

COM Research Participation Student Handout

In some of our Communication Studies (COM) classes, students are exposed to the results of social-scientific studies. Students in those classes also should have first-hand experience with the research process to have a better understanding of the research they read. Therefore, the UNLV Communication Studies department offers students an opportunity to participate in research. Instructors of COM courses may require research participation or offer research participation for extra credit, if you are receiving this handout it is because your COM course has opted into participation through the research pool this semester.

Some COM courses require students to earn research credits during the semester they are enrolled in the course. Other COM courses may offer research credit as an extra credit option. Check with your instructor to see if research credit is required or offered as extra credit.

If you have questions, feel free to ask your instructor, the researcher conducting the study, or the COM Research Participation Coordinator (COM.Research@unlv.edu).

Options for Earning Research Credits

Students may earn research credit in two ways:

OPTION 1: Participating in research studies (e.g., experiments, surveys, interviews) posted on SONA (<http://unlv-comm.sona-systems.com/>).

Research projects currently recruiting participants are described in SONA (the research participation management system the COM Department uses). Descriptions provide some background on the study, what you will be asked to do, and any relevant deadlines for that specific study. If you have any questions about a specific study, contact the researcher conducting that specific study. Please note:

- Each research study is worth between ½ to 2 credits
- The information collected for studies is kept confidential. The information you share with researchers will not be revealed to instructors. Each study starts with an informed consent form that provides more information about what the researcher is studying and how they will protect the information you provide them.
- For online surveys, once you submit a survey you may not withdraw from the study; however, you may cease to participate at any time before the survey is submitted.
- For studies that require appointments, you must give 12 hours' notice if you need to cancel a scheduled appointment (Cancel at <http://unlv-comm.sona-systems.com/> or contact the researcher).
- Some studies accept participants throughout the semester. Other studies may have different start and end dates. Read the study description carefully to know when participation must be completed.
- Check the deadlines for each individual study as well as the overall deadlines for research participation completion – these deadlines do not always coincide.

OPTION 2: Writing a summary of existing research, which is provided by the Research Coordinator.

If you do not meet a study's qualification criteria or if you have ethical concerns about research participation, then you may earn research credits by completing a written assignment. Contact the Research Coordinator (COM.Research@unlv.edu) to request the written research credit option. In your email request, include:

- A statement regarding your desire to complete the research credit written alternative.
- The name of the research study for which you are requesting the written alternative.

- Your first and last name and SONA account ID. You must have a SONA account to complete the written assignment because ALL research credit is tracked in the SONA system, including the written alternative.

The Research Coordinator will email the necessary materials to complete the written assignment. The written response must be:

- Typed in completed sentences and correct grammar, following APA 7th edition formatting and citations.
- Submitted in an email attachment as a .doc, .docx, or .rtf. If the Alternative Assignment is not submitted in one of these formats, the researcher reserves the right to not accept the research credit or return it without awarding research credit.
- Submitted to Research Coordinator by the final date and time for completing participation for that research project.

Deadlines

Deadlines for research participation are listed on the COM Research Participation webpage (which is accessible via the department website), please note the following:

- No “late participation” will be permitted. It is your responsibility to know and comply with the deadlines for each study and for overall participation.
- Researchers will post all research credits within 48 hours of the final participation deadline. This should provide instructors and students sufficient time to verify credits, dispute final credit tallies, and add research credits into students’ grades.
- If research credit disputes arise, students have until 5pm on Friday the last week of classes (i.e., study week, NOT finals week) to resolve the situation.

These are typical deadlines and may vary slightly depending on variations in UNLV’s academic calendar. Be sure to check [here](#) for the specific deadlines each semester.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What’s SONA? And, why do have to have another account at UNLV?

A: SONA is the online research participation management system the COM department uses to manage research recruitment and participation. It allows researchers to inform users of available research opportunities. Also, interested users can volunteer to participate in research studies. Once participation is completed, SONA provides a way to inform participants, researchers, and instructors that participation has been earned (or not earned). Basically, it’s a central location for researchers, students, and instructors to share and get the information they each need about research opportunities in the COM department. Several departments at UNLV use SONA to manage research participation (e.g., PSY). Each department has its own system, so you must have an account with each department if you are enrolled in courses in different departments offering research credits.

Q: I have multiple classes that require or offer extra credit for earning research credits. Can I participate in 1 study and have it count for both classes?

A: Students may not use credit earned for more than one class. If a student participates in a study and earns 1 research credit, then that 1 credit may only be applied to one course within the semester earned. Credit earned in one semester may not be applied in a subsequent semester. Credits earned in PSY (or other research participation pools/systems) cannot be credit to COM (and conversely, COM credits cannot be transferred to other research participation pools/systems).

Q: How do I go about earning credits in SONA?

A: To earn credits, you must create an account in SONA; then, log-in to your account to read about, sign-up for research studies, and track your earned research credits. To create an account, go to: <http://unlv-comm.sona-systems.com/>

You will need to provide the following information to create an account: First, your full name (first, last) as it appears on the UNLV course you are enrolled in, Second, a User ID, which must be your RebelMail email account name, and Third, you must select the course and section you are currently enrolled in. There is an option to include your Student ID number and/or Telephone number, these are not required.

After you have an account, you may login to SONA. From this screen, you can update your profile and personal contact information, select studies to participate in, change your courses, provide alternative email addresses (this is highly recommended if you do not frequently use RebelMail), view your history in COM SONA research, etc.

Q: I had a SONA account with COM from when I took another COM course. Does my old login information work? This looks completely different!

A: All of your old information (login information, history, etc.) are all still in the system and can be used each semester, however you will need to identify the current course you are enrolled in. If you forgot your password, just click on “Forgot Password?” on the main login page. Please note your User ID MUST be your RebelMail login. If you are still having issues logging please contact the Research Coordinator (COM.Research@unlv.edu) for assistance. Please also note that while you may have previously created a SONA account with a different department these sites are not linked, so if you participated in research for Psychology, that is not the same as having a SONA account for Communication Studies.

Q: Why are the studies worth different amounts of research credit?

A: Research credits are determined based on approximately how long participation is estimated to take:

- ½ credit = the study should take less than 30 minutes to complete
- 1 credit = the study should take about 30 – 60 minutes to complete; most studies are worth 1 credit
- 2 credits = the study should take about 90 – 120 minutes to complete

Q: I’ve participated in study in a previous semester. It was fun. Can I participate again?

A: Researchers love to hear you enjoyed participating in their study, but you can only participate once in any specific study, even if your participation would occur across multiple semesters. This is because you would be represented in research results two or more times while everyone else would be in there once – you would count more and have a bigger influence on what we learn from the study. It would be kind of like counting all of your grades twice and everyone else’s only once when calculating a class’ average on exam.

Q: I just finished participating in a study, but my credit is not displayed in SONA. What did I do wrong?

A: Depending on the study and how it was designed and administered, most credits will not be displayed in SONA immediately. For most studies, the researcher must enter credits by hand. Especially for online surveys, the researcher may not be watching online at all times for studies to be completed; they usually check about twice a week to update students’ participation in SONA. If you do not see your credit posted within one week of completing participation, consider contacting the researcher to verify your participation.

Q: I don't know if I want other people knowing this kind of information about me. Who will know my responses?

A: All of the studies are confidential. This means the researcher will know you were involved in the study. For a while the researcher will be able to link your name to your responses in order provide you research credit and verify the credit at the end of the semester. But, the researcher promises never to release any personal information about you to anyone. When the researchers present results of the study, they remove your name from the data. Also, researchers usually talk about the general patterns they found across all of the people in the study. They avoid providing any information that will ever link you to the study. Also, because the researcher studies are confidential, the researcher will not share any information they learn about you with your instructor. Your instructor will only know how many research credits you earn. They will not know how you earned those credits (e.g., alternative assignment and research participation are not distinguished in SONA). They will not have access to your survey responses, video recordings, or any other data the researcher may have.

Q: I'm not sure I want to participate in research, but I do need those points for class. Is there something else I can do?

A: Yes! No one is required to participate in research, it is optional. Please email the Research Coordinator (COM.Research@unlv.edu) to request the alternative assignment. The same deadlines for research apply each semester to the alternative assignment options as well.

*****Please note this document and the procedures described within are patterned after the UNLV Psychology Department's Subject Pool student handout, and have been modified to reflect the UNLV Department of Communication Studies' needs and goals. These are two separate research pools for participation.*****