

COMM 415-201 (5659) Research Methods: Discovering and Investigating Stories

Loyola University Chicago, Fall 2015 (Thursday 7:00-9:30, SOC 003)

Dr. Pamela Morris (Office hours: Lewis Tower #904, Tues. 1:00–2:15 and Thurs. 4:00-5:00, pmorris1@luc.edu)

Course Description and Learning Objectives

The objective of this course is to enable you to become well-informed users of communication research, to find and develop story and communication content ideas. This class will help you formulate research questions, know the appropriate research method to be undertaken, appreciate what can and cannot be learned from investigations, consider how different methods provide unique perspectives, evaluate source credibility, contemplate ethics, and analyze found information. You will learn a variety of different research techniques and have the opportunity to try many out yourself in several mini-project assignments based on topics that interest you. Assignments should help you develop ideas and methods which you may use in other program courses.

By the end of this semester, you will be able to:

- Apply critical thinking to evaluate source credibility and interpret information.
- Find, analyze, and critique data by employing different methodological approaches.
- Demonstrate how to use a variety of investigative methods with the internet, social media, interviews, ethnography, and others to find and polish story ideas.
- Describe the concept and role of research in developing good stories and communication content.

IDEA Outcomes – Essential course goals based on the IDEA system:

- Learning how to find and use resources for answering questions or solving problems.
- Learning to analyze and critically evaluate ideas, arguments, and points of view.
- Developing skill in expressing oneself orally or in writing.

Course Design

The course will utilize lectures, guest speakers, readings, projects, and discussions. While graduate-level study is self-driven, the variety and combination of course components are devised to motivate students to engage in active learning. Students are expected to come to class prepared to participate in discussions. An important aspect of this course is the hands-on experience to be gained from the design and implementation of research projects, analysis of data, and presentation of results, which should take creative storytelling/multimedia approaches.

Required Text

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

Individual Assignments (70%)

Assignments are summarized here although they may change based on student interests and opportunities that come about throughout the semester. More details for each will be provided in class.

Assignment Summary			
#	Description	Due	Pages
1	3 Original Research Topics – In class write and hand in 3 research topics you are interested in pursuing during the semester.	In class	1+ page

		8/27	
2	Journal Article Examples – Find, post, and bring in copies of a journal article of original research using your assigned research method. Be prepared to discuss.	9/10	1+ page, post/email article
3	Literature Review Articles – Conduct a search using key words, find, and collect 6 relevant articles, write an abstract of each.	10/1	3 – 4+ pages
4	Mapping – Research your topic using maps.	10/15	2 – 3+ pages Pres
5	Social Media Report – Select a topic and conduct a search using search techniques discussed in class to review 3 social media platforms, such as blogs, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, and others. Write a report of your results including details of the search (key words/filters), perspective/credibility considerations, similarities/differences, and which platforms/sources you feel offer content most helpful to your question/topic. Present your findings to the class.	10/29	4 – 5+ pages Video/other Pres
6	Content Analysis Plan – In class create topic and plans for an original content analysis investigation.	11/12	3 – 4 pages
7	Interview/Participant Observation/ Ethnography Research Report and Presentation – Report and present findings for 3 method research topic. Include objectives/research question(s), methods, analysis, findings, and discussion/implications. Present to the class summary of goals, methods, and findings/implications creatively (use storytelling/digital techniques).	12/3 12/10	Progress Report 5 – 6 pages Pres
8	Reflection – Reflect on the class, experiences, and how different methods can produce varying results. How do you think you may use research for developing content?	12/10	1+ page

Tests (20%)

There will be two tests (10% each) to encourage you to keep up with the reading, engage in the material, and participate in discussions.

Class Participation and Other Exercises (10%)

An overall grade for class participation will be given and will consider how actively involved students are in all class discussions and work. Participation is valued and is expected of all students. Students should come to class prepared by reading assigned texts, and doing homework/other outside investigations necessary to succeed. There will also be several in-class activities and other exercises where students will need to be engaged.

Course Policies

Attendance – Regular and **on time** attendance is essential for the educational process to work. Loyola University Chicago expects all students to attend every scheduled class on time. Exceptions may be made for University sponsored or work related activities, illness, or valid emergency situations. Any unexcused late arrivals and absences will result in a lower participation grade.

Meeting Deadlines – Deadlines for all projects are firm. Any work turned in after the deadline will receive a one letter grade reduction for each week it is late, even if by one day.

Special Needs – Please give me written notice in the first week of class about any medical or other conditions that may interfere with your individual performance. Documentation may be required.

Information about Services for Students with Disabilities (SSWD) can be found at <http://www.luc.edu/sswd/index.shtml>

Wellness Center – Students are urged to contact the Wellness Center for any physical or mental health issues. Visit <http://www.luc.edu/wellness/> if you have issues or concerns about you or someone you know.

Spelling & Grammar – All assignments must be typed (unless otherwise directed) and free of spelling and grammatical errors. Allow time for proofreading, editing, and revision. As a student in communication, you have a responsibility to pay close attention to details and if your work contains blatant errors, expect a grade deduction.

Plagiarism and Academic Integrity – Any use in whole or in part of another person’s work or ideas constitutes plagiarism and will result in an automatic failure in this course. Details of the SOC policy on this issue will be given to students and they are expected to understand and follow the policy. Students should always ask questions if they are not sure about the policy rather than risking a failing grade. The policy can be found at: <http://www.luc.edu/soc/Policy.shtml>. Remember, integrity is one of the most important traits for success. You control your own honor and integrity.

Performance Evaluation and Grading

In addition to project specifics, evaluation of assignments will use this rubric to ensure clear/consistent grading.

Grade	Description
A range	Excellent analysis that critically examines topic; digs deep beneath the surface. Creative and innovative approach to the problem/question being considered. Outstanding content, clarity of writing and organization of research material. Sophisticated, appropriate use of language. Thorough research and documentation of ideas, arguments, and comments. Free of mistakes: no typos; no misspellings; no punctuation or grammatical glitches; no errors of fact. All the necessary details, documentation, quotes, citations, and specifics are there.
B range	Very good attempt to link analysis to class themes, but more connections could be made. Very good to excellent; above average work and research. Some improvement needed in content, clarity, organization, or documentation. Occasional typos or other glitches say more about the lack of close proofreading than failure to master the mechanics of spelling, punctuation, and grammar. More details, quotes, citations, or examples needed. Errors of fact (incorrect spelling of a title, reference name, source, or date, etc.) show inattention to detail/accuracy although content is above average.
C range	Average analysis that lacks clear connections to class themes. Average, acceptable writing and research that meets basic expectations. Needs much work on content, clarity, organization, and documentation. Although basic facts most likely are there, lacks elaborating and supporting documentation or quotes. Errors indicate need for improvement in grammar, punctuation, spelling, and word usage: material was not proofread carefully. Errors of fact (incorrect spelling of a title, reference name, wrong source, date or page number, etc.) show inattention to detail and accuracy.
D range	Weak, unfocused work. Organization is below average, with numerous grammar, punctuation, and spelling errors. Documentation and details are scanty or superfluous, with errors of fact. Paper may reflect a lack of understanding of the assignment or a lack of research effort.

Grading Scale

(The grading policy is subject to change but it will be based on these guidelines.)

70% Assignments	100-93% = A	87-83% = B	77-73% = C	67-63% = D
20% Tests (2 @ 10% each)	92-90% = A-	82-80% = B-	72-70% = C-	62-60% = D-
10% Participation and Other Exercises	89-88% = B+	79-78% = C+	69-68% = D+	59% ≥ = F
100%				

COMM 415 Fall 2015 Tentative Schedule

Wk	Date	Readings/Assignments DUE	Topics/In-Class Activities
1	Aug 27	- Introductions, review schedule, expectations, grading - APA style - Finding and developing story ideas, ways of knowing. - <u>Introduce Assignment 1 and finish in class</u>	

		- Searching the communication literature - <u>Introduce Assignment 2</u>
2	Sept 3	<u>Ch 1</u> Introduction to the Field of Communication - Ways of knowing, theory, research reports, journals <u>Ch 2</u> Ethics and Research
3	Sept 10	- Due Assignment 2 - IC – Look at journal articles for RQ/H, structure, method, theories - IC – Brainstorm topic ideas <u>Introduce Assignment 3 literature review</u> <u>Ch 3</u> Three Paradigms of Knowing
4	Sept 17	<u>Ch 4</u> Making Claims <u>Ch 5</u> What Counts as Communication Data?
5	Sept 24	Meet at Live Lab for Open Circle Qual Session
6	Oct 1	Due Assignment 3 Due Literature Review - <u>Introduce Assignment 4 research map and presentation</u> - <u>Introduce Assignment 5 Social media research report and presentation</u> <u>Ch 6</u> Warrants for Research Arguments 8:30 Guest speaker Gabriella Annala, Reference Librarian, Subject Specialist for Business Administration and Communication - Social Media/Digital Sources Search - Searching subscription-based and open web for content, evaluation criteria, privacy, and ethics issues lecture, discussion, and in class demonstration/activities. Please be ready with ideas to try!
7	Oct 8	Test #1 (Chapters 1 – 6)
8	Oct 15	7:15 Guest Speaker, Lisa Dubina, Online Community Research Associate Due Assignment 4 Research map and presentation
9	Oct 22	Guest speaker Matt Black, Photo Journalist to be confirmed <u>Ch 8</u> Experimental Research
10	Oct 29	Due Assignment 5 Social Media Research Report and Presentation. - <u>Introduce Assignment 7 Participant observation/interview project</u> <u>Ch 13</u> Ethnographic Research
11	Nov 5	Guest Speaker NORC <u>Ch 7</u> Survey Research
12	Nov 12	<u>Ch 9</u> Content Analysis IC – Review newspapers - <u>Introduce Assignment 6 and finish in class</u>
13	Nov 19	- <u>Introduce Assignment 8 Reflection paper</u>
14	Nov 26	No Class – Happy Thanksgiving
15	Dec 3	Due Assignment 7 Progress report for participant observation/interview method research project Test #2 (Chapters 7, 8, 9, and 13)
16	Dec 10 7-9:00	Due Assignment 7 Interview/participant observation report and presentation. Due Assignment 8 Reflection paper.

*Schedule may change based on class interests, understanding, needs and unforeseen events.