

MCOM 3380: Mass Communications Research Methods, Spring 2011

Section: 002, TR 8:00 – 9:20, MCOM 0104
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Required Texts

Wimmer, R. D., & Dominick, J. R. (2010). Mass media research: An introduction (9th Ed).
Boston: Wadsworth.

**Supplemental readings will be made available to you through the course website.*

Course Description

This course serves two goals. One is to provide you with a critical framework for understanding and evaluating mass communication research so when you encounter it in almost any media-related job you can interpret and report social science research with a reasonable level of competence. Think of the course material as professional survival skills. The second goal is to provide you with some first-hand experience in conducting a research project. This practical experience will be beneficial both in future courses you take in the College of Mass Communications, but also in your professional careers. Given my desire for this course to be practically useful we will spend the majority of our time learning how to conduct and analyze quality surveys and focus groups, which are the most commonly used methods for communication professionals. We will also spend some time briefly learning about other common techniques used by communication researchers.

Prerequisites

To enroll in MCOM 3380, you must have at least sophomore standing and passed MATH 2300 or 2345 with a grade of C or higher.

Disability Statement

Any student who, because of a disability, may require special arrangements in order to meet the course requirements should contact the instructor as soon as possible to make any necessary arrangements. Students should present appropriate verification from Student Disability Services during the instructor's office hours. Please note instructors are not allowed to provide classroom accommodations to a student until appropriate verification from Student Disability Services has been provided. For additional information, you may contact the Student Disability Services office in 335 West Hall or 806-742-2405.

E-mail

All students enrolled in MCOM 3380 are required to have a working Texas Tech e-mail address and to check it regularly. If you do not have such an e-mail, then the responsibility is on you to find out about missed announcements.

Academic Integrity

Students are expected to abide by the Academic Integrity Guidelines found in The Code of Student Conduct of Texas Tech University. This information can be found in the Student Affairs Handbook. In general, cheating on exams or plagiarism or any form of violation of the University honor code is serious offense and depending on the severity of the offense will result in a grade of zero on the assignment or a grade of 'F' for the course.

Civility Policy

The University supports an environment of ethnic, religious and cultural diversity. It neither endorses nor tolerates statements, behavior, tokens or insignias that deride or disparage an individual or group because of race, ethnicity, creed or personal lifestyle.

Students are expected to assist in maintaining a classroom environment that is conducive to learning. In order to assure that all students have the opportunity to gain from time spent in class, unless otherwise approved by the instructor, students are prohibited from engaging in any other form of distraction. This includes -- but is not limited to -- reading, sleeping, facebooking, texting or otherwise using your phones in class. Inappropriate behavior in the classroom shall result, minimally, in a request to leave class and will count as an absence.

Attendance Policy

Attendance will be taken at the start of every class via sign-in sheets at the front of the room. Once I begin to lecture, I remove the sign-in sheets. Therefore, if you are not present **prior** to 8 a.m., you are counted absent for the day. There is no penalty for absences, but if you miss three or fewer days, you can choose to not take the final exam. If you miss four or more days you must take the final. There is no such thing as an excused absence (other than the University-wide policy of official Tech business, religious holidays and life-threatening illness being excused). If you would like to avoid taking the final, treat your three absences as personal days and use them wisely. Weddings, funerals, illnesses, doctor appointments, job conflicts, car problems, and the like are considered a personal absence and are not excused.

I will work hard to find ways to make the class interesting, educational, and conducive to critical thinking. I care whether you come to class. I want you to be here, and I want you to get the most out of the class. Missing class will significantly lower your grade. This course covers content that is difficult for many students. Hearing the material and reading the material will greatly benefit you. I do not post slides, and if you miss a class it is up to you to obtain course materials from a classmate.

Deadline Policy

Any late assignment turned in later than the deadline will receive a zero. In addition, no work will be accepted by e-mail. Assignments need to be turned in to the appropriate Blackboard drop box **and** in hard copy form at the beginning of class.

Make-up Assignments

No make-up assignments will be given except in three cases: 1) Official Texas Tech business which takes you away from campus, 2) A religious holiday, 3) Life-threatening situations. You must notify me prior to the deadline you are missing and show me an adequate written documentation to qualify for a make-up assignment. If class schedules conflict with a religious holiday, bring this to my attention by the end of the second week of class. After the second week of class, only those with documented cases will have assignments rescheduled.

Course Assignments and Grading

I will be as fair and impartial as is humanly possible in the grading process. Each of you will be graded on the same basis. Because of this, no extra work or special assignments will be given. Normally, by the time I return your graded assignment, I have looked at each person's work at least several times and feel comfortable with the grade assigned to it. Grades are earned; they are not gifts. Grades are awarded on the basis on the quality of the work performed, not the amount of time expended.

I will work my hardest to make this course enjoyable and interesting. However, this is a course when students often do not do as well as they wish. Some students struggle with the material. Please see me if you are having problems understanding the concepts covered in class. I am your resource for this class, see me in office hours or make an appointment if you can't come to office hours. I will do all I can to help you before a deadline. After a deadline has past, or an exam has been given, there is nothing I can do to help you.

Exams

There will be three unit exams. These exams will not be intentionally cumulative, but some chapters will utilize concepts from previous chapter. I will try to point these instances out when covering the material in lecture. Each exam will consist of objective (multiple choice, true/false, matching) questions and will cover material presented in the lectures, the readings, exercises, and homework. Please note that make-up exams will be allowed only in the cases of one of the three university-approved circumstances outline above. If you miss an exam, you will receive a zero.

There will also be a cumulative final. The format of this exam will be the same as the prior exams but will cover material from the entire semester. The final cannot be moved from its appointed day or time. If you missed four or more classes and you make travel arrangements prior to the final, I will assume you want to skip the final and receive a zero.

Real-world research participation

Throughout the semester you will be provided with opportunities to participate in research projects. You are required to participate in **1 hour** worth of research projects. All projects will have alternative assignments associated with them, so job conflicts will not be an issue. **If you sign up to participate in a project, but do not attend, you will lose one percentage point off your final grade.** It is understandable if something comes up and you cannot attend, but you need to let the researcher know prior to when you were signed up to participate.

Research project

A key objective of this class is to provide you with hands-on experience conducting research that is commonly used in various communication professions. Students will be required to engage in creating, conducting and analyzing information from both a focus group and a survey. Yes, this will require group work, but life is a group project, and communication research in the real world almost always will require group work. There will be multiple assignments related to the research projects that will be completed throughout the semester. These projects will be discussed in significant depth later in the course and materials will be provided in class and will be made available on the course website.

In-class activities

I believe, and research has shown, that active participation in learning is crucial for long term learning. Ten times throughout the semester we will undertake a research-related exercise in class when it is useful to help you learn or master a new concept. Sometimes these will be individual and sometimes these will involve group work.

Point Distribution

Grading Weights

| | |
|------------------------|----------|
| Exam 1 | 200 pts |
| Exam 2 | 200 pts |
| Exam 3 | 200 pts |
| Final | 200 pts |
| Research project | 300 pts |
| Research participation | 50 pts |
| In-class activities | 50 pts |
| TOTAL | 1200 pts |

*If you are able to, and choose to not take the final your grade is calculated out of 1000 points.

**I will use the normal grading scales and I won't round up grades.

Expected Learning Outcomes and Methods of Assessment

| | |
|---|---|
| Students will be able to select appropriate quantitative research methodologies for use in advertising, broadcasting, journalism and public relations. These methodologies include, but are not limited to, experimental, survey, and content analysis. | Class discussions, instructor interviews, and exams |
| Students will be able to describe basic to qualitative research used in advertising, broadcasting and public relations. These methodologies include, but are not limited to, historical, case, critical and legal analyses. | Class discussions, instructor interviews, and exams |
| Students will be able to identify and critique research questions and hypotheses | Class discussions, instructor interviews, and exams |
| Students will be able to identify appropriate systems of data analysis. | Class discussions, instructor interviews, and exams |
| Students will have experienced data collection techniques and problems. | Research project |

Tentative Course Schedule*

| WEEK | TOPICS | READINGS |
|-------------------------|---|--------------------------------|
| Week 1 Jan. 13 | Intro to course | |
| Week 2 Jan. 18, 20 | What is research and why should we care? | Ch. 1 |
| Week 3 Jan. 25, 27 | Goal of Qualitative Research Intro to focus groups | Ch. 5 |
| Week 4 Feb. 1, 3 | Focus groups – protocol creation | FG supplement |
| Week 5 Feb. 8, 10 | Focus groups – conducting and analyzing | FG supplement |
| Week 6 Feb. 15, 17 | Other qualitative methods Unit 1 Exam Feb. 17th (Ch. 1, 5, supplement) | Ch. 5 |
| Week 7 Feb. 22, 24 | Measurement | Ch. 2 |
| Week 8 March 1, 3 | Sampling | Ch. 4 |
| Week 9 March 8, 10 | Survey Design – question creation and types of surveys | Ch. 7 |
| March 15, 17 | Spring Break | |
| Week 10 March 22, 24 | Content Analysis Unit 2 Exam March 24th (Ch 2, 4, 6, 7) | Ch. 6 |
| Week 11 March 29, 31 | Experimental Design | Ch. 9 |
| Week 12 April 5, 7 | Descriptive statistics | Ch. 10 |
| Week 13 April 12, 14 | Hypothesis testing | Ch. 11 |
| Week 14 April 19, 21 | Hypothesis testing | Ch.11 |
| Week 15 April 26, 28 | Unit 3 Exam April 26th (Ch. 9, 10, 11) Real World Application | Part 4 (Ch. 13, 14, 15, 16) |
| Week 16 May 3 | Real World Application | Part 4 (Ch. 13, 14, 15, 16) |
| FINAL | Tuesday May 10th, 7:30 a.m. – 10 a.m. | ALL CONTENT |

*This schedule is tentative and subject to change. Changes to the schedule will be discussed in class. You are responsible for attending all classes unless it is marked as a holiday.

MCOM 3380 Acknowledgement of Contract

I acknowledge that I received a copy the syllabus for MCOM 3380, Section 002. I understand and will abide by all of the course policies stated within.

Please initial next to each policy:

_____ If I am disrupting class (sleeping, using my cell phone, ect.) I will be asked to leave and will be considered absent.

_____ Class begins at 8 a.m. If I am not in class prior to 8 a.m., I am considered absent.

_____ The only absences that will not be recorded are absences due to university business, religious holidays or life threatening illness.

_____ If I miss three or fewer days, I am allowed to opt out of the final exam.

_____ No late work is accepted.

_____ Assignments must be turned into the Blackboard drop box and in hard copy prior to the due date.

Sign Name

Date

Print Name

MCOM 3380: Research Project

DUE: Various deadlines throughout the semester

POINT VALUE: 300 points

Assignment description:

A key objective of this class is to provide you with hands-on experience conducting research that is commonly used in various communication professions. Students will be required to engage in creating, conducting and analyzing information from both a focus group and a survey. Yes, this will require group work, but life is a group project, and communication research in the real world almost always will require group work. There will be **seven** assignments related to the research projects that will be completed throughout the semester.

- Creating questions for a focus group protocol (group) DUE 2/8
 - In a group of seven or eight – **WHICH I WILL ASSIGN** – create a protocol that could be used in a focus group in order to better understand what Tech students think about social smoking, and in what situations tobacco use is acceptable. We will talk about this project in particular when we begin discussing focus groups.
- Conducting a focus group (group) DUE 2/24
 - Based on what all the groups turn in, I will create a master protocol to use for the focus groups (by 2/15). In your groups, you will conduct a focus group with 6 to 10 participants. Tapes or a digital recording (preferred) of the focus groups and copies of notes must be turned in as proof of focus group completion. As a group, you must decide who will be the focus group moderator, and how the note taking responsibilities will be divided.
- Focus group reaction/summary (group and individual) DUE 3/3
 - As a group, you need to turn in a 3 page, double spaced report describing how you think your focus group went, what were the themes that emerged or conclusions that can be drawn, and what you would have done differently. Individually, you need to submit a report evaluating all of your group members. The form for the individual evaluations will be provided for you.
- Creating questions for a survey (individual) DUE 3/22
 - Based on what you learned from the focus group you participated in, 10 questions that you would want to include on a survey about social smoking and related concepts. Each question needs to be labeled with a conceptual definition and items will be scored for following correct question design principles (i.e. not double barreled, leading, ect.)
- Recruiting survey participants (individual) DUE 4/7
 - I will create an online survey (posted by 3/29) based both on the questions you turn in and class discussions. You need to recruit **five** Tech students to complete the online survey by class time on 4/7. At the end of the survey, participants will write in who recruited them to participate – remind your recruits that they must enter your name so you get credit (you will get a 5 point deduction in your grade for every person under five that you recruit).
- Survey reaction/summary (individual) DUE 4/28

- You will turn in a three page, double spaced paper testing two hypotheses from the survey data. I will provide you with the basic results from the online survey. Based on those results you need to describe what the implications are for health communication research. Also make sure you address strengths, weakness, and future directions for the research project. What questions would you ask now? What would you have done differently?
- Comparison (individual) DUE 5/3
 - For this 2-page double-spaced paper, describe your experiences participating in creating a survey. Compare and contrast that with your experience participating in the focus group. Which method do you think you learned more from? Why? Which method do you think you will be more likely to use in the future? Why? The point of this assignment is to get you to compare the two types of data collection and give your reactions to the two methods in general.

Point breakdown:

- Creating questions for a focus group protocol (group) **50 pts.**
- Conducting a focus group (group) **50 pts.**
- Focus group reaction/summary (group and individual) **50 pts.**
- Creating questions for a survey (individual) **40 pts.**
- Recruiting survey participants (individual) **25 pts.**
- Survey reaction/summary (individual) **50 pts.**
- Comparison (individual) **35 pts.**

Up to 10% can be deducted from each grade for sloppy presentation including poor grammar, spelling, and punctuation.