MMC 6421: Research Methods in Mass Communication

Fall 2024

Meeting: Mondays 9:35am-12:35pm 2050 Weimer Hall *(unless specified)*
Instructor: Jasmine McNealy jmcnealy@ufl.edu
Office: 3062 Weimer Hall
Office Hours: Wednesday 9-11am or by appointment

Course Overview:
This course provides an overview of common mass communication research methods. Specifically, we will discuss content analysis, experiments, surveys, interviewing, and focus groups. You will learn the benefits and shortcomings for each method. In addition, you will also be introduced to R, a software program used to analyze data.

Objectives
Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:
- Demonstrate the application of quantitative and qualitative research methods in mass communication contexts.
- Understand and effectively utilize key methodological terms, concepts, and operations, such as research design, sampling procedures, measurement, reliability, and validity.
- Apply ethical principles in research involving human participants and reporting of findings.
- Design, conduct, articulate, interpret, and evaluate research

Required Textbook(s) and Materials:
- APA. (2019). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (7th ed.). ISBN:978-1-4338-3216-1
- Other readings will be posted on Canvas and/or can be accessed through the UF Libraries course reserves. This may mean that you need to download and install the UF VPN ((https://it.ufl.edu/ict/documentation/network-infrastructure/vpn) for use when off campus.
- Download R (https://cran.r-project.org/mirrors.html) and R Studio (https://cran.rstudio.com/)

Recommended: Croucher, SM and Cronn-Mills, D. (2024/5). *Understanding Communication Research Methods: A Theoretical and Practical Approach* (3 Ed. – the 2nd Ed. is also sufficient)

Grading and Assignments

Grades will be decided based on the following assignments. **<u>Note:</u>** many of these assignments are completed during class.

1. **Quizzes (15%) <u>Sept. 16, Oct. 7 & 28, Nov. 18</u>**
   You will complete four (4) quizzes throughout the course of the semester. These quizzes are designed to test your understanding of concepts and critical vocabulary related to research methods

2. **IRB training and certification (5%) <u>Due September 9</u>**
   You must complete the required training for IRB2, submit a copy of your completion form and create a myIRB account.

3. **Discussion Leader and participation (10%)**
   Twice during the semester, every student will lead discussion based on research you've found in the wild. This can be a news article or broadcast and should relate to the topic of the week in which you are presenting. Collect the article (or broadcast) and the study from which they are reporting data. At least 1.5 weeks prior to your discussion date, you will send the article and study to your classmates so they can read/view and prepare for your discussion. You should also prepare and share a list of questions and/or guiding topics that you will cover during your discussion. Your classmates should come prepared to discuss both the discussion materials and other course materials.

4. **Research Protocols (10%) October 14**
   In groups you will develop a protocol for conducting both an interview and a focus group.

5. **Build a Qualtrics survey (10%) September 30**
   Create an online survey using Qualtrics. The survey should measure at least 3 variables, with at least 4 items for each variable. The survey must also include screening questions and capture the participant's demographic information. Part of this assignment is to complete your peers' surveys.

6. **Design an experiment (10%) November 4**
   In groups, you will develop an experimental design to test a hypothesis. The design must manipulate your independent variable, measure your dependent variable(s), and include a manipulation check.

7. **Clean and analyze a data set in R (10%) October 7**
   Using the data from either your experiment or survey assignment, you will clean the data and analyze the results. You will report both descriptive and inferential statistics.

8. **Peer review (5%) November 25**
   You will have the opportunity to review a draft of each other's research proposal. Your peer review should be 500 words, at minimum and consider the critical concepts we have discussed so far during class.

9. **Final project: Research proposal (30%): Final draft Due December 8**
   You will create a research proposal demonstrating your grasp of mass communication research methods. The proposal will include a brief review of the literature to frame your research question or hypothesis. The methods section will include a rationale for why you

chose your method, with detailed explanations for how you will collect and analyze your data. Your project will be scaffolded as follows:

- Research topic (1 paragraph): <u>Due September 9</u>
- Literature review (3-5 pages): <u>Due September 23</u> *EOD*
- Hypotheses and Research Questions (250 words min): <u>Due September 30</u>
- Method, procedure, and sampling (1-2 pages): <u>Due October 21</u>
- Materials and Measures (1-2 pages) <u>Due October 28</u>
- Analysis Plan (1 page) <u>Due November 4</u>
- Complete Draft for *peer review* (8-12 pages): <u>Due November 25 in class</u>

On the use of Artificial Intelligence

There may be a temptation to use ChatGPT and/or other LLMs to assist you in doing assignments, especially those requiring writing. My suggestion is that you not use them. The purpose of courses, especially graduate level courses, if for students to learn how to read, summarize, formulate, and synthesize materials for themselves. The use of advance tools to do this for you robs you of the process of developing these important skills. <u>*My suggestion:*</u> Don't use them. You don't need them. You may spend more time making them work and reviewing the outputs than just completing the course assignments. If you do decide to use them, you are responsible for any errors or material that we have not covered in this course.

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OTHER IMPORTANT INFORMATION

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Classroom Behavior and Course Policies

You should check the syllabus, at a minimum, at the beginning of each week as a reminder of upcoming assignments. The best way to reach me is by email. When you email me, please put "MMC4621" followed by the subject of your email IN THE SUBJECT LINE. In addition, please be professional in your emails.

All grades are final after one week. No exceptions. If a student wishes to challenge a grade, they must contact me 48 hours after receiving their grade. In an email, the student should provide a detailed description of the substantive issue with their grade.

Academic Honesty and UF Policy

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, "We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied:

"On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment."

The Honor Code (https://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conducthonor-code/) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to

appropriate personnel. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor.

Plagiarism. A student shall not represent as the student's own work all or any portion of the work of another. Plagiarism includes but is not limited to:
1. Quoting oral or written materials including but not limited to those found on the internet, whether published or unpublished, without proper attribution.
2. Submitting a document or assignment which in whole or in part is identical or substantially identical to a document or assignment not authored by the student.

From Regulations of the University of Florida, 6C1-4.047 Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code: Sanctions

Absences in General
Students should make every effort to come to class prepared to discuss the materials, having read and completed the assignments for the course as schedule each class as scheduled. You may complete assignments ahead of schedule, but you will not receive credit for work completed after the deadline without prior clearance outside of documented illness or other absence approved under UF policy. No alternative assignments will be provided for a student who misses an assignment without properly notifying the instructor.

Religious Holidays
The university calendar does not include observance of any religious holidays. The Florida Board of Governors and state law govern university policy regarding observance of religious holidays. Students shall be excused from class or other scheduled academic activity to observe a religious holy day of their faith with prior notification to the instructor. Students shall be permitted a reasonable amount of time to make up the material or activities covered in their absence. Students shall not be penalized due to absence from class or other scheduled academic activity because of religious observances.

Student Illness
Students who are affected by illness should contact UF Student Health Care Center (SHCC) or a home physician who can provide medical care. In any case, please inform me if your health is making it difficult for you to complete class assignments.

Accommodation for Students with Disabilities
Students requesting classroom accommodation must first register with the Dean of Students Office. The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the student who must then provide this documentation to the instructor when requesting accommodation.

Tech Support and Netiquette
This course is delivered in class and using Canvas. For tech support please contact UFIT at http://helpdesk.ufl.edu. I suggest using Chrome or Firefox as browsers for accessing course content. You can also get more information at http://elearning.ufl.edu.

Online discussions can be fruitful and interesting. It is my expectation for this course that you give your classmates the utmost respect when interacting with them in this course. Remember that it is much different to communicate thoughts and opinions over discussion boards than in person. Be respectful to your classmates' ideas, ask insightful questions for clarity, read with consideration, and give criticism with professionalism.

Both students and faculty each have a responsibility to maintain an appropriate learning environment online. I expect that we will all show professional courtesy and good netiquette in our discussions. Per university policy, we will all give due respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, color, culture, religion, creed, politics, veteran's status, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, and gender expression, age, disability, political affiliation, and nationalities. If there is a way your classmates and I should address you, please let us know.

Course Evaluations
Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via https://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/

RESOURCES
Health and Wellness
- *U Matter, We Care* (https://umatter.ufl.edu/) If you or a friend is in distress, please contact umatter@ufl.edu or (352) 294-2273 so that a team member can reach out to the student.
- *Counseling and Wellness Center* (http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/) If you would benefit from talking to someone or getting resources to cope with stress or any other thoughts and feelings, please call (352) 392-1575 or visit https://counseling.ufl.edu/about/location-hours-contact/.
- *Title IX* (https://titleix.ufl.edu/) To report sexual assault, harassment, or discrimination, please contact the Title IX office via their website, inform@titleix.ufl.edu, or (352) 275-1242.
- *Student Health Care Center* (https://shcc.ufl.edu/) Please visit the website or call (352) 392-1161 for 24/7 information to help you find the care you need.
- *GatorWell Health Promotion Services* (https://gatorwell.ufsa.ufl.edu/): For prevention services focused on optimal wellbeing, including Wellness Coaching for Academic Success, visit the GatorWell website or call 352-273-4450

Academic Resources

- *E-learning Technical Support* (https://elearning.ufl.edu/student-help/) For help with Canvas and other technologies for this course, contact helpdesk@ufl.edu or (352) 392-4357 (select option 2).
- *Career Connections Center* (https://career.ufl.edu/) For career assistance and counseling, contact UFCareerCenter@ufsa.ufl.edu or (352) 392-1601; Located in Reitz Union suite 1300.
- *Ask-A-Librarian* (https://uflib.ufl.edu/find/ask/) This site provides multiple ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources.
- *Teaching Center* (https://teachingcenter.ufl.edu/) This office helps with tutoring, study groups, and general study skills. Visit the website or call (352) 392-2010.
- *Writing Studio* (http://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/) This office helps with brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers. Visit the website to make an appointment, or call (352) 846-1138.
- *UF Online/Internet Privacy Statement* (https://privacy.ufl.edu/privacy-policies-and-procedures/onlineinternet-privacy-statement/) UF's statement about privacy and data security.

COURSE SCHEDULE (first four weeks of readings, others TBD) *[Subject to change]*

Week	Class	Assignment
1: Aug. 22	No class	
2: Aug. 26	Intro and Research Paradigms	**Read:** • UCRM Chap. 1& 2 (Canvas) • McCay-Peet, L. & Quan-Haase, Anabel (2022). "What is Social Media and What Questions Can Social Media Research Help Us Answer," in The *SAGE Handbook of Social Media and Research Methods* (Sloan, L. & Quan-Haase, A. Eds.) (Lib. Course Res)
3: Sept. 2	No class – Labor Day	
4: Sept. 9	Data & Ethics	**Read:** • UCRM Chap. 5 (Canvas) • APA Chap. 1 • Burkell, J. et al (2022). "Privacy, Consent, and Confidentiality in Social Media Research," in The *SAGE Handbook of Social Media and Research Methods* (Sloan, L. & Quan-Haase, A. Eds.) (Lib. Course Res) **Due:** • IRB training certification • Research topic paragraph