



COM 712/Empirical Research Methods

Sample Syllabus

COURSE INFORMATION AND OBJECTIVES

Please note there is no required textbook for this course, readings will be supplied through Canvas. However, I do have two recommended texts to assist with the course:

- Green, S. B., & Salkind, N. J. (2017). *Using SPSS for Windows and Macintosh* (8th ed). Pearson.
- *APA Style Guide 7th Edition* (2020).

Quantitative Research Methods provides a foundation for understanding how to read, interpret, and participate in the process of social scientific academic research. The course objectives outlined below satisfy several of the [learning objectives](#) for the Communication Studies department at UNLV. To accomplish these goals, COM 712 provides a survey of several empirical research designs (e.g., surveys, experiments, content analysis) often used in social scientific communication research, and issues related to human research, including ethical obligations, conceptualization, sampling, and data analysis.

Course Goals and Learning Objectives

1. Understand the goal of social scientific research and the basic steps in the research process.
2. Explain and employ the guiding ethical principles of conducting human research.
3. Distinguish between a research purpose, hypotheses, and research questions.
4. Identify and distinguish between independent and dependent variables and explain the implications of a variable's level of measurement.
5. Explain the difference between several types of research designs using their defining characteristics and distinctive elements and why a researcher would choose one design type over another.
6. Identify and explain threats to validity and reliability within research.
7. Explain the differences between random and nonrandom sampling techniques and why a study would employ one over the other.
8. Use the skills learned in the course to conduct your own communication social science research study and to critique communication social science research.
9. Have a basic understanding of how data is analyzed.
10. Improve your knowledge of the methods as applied in Communication Studies.

COURSE EXPECTATIONS AND POLICIES

Responsible Classroom Behavior: As this is a university course, you are expected to behave in a respectful manner; this includes but is by no means limited to:

- Reading the syllabus and being aware of the course's policies and regulations.
- Informing your instructor prior to or on the same day as the class you are unable to attend.

- Obtaining missed class notes, assignment information, and course materials from classmates.
- Coming to class on time and in the right place.
- Behaving with academic integrity and honesty on all assignments.
- Completing assignments before or on the date they are due.
- Treating classmates with the respect and dignity afforded to all human beings in a just society.
- Recognizing and accepting the consequences for your actions and choices.

Attendance Policy

Students are expected to attend every class. Missing class will affect a student's ability to succeed in the course. I expect students to not only be present, but also actively listening, asking questions, responding to peers, and making comments. This is a graduate level course that requires active and critical engagement in the content, so students are expected to participate **every class session**.

Technology Policy

I expect that you will communicate and use digital media appropriately and thoughtfully, particularly given the online nature of this course. You are not required to have your video on during our meetings, but please be prepared to turn on audio as needed to answer questions and engage in discussion.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GUIDELINES

What follows is a brief description of each of the major course assignments; specific details are available in Canvas including due dates.

ASSIGNMENT	DESCRIPTION
Vocabulary Test	Midway through the semester there will be a vocabulary test of key course concepts and theoretical ideas. This is worth approximately 20% of your final grade in the course.
Article Critique (2)	You will be assigned two articles to critique based on their methodological choices. You will produce a 3-page paper that identifies course concepts that relate back to the methods of the study noting strengths and weaknesses of the study (5% of final grade each, 10% total).
Participation	Active engagement is an important part of the learning process, in particular with research methods. As such, 10% of your grade is associated with points earned through participation in the course on a day to day basis, which includes but is not limited to: group work, homework, and/or self-check quizzes.
Research Project	You will complete a research project worth 50% of your final grade in the course that showcases your ability to analyze past work and propose a research project. This will be broken up into smaller assignments during the semester with the final cumulative project due during finals week.
Final Presentation	To wrap up the semester you will give a presentation over the research project that you developed. This represents 10% of your final grade in the course.

Assignment Submission Instructions

All assignments are due by the start of class (10:00am PST) on the date listed on Web Campus/Canvas unless otherwise noted online. The official time of submission is the date stamp of Canvas. Do not rely on your personal clock time.

Late or Missing Assignment Policy

All assignments are due by 2:30pm (PST) on the date listed on Web Campus/Canvas unless otherwise noted online. If for any reason you are unable to complete the assignment on time, please contact me by email as soon as possible. Please note there is no guarantee an extension will be granted. The final paper, participation, vocabulary test, and final presentation may not be submitted late. Articles critiques and each part of the research paper project up to the final paper can be submitted up to 48 hours late for a 20% starting deduction (e.g., if worth 100 points, you would have an auto-deduction of 20 points on the assignment if you submit late). After the 48-hour window you will be assigned a zero on the assignment.

Grading Scale

This course operates on a +/- system for final grades (i.e., A, A-, B+, B, B-, C+, C, C-, D+, D, D-, F)

Grading Philosophy

Grades should be a reflection of what you demonstrated you have learned, not a reflection either of how hard you've worked or what you report you have learned after you've received your grade. You must demonstrate that you have learned the material by the work that is submitted. Instructors must base their evaluations of your work on the material you turn in; that is, on the words you write. If you do not understand why you have received the grade you have, please schedule a meeting.

24/7 Rule

You must wait 24 hours after receiving a grade to contact me to discuss or appeal it. This way, you have time to fully review the comments given as well as review the assignment guidelines. Further, you have one week from the date the assignment was returned in class or was posted on Canvas to meet with me about it. When bringing assignments in for discussion, I expect that you have thoughtful arguments to make and can point to specifics in the assignment as well as in your work. I will not discuss grades after one week has elapsed. This course moves quick and we will have moved on to several other assignments by that point. I will do my best to return assignments as quickly as possible to help facilitate discussion.

Academic Misconduct

See below under UNLV policies for the details regarding academic misconduct at a university level. Failure to understand what constitutes academic misconduct and more specifically, plagiarism are not an appropriate excuse should an issue arise within the course. This course uses Turnitin for all submitted written work; you will have the opportunity to submit to check your paper prior to the due date and resubmit. Please ask questions if you are concerned.

UNLV UNIVERSITY POLICIES

For a full list of UNLV policies updated by term [please click here](#). Specific policies are also noted below.

Rebelmail

By policy, faculty and staff should e-mail students' Rebelmail accounts only. Rebelmail is UNLV's official e-mail system for students. It is one of the primary ways students receive official university communication such as information about deadlines, major campus events, and announcements. All UNLV students receive a Rebelmail account after they have been admitted to the university. Students' e-mail prefixes are listed on class rosters. The suffix is always @unlv.nevada.edu. Emailing within Canvas is acceptable.

Incomplete Grades

The grade of I—Incomplete—can be granted when a student has satisfactorily completed three-fourths of course work for that semester/session but for reason(s) beyond the student's control, and acceptable to the instructor, cannot complete the last part of the course, and the instructor believes that the student can finish the course without repeating it. The incomplete work must be made up before the end of the following regular semester for undergraduate courses. Graduate students receiving "I" grades in 500-, 600-, or 700-level courses have up to one calendar year to complete the work, at the discretion of the instructor. If course requirements are not completed

within the time indicated, a grade of F will be recorded and the GPA will be adjusted accordingly. Students who are fulfilling an Incomplete do not register for the course but make individual arrangements with the instructor who assigned the I grade.

Tutoring and Coaching

The Academic Success Center (ASC) provides tutoring, academic success coaching and other academic assistance for all UNLV undergraduate students. For information regarding tutoring subjects, tutoring times, and other ASC programs and services, visit <http://www.unlv.edu/asc> or call 702-895-3177. The ASC building is located across from the Student Services Complex (SSC). Academic success coaching is located on the second floor of SSC A (ASC Coaching Spot). Drop-in tutoring is located on the second floor of the Lied Library and College of Engineering TBE second floor.

UNLV Writing Center

One-on-one or small group assistance with writing is available free of charge to UNLV students at the Writing Center, located in CDC-3-301. Although walk-in consultations are sometimes available, students with appointments will receive priority assistance. Appointments may be made in person or by calling 702-895-3908. The student's Rebel ID Card, a copy of the assignment (if possible), and two copies of any writing to be reviewed are requested for the consultation. More information can be found at: <http://writingcenter.unlv.edu/>

Library Resources

Students may consult with a librarian on research needs. Subject librarians for various classes can be found here: https://www.library.unlv.edu/contact/librarians_by_subject. UNLV Libraries provides resources to support students' access to information. Discovery, access, and use of information are vital skills for academic work and for successful post-college life. Access library resources and ask questions at <https://www.library.unlv.edu/>

Academic Misconduct

Academic integrity is a legitimate concern for every member of the campus community; all share in upholding the fundamental values of honesty, trust, respect, fairness, responsibility, and professionalism. By choosing to join the UNLV community, students accept the expectations of the Student Academic Misconduct Policy and are encouraged when faced with choices to always take the ethical path. Students enrolling at UNLV assume the obligation to conduct themselves in a manner compatible with UNLV's function as an educational institution. An example of academic misconduct is plagiarism. Plagiarism is using the words or ideas of another, from the Internet or any source, without proper citation of the sources. See the *Student Academic Misconduct Policy* (approved December 9, 2005) located at: <https://www.unlv.edu/studentconduct/student-conduct>

Copyright

The University requires all members of the University Community to familiarize themselves with and to follow copyright and fair use requirements. You are individually and solely responsible for violations of copyright and fair use laws. The university will neither protect nor defend you, nor assume any responsibility for employee or student violations of fair use laws. Violations of copyright laws could subject you to federal and state civil penalties and criminal liability, as well as disciplinary action under University policies. Additional information can be found at: <http://www.unlv.edu/provost/copyright>

Disability Resource Center (DRC)

The UNLV Disability Resource Center (SSC-A 143, <http://drc.unlv.edu/>, 702-895-0866) provides resources for students with disabilities. If you feel that you have a disability, please make an appointment with a Disabilities Specialist at the DRC to discuss what options may be available to you. If you are registered with the UNLV Disability Resource Center, bring your Academic Accommodation Plan from the DRC to the instructor during office hours so that you may work together to develop strategies for implementing the accommodations to meet both your needs and the requirements of the course. Any information you provide is private and will be treated as such. To maintain the confidentiality of your request, please do not approach the instructor in front of others to discuss your accommodation needs.

Religious Holidays Policy

Any student missing class quizzes, examinations, or any other class or lab work because of observance of religious holidays shall be given an opportunity during that semester to make up missed work. The make-up will apply to the religious holiday absence only. It shall be the responsibility of the student to notify the instructor within the first 14 calendar days of the course for fall and spring courses (excepting modular courses), or within the first 7 calendar days of the course for summer and modular courses, of his or her intention to participate in religious holidays which do not fall on state holidays or periods of class recess. For additional information, please visit:

<http://catalog.unlv.edu/content.php?catoid=6&navoid=531>

Classroom Surveillance

Nevada Revised Statutes (State Law) 396.970 Surreptitious electronic surveillance on campus; exceptions.
[Effective January 1, 2017.]

1. Except as otherwise provided in subsection 2, it is unlawful for a person to engage in any kind of surreptitious electronic surveillance on a campus of the System without the knowledge of the person being observed.
2. Subsection 1 does not apply to any electronic surveillance:
 - (a) Authorized by a court order issued to a public officer, based upon a showing of probable cause to believe that criminal activity is occurring on the property under surveillance;
 - (b) By a law enforcement agency pursuant to a criminal investigation;
 - (c) By a peace officer pursuant to [NRS 289.830](#);
 - (d) By a uniformed peace officer of the Nevada Highway Patrol Division of the Department of Public Safety pursuant to [NRS 480.365](#);
 - (e) Which is necessary as part of a system of security used to protect and ensure the safety of persons on the campus; or
 - (f) Of a class or laboratory when authorized by the teacher of the class or laboratory.

(Added to NRS by [1993, 2138](#); A [2015, 575, 3668](#), effective January 1, 2017)

SAMPLE COURSE SCHEDULE

Tentative Schedule, Subject to Change

Wednesday, January 20/Introductions and Expectations

Monday, January 25/Overview of Methods and the Research Process

Readings: Levine, T. R. (2011). Quantitative social science methods of inquiry. In M. L. Knapp & J. A. Daly (Eds) *Sage handbook of interpersonal communication* (4th ed, pp. 25-57). Sage.

Wednesday, January 27/Reading Journal Articles

Readings: Rains, S. A., Levine, T. R., & Weber, R. (2018). Sixty years of quantitative communication research summarized: Lessons from 149 meta-analyses. *Annals of the International Communication Association*. 1-20.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/23808985.2018.1446350>

Monday, February 1/ Basics of APA

Readings: APA Style Guide—Introduction & Assigned Reading (individual basis)

Wednesday, February 3/ Research Ethics

Readings: Mujere Chapter (Canvas) Hintz, E. A., & Dean, M. (2019). Best practices for returning research findings to participants: Methodological and ethical considerations for communication researchers. *Communication Methods and Measures*. Online First. 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19312458.2019.1650165>

Monday, February 8/Operationalizing Variables and Measurement

Readings: Baxter and Babbie Chapter (Canvas)

Wednesday, February 10/ RQs and Hypotheses

Readings: Trochim Chapter (Canvas)

Monday, February 15/NO SCHOOL PRESIDENT'S DAY

Wednesday, February 17/Reliability and Validity

Readings: Baxter and Babbie Chapter (Canvas)

Monday, February 22/Sampling

Readings: Mujere, N. (2016). Sampling in research. In M. Baran & J. Jones (Eds.) *Mixed methods research for improved scientific study* (pp. 108-123). IGI Global.

(Canvas) Meltzer, C. E., Naab, T., & Daschmann, G. (2012). All student samples differ: On participant selection in communication science. *Communication Methods and Measures*, 6, 251-262.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/1912458.2012.732625>

Wednesday, February 24/Study Design Wrap Up—Writing

Readings: (Canvas) Lamott—Shitty First Drafts

Monday, March 1/Getting Started with SPSS

Readings: (Canvas) Kent State SPSS Library Guide

Wednesday, March 3/Descriptive and Comparative Statistics

Readings: May, A. (2018). Simple descriptive statistics. In M. Allen, *The sage encyclopedia of communication research methods* (pp. 1602-1606). Sage.

Monday, March 8/Descriptive and Comparative Statistics in SPSS

Readings: See Canvas for Link

Wednesday, March 10/In-Class Vocabulary Test

Monday, March 15 & Wednesday, March 17: SPRING BREAK

Monday, March 22/Survey Research

Readings: Jin, B., & Pena, J. F. (2010). Mobile communication in romantic relationships: Mobile phone use, relational uncertainty, love, commitment, and attachment styles. *Communication Reports*, 23, 39-51.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/08934211003598742>

Wednesday, March 24/Inferential Statistics Part 1

Readings: See Canvas for Link

Monday, March 29/Experimental Research

Readings: Pennington, N., Winfrey, K. L., Warner, B. R., & Kearney, M. W. (2015). Liking Obama and Romney (on Facebook): An experimental evaluation of political engagement and efficacy during the 2012 general election. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 44, 279-283. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2014.11.032>

Wednesday, March 31/Inferential Statistics Part 2

Readings: See Canvas for Link

Monday, April 5 & Wednesday, April 7: Proposal Meetings (no formal class)

Monday, April 12/Content Analysis

Readings: Hefner, V., & Wilson, B. J. (2013). From love at first sight to soul mate: The influence of romantic ideals in popular films on young people's beliefs about relationships. *Communication Monographs*, 80, 150-175. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03637751.2013.776697>

Wednesday, April 14/SPSS Wrap Up

Readings: See Canvas for Link

Monday, April 19/Measures Workshop

Wednesday, April 21/Future Directions in Communication Research

Readings: *TBD*

Monday, April 26/ Future Directions in Communication Research

Readings: *TBD*

Wednesday, April 28 & Monday, May 3: Final Research Presentations

Wednesday, May 5/No Class—Work on Final Paper!

Final Paper Due Wednesday May 12th by 11:59pm (PST) to Canvas
