media research: An introduction* (10th ed.). Boston, MA: Wadsworth Cengage. ISBN: 9781133307334
2. Pallant, J. (2016). *SPSS survival manual* (6th ed.). Berkshire, England: Open University Press / McGraw Hill. ISBN: 9780335262588

Pallant offers a gentle introduction to statistics while walking you through SPSS: everything from which buttons to press to how to write the results. Only three chapters are assigned (1, 2, and 10) with the rest listed as “skim” because stats is a secondary purpose to this course. But read the entire book as you have time. It's an amazing resource aimed at those of us who are not stats whiz kids.

Also: Assigned readings (PDFs) are on the Canvas website.

Class Schedule

The schedule has been configured to accommodate student schedule conflicts known as of May 1. When we meet for the full time on Fridays, we will have a 30-minute lunch break.

	Date	Subject	Topics	Readings	Assignments
1	Wed, May 16	Science	What makes research scientific Research and data terminology Reliability and validity Populations and samples How to choose a research topic How to read a research paper	Wimmer & Dominick 1, 2, 3, 4; Pallant 1-2; PDF: Nature article; video: John Oliver	
2	Friday, May 18	Research	Choosing a research topic UF library resources What marks good research	PDFs: research journal papers	In class: detail paper idea; critique research articles
3	Wed, May 23	Qualitative, part 1	Qualitative research overview Method 1: Interview Method 2: Focus group	Wimmer & Dominick 5, 8	<u>May 22</u> : Qual 1 Sums assign <u>May 28</u> : IRB Forms assign
Friday, May 25: No class					
4	Wed, May 30	Qualitative, part 2	Method 3: Historical Method 4: Ethnography Method 5: Case study	PDFs: Agnew, women, radio, ethnography	<u>May 29</u> : Qual 2 Sums assign
5	Friday, June 1	Quantitative	Quantitative research overview Method 6: Content analysis Method 7: Survey Method 8: Experiment	Wimmer & Dominick 6-7, 9, 13-16; PDFs: content, sample, survey, framing	<u>May 31</u> : Quant Sums assign
6	Wed, June 6*	Statistics, part 1	Elements of statistical reasoning Matching statistic to data Benefits and dangers in statistics	Wimmer & Dominick 10-12; Pallant 10	
7	Fri, June 8*	Statistics, part 2	Statistics plus SPSS using Pallant text (bring to class)	Bring Pallant to class	
8	Wed, June 13*	Paper Abstract	Student paper abstract presentations		Bring copies of 150-word abstract to share with class
June 15, 20, 22: No class so you can work on paper					
Noon Saturday, June 23: Research paper shell due (upload to Canvas)					

* Classes on June 6, 8, and 13 will end at noon

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

Assignment Weighting (total: 1,000 points)

Method One-Sheeters (8 X 25 points each)	200 points	(20%)
Method Presentations (2 X 50 points each)	100 points	(10%)
IRB Proposal	100 points	(10%)
Research Paper Shell (due noon Saturday, June 23)	600 points	(60%)

Grading Scale (in points)

		B+	899 to 870	C+	799 to 770	D+	699 to 670
A	1,000 to 930	B	869 to 830	C	769 to 730	D	669 to 630
A-	929 to 900	B-	829 to 800	C-	729 to 700	D-	629 to 600

Consult the UF graduate school catalog for details about the [grading policy](#).

Method One-Sheeters (8 x 25 points = 200 points)

These are eight, single-page, bullet-point listings of the key strengths and weaknesses of each method. These don't have to be comprehensive but should hit the highlights – the benefits and pitfalls – of each method.

Each method is a different sheet. By definition, some methods (such as case study) have fewer strengths and weaknesses than others (such as a survey).

State your sources at the top of the page. You are welcome to draw from other material beyond the textbooks but are not required to do so.

Each submission is a single (multi-page) Word document uploaded to the Canvas assignment by the night before they are discussed in class:

- Qualitative 1 Summaries (2 methods) due before 11:59 p.m. Tuesday, May 22
- Qualitative 2 Summaries (3 methods) due before 11:59 p.m. Tuesday, May 29
- Quantitative Summaries (3 methods) due before 11:59 p.m. Tuesday, May 31

Method Presentations (2 X 50 points = 100 points)

You will each give two teaching presentations (roughly 15-20 minutes each) that supplement the Wimmer and Dominick text on a particular method. We will choose those on the first class, May 16. Each is worth 50 points.

Although you are welcome to use presentation software like PowerPoint, the main takeaway will be a one-page (front and back OK) handout for your peers that summarizes your presentation. Don't get too fancy!

These presentations are intended to enable you to become sufficiently familiar with a method to teach it to your peers. (If you can teach it, you've learned it!) However, a presentation does not have to be a lecture. Engaging the class helps facilitate learning.

The presentations should cover:

1. An overview of the method.
2. Hypotheses or research questions suitable to be addressed by the method.
3. Best practices (and pitfalls to avoid) for conducting the method.
4. Examples of good (and bad) research that used the method.
5. Ways to analyze the data generated by the method.

These will be done in class on May 23, May 30, and June 1.

IRB Proposal (100 points)

Complete a human subject research proposal for [IRB-02](#) for the study you plan for this class, or for another study you would like to do. (For this assignment, you don't have to actually submit the form electronically to myIRB. Just upload a single completed Word document to this assignment.)

We will discuss more about this in class on May 23.

That single document will include two parts, all of which are files to be downloaded on the Canvas assignment or are linked from the Canvas assignment

1. A completed protocol form using a fill-in-the-blank document. (A protocol guide is available to help.)
2. An informed consent form. (The IRB website has examples and a checklist.)

Upload the single Word document to the Canvas assignment before 11:59 p.m. Monday, May 28.

Research Paper Shell (600 points)

This is the shell of a research paper – the introduction through the methods section with a reference section and any appendices required (such as a survey questionnaire or a content analysis code book). In short, it is everything except the data.

This can be on any subject you like. It will hold the most value if you focus on a topic you think might become your thesis or dissertation, or a research paper you would like to conduct for an academic conference and/or a peer-reviewed journal.

It can be a paper you have already planned to do. It even can be a paper for which you have begun to do some exploration.

It cannot, however, be a paper you have already completed. It cannot come from another class. It cannot be a paper that is substantially completed except for data collection. It cannot be a summation of a master's thesis.

To put it another way, the research paper shell should be no more than roughly 20 percent complete before beginning work on this class.

About the paper:

- Length: Roughly 5,000 words, including references
- Style: APA (preferred) or Chicago
- Abstract: 100 words (so shorter than what you will show in class)
- Follow the format given in class in the Research Paper Outline
- The most common problem areas in these papers involve:
 - A burning question that's not really interesting
 - A lit review that fails to explicate terms or justify RQs and H's
 - RQ's and H's that are too vague or too complex
 - A method section that fails to justify and detail the steps to be taken in either the study design or the data analysis
 - Omission of supporting methodological documentation, such as survey questions, code book, interview questions, ethnography protocols, etc.

About the grading:

- An A paper is (a) fully ready for data to be collected and analyzed, *and* (b) which conceptualizes a study that is worth acceptance at a regional (multi-state or sub-national) academic conference.
- A B paper is one that (a) is close, but not quite ready for data to be collected, *or* (b) is fully formed but proposes a study that is unlikely to be accepted at a regional academic conference.
- A C paper is one that is (a) not ready for data to be collected *and* (b) conceptualizes a study unlikely to be accepted at a regional academic conference.
- A D paper is one that is more an essay than an academic study.

The research paper shell is due to the Canvas assignment before noon Saturday, June 23. The paper will automatically be uploaded to Turnitin, the plagiarism detector.

Paper Abstract June 13

To help you shape the paper, bring paper copies (enough for everyone in class) of a roughly 150-word abstract to class on June 13 and discuss. This will give your peers a chance to ask questions and offer suggestions.

The abstract should address the seven items in the Choosing a Research Paper list we will discuss in the first class, on May 16:

1. What is the study's *burning question*?
2. In what *academic genre* would this study be situated
3. *So what?* How would answering this question advance academic knowledge?
4. What *theory* is used to ground and guide your study?
5. What 3 to 5 *research questions or hypotheses* do you expect your study to explore? (These can be listed after the abstract is concluded.)
6. *Study design*: How do you plan to collect data?
7. *Data analysis*: How do you plan to analyze the data?

MORE IMPORTANT DETAILS

Attendance

Punctual attendance is expected of graduate students unless an absence is allowed under UF [policy](#). If you are going to be absent, let me know ahead of time.

Academic Integrity

UF students live by an honor code that prohibits academic dishonesty such as (but not limited to) cheating, plagiarism, fabrication, engaging in unauthorized collaboration, reusing a paper from another class, writing a similar paper for two classes, drawing too heavily on another's work for your own, and having someone else write your paper.

Be aware of the UF graduate school [academic honesty policy](#) as well the one in the college's Doctoral Handbook. Students have an affirmative obligation to know what is in the handbook and to abide by it. The handbook includes a detailed description of plagiarism, copies of which are available in Chinese, Korean, Mandarin, Portuguese, and Spanish. If you are unsure of citation rules or what requires attribution, ask me *before* turning in a paper. Ignorance is not an excuse.

My default practice for an academic integrity violation is a failing grade for the course and to recommend the student be removed from the graduate program.

Students with Disabilities

If you would benefit from disability-related accommodations, contact the [Disability Resource Center](#) as early in the semester as possible. The center will provide documentation so appropriate accommodations can be made. The center is in Reid Hall, 392-8565.

Help with Coping

The UF [Counseling and Wellness Center](#) is a terrific, free resource for any student who could use help managing stress or coping with life. The center, at 3190 Radio Road on campus, is open for appointments and emergency walk-ins from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. To make an appointment or receive after-hours assistance, call 352-392-1575.

The UF Police can be reached at 392-1111 or, in an emergency, by dialing 911.

Course Evaluations

Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online [evaluations](#). You will be notified by email when the evaluations are open, near the end of the semester. Summary [results](#) are available to you and the general public.