

Winter 2014 COMS 244:
Introduction to Communication Research Methods

Instructor: Dr. Iaroslav Pankovskyi
Office: ARTS 217-D
Telephone: (780) 885-1023
E-mail: pankovsk@ualberta.ca

Time: T R 9:30am – 10:45am
Place: ARTS 246
Office Hours: M, T 11:00am – 12:00pm
or by appointment

Course Prerequisite:	None
Ethics Approval:	Not needed, no such projects involved
Community Service Learning component:	None

Course Description

This course explores various modern and traditional research methods in communication and takes students through various research stages such as formulating research questions, obtaining ethics approval, collecting and analyzing data, preparing a research report. The students in this course do not need to have previous knowledge in the field since the key notions are thoroughly covered. The material is presented with the help of numerous tables and illustrations and is explained using abundant examples. This course uses a research-as-argument approach which aims at helping students to become not only more effective researchers, but also more critical research appraisers.

This course may be of particular interest to students in communications studies, as well as those taking interest in media studies, anthropology, sociology, and discourse analysis. The topics to be covered include: research ethics, three paradigms of knowing, kinds communication data, survey research, experimental research, content analysis, hypothesis testing, conversation analysis, discourse analysis, ethnographic research, and rhetorical criticism.

Course Objectives:

On the completion of course you should:

- Learn the key stages of communication research and how exactly research is carried out at each of these stages.
- Acquire the necessary knowledge and develop the skills to critically examine various communication problems and to evaluate claims on communication process.
- Obtain the inventory of tools allowing analyzing communication data more efficiently.
- Gain experience in communication research through conducting small-scale research projects.
- Reflect critically on the advantages and disadvantages of various communication research methods.

Textbooks and materials:

Merrigan, G., & Huston, C. (2009). *Communication research methods* (2nd ed.). New York: Oxford University Press

All additional materials are going to be available via Blackboard/Moodle.

The Use of Laptops and Other Devices:

Students are welcome to use their laptops to aid their learning. During class, it is unacceptable to engage in unrelated activities such as checking email, playing games, or surfing the Web. A silence mode should be used for cell phones. Cell phones and smart devices must be switched off during

exams. “Audio or video recording of lectures, labs, seminars or any other teaching environment by students is allowed only with the prior written consent of the instructor or as a part of an approved accommodation plan. Recorded material is to be used solely for personal study, and is not to be used or distributed for any other purpose without prior written consent from the instructor” (Calendar 23.4e).

Grade Distribution:

Participation and attendance	15%	ongoing
Journal reflections, 3 @ 5%	15%	Sep. 30, Oct. 30, and Nov. 27
Mini tests, 3 @ 10%	30%	Oct. 2, Nov. 4, and Dec. 2
Research paper	40%	Dec. 8

Brief Description of Assignments:

Participation and attendance - 15%

The course attendance is required and is taken at the beginning of each class. Active participation in class discussions (based on the readings) is expected. Students are required to contribute to the blog set up specifically for this course. Contributions must be original, critical, and reflective. References to the course textbook and/or other materials are strongly encouraged to support your argumentation. At least 3 posts and/or comments (50-150 words each) are expected from every student during this course.

Journal reflections (3 @ 5%) – 15%

Journal reflections should summarize and critically assess course materials and relate these to the students’ own experiences. Students are required to write three reflections of medium length (~500 words each).

Mini tests (3 @ 10%) - 30%

The mini tests are held in class. They are designed to check students’ comprehension of basic concepts in communication research methods. These tests consist of three parts: a) 10 multiple choice questions; b) 5 questions which require brief, phrase-long answers; and c) 1 question requiring a short paragraph to answer.

Research paper – 40%

The paper may be on any topic in connection with the material covered in the course, but I have to approve it first. Please submit a title, a short description, and some sources on November 2 or earlier. I can help you with choosing and formulating a topic and may suggest sources.

Research papers must be original compositions. All the ideas, words, images, tables and other information that you use must be cited. Please make sure that all the information, including websites, is cited properly. For the academic style, I recommend American Psychological Association (APA). You can check the OWL website for the details on APA style (the URL is in the “Resources” section below).

The length of your research paper (excluding references) should be 2500 – 3000 words, but the length is flexible. I encourage my students to add illustrations.

Feel free to make an appointment with me to discuss your paper at any time.

Grading criteria for the research paper:

- research quality;
- depth of analysis;
- style and language (e.g. proper references; proper English);
- organization (e.g. introduction, conclusions, etc.);
- presentation (e.g. illustrations, italics if needed).

Policy on Late Assignments:

Students who would like to be granted an extension, must consult with the instructor, otherwise, assignments submitted after the deadline may be penalized with the loss of a grade (e.g. A- to B+) for each day late. In a case of a medical emergency or severe domestic affliction, students must give a written notice to the instructor within two days of the due date explaining why the assignment was not completed on time.

Attendance, Absences, and Missed Grade Components:

In a case of a medical emergency, domestic affliction, or other potentially excusable absence (sections 23.4.2 and 23.4.3 of the University Calendar), students must notify the instructor by e-mail within two days. Unexcused absences result in partial or complete loss of the grade for any assignments that are not handed-in or completed as a result of absence, and for the “participation and attendance” component of the course.

Writing Skills Statement:

Please note that in this course, all written assignments including written exam responses are partly assessed on writing skills. Therefore, it is necessary to ensure that both surface structures (grammar, syntax, punctuation, etc.) and general structure (argumentation and clarity) of the assignments are properly kept.

Grading Scale:

Percentage	Letter Grade	Point Value	Descriptor
96 – 100	A+	4.0	Outstanding
90 – 95.99	A	4.0	Excellent
85 – 89.99	A-	3.7	Very good
80 – 84.99	B+	3.3	Good
75 – 79.99	B	3.0	
70 – 74.99	B-	2.7	
65 – 69.99	C+	2.3	Satisfactory
60 – 64.99	C	2.0	
55 – 59.99	C-	1.7	
53 – 54.99	D+	1.3	Failure
50 – 52.99	D	1	
0 – 49	F	0	

Required Notes:

Policy, about course outlines, is provided in Section 23.4(2) of the University calendar. The University Calendar is available online at <http://www.registrar.ualberta.ca/calendar>. “The University of Alberta is committed to the highest standards of academic integrity and honesty. Students are expected to be familiar with these standards regarding academic honesty and to uphold the policies of the University in this respect. Students are particularly urged to familiarize themselves with the provisions of the Code of Student Behaviour (online at www.governance.ualberta.ca) and avoid any behaviour which could potentially result in suspicions of cheating, plagiarism, misrepresentation of facts and/or participation in an offence. Academic dishonesty is a serious offence and can result in suspension or expulsion from the University” (Calendar 23.4(2)c). All students should consult the “Truth-In-Education” handbook (<http://www.uofaweb.ualberta.ca/TIE/>) regarding the definitions of plagiarism and its consequences.

Students with Disabilities:

Students who require accommodation due to a disability are advised to discuss their needs with Specialized Support and Disability Services (2-800 Students' Union Building: <http://www.uofaweb.ualberta.ca/SSDS/>).

Resources:

The Centre for Writers (1-42 Assiniboia Hall: <http://www.c4w.arts.ualberta.ca/>) and Writing Resources (2-300 SUB: <http://www.uofaweb.ualberta.ca/academicsupport/writingresources.cfm>) provide writing assistance for both Canadian and international students. The Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL) website is a very useful resource on style and the writing process in general: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/>.

The University provides a free accompaniment service for anyone travelling on, or around campus at night, please contact Safewalk (0-22 SUB: <http://www.su.ualberta.ca/services/safewalk/>).

Course Schedule:

A detailed schedule is to be distributed during the first class.