

**COMM 514: COMMUNICATION RESEARCH**  
**Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey**

**Spring 2016**  
**Mon 6:20-9:00pm (CI 304)**

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All course correspondence, including posted grades, announcements, additional readings, etc. will be posted on the Sakai website for this course: <http://sakai.rutgers.edu>

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course will introduce students to a set of social science research methods that are used in the communication discipline and in workplace and organizational contexts. At the end of this course, students should have a basic understanding of several general research methods used by communication scholars and have gained an appreciation for the ethical considerations in conducting human subjects research. Students will gain knowledge and practice of collection methods such as questionnaires, experiments, structured interviews, focus groups, structured observations, and content analysis.

**PREREQUISITS**

None.

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

- Understand and use a basic vocabulary of concepts relating to social science methodology.
- Be able to identify the basic considerations in designing and conducting a variety of quantitative and qualitative methods, such as surveys, experiments, structured interviews, and content coding.
- Be familiar with the requirements for treatment of human subjects in social science research and be apply to apply principles for ethical research to specific study designs.
- Be able to identify quality and problematic research exemplars.
- Be able to describe a research study that uses social science methods of questionnaires, experiments, interviews, and /or content coding.

**ORGANIZATION OF THE COURSE**

Communication research is all around us: in textbooks and journal articles, in newspaper stories and TV talk shows, in political debates and government decision-making, and in marketing and organizational research. Communication research often involves us even more directly, as subjects in marketing surveys and public opinion polls. Being an informed citizen requires knowing how to evaluate research results. Career success also often requires knowing how to use and evaluate research methods. In this course, students will be introduced to a variety of quantitative and qualitative research methods that are used in the social sciences as well as in workplace and organizational contexts. Students will develop the vocabulary and tools to develop and evaluate research, as well as gain firsthand experience with the research process; from the formation of research questions and hypotheses, through data collection, data analysis, and the presentation of findings.

This course will consist of a combination of lectures, workshops, group work, and research activities. The course is designed around a central textbook supplemented with additional readings that are intended to stimulate in-class discussion. Readings, videos, and examples from the news will be introduced into the classroom to engage students in a dialogue that will require students to “think on their feet” to evaluate research projects. Textbook and classroom

material will be reinforced through a series of in-class group workshops where students will work with their peers in small groups to formulate and refine research questions, develop hypotheses, design a survey, do qualitative observations, administer a survey, analyze survey results, present findings, and prepare written reports of their conclusions.

## **ASSESSMENT**

Final grades will be based on successful completion of three in-class exams (15%), five assignments (60%), one chapter presentation (10%), one group presentation (5%), and in-class participation (10%). All assignments are due at the beginning of the class and must be submitted in-person and on paper; assignments cannot be submitted online or by email.

Final grades will be assigned according to the following scale:

A:	90-100%
B+	85-89%
B	80-84%
C+	75-79%
C	70-74%
F	below 70%

## **Grading of Assignments and Presentations**

An A grade will be awarded to an assignment that both fills the terms of the assignment and shows evidence of out-of-the-ordinary, creative, analytical, and interesting thought. A B grade will be awarded if the terms of the assignment have been fulfilled thoroughly and thoughtfully, with some evidence of originality and creativity. Assignments that merely fulfill the terms of the assignment will receive a C grade. Assignments that fail to fulfill the terms of the assignment will receive an F. All grades are final. Please do not ask to have your grade changed for reasons other than mathematical error. A grade of “incomplete” will not be assigned except in the most unusual, extreme (and generally emergency) circumstances.

## **Participation**

Class meetings will be in a seminar format, there will be a limited amount of lecturing, instead students and instructor will explore key concepts through a guided dialogue. Students are expected to have read all of the week’s readings in advance of the course meeting. Participation grades will be based on demonstrated familiarity and critical reflection on the readings, involvement in classroom activities and exercises, and engagement in discussions. The participation grade is assessed above and beyond your attendance, just showing up for class will not earn you any participation points. You must do the readings, or this class will be a waste of time. You can expect that I will call on students at random to provide a summary of specific readings and to provide a basic comparison to prior course content.

Use of mobile phones and computing devices in class, for purposes unrelated to note taking and direct class participation, will adversely affect your grade. Students are expected to attend all classes; if you expect to miss one or two classes, please use the University absence reporting website – <https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/> – to indicate the date and reason for your absence. An email will automatically be sent to the instructor from this system. Note that if you miss classes for longer than one week, you should contact a dean of students to help verify your circumstances. Students are responsible for getting course notes from their classmates, the instructor will not provide you with notes, slides or exam guides. Students are never granted permission to make audio or video recordings of the class.

## **Group Work**

A significant proportion of the final grade in this course will result from work that a student starts or completes as part of a small group. Students will be allowed to form their own groups, but the instructor reserves the right to move students to different groups. In most cases students in a group will receive the same grade for group work. However, the instructor reserves the right to vary individual grades for those who do not demonstrate an equal level of participation.

Each student will also submit a confidential description of their work and the work of their team members. Individual work statements will be taken into account when deciding to give any team member a higher or lower grade. The course is designed so that all group work can be started during class time. During group workshops students will have the opportunity to meet with their groups and to engage in a discussion with the instructor. While all group work can be started in class, it will not always be possible to complete group activities within the class period. Group members should exchange contact information to arrange meetings and coordinate research activities.

### **Chapter Presentations**

Each student will be responsible for leading the discussion for one week of the course (10%). The primary responsibility of the student is to review the key terms and concepts covered in the assigned chapters from the Schutt textbook (and select chapters from Lindlof & Taylor). Students are expected to prepare a 30 minute PowerPoint presentation, distribute printed copies of the presentation to members of the class, and present the key ideas/concepts that are covered in the chapter(s). Students are encouraged to actively engage the class through their chapter presentations. Students will be evaluated based on the thoroughness and accuracy of their presentation.

### **Assignments**

#### *Assignment #1 (5%): Human Subjects Certification (Due: Feb 22)*

Students must demonstrate an understanding of the issues important in conducting research involving human subjects. Access the online Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) Human Subject Protections Course and, working independently, successfully complete all 16 modules of the "CITI Human Subject Protections Basic Course" for "Social / Behavioral / Epidemiologic Research Investigators". A letter of certification indicating successful completion of all modules must be submitted to the instructor by the due date (instructions are provided at <https://orra.rutgers.edu/citi>).

#### *Assignment #2 (10%): Problem and Hypotheses Formulation (Due: Feb 29)*

Early in the semester students will form into small research groups. The group will agree on a common research theme (e.g., reality television, health, mobile phones, etc.). Students will work within their group's common topic to develop an individual research question, complete a mini literature review, and propose two hypotheses. Each student will receive an individual grade based on a mini-report (apx. 2 pages).

#### *Assignment #3 (15%): Survey Design (Due: Apr 4)*

Students will continue to work with their groups. For this assignment, individual group members will revise their individual research question and hypotheses to develop a group survey. Group members will work together to write and review questions for a survey, draft a questionnaire, and propose a research plan. Each group will submit one proposal. In most cases students in a group will receive the same grade for this group work (apx. 8 pages).

#### *Assignment #4 (15%): Qualitative Observations (Due: Apr 25)*

This is an individual assignment. Based on your individual research question, develop a methodology for answering your question using a qualitative methodology (e.g., not a survey or an experiment,). If you propose a study that involves participant observation, describe your role as an observer and how you will enter the field. For interview based studies, provide a list of your main questions and an outline of the interview topic. For all proposals, provide a detailed rationale for why you are adopting a qualitative approach, provide a plan for systematic sampling of people/events, note taking or data recording procedures, discuss ethical considerations, and provide a plan for the analysis of your data (apx. 4 pages).

#### *Assignment #5 (15%): Survey Research Findings (Due: May 9)*

Students will continue to work with their groups. Based on the feedback groups received from the instructor on Assignment #3, groups will revise their survey for administration. Each group will be responsible for administering their survey to a sample of Rutgers students. Each student will be responsible for completing a minimum number of surveys and entering the results of their survey into Survey Monkey to be shared with group members and the instructor. Each student will use the group's combined dataset to complete an analysis of their individual hypotheses (apx. 3 pages).

## **Presentations**

Group Presentation (5%): Quantitative Research Project (Due: May 2)

Students will be given the opportunity to meet with their group members and review the findings of their common survey. Group members will make a 10-15 minute presentation of their findings.

## **Exams**

In-class exams may include multiple choice, fill in the blank, or short answer questions. For each exam, students will have 30 minutes to complete approx. 20 questions. The exams will cover all readings and class materials, this includes the textbook, lectures, videos, additional readings, and all material discussed in class. The exams will not be cumulative. Any student who arrives late will not be allowed to take the exam.

Exam #1 (5%): Feb 15

Exam #2 (5%): Mar 7

Exam #3 (5%): Mar 28

## **Late Assignments and Missed Exams**

If you miss an exam, to be allowed to make up the exam, you must: 1) have an acceptable excuse, and 2) contact the instructor before the time of the exam. The only acceptable excuses to miss an exam or submit a late assignment are a) an illness that can be substantiated by a note from a medical professional, b) a family death documented by a death certificate. Students should pay close attention to due dates, late assignments will not be graded.

## **Academic Integrity**

The consequences of scholastic dishonesty are very serious. Evidence of plagiarism, cheating, fabrication, facilitation of dishonesty, academic sabotage, criminal activity, or other violations of research or professional ethics will be dealt with severely – at a minimum students will receive a grade of “F” in the course. Rutgers academic integrity policy is at <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu>.

## **COMMUNICATING WITH THE INSTRUCTOR**

I’m here to help, please ask questions, share your ideas, and visit me often during office hours. However, keep in mind that when seeking advisement and support, email is no substitute for an in person meeting. Students seeking help with the content of this course should consult with me at the start of class, during office hours, or by requesting a separate appointment. Plan ahead and consult with me in advance of any due dates. Do not expect a detailed response by email to requests for advice or review of materials (some things are still best done in person!)

## **COURSE MATERIALS**

The following books are on reserve at Alexander Library and are available for purchase at the Rutgers bookstore and at other outlets.

### **Required Texts:**

Schutt, Russell K (2015). [\*Investigating the Social World: The Process and Practice of Research, 8th ed.\*](#) Sage.

It is important that students acquire the 8<sup>th</sup> edition of this textbook.

### **Recommended Texts:**

American Psychological Association. (2009). [\*Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 6th ed.\*](#) Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

It is important that students acquire the 6<sup>th</sup> edition of this book.

## Other Required Material:

Students are required to use Survey Monkey as part of their group assignments. Each group will need to purchase a two month subscription to the Survey Monkey “Select” plan. Students should not purchase their subscription before March 21. Students are encouraged to split the cost of the subscription between group members (apx \$13 for two months per student). [https://www.surveymonkey.com/pricing/?select=monthly&utm\\_source=none&t=annual\\_us](https://www.surveymonkey.com/pricing/?select=monthly&utm_source=none&t=annual_us)

All other readings, files, and grades will be available from the course website (generally in the form of a PDF or a link to content): <http://sakai.rutgers.edu>.

## COURSE OUTLINE

This portion of the syllabus is subject to change as the course evolves. I may add or remove material based on the interests and pace of the class. At times, I will distribute new and timely material that appears in the news or has been recently published. It is your responsibility to learn of any changes by regularly attending class, visiting the course website, and reading your email.

### WEEK 1 – Introduction to the Research Enterprise

Jan 25

**Readings:** None.

### WEEK 2 – The Research Process

Feb 1

**Reading:** Schutt: Chapters 1-2, Appendix A (Appendix B is optional).

**Reading:** Fox News article on “Watching SpongeBob Can Lead to Learning Problems?”

**Assignment:** Assignment #2 distributed.

### WEEK 3 – Conceptualization and Measurement

Feb 8

**Reading:** Schutt: Chapter 4

**Reading:** Appel, Lora, Punit Dadlani, Maria Dwyer, Keith N. Hampton, Vanessa Kitzie, Ziad A. Matni, Patricia Moore, & Rannie Teodoro. (2014). Testing the Validity of Social Capital Measures in the Study of Information and Communication Technologies. *Information, Communication & Society*, 17(4): 398-416.

**Workshop:** Problem formulation.

### WEEK 4 – Research Ethics

Feb 15

**Exam:** Exam #1 (includes weeks 2-3)

**Reading:** Schutt: Chapter 3

**Reading:** Facebook altered 689,000 users’ news feeds for a psychology experiment. *The Verge*. <http://www.theverge.com/2014/6/28/5852652/facebook-altered-689000-users-news-feeds-for-a-psychology-experiment>

**Video:** Quiet Rage: The Stanford Prison Study (43 min) (NOTE: view prior to the class meeting: <https://youtu.be/760lwYmpXbc>)

**Video:** Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment-Guatemala (16 min) (NOTE: view prior to the class meeting: <https://youtu.be/nha9MsSSkVc>) [optional].

## WEEK 5 – Sampling

Feb 22

- Reading:** Schutt: Chapter 5
- Reading:** Social media data pose pitfalls for studying behavior.
- Reading:** RetailMeNot.com’s Shoppers Trend Report
- Reading:** Plimus Survey Finds Virtual Gifts Top Everyone’s List
- Assignment:** Assignment #1 due.
- Workshop:** Sampling with chocolate.

## WEEK 6 – Causation

Feb 29

- Reading:** Schutt: Chapter 6
- Reading:** Steinfield, C., Ellison, N. B, & Lampe, C. (2008). Social Capital, self-esteem, and use of online social network sites: a longitudinal analysis. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology* 29: 434-445.
- Assignment:** Assignment #2 due.

## WEEK 7 – Experiments

Mar 7

- Exam:** Exam #2 (includes weeks 5-6)
- Reading:** Schutt: Chapter 7
- Reading:** Dill, KE, Brown, BP, & Collins MA (2008). Effects of exposure to sex-stereotyped video game characters on tolerance of sexual harassment. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 44(5): 1402-1408.

## WEEK 8 – SPRING BREAK

Mar 14

## WEEK 9 – Survey Research

Mar 21

- Reading:** Schutt: Chapter 8
- Reading:** Hampton, K. N., Goulet, L. S., Rainie, L., & Purcell, K. (2011). Social Networking Sites and Our Lives: How People’s Trust, Personal Relationships, and Civic and Political Involvement are Connected to Their Use of Social Networking Sites and Other Technologies. Washington, DC: Pew Research.
- Video:** Understanding Why We Take To The Streets (NOTE: view prior to the class meeting: <http://fivethirtyeight.com/features/collectors-protests-climate-march-political-action/>)
- Workshop:** Survey design

## WEEK 10 – Survey Research

Mar 28

- Exam:** Exam #3 (includes weeks 7-9)
- Workshop:** Survey design

## WEEK 11 – Qualitative Research: Ethnography

Apr 4

- Reading:** Schutt: Chapter 10
- Reading:** Goffman, A. (2009). On the Run: Wanted Men in a Philadelphia Ghetto. *American Sociological Review*, 74(3), 339-357
- Assignment:** Assignment #3 due.

**WEEK 12 – Qualitative Research: More observation**

**Apr 11**

- Reading:** Tufekci, Zeynep (2014). Hollaback and Why Everyone Needs Better Research Methods And Why All Data Needs Theory. *Medium.com*.
- Reading:** Lindlof, T., and Taylor, B. (2011). *Qualitative Communication Research Methods*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Thousand Oaks: Sage. (Chapters 6)
- Reading:** Hampton, Keith, Oren Livio, & Lauren Sessions (2010). The Social Life of Wireless Urban Spaces: Internet Use, Social Networks, and the Public Realm. *Journal of Communication* 60(4), 701-722
- Reading:** Hampton, K. N., Goulet, L. S., & Albanesius, G. (2015). Change in the social life of urban public spaces: The rise of mobile phones and women, and the decline of aloneness over thirty years. *Urban Studies*, 52(8), 1489-1504.

**WEEK 13 – NO CLASS**

**Apr 18**

**Assignment:** Administer surveys

**WEEK 14 – Quantitative analysis**

**Apr 25**

- Reading:** Schutt: Chapter 9
- Assignment:** Assignment #4 due.
- Workshop:** Analyzing your survey findings

**WEEK 15 – Quantitative presentation**

**May 2**

**Presentation:** Survey research findings

**WEEK 15 – Final assignment due.**

**May 9**

**Assignment:** Assignment #5 due.

## CHAPTER PRESENTATIONS

Week 2

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Week 3

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Week 5

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Week 6

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Week 7

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Week 9

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Week 11

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Week 12

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